Minutes: October 28, 2013

Attending: Renee Alexander, Joe Bergen, Amanda Carreira, Ken Clarke, Janet Corson-Rikert, David Delchamps, Betsy East, Kathy Edmondson, Greg Eells, Michele Fish, Kathryn Gleason, Carol Grumbach, Tanni Hall, Christine Holmes, William Horning, Kent Hubbell, Kent Hubble, Shama Iyer, Monica Jones, Barnaby Knoll, Janna Lamey, Anne Lukingbeal, Linda Najani, Tim Marchell, Alan Mathios, Beth McKinney, Neoma Mullens, Susan Murphy, Andy Noel, Susan Riley, Rebecca Robbins, Keba Rogers, Sarah Rubenstein-Gillis, Lisa Ryan, Lisa Shaffer, Janet Shortall, Alex Skinnion, Amanda Soule-Shaw, Blane Stone, Janis Talbot, Catherine Thrasher-Carroll, Shawkat Toorawa, Lane Wendel, Elise West, Janis Whitlock, Wai-Kwong Wong, Kathy Zoner

Guests: Franziska Doerfinger, Elizabeth Newbury, Claire Zoellner, Barbara Knuth, Anne Jones, Cindy Grey

Welcome and Introductions: Susan Murphy

- Last spring members of the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly prepared a progress report on the 2008 Graduate and Professional Community Initiative. The report was created to increase community awareness of progress made in addressing graduate and professional student needs over the past few years; and to identify areas in which the GPSA would like to see more focus in the future. Invited guests to lead today’s discussion include:
  - Barbara Knuth, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School;
  - Janna Lamey, Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Life in the Graduate Student Office;
  - Franziska Doerfinger, Chair of the GPSA Advocacy Committee and
  - Elizabeth Newbury, Executive Vice President of the GPSA.

Janna Lamey began the discussion with a short overview of the Graduate School’s recent initiatives and showed the new Graduate Student orientation film used this August. Franziska Doerfinger reviewed the GPCI report, highlighting areas of focus related to student mental health.

The Graduate School: Janna Lamey (Review the PowerPoint presentation)

- Graduate School administers 4 research-degree programs and another 12 professional degree programs for the 5,177 students enrolled in fall ’13. Note: the professional school degree programs are completely separate from the Graduate School, and include Vet, Law and Business.

- In addition to meeting with students individually about concerns all students might have about their general health, housing, disability and leaves of absence, graduate students also turn to the Graduate Office with these unique issues:
  - Difficult relationship with advisor
  - Chair resignation
  - Academic issues specific to graduate work
  - Financial/funding concerns
  - Grievance
  - Immigration
  - Worksite (lab) injuries

- Graduate student concerns often have mental health implications, so the Graduate School Office works to support student mental health by:
  - Demystifying the graduate education experience,
  - Normalizing the diversity of experiences, perspectives, and goals that students have
Empowering graduate students with concrete information and skills to enable success
Championing and embracing a holistic approach to graduate student life

- The Graduate School staff offer a number of support services and specialized programs to meet these goals.

- Jan Allen, Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs in the Graduate School, provides:
  - Academic English Classes
  - Graduate Writing Consultation Service
  - Proposal, Thesis, and Dissertation Writing Boot Camps
  - Productive Writer Listserv
  - Graduate School Write-In
  - Writing Competitive Fellowship Application Workshops

- Sheri Notaro, Associate Dean for Inclusion and Professional Development, offers:
  - Support for graduate/professional student groups from communities historically underrepresented in graduate education,
  - Guides competitive application process for Graduate School funded recruitment and retention of diversity fellowships,
  - Provides leadership for Graduate School Diversity Council & Initiatives
  - Coordinates the networking and social programming for students

- Janna Lamey, Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Life, focuses on topics related to maintaining a healthy student life, including stress management, a sense of community, life-academic balance, and support for students’ personal development through a series of workshops and these services:
  - “Perspectives: The Complete Graduate Student”
  - “Transitions… Navigating Graduate School for First-Year Students”
  - Communication Sessions (using EARS Skills)
  - “Fireside Chats”
  - New, improved and continually developing website: http://www.gradschool.cornell.edu/life-cornell
  - Chair of “Graduate Students with Families Campus-Wide Advisory Committee,”
    - Communication Center for Students with Families
    - Dual Career Support (partnership with Tompkins Workforce and Cornell OHR)
  - Increasing visibility of off-campus housing resources
  - Increasing effort for personal financial management
    - Campus-wide effort with grant support through the Council of Graduate Schools
  - Collaboration with the Dean of Students - Office of Student and Community Support on
    - Crisis Management Team – liaison for graduate students
    - Community Support Team
    - Alert Team
    - Maxient
    - Network to other resources throughout campus
  - Extend these Programming Opportunities to Graduate Students through: EARS (Empathy, Assistance and Referral Service), Women’s Resource Center, Cornell Minds Matter, Ordinary People Peer Education Theater Ensemble

- Kris Corda, Manager of the Big Red Barn, sponsored 237 social events for graduate students including: 40 TGIF’s celebrations, Tango dancing lessons, Trivia Night, International Coffee
Hour, Inter-field Mixers, Winter Holiday Party, family programs, cultural nights, arts events, other social programs.

- Future goals/directions of the Graduate School Office include development of:
  - Proactive intervention plan for identified stress-points in graduate career (e.g. A-exams, B- exams)
  - Peer education program for conflict resolution (e.g. Similar to the peer-to-peer support available in the Vet. School)
  - Increase students’ sense of community and enhance programming with the Office of Student and Community Support
  - Offer educational opportunities to improve personal financial literacy
  - Continue to collaborate with campus partners

- “Graduate Students: Graduate Stories,” the new 15-minute orientation film was previewed during the session. *(While the DVD is not available online, campus groups can request a viewing through the Graduate Office.)* Some of the key objectives while developing the film were to normalize a variety of common graduate student experiences, identify ways students make social connections that gave them a sense of community, and the importance of using campus resources to build new skills and meet new challenges.

**Graduate & Professional Community Initiative (GPCI) Report:** Elizabeth Newbury, Vice President of the GPSA

- Reviewed how the GPSA Advocacy Committee’s work led to the GPCI follow-up report last spring. Recognizing the progress made to enhance mental health since the 2007 Graduate Community Initiative (GCI), this year’s GPSA continued to gather information from students to better understand how to improve student mental health and propose the following objectives to guide future efforts: *(Review the full 2013 GPSI report at: [http://assembly.cornell.edu/uploads/GPSA/2013GPCI.pdf](http://assembly.cornell.edu/uploads/GPSA/2013GPCI.pdf]*)
  - Provide resources for emotional and psychological support tailored to the G&PS experience (mental health & well-being)
  - Support and promote G&PS physical fitness (mental health & well-being)
  - Improve opportunities for meaningful interactions and interdisciplinary collaborations across the broad G&PS community (community)
  - Increase support structures for international students (diversity)
  - Increase support for the LGBTQI G&PS (diversity)
  - G&PS should have access to affordable child-care options (family)
  - Provide support for G&PS living off campus; Help create a better community for G&PS living off campus (housing)
  - Enhance access to flexible programming spaces on campus and expand usage of Willard Straight Hall (student center)

- The above areas can have broad impact on graduate and professional students’ mental health and can offer opportunities for partnerships to form across campus. Three areas of suggested focus moving forward are:
  - Continue to improve students’ knowledge about resources and their ability to reach out for support.
  - Promote resources that give students multiple tools to tackle stress (i.e. support physical fitness through equitable rates for membership fees; develop a set of field-specific
resource lists, continue programming on time management, writing and research skills, navigating life as a graduate or professional student; and advisor-advisee relationships. 

- Increase capacity for peer-to-peer support through programs such as the Peer Support Network developed in the College of Veterinary Medicine.

**Open discussion.**

**Reactions to the video Graduate Students: Graduate Stories:**

- It was helpful to hear such honest stories and the challenges mentioned ring true for many students.
- The personal stories were significant and made the information more available.
- Faculty members present also noted that the experiences shared in the film sounded familiar.
- Some of the issues raised around managing stress created by relationships, isolation and loneliness seem very relevant.
- Film underscored the need for students to be self-driven and to learn to ask for what they need. How can we help students with this and begin the process earlier in their career as a student?
- Where is this film being used on campus? *The film was used during August Orientation and was shown to the Directors of Graduate Study in September. While posting the film on the internet is not planned, departments and other groups who like to view the film can make arrangements by contacting Janna Lemay directly.*

**What strategies are there to help students reach out?**

- "Let's Talk" is a program that provides easy access to informal confidential consultations with counselors from Gannett Health Services. Counselors hold walk-in hours at sites around campus Monday through Friday.
- Also last year, Gannett’s Counseling and Psychological Services initiated evening hours (Monday-Thursday) for students to either call or walk-in for consultations.
- CCI (Community Consultation and Intervention) is another service CAPS offers to lend support to faculty, staff and other community members who are in contact with a student in need of assistance, but who may not feel comfortable reaching out for counseling support. Two therapists work with community members so they are better able to support, assist and/or referral to the student.

**Other suggestions:**

- Student and Academic Services offices need to be more mindful that events and programs for graduate students are labeled as such.
- How can Directors of Graduate Studies work to create a culture of balance within their fields? This is a process we all need to be working toward.
- How can we help faculty think about their mentoring role and to not lose sight of the effect they can have on students with their comments?
- Professors have different styles of relating to their students and it’s hard to change ones that are less than supportive. Sometimes the way they relate to their students reflects what they experienced as grad students. At some point these behaviors and relationships can become dysfunctional. How do we recognize the breaking point for students? Where is help for the student?
- The GPSA gives awards each year to faculty who model stellar behavior. Students nominate faculty and share their reflections on what made them so stellar. Perhaps this could be more widely publicized.

*Today’s discussion on graduate student concerns identified many issues which we all have a role to play.*