MINUTES
March 2, 2016

Attending: Renee Alexander; Blake Tyler Brown; Joe Burke; Janet Corson-Rikert; Eddy Cruz; David DeVries; Kathy Edmondson; Greg Eells; Kappy Fahey; Shura Gat; Kathy Gleason; Mary Beth Grant; Carol Grumbach; Jen Gudaz; Woodg Horning; Kent Hubbell; Jody Kunk Cziplicki; Janna Lamey; Laura Lewis; Tim Marchell; Andrea McPherson Kiely; Beth McKinney; Elena Michel; Carolina Panisello-Manter; Lisa Ryan; Janet Shortall; Sophie Sidhu; Ethan Stephanson; Jai Sweet; Catherine Thrasher-Carroll

Guests: Fred Blaisdel (Undergraduate, member of Akwe:kon community); Andrew Eng (Public Health Fellow, member of A3C community); Ulysses Smith (Office of Workforce Diversity & Inclusion-Bias Reporting);

Upcoming meetings:
Monday April 13, 2016 4:00-5:30pm; McManus Lounge in Hollister Hall

I. Welcome and Introductions – Tim Marchell, PhD, MPH; Director Skorton Center for Health Initiatives
   A. Today’s focus is on mental health among students from non-majority backgrounds and identities
   B. Acknowledgement of Dr. Janet Corson-Rikert, who started this council back in the early 2000’s and who will be retiring April 1st of this year.

II. Cultural complexities at Cornell - ppt presentation by Greg Eells, PhD, Director CAPS and Ulysses Smith, Office Workforce Diversity & Inclusion
   A. Context for council discussion following panel presentation
      1. Overview of diversity
      2. Bias Reporting System Update – Ulysses Smith
      3. From cultural competence to cultural consciousness to cultural humility
      4. The ADDRESSING model provides a framework for understanding our multiple identities an intersectionality of these
      5. See attached ppt slides

III. Student/ Staff Panel on ....student of color mental health: where we’re doing well, where the gaps are
   A. Renee Alexander, Director Student Development Diversity Initiatives and Cornell Intercultural Center
      1. Students of color in general are increasingly more aware of their need for mental health services, however they still feel they cannot/ should not utilize services or let anyone know they need them
         a. Recent documentary “Agents of Change” on the WSH Take Over showed black students asking for mental health services back then – September 1968
      2. The student women of color group has started their own support group and asked Renee to be an advisor
      3. On March 20th in just a few weeks the women students of color are also hosting a mental health summit in an effort to educate and increase awareness of mental health issues, de-stigmatize utilization of services and provide information on campus resources, both formal and informal.
   B. Fred Blaisdel, Undergrad, RA and member of Akwe:kon Native American Community; Oneida Nation, Bear Clan
      1. Native students do take advantage of the safe spaces on campus such as the Akwe:kon residential community and the American Indian Program.
a. These spaces hold indigenous cultural values and help the students explore and navigate cultural differences encountered such as:
   - conduct around elders vs peers
   - conversations engaged in by men and women separately vs in mixed company
   - the soft-spoken way of the cultures from which students come vs the Cornell culture of speaking up assertively for yourself, even to authority figures/elders.

b. An issue indigenous students face is dealing with “Imposter Syndrome”
   - Often hear and experience sense that others and think of them as a “diversity quota admit” but in fact most were in the top ten students in their high school graduating class.

C. Andrew Eng , Public Health Fellow at Skorton Center for Health Initiatives, member of A3C Community
   1. The Asian/Asian American Community is very diverse as it is made up of domestic and international students from numerous countries and cultures.
   2. Speaking from his experience as a student, mental health was not discussed much among his peer group. Although he and his peer group were experiencing pressures of college life, it was swept under the carpet. There was a stigma to seeking help and this was related to the environments they grew up in where you didn’t admit to struggling but you were supposed to just keep working hard.
   3. As a public health fellow, one year out from his student experience he sees how the A3C provides a safe space for open discussions on identity and experiences, both positive and negative which relate to identity, cross-cultural dialogue, mental health needs and available resources.
   4. The Asian American Studies Program is another safe space for Asian/Asian American students; however more representation in faculty and staff outside of this academic department is needed.

a. Council member commented that microaggressions and bias incidents are happening on a regular basis with these students and they are reluctant to admit these are happening, let alone report them through the reporting system. There is a need to look at this phenomena.

D. Carolina Panisello-Mantero, Undergraduate, RA, identifies as Bi-Racial Hispanic & White
   1. In preparation for this panel she had a discussion with several students from varied background. Some of the themes she heard were:
   a. Micro-aggressions and macro-aggressions happen on an almost daily basis for some students. These are particularly difficult to handle when they come from an authority figure
      - These constant situations wear down students and soon affect their self-esteem and self-confidence.
      - Uncertainty about how to report bias incidents; not sure where the form is
      - Fear of retaliation if they report
   b. Faculty need more information/education about supporting student mental health
      - Inequity in class absence/assignment accommodation for health reason vs mental health reason
      - Inequality in whether or not an absence excused due to different religious/cultural holidays.
      - First question faculty ask if student mentions mental health issue is, “Are you taking medication?” which feels very intrusion and creates worry about being labeled as “less than” in some way.
   c. Concern re: incident where CU Police used handcuffs to transport student who was suicidal
      - CAPS director shared that this is not the regular practice of CU Police for mental health transports, but that sometimes if someone becomes combative the use of handcuffs happens for safety purposes.
      - This can be looked into with CU Police if more specifics can be given regarding the incident.
   d. Cultural appropriation was mentioned as a troubling occurrence.
   e. Low SES students shared that they are thinking about finances all the time, trying to figure out how to pay for textbooks, food, etc. This constant stress weighs heavily on their minds and creates physical and mental health issues.
   f. International students experience being treated like they are not as intelligent as everyone else because English is their second language.
   g. Students with disabilities experience lack of privilege and stigma when seeking accommodations.
   h. Within the Hispanic culture, ties to family are highly important and when student is feeling depressed and don’t have money to go home to get support from family, they tend to isolate.
   i. It is all the above-outlined factors together that are affecting the mental health of students from marginalized groups. All of the above “otherize” people, build up and negatively affect student mental health.

E. Janet Shortall, Asst. Dean of Students, Director of EARS peer counseling and Crisis Management Team
   1. The culture of Cornell perpetuates these notions:
      a. we do not talk about what is not going well
         - students are constantly wondering “Can I really tell someone that I’m not ok?”
• the staff tell me it’s okay to talk about my struggles and seek support, but my professors seem to want perfection
• the mental gymnastics of trying to figure out who/what to believe is an ongoing source of stress, anxiety and exhaustion

b. do not speak up in class because you will sound stupid

2. Students have layers (of identities) within themselves that many are beginning to explore for the first time in the safe spaces here at Cornell
   a. They are beginning to understand about intersectionality
   b. There are also social pressures within the identity groups with which they are affiliating

3. Students are not prepared for what it might feel like afterward once they share their individual story publically, speak out in an activist role or participate in a protest
   a. Staff other than the Center for Intercultural Dialogue staff need to be prepared to have these conversations with students and be able to support students from marginalized groups
      • Suggestion for supporting these students: ask, “Do you have people who get you, to talk to?” rather than “tell me your story”. The continual re-telling of their story and educating others becomes exhausting,

IV. Council Responses to Panel
   A. Expectation vs reality creates “Imposter Syndrome”
      1. The idealized idea of what an Ivy League student “is” often doesn’t match the actual experience of the student
      2. There is a lack of understanding that bumps in the road are a normal part of the college student experience
         a. Normalizing the ups and downs of college life is part of what seems to make the Walton/Yeager Social Belonging Project so successful at persistence and retention to graduation for students of color.
         b. Question to students on panel and in audience: Does it resonate with you when an authority figure (staff, faculty or administrator) shares about their failures and ultimate successes?
            • Yes, and more student to student conversations could combat and normalize the reality of the inevitable ups and down of college/ life
         c. Comment: Harvard’s website hosts stories of student, faculty and staff low points and how they moved through them
      3. Faculty and staff need to share more about non-cookie cutter paths to success, as well as speaking out about challenges or failures they’ve experienced and navigating through those.

V. This conversation on the mental health of students from diverse backgrounds and identities will continue at our April meeting.

Minutes taken by Catherine Thrasher-Carroll