Beyond the Fragile Student

Smith College Teaching Arts Lunch

March 4, 2016

Laura Rauscher, Disability Services Director (Irausche@smith.edu)
Pam McCarthy, Director of Counseling Service (pmccarth@smith.edu)
Sarah Orem, Disability Studies Instructor, American Studies (sorem@smith.edu)

1. Introduction - Laura

2. Overview of Campus Supports and Services - Pam and Laura

3. Mental Health in the Classroom: Instructor perspectives - Sarah Orem

4. Institutional, Instructional, and Individual Strategies for Success - Laura and Sarah

5. Participation activity and Discussion
Experiencing Supports and Strategies that impact success of students with mental health/psychiatric conditions

Institution level: What policies and practices allow for support and flexibility regarding transition, success, and retention?

Existing options:

- Transfer of credits from another school
- Use Free Drop options
- S/U options
- Medical drop for a course
- Medical withdrawal from the Semester
- Finish elsewhere
- Use of AP credits to allow for reduced course load or to replace lost credits
- Additional Semesters as accommodation
- Petitions for other exemptions, etc.
- Student registers with ODS for evaluation and determination of need for accommodations under 504/ADA.

Possible additional strategies:

1. More free drop options
2. Allow additional transfer credit for medical reasons
3. First year reduced course load
4. Drop first semester grades
5. Part time for some number of semesters
6. Restricting total course load to 20 credits without permission from adviser and Class Dean

Department Level: What policies and practices at the departmental level support student success?

- Developing markers of required competencies before progressing in a major
- Define essential functions for the major.
- Clarity on what constitutes intellectual/academic rigor and where there is flexibility to lighten weight of the work.
- Quality vs quantity in expectations and in grading.
Instructor/Course level: What proactive strategies promote universal access for all learners that are particularly important for students with mental health conditions?

- Clear syllabus
- Explicit Learning objectives
- Step by step instructions for assignments
- Appoint a note taker
- Allow technology in class for everyone, consider classroom management strategies rather than requiring as an accommodation.
- Post PowerPoints on Moodle the night before or have hard copies available.
- Post only accessible documents on Moodle - non-image PDF or word documents
- Use captioned video materials
- Offer some choice of assignments
- Choice of preferred mode, written or presentation
- Consult about group formation and offer tools for role assignment, decision making etc
- Allow student to opt out of group work, substitute alternatives
- Create participation alternatives, like comment cards, online posts, talk to one other student, etc.
- Have a clear absence policy with explanation about impact of missing work
- Allow students to submit drafts, but not endlessly!
- Allow all students to drop lowest grade
- Allow all students to miss one assignment w/o penalty
- Allow students one or two extensions of 24-48 hours w/o penalty
- Model respect and value for differences in learning styles
- Avoid contributing to or validating stress messaging
- Model work/life balance.
- Encourage self care and limit setting
- Avoid singling out a student for any reason.
- Acknowledge world events as impacting presence in the classroom.
- Give students a few minutes to write down anything that is getting in the way of being present so they can discuss this with you or seek help after class.
- Self scheduled exams
- Take home exams
Student Level: What specific strategies can be used by faculty and students to meet individual needs?

- Encourage all students to discuss any individual learning needs.
- Use a mutual problem-solving format to handle problems in the classroom.
- Incorporate tips for organization and planning
- Encourage peer/partnered learning/studying
- Use of voice dictation for writing
- Use of note taking Apps
- Use of text to voice in Adobe for reading with audio.
- Encourage use of Jacobson, be specific about what they can get from this.
- Avoid vague statements or sarcasm when talking with students with Autism
- Investigate “bad” behavior before reacting. Misunderstandings are common with Autistic students
- Be specific in providing feedback about when, where, how and why, either behavior or academic work needs to improve.
- Keep suggestions for improvement constructive, specific, and brief.
- Give examples of the kind of work you expect to see.
- Trust and expect communication and accountability.
- Validate, validate, validate
- Encourage self care and limit setting
- Discourage perfectionism - accept drafts
- Be a good listener, but not a therapist
- Refer students to campus supports Counseling, Chapel, Multicultural Affairs, Disability Services, etc.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Honor specific accommodations in accommodation letter. Don’t question, push back or negotiate accommodations with students, instead communicate with ODS if accommodations might be problematic
General Strategies:

- Educate yourself about mental health conditions and how they impact students.
- Educate yourself about mental health and disability supports and resources on campus.
- Learn about Smith's emergency resources and protocols.
- Be honest about your availability and mindful of giving out personal phone numbers.
- Demonstrate unconditional acceptance of students, validate intelligence, but be honest about quality of work produced.
- Consider your own use of disability/illness metaphors and language and ways that may create an exclusionary learning environment.
- Consider mental health/disability content within your curriculum. What are the messages and is their inclusion intentional to your pedagogy? Be prepared to discuss/change/expand, etc.
- Don’t accept bad behavior, but investigate before making conclusions. Respond in clear, concrete terms, avoid shaming.
- Don’t just stop a behavior, describe the behavior you want to see.
- Model work life balance and encourage students to take advantage of non-academic opportunities to have fun and de-stress.
- Talk about creating "supportive" spaces not "safe" spaces. We can’t make everything "safe" we can create supportive spaces for students to take risks and help them learn to recover from discomfort of being wrong or disagreed with.
- Consider content transparency for sexually graphic or violent content.
- Discourage the "stress olympics"
Apps for Wellness

In an effort to reduce stress and teach individuals to be more mindful:

- **Take a break!** Guided Meditation
- **Relax Sounds** - relaxing nature and ambient melodies
- **Nature Melody**, sleep pillow sounds
- **iZen Garden 2**: is a Zen garden, one can stack stones in.
- **Koi Pond**: plays the sound of birds chirping as fish swim about. When one touches the screen, ripples gather around and you can hear splashing noises.
- **Key Ring**: puts grocery cards, gym cards, library cards etc. on your phone, so you can travel with a lighter key ring.

Apps for mood management include:

- **PTSD Coach**: this was designed by the Veterans Administration and teaches relaxation skills, positive self-talk, anger management and how to find additional support.
- **DBT Emotion Regulation Tools**: utilizes Cognitive behavior therapy. Individuals can review their thoughts, feelings and then replace them with new thoughts.
- **Operation Reach Out**: this app helps individuals know when to reach out in a crisis. It was developed to prevent suicide.
- **T2 Mood Tracker**: individuals can chart their moods and monitor their anxiety levels, depression, brain injury, post-traumatic stress and general wellbeing.
- **MindShift**: offers tools for relaxation and healthy activities.
- **Self-Help for Anxiety Management**: teaches calming or relaxation techniques in response to inputting how anxious or worried an individual is.

For sleep management, there are:

- **Sleep Cycle Alarm Clock**
- **Sleep Bot-Smart Cycle Alarm with Motion and Sound**: These tell how efficient one is sleeping as well as offering a time to wake up.
- **Relax Melodies**: To aid the sleep cycle there is Sleep Zen Sounds and White Noise. This app allows one to program sounds and music that one finds relaxing.

For Task Management:

- **30/30** which allows one to set up times to complete items and it tells when to move on to the next task.
- **Pomodoro Timer**: Focus on Productivity, runs for 25 minutes with 5 minute breaks.
- **Evernote**: For note taking, where you can store text, photos and audio notes.
- **Notability**: also gives the option of handwriting, typing or recording lectures.
**Student Referrals and Resources:**

**The Counseling Service**  
Schacht Center for Health and Wellness  
21 Belmont Avenue  
413-585-2840  
counselingservices@smith.edu

**The Office of Disability Services**  
College Hall, Room 104  
413-585-2071  
ODS@smith.edu

**The Center for Religious & Spiritual Life**  
Helen Hills Hills Chapel  
Smith College  
Northampton, MA 01063  
Phone: (413) 585-2750  
jwalters@smith.edu

**The Student Aid Society**  
Anne White  
awhite@smith.edu

**The Office of International Students and Scholars**  
Dean Caitlin Symkowicz  
Wright Hall Room 124  
Phone: (413) 585-4905 or (413) 585-2697  
interstu@smith.edu

**The Office of Multicultural Affairs**  
Clark Hall  
L’Tanya Richmond  
Phone: (413) 585-4940  
E-mail: lrichmon@smith.edu