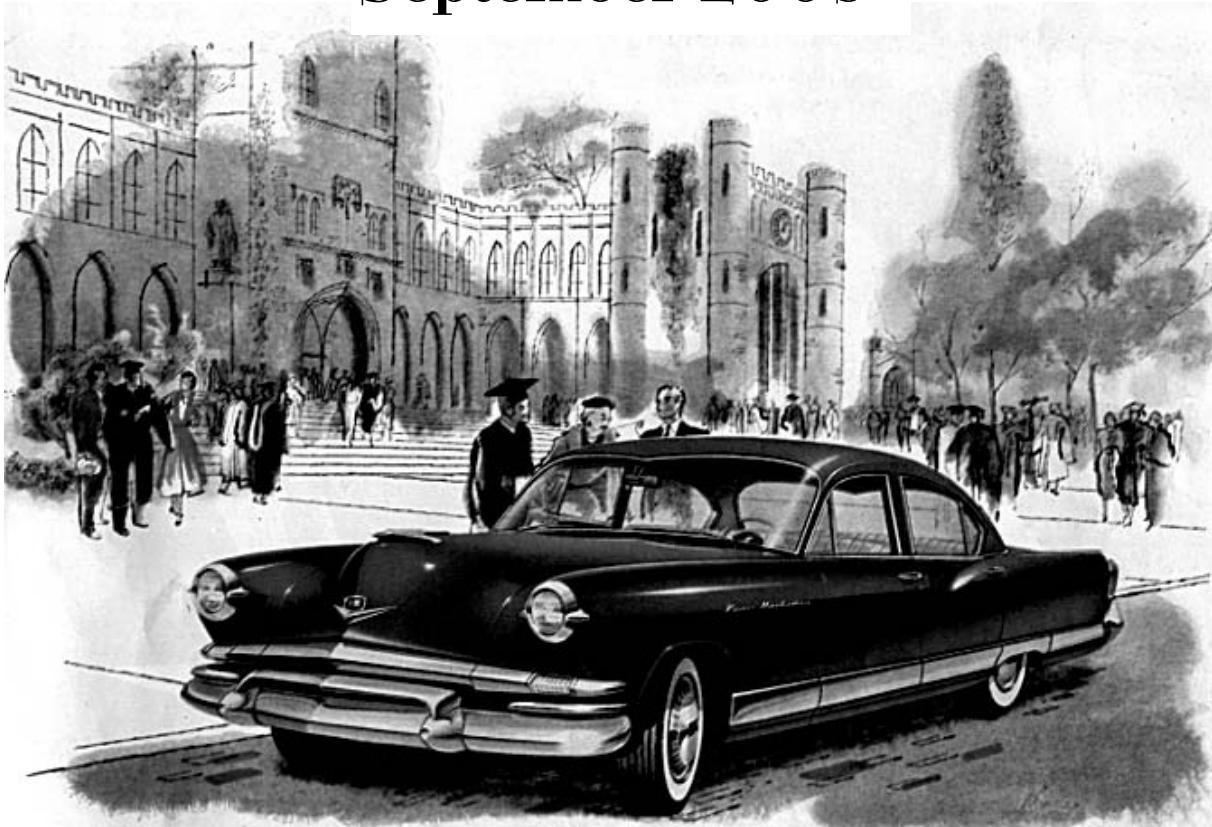


States of Mind

The Publication of the Mental Health Association in Tompkins County

September 2009



The College Conundrum: Student Life and Mental Health

To understand and improve the mental health of our community

a d v o c a c y • i n f o r m a t i o n • e d u c a t i o n



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Thanks to Our Donors

The Mental Health Association in Tompkins County is composed of people working together to improve the mental health of our community. The goal of this publication is to inform the community about ideas, different viewpoints, developments, and activities in the field of mental health; its contents are not intended to provide advice about individual problems. Such advice should be offered only by a person familiar with the detailed circumstances in which the problem arises. Unless otherwise noted, opinions expressed in *States of Mind* are the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of the Board of Directors, staff, or membership. Submissions and announcements are welcome. Please call (607) 273-9250 if you wish to submit an article, poem, story, or drawing, or send it to:

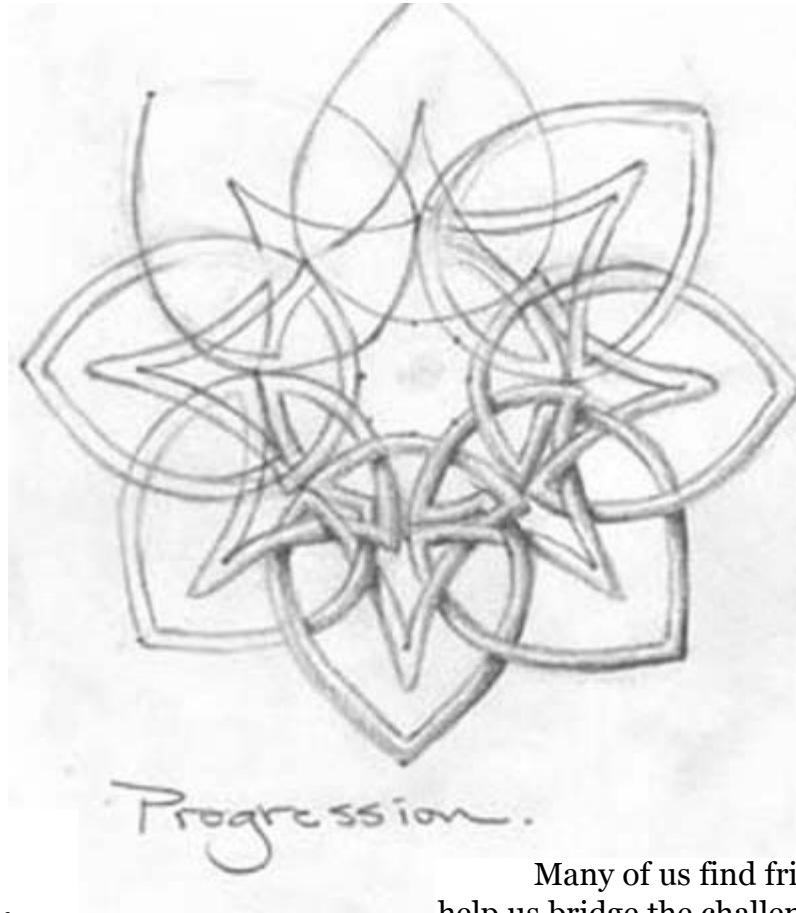
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*From the desk
of ...
the Executive
Director
Beth Jenkins*

When I attended college in the days of yore, we seemed to have no issues. At least that is how I remember things, and we all know how accurate our memories can be. We drop details, forget unpleasant events, expand or contract issues, and re-list them in importance. Our memories do not always help us see clearly.

For some, the path to college is a clear one—a given. For others it is less clear and has detours along the way. It is a journey that is filled with hope, expectations, dreams, and wonder. While some parts of the journey are structured and regulated (loans, applications, letters of reference, required courses for your field of study, and exams) some daunting decisions lie in your own hands. The realization that it is your decision to do or not do something is sometimes overwhelming.

Many of us find friends and family that help us bridge the challenges and pitfalls. They help us focus and establish routines that enable us to successfully travel the college path. Some of us don't find that bridge. We end up feeling alone and scared. Our ways of coping may no longer work. We find ourselves face to face with anxiety, depression, and an inability to cope.

If that should happen to you or a friend, reach out for help. Our colleges have resident assistants, counseling centers, professors, teaching assistants, and special support offices that can help you sort out the issues. Sometimes our issues are easily solved ... while at other times they require more attention.

I can't encourage you enough to reach out early and frequently for guidance. (Then, as you advance in your college career, you may become savvy. You may find yourself reaching out to help others as you in turn were helped.)

Help is there. Please ask.

ECONOMY GOT YOU DOWN?

By Jennifer Wholey

No one truly needs a reminder that we are living in tough economic times—the signs are everywhere. In some respect the facts are particularly poignant on college campuses. Many students are in a scramble, the decision of what to do after leaving the relative shelter of school a constant question. Recent Cornell alumni, like Alex Roth, who thought that he would immediately be attending a graduate program, are instead finding themselves biding their time.

Even though the outlook is currently on the gloomy side, students also believe that the situation won't last for too much longer.

"We are graduating with degrees from a world-renowned university, proof of our success as undergraduate students and as potential employees and graduate students," said Alex.

"Our frustration and dismay leveled us this year, but next year holds renewed vigor and the potential for a successful future. All we need to remember is that our hard work that helped us get into college and get through college will also help us to get to and through whatever comes next."

"It's been tough for everyone. The loss of jobs has forced more applicants toward higher degrees," Alex confided. "With schools across the country losing funding, the number of spaces available in graduate school has declined. Older people with more experience have swarmed to the graduate application pool."

Students are applying to higher degree programs at record rates, hoping to avoid the tanking job market, all the while praying for a grant or fellowship to offset student loans.

Meanwhile, hopeful high school students are also applying to undergraduate colleges, particularly community colleges, at higher numbers than ever before. Between the year 2007 and 2008, total enrollment at Cornell University, for example, jumped 492 individuals according to admissions data. That may seem modest, until the general stasis of enrollment is taken into account. Incoming and outgoing students normally create somewhat of a balance. However, the rise in enrollment in that one-year period was larger than all the growth between 2002 and 2007.

Although at the time of this issue's publication, final numbers are not available, the number of freshmen in the Class of 2013 is sure to be unprecedented. Facilities and services are definitely seeing a stretch, as evidenced by the lack of adequate space in freshmen-only dorms. Some students, like Sam Bobra, 2013, have been displaced to program housing. "I've had endless issues with housing this year. I went from being assigned to live in a residence hall lounge to being shunted to a program house for which I didn't even apply," said Sam. "The housing office has been less than helpful when I've tried to sort out this problem. I know that there are many others in similarly difficult situations, and it's not really fair to these students that our class is so large and there isn't adequate space to house us. This whole process has been frustrating and is not something that scared, confused freshmen should have to deal with. It's definitely not fun to be leaving home when you're not even sure where you're going to live next year."

ITHACA ON THE CHEAP

You already know that Ithaca is “gorges,” so while the weather’s still nice, check out Ithaca’s beautiful state parks. Admission is typically \$7 per car per day or \$65 for a year-long pass.

Buttermilk Falls

Take a walk around the lake while you enjoy views of the falls cascading into the creek.

On Route 13.

Robert H. Treman Park

With 9 miles of hiking trails winding through views of 12 waterfalls, you’ll be glad there’s a swimming area so you can cool off!

On Route 13.

Taughannock Falls

Several trails surround this 215-foot tall wonder spilling out of the gorge.

On Route 89.

Watkins Glen

Trails crisscross this 400-foot stream that forms 19 waterfalls as it descends.

Off Route 14.

Other places to go:

Ithaca Farmers’ Market

Fresh, delicious food and local crafts:

DeWitt Park

Tuesdays through Oct. 27, 9am – 2pm.
Thursdays through Sept. 3, 4pm – 8pm.

Steamboat Landing

Saturdays through Oct. 31, 9am – 2pm.
Saturdays from Nov.17 – Dec. 19,
9am – 3pm.
Sundays through Oct. 27, 10am – 3pm.

Cayuga Nature Center

\$2 student admission! Hosts night hikes every Friday at 7:30pm, weather permitting.

On Route 89. Tues. - Sun. 10am - 4pm.

Museum of the Earth

\$5 with student ID! Want to see a giant mastodon that was found in someone’s backyard? This is the place.

On Route 96. Call 272 -6623 for hours.

Sciencenter

\$7 admission! Unleash your inner kid and go play! It’s educational, honest. There’s also mini-golf. Tues. - Sat. 10am - 5pm,
Sun. 12pm -5pm. On Route 13.

Cornell University

FOR FREE!

**Herbert F. Johnson
Museum** Check out the view from the top floor. Tues. - Sun,
10am-5pm.

**Lab of Ornithology
&Sapsucker Woods**
Stop by the visitor center or hike the trails. Call
254 -BIRD for hours.

Fuertes Observatory
See the stars on Friday
nights from 9pm to

midnight. Call 255 -6920 to check openings.

Plantations –

Visit all of the 12 themed gardens, explore the arboretum, and enjoy 4,300 acres of natural areas.

Events

Apple Harvest Festival

Come to the Commons Sept. 25 -27 for food, crafts, and other entertainment.

Friends of the Library Book Sale

509 Esty Street, Oct. 10 -12, 17 -19, 24 -27.
Books cost less every week. On the last day you can buy a Wegman’s plastic grocery bag full of books for only \$1!



WELL FIRST THESE
NINJAS
CAME
AND WOKE ME UP

and were hanging
UPSIDE DOWN

(which is strange because
there's nothing on my ceiling
to hang from)

and then I ran downstairs
AND MY BASEMENT
HAD BEEN REPLACED
BY A SWAMP

AND ALLIGATORS ATE ALL THE NINJAS
SO I RAN BACK UPSTAIRS

SLEEPING LIKE A PRO

By Isaac Taitz

Dreams can be ridiculous sources of awesome adventure, but you might not know that because you're too busy partying and studying and Facebooking. Well, stop multitasking, turn down your phone, and tell your frat bros you'll sit out on this round of Beer-Pong, because you've got some learning to do up in this 'zine... about Sleep.

First off, I'm not James Maas, but if he didn't coin "power nap," I would've.

I've been taking power naps a bunch lately, and I love 'em!

Seriously, homeslice, you take one of these quick breaks for about 45 min to an hour and you'll be kicking ass and taking names like no one's business. Power naps act as mini recharge sessions—pit stops—if you're living a high octane/caffeine life.

You're constantly taking in information from all over—eyes, ears, even skin is constantly sending neuronal messages about whatever it touches, but to keep you sane, you're not always conscious of every hair on your body (you are now, I bet!)

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and that's when the zombies came...

Sleeping Like a Pro

Anyways, most peeps run around all day and night nonstop, and it wears on your immunity, energy, and sometimes sanity, especially at college, where genius is just a few sleep-deprived hours away from eating your textbook. BUT, if you guys take 45-60 minutes out of your day to nap up before studying, partying, or just between classes, you'll be refreshed, more attentive, less stressed, and probably looking better because bags under the eyes "are so out," as Bruno would say.

Sleeping has also been shown to help you digest everything you've learned and improve your memory. Just make sure you only nap for up to an hour—any longer and your brain is tricked into thinking that you're actually going to sleep for the night. It messes with your circadian rhythm, and you don't want to mess with the rhythm, ya dig?

But you might be saying, "Wah, sleep is for the dead. That's valuable time I could be cramming more or go into my head!" But listen carefully, because you're missing the trippiest adventure you've always had available—dreaming. I know they're hard to remember, but you do dream a few times every night, sometimes wacky adventures with historical figures and a penguin, other times just replaying a date you had. These mini movies in your head are different for everyone, and you rarely have the same one twice.

Most people have trouble remembering these dreams, but if you keep a little journal next to your bed at night and write down whatever you can remember in the morning, your brain will start to expect to remember them, and you'll remember them more and more.

Now prepare to have your mind blown. When you have good enough dream recall, you'll be able to be a conscious actor in your dreams. That's right, you don't always have to build a go-cart with your household cat, you can recognize it's a dream and say no and go off and

be completely in control of the alternate reality in your head. Anything you think of can happen, literally! This is called lucid dreaming, and you can use it for a variety of purposes. Got a big speech coming up? Conjure up your own audience and recite your speech for them, and make them give you a standing ovation if you want them to. Have a complicated problem in a class? Use your dreams to think of it from a different perspective. Or just be your own superhero and fly, web-sling, punch through walls, and save whatever prince/princess you want. And as a tribute to Billy Mays, ALL THAT WITHOUT THE RISK OF INJURY FOR THE LOW, LOW PRICE OF NOTHING! BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE! Your body has a kick-ass fail-safe system in place called sleep paralysis, which locks up your muscles so you don't go running around punching your hallmates in the face, normally.

Now, sleepy time isn't always sunshine and bunny rabbits. Just like too long of a nap will mess with your head, so will oversleeping. Since dreaming can be so enjoyable, it can be habit forming. If you don't cultivate some self-control, you'll find yourself hitting snooze till lunchtime or escaping to dreamland in class, which'll come back to bite you in the butt when finals come along. In addition, hypersomnia (oversleeping) is one of the symptoms of depression, but in these cheery schools of ours, you don't need to worry about that...not.

So ladies and gents, Cornellians and Ithacans (TC3 too), there's a hidden ability within all of us that we've had all our lives but always forgot. There's our own personal world that we can be in control of. There's a natural way to recharge that doesn't come in a can. Sleep doesn't have to be just something you do when you're being conscious.



It's not unusual to feel your mood shift during bleaker weather.

Who doesn't feel a little down when it's dreary? However, many people with otherwise normal mental health may experience symptoms of depression during certain times of the year. If you find yourself sleeping too much, feeling anxious, having little energy, and craving foods rich in carbs toward the end of the fall, it might not just be finals getting you down—seasonal affective disorder is a real problem heightened by the lengthy wintry months in upstate New York.

A lot of the problem can be blamed on decreased exposure to sunlight as the season deepens. Almost 25% of college students may feel this difference and experience a mild depression. The good news is that these symptoms are highly treatable.

Let the Sun Shine In!

The high-intensity light emitted from a light box is similar to natural sunlight. Use it in the morning when you get ready for class, and chances are you'll feel better within 2 weeks! Check your school's pharmacy for availability.

Exercise

Everyone knows that exercise is beneficial to your health. Even though you may feel less motivation to get up and go when it's cold and cloudy, studies have shown that an hour of exercise provides the same positive effects as double that amount of light treatment!

Feed Your Brain, the Right Way

You really want that soda or candy bar because it'll give you a rush, right? Carbs tend to increase serotonin levels in the brain and make you feel better. However, you ought to choose healthier carbohydrates for more sustained energy without the crash,

BEATING THE WINTER BLUES: THE REALITY OF SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER

By Jennifer Wholey

like those found in fruit.

Waking Up Is Hard to Do

It's undoubtedly tough to drag yourself out of bed when the thermometer is barely registering 10 degrees, but having an actual sleep-wake schedule, even on weekends, is incredibly helpful in maintaining your mood.

If you're still feeling down, talk to your health-care provider about other options, such as antidepressant medication.

What's to Do in Winter

National Novel Writing Month

Got a story inside of you clawing to come out? Now's your chance to join a fabulous 50,000-word-long race to the finish in only 30 days during November. nanowrimo.org

The International Rutabaga Curl

Participate in the 12th Annual Rutabaga Curling World Championship! Held at the Ithaca Farmers' Market. If you're curious or have no idea what curling is ...

Rutabagacurl.com

Lights in Winter

One weekend in late January, just when you'll wish that it was still winter break, Ithaca surprises you with a festival of the sciences and arts. lightsinwinter.com



GOING TO COLLEGE

by Joanne Zager, Ph.D.

A new school year at college is almost upon us. The college years are another developmental milestone that marks the end of childhood as you experienced it and the beginning of adulthood. You may be feeling anxiety, fright, excitement, joy and/or other emotions. You may be wondering how you will make friends and meet new people and how well you will do in your classes. Below are some tips to help you have a rewarding and enjoyable college experience.

Engage in Campus Activities

During the orientation phase of college, get involved by joining clubs and groups as soon as you arrive. Clubs will help you to meet people and you may find friends with common interests. By staying on campus, you will more quickly adjust to campus life and learn the geography of your school. Meeting people on campus will help you feel less isolated and alone.

Ask Yourself - Why Am I Going to College?

Students are very often overwhelmed with the differences between high school and college. For the most part, high school classes are smaller than are those in college. High school pupils get far more attention from the teacher than do college students. High school students are frequently reminded of the due dates of papers and exams and usually have homework assignments to do every day. College students, on the other hand, mostly attend large classes. In addition, college students receive a syllabus at the beginning of the semester that indicates the due dates for papers, exams, and other course requirements. It is then the responsibility of the student to remember the due dates, study, prepare for tests, and write papers.

Studying for Examinations and Writing Papers

As soon as you receive the syllabus for each class, you will have to find a way to manage your time so that you can receive good grades. Regularly attending classes, in addition to studying and reading, will help prepare you adequately for the exams. Motivate yourself to attend classes no matter what social event is happening at that time.

Also, don't depend on other people to take notes for you. Have a calendar in which you note the times and dates of the deadlines and plan study time to meet the goals of each class. If you are having difficulty accomplishing the class goals, meet with your resident assistant (RA) or advisor to help you contact the academic help center. Allow about two hours per credit of study time each week to accommodate the large amount of reading in college. Also, try to study in a quiet place such as the library reading room. Select a place to study that has minimal distractions. Some residence halls even have quiet times and places to study.



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GOING TO COLLEGE

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Remind yourself why you are going to college (to learn something, get a good job, go to graduate school, etc.). If you are not taking school seriously, why not take time off and work instead to earn money? You can always return to school when you are ready to appreciate it.

Residence Hall Life

Try to smile and say hello to other people in the residence hall. People will see you as friendly and might want to get to know you. Leave your door open when you are awake and in your room. The open door may inspire other students to greet you. Don't isolate yourself. Seek help and guidance from the resident assistant. RAs are trained to deal with many common issues such as conflict resolution, information and referral, alcohol and drug enforcement, and planning social and group classes and activities. Note the times they are available to talk with you. Times are usually posted on their doors. The RAs are there to help you.

Making Friends

If you want to make new friends, the best option is to have a roommate. The advantage of having a roommate is that you have someone with whom to spend time. One major disadvantage of a roommate is that you may not get along. It is easier to meet people when two of you are trying to do so. Your roommate does not have to be your best friend. Your roommate could just be company for you.

Don't forget your friends back home, and try to communicate with them via chat, text messaging, and phone. Limit the calls to your parents. You want to develop a sense of independence, and reaching out to peers helps you to develop a social life.

Mental Health Issues

If you find that you feel overwhelmed, depressed, or anxious, reach out to friends or to the RA. RAs make referrals to the mental health professionals in the community who are trained to counsel students. Don't wait too long to tell someone that you are having difficulty. The longer you wait, the more intense the issue can become. You can also call the Mental Health Association at 607-273-9250 for the names of psychotherapists in the community.

Employment

Try to obtain some part-time employment on campus. Not only will you feel good about earning your own money, but you will be able to meet more students during the course of your day.



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Food, Exercise, Alcohol, and Sleep

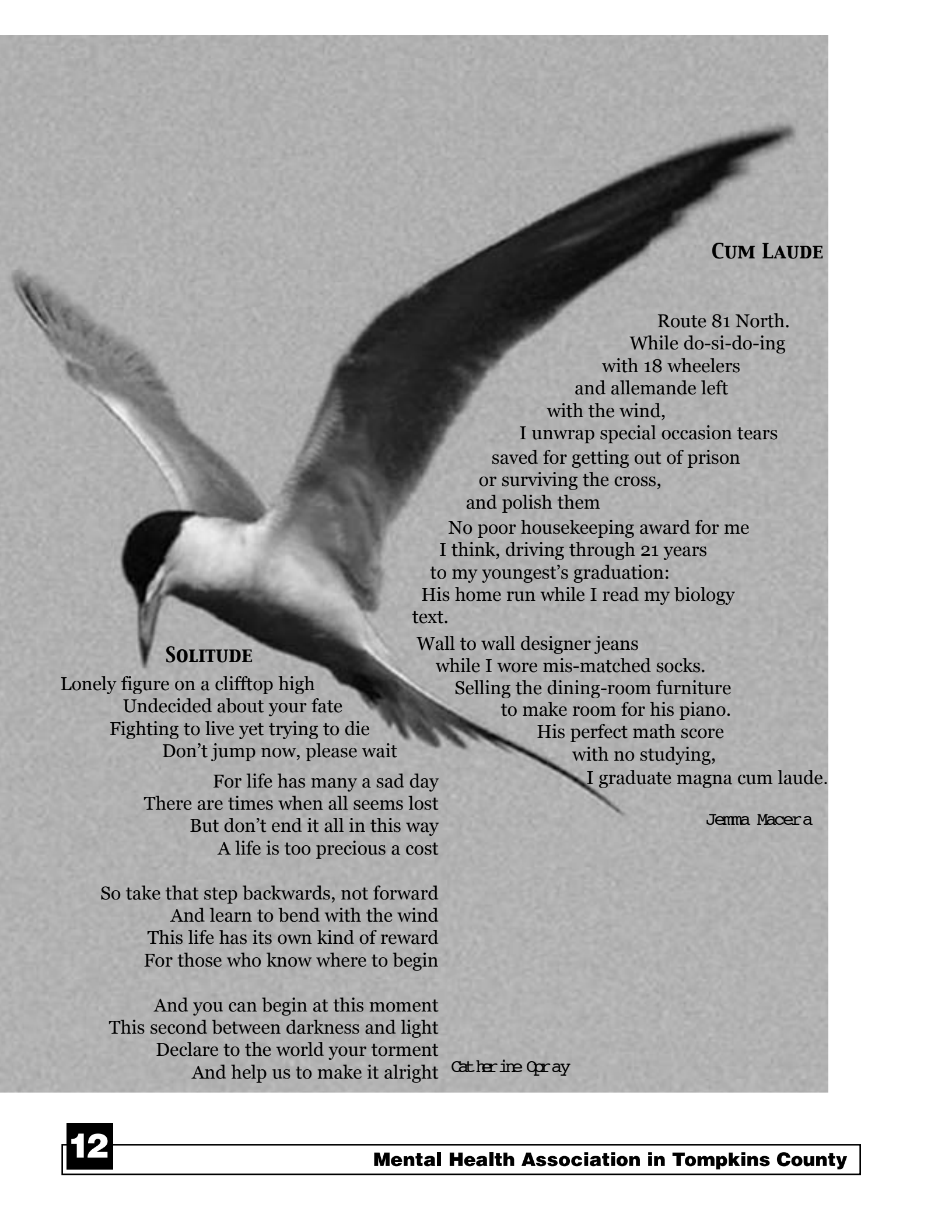
Make certain that you select healthy foods to eat. Most colleges offer a good selection of healthy food choices. Alcohol abuse may interfere with your health, sleeping patterns, class attendance, and study habits and may get you in trouble. Try to get at least eight hours of sleep per night. In college, it may become very easy to stay up late with friends and forget about the time. Regular sleep patterns contribute to good mental health. Exercise regularly by going to the gym. Ask friends or roommates if they would like to work out with you.

Final Notes

Take care of yourself and be mindful that we all may learn from our mistakes. Most people report that college was a wonderful time. In four years students may grow to become mature, productive, independent members of society.

Joanne Zager, Ph.D., is a New York State Licensed Psychologist who has a private practice in Ithaca, NY. Dr. Zager specializes in anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), relationships, and LGBT issues. She also helps students with school and/or work concerns and difficulties with master's and doctoral dissertations. She can be reached at (607) 272-6353. Her E-mail is: <jzager@twcny.rr.co, and her website is: <<http://home.twcny.rr.com/drzager>>.





CUM LAUDE

Route 81 North.
While do-si-do-ing
with 18 wheelers
and allemande left
with the wind,
I unwrap special occasion tears
saved for getting out of prison
or surviving the cross,
and polish them
No poor housekeeping award for me
I think, driving through 21 years
to my youngest's graduation:
His home run while I read my biology
text.
Wall to wall designer jeans
while I wore mis-matched socks.
Selling the dining-room furniture
to make room for his piano.
His perfect math score
with no studying,
I graduate magna cum laude.

Jerma Macera

SOLITUDE

Lonely figure on a clifftop high
Undecided about your fate
Fighting to live yet trying to die
Don't jump now, please wait
For life has many a sad day
There are times when all seems lost
But don't end it all in this way
A life is too precious a cost

So take that step backwards, not forward
And learn to bend with the wind
This life has its own kind of reward
For those who know where to begin

And you can begin at this moment
This second between darkness and light
Declare to the world your torment
And help us to make it alright

Catherine Gray

A STROLL ACROSS AMERICA

by Kendrick Pangman

I graduated in May, leaping feet first into the worst job market in the last decade or two (or perhaps longer—time will tell). I hit the ground running, applying for 21 jobs in eight states over the course of several weeks. I even managed to get three interviews, but my run ended there. I was regretfully informed and encouraged to apply again in the future. The education market is awful this year, retirements were hit hard, and districts are laying off teachers left and right. All of this would have been fine except that the phone hadn't stopped ringing with constant reminders of student loans and debt.

My family isn't poor. In these hard times, most of my relatives have managed to hang onto their jobs. The stock market sputtering doesn't affect those of us without a portfolio quite as much. We sure aren't rich though. At last count, my debt had hit \$72,000, and I'm still watching the mail, dreading another notice from a loan company that I haven't heard from yet. It sounds like a lot, but for two degrees, undergrad and graduate, comparatively it isn't that bad.

However, banks don't care about difficult economic times. Sure, I could (and did) apply for economic deference of my loans. I got a notice in the mail a week later about how my interest rate had jumped 2%. It made my blood boil. I wanted to work, and I was looking very hard. Banks were getting bailed out all over, but a kid who made the poor decision to go to college without looking at the job market six years in the future was punished instead.

So what's a 25-year-old recent graduate living in Syracuse to do when he has no idea what's next? The solution I came up with was to hitchhike to California for the High Sierra Music Festival (www.highsierramusic.com) to see some friends.

I had two weeks and figured that I could make it out and back in time for my cousin's graduation party. She'd made me promise to be there months ago, and it wouldn't be pretty if I didn't show.

I called two friends who were going to the festival to make sure I had a place to sleep at the four-day-long event. I loaded up my pack, told my brother and sister the route I would be taking, and made a cardboard sign that said "WEST." I parked my car near the Thruway. It took a half hour to get my first ride and I was on my way.

The next four days were some of the most intense, exhausting, and educational of my life. The trip from Syracuse, New York, to Quincy, California, a journey of 2,600 and some odd miles took four days, twenty-two rides, and a Greyhound. I slept by the highway in Gary, Indiana. I slept on the couch of a campus minister who picked me up and took me to his house in Nebraska. I got attacked by an ex-convict on a bus going through the Nevada desert. Immigrants picked me up who couldn't speak English but trusted I was just somebody who needed a ride.

There's a lot of time to think while hitching. Standing by the side of the road, wondering what you're doing out here, wondering if you're going to find a ride. It also leaves lots of time for self-reflection. What am I doing? What am I going to do for work? If I can't find a teaching job, what next? Do I even want to be a teacher anymore? Every experience in life tends to augment or upset the previous succession. Old ideas get reinforced or stripped away.

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**A STROLL ACROSS AMERICA
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13**

Pieces are left to meld and repel the new knowledge, the new thoughts. We're left with an accumulated experience that dictates our decisions whether we realize it or not.

College leaves a lot of questions at the end. I walked in with a plan that was quickly destroyed when the college dropped my program in my sophomore year. Four inept advisers later, I was on my own, apathetic and disillusioned about academia, and struggling to finish my degree. I kept my scholarship all four years despite less-than-adequate grades due to unbelievably poor record keeping. I spent the next two years swallowing half-truths just to get that next piece of paper. Three days talking to strangers helped put some perspective to my experience.

The festival was amazing. I shared a tent with a friend I hadn't seen in two years in a campsite of strangers, literally next to one of the three stages. I walked around barefoot for three days, following the music. I talked to everyone about everything. I shared what I had, and strangers shared with me. It was exactly what I needed.

The ride home was a blur. The police picked me up for hitching in Reno and dropped me at a truck stop. I found a Ukrainian who didn't speak much English but drove me to Pennsylvania. I was home in three days.

My faith in people had been reaffirmed and battered a bit as well. Everyone is still worried about the same things. People are losing their jobs, they're worried about a government that seems to continue creeping further from the populace, they're at least taking notice of the environment and the way we live our lives, even if they don't agree it's changing.

A rancher in Nebraska probably summed it up best as I hopped out of his truck on an exit ramp. He wore a cowboy hat and told me when I got in he wasn't too worried since he had a .45 under his seat. We talked about everything from energy and the Cornhuskers to President Obama and baseball.

"Well, I thought I was gonna hafta kick you out after the first few miles, but I guess we're closer than I thought," he said as I grabbed my pack.

"We're all closer than we think. Until everyone realizes it, nothing's going to get better," I replied with a smile as I shouldered my pack and closed the door.

Back in Syracuse the job search continues to bear no fruit. I don't know how things will end up. I have myself and everything I've learned, been taught, and experienced up to this point. Life continues to fill in the blanks in my education with every passing day. I'm still not sure where I'm going. After my trip, at least I'm sure where I've been. It's up to me to point my feet and start walking. At least it will never be boring.



THE TOP 10 PIECES OF MENTAL HEALTH ADVICE FOR COLLEGE FRESHMEN

By Celia Smith

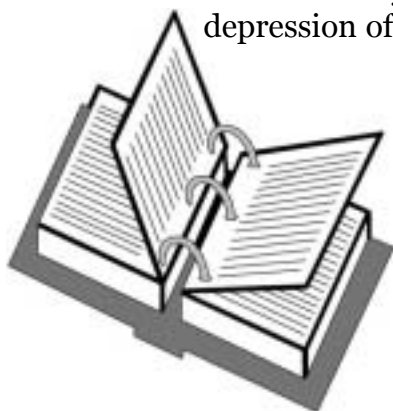
QUESTION: How many Cornell students does it take to screw in a light bulb?

ANSWER: Two—one to put in the bulb, and one to crack under the pressure.

Like this slightly sinister take on the classic light bulb joke, the summer before my freshman year at Cornell was spent trying to make light of the stress that comes with a college education. I knew it was bound to be the most exciting four years of my life; I was also acutely aware that I was in for a good deal of anxiety and pressure to excel.

The fear of failing afflicts incoming university students everywhere. This is because the move from high school to college has an inevitable impact on all aspects of a young person's life. It's no wonder that sometimes students feel exactly like they are about to crack.

One of the biggest issues I have noticed as a college student is that of balance—the struggle to maintain it as it simultaneously seems to slip away in a tidal wave of homework, crowded frat parties and all-you-can-eat meal plans. Straight-A high school students struggle to pass intro chem while maintaining a schedule that includes a social life, at least four hours of sleep a night and, just maybe, doing laundry a few times a semester.



Anxiety, stress, and depression often arise from simple biological deficiencies like hunger, hangovers, or exhaustion; others are more deep-rooted in thoughts of failure, loneliness, homesickness and hopelessness.

This is not an article intended to scare college freshmen. I can honestly say that college has been the most exciting, fun, and—most importantly—happy period of my life so far. That being said, it has also been the time when I have experienced the most anxiety and doubt about my ability to conduct a semi-independent existence.

Before I left for college, I received a lot of advice and support about how to care for my body (get enough sleep, eat breakfast, dress warm, get a flu shot, etc). What I wish is that I had also received advice about caring for my mental health. So here is a list of tips on how to keep your mind in top shape as you dive into your first year of college life:

10. TAKE A MENTAL HEALTH DAY

Seriously. Forget what your mom says; sometimes the best thing you can do for yourself during a tough week is turn off your phone, skip all your classes, close all your books, and focus on relaxing and de-stressing. I'm not advocating this as a regular habit, but sometimes taking a day to go for a long walk or to make space in your dorm room so that you can actually see the floor is as valuable as acing a final.

9. KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

Especially where schoolwork is concerned, small problems can expand and consume your life ... like when you find yourself dreaming about the calculus problem you've been unable to solve since Monday. Or when you fail your first test and become convinced that you will never graduate, get a job, a house, or retirement fund and will eventually end up living under a bridge somewhere. Don't let your anxieties take on lives of their own; tell yourself that yes, you messed up, but it's not the end of the world and you have many other successes to be proud of.

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8. RESIST COMPARING YOURSELF TO OTHERS TOO MUCH

While learning from your peers is a great way to expand your interests and explore new horizons, students tend to fall into the trap of feeling bad about themselves because the girl down the hall is the president of the class council, captains the polo team, gets straight As, and just hooked up with the hottest guy on the floor. It is crucial to take things at your own pace. While challenging yourself is great, it's important to think about how much you can handle before you sign up for that fifth club.



7. KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN

One of the most important things you can do for yourself in college is to make sure there is always someone to talk to whom you love and trust. In the rush to be independent, many new students (myself included) roll their eyes at the thought of calling their parents to update them ... but honestly, sharing your troubles, anxieties, or problems is the best way to cope with them. Whether it's a parent, a friend, a mentor, or teacher, make sure there is always someone you can tell about the exam you're sure you flunked, the terrible food, or your weird roommate.

6. IT'S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW, IT'S WHO YOU KNOW

Make an effort to become involved with a variety of friends rather than forming a high school style clique from your dorm suite, biology lab, or sorority pledge class. One of the greatest advantages of college is the opportunity to meet cool kids from a diversity of backgrounds, and you may never again experience the chance to meet so many different people in one place.

5. PRIORITIZE

Although it is much easier said than done, prioritization is the key to a happy and mentally healthy college existence. Yes, the weekends will always be there for doing homework, but be honest with yourself and admit that you will probably spend all Saturday partying and all Sunday sleeping in recovery from Saturday. Try to accomplish as much as you can during the week, but be sure to allow yourself some free time as well.

4. EVERYTHING IN MODERATION, INCLUDING MODERATION

College is a time of extreme extremes—very late nights followed by sleeping until 3, too much alcohol, 200 pages to read by tomorrow, three months since you last did laundry... sometimes, its hard to take it all in stride. Working hard and playing hard are the name of the game in college, but for every all-nighter you pull, make sure you add a hot shower and a nap; for every class skipped, spend an extra hour catching up on the reading. College is like tightrope walking: it's all about balance.

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3. SURROUND YOURSELF WITH HEALTHY
RELATIONSHIPS

College is a time to meet many interesting people ... some better for your mental health than others. Avoid toxic friendships, where everything is demanded of you but no support is offered in return. Likewise avoid relationships built around alcohol, drugs, or skipping class. Dating in college can be exciting and magical, but beware the drunken hookup, which rarely leads to anything more romantic than a hangover and hurt feelings.

2. DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP

As mental health becomes more widely addressed on college campuses, more resources for those affected by issues such as alcohol abuse, depression, and eating disorders have become available. If you are having trouble coping, or know someone who is, it is essential to realize that there is no shame or stigma in taking advantage of mental health services. No, it doesn't mean you're crazy ... it means you are smart enough to take care of yourself so you can go on living your life to its fullest potential. If you had the flu, you'd go to the doctor, right? Your mental health should be no less important than your physical well-being.

1. DON'T BE TOO HARD ON YOURSELF

Professors, peers, and parents aside, you will probably find that the hardest person to please is yourself. Don't mentally punish yourself every time you earn a bad grade, fail to get an internship, or get dumped ... remember that these things happen to everyone, and that if you stick with it, eventually you'll succeed. Why do you think they call it "the old college try?"

BEDTIME STORY FOR ICARUS

by Jennifer Wholey

Smoothing the creases in his son's sheets
the ripples mirroring the furrows in his own brow,
did Daedalus spin a tale to soothe his son pre-flight?
Might Dad have told a favorite yarn to ward off the
night?

Or was he harsh and harried, spitting out a warning
while the bedside candle sputtered and died, wax
dripping?

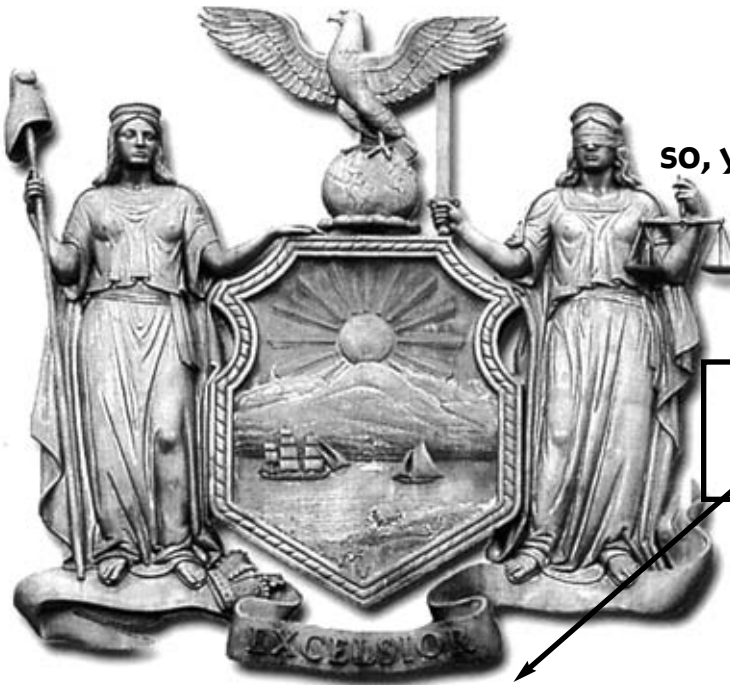
When I was a young girl, my mother never left me,
not until she knew that my every breath was serene.
She would read and I would bask, a sponge for her
sunlight.

Eyelids a-tremble, I longed to save her in my sight –
I grasped her hand in mine as tight as I could muster,
hoping that my Goliath grip might hold and keep her.

An accident is all it was, and yet I can't help
but think that if Icarus had my mother instead
I might have heard a different bedtime story.



SOL **i** TUDE



so, you're thinking of dropping out?

consider this alternative....

SUNY EMPIRE STATE COLLEGE

... and for the returning veteran, including National Guard and Reservists

Founded in 1971, Empire State College, State University of New York, is one of the university's 13 colleges of arts and sciences, accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. This NYS public institution is uniquely designed to serve adults pursuing associate, bachelor's and master's degrees. The college offers affordable, SUNY degrees onsite at 35 locations in New York state and abroad, as well as entirely online. Students choose how, when, and where they will study. In 2009 there are 18,000 adult learners served by the college, and enrollment continues to grow.

Empire State College offers

- **Affordable SUNY tuition**
- **Degrees that can be tailored to meet a student's education, career, and personal goals**
- **A process for assessing and awarding credit for college-level learning from an applicant's work and life experience. (College-level learning credit may be given from training programs at work, a real estate license, military training, certification in fields such as early childhood or chemical dependency counseling, or artistic pursuits such as paintings, sculpture, or music.)**
- **An independent study program, guided by SUNY faculty mentors, allowing students to study on their own schedules.**
- **"Transfer-friendly" policies**
- **Student online library and study resources**

Recently named one of America's top Military Friendly Colleges, Empire State College is committed to enabling military members, regardless of their status, to continue their educational goals. With a dedicated staff, the Office of Veteran and Military Education (OVME) is a one-stop shop of information and resources for veterans and military students. As such, we pledge to ensure that your transition to college goes smoothly.

Call our Student Information Center at
800 847-3000.

or visit:

<http://www.esc.edu/>



"In recent SUNY student surveys, Empire State College consistently ranked #1 in student satisfaction."

MY STYROFOAM CUP

By Christina Rockwell

"Hey, there. How's it going?"

I'm passing an acquaintance on the Ag Quad.

"Oh, fine." I reply automatically.

"What's up?"

I'm standing in line at Appel with a classmate from my writing seminar.

"I'm managing, I guess."

"I know exactly what you mean. I feel like prelims are already bearing down on me."

No, you don't. My dad died last week.

I take some mashed potatoes.

"Yeah ... it's going to be a tough semester."

I was a scant few days into my sophomore year at Cornell when I was called home to Delaware. A bicycle and some asphalt had had a rough exchange; my father was the casualty. At home the phone rang continuously from sympathetic friends of the family. A stream of visitors came to the house, bringing hugs, damp eyes, and casseroles. The kitchen table was full of flower arrangements, and the refrigerator was crammed with food. We heard the same mournful lines repeated endlessly. My family could find little comfort in the words themselves, for there are few words that can alleviate that suffering. Yet the efforts and concern of our community buoyed us, amazing us at how many people cared about our family (and how quickly and how far news of tragedy could spread).

My family held a funeral; the guest of honor was concealed in a silver box. A few days later Dad came home in a much smaller box. Then I returned to Cornell, my other home. There I met silence. The contrast between these two homes, my two worlds, was palpable. The feeling of a supportive network of humanity was yanked away from under my feet once I was back at school. The reason was simple: no one knew. No one had known my father or my family; my own absence was detected primarily by my close friends. These colleagues were informed of the situation, but the response was nothing remarkable. I heard the characteristic phrases of shock and sympathy, an awkward silence, and a permanent change in the subject. Over the next days, weeks, months, every time a friend or classmate asked how I was doing, a deluge of thoughts raced by before I could reply. "How am I doing? Do I tell her about Dad? Do I know her well enough? She's just making friendly conversation ... do I unload this burden on her unsuspecting lap? Hardly seems fair. Is this an appropriate time to delve into this mess?" I wonder now if my unemotional, matter-of-fact account was unnerving to the listener.

More than once I contemplated constructing a paper hat that said: "Hi, my Dad is dead." Actually, what I really wanted, was a neon sign, but I lacked the necessary engineering skills. I was not interested in garnering pity—quite the opposite—but such an emblem would at least announce unabashed that things were *not* fine. Instead, I developed a habit of saying: "As well as can be expected." That response gave the inquirer some control as to whether to pry open that particular can of fish bait. With each repetition of the story, it flowed more naturally, my voice cracking less. In time I could recount all the gruesome details with a completely straight face.

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MY STYROFOAM CUP
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

Being emotionally tough was my general guideline for coping with the loss. The past was unchangeable; all I could do was to accept the development and continue my academic life. It was remarkably easy to do. Courses kept my mind and body occupied. Everyone else was acting normally. Perhaps most importantly, at school there was no void where my dad should have been. Dad was not a player in my Cornell universe, so, unlike at home, I was not continuously and painfully reminded of his absence. There was no source of grief at school; all that I had I brought with me from Delaware. The simplest course of action was to set it aside in an insulated styrofoam cup while I immersed myself in lectures, labs, papers, and exams. Occasionally my memory would take cautious sips from that styrofoam cup, scalding myself each time. Not surprisingly, my approach to the situation led to several unpleasant conversations with my mother:

"Have you met with the school's grief counselor yet?"

"No, Mom. I haven't. I've been busy."

"You really should. It will help you with the grieving process."

"I don't need a counselor. You're the one who's always saying that everyone grieves differently. Why can't I deal with it my way?"

"You're not dealing with it. You're ignoring the fact that your father is dead and he's never coming back."

And so on. In hindsight, we both had valid points. Talking about it more might have helped me find closure. Yet the one rule of grief is that every individual follows his or her own rules. The response within my family was highly variable, even though we had lost the same person. My brother retreated into a shell of sullen depression. My mom talked about the tragedy indiscriminately, even sharing her grief with total strangers. I think it was overall harder for them because the whole experience was more tangible. Their minds are branded with images of the accident scene and the hours in the hospital hovering over his broken body. They continued to live in the house my Dad had designed, filled with his possessions, unfinished projects, and memories. I alone had arrived late from an alternate reality and escaped to life back there. I sincerely wish it had been otherwise.

It would be foolish to think I could offer any advice to a student suffering loss or what a concerned friend should say to a griever. Grief takes many forms, and there is no relief except that of time. A beloved grandparent succumbs in a battle against age and disease. Parents who seemed to stick together through thick and thin turn out to be sticking together only until the kids are in college. A car accident swiftly cuts short the life of a friend from high school. Know that a tragedy that occurs in your home life is naturally going to affect your college life. Yet in an environment in which all the residents are brimming with youth, independence, and potential (or tenure), it can be a very lonely walk. It does not have to be. I worried too much about inconveniencing others, awkward silences, and appearing vulnerable. Yet the people around you, including friends, counselors, and support groups, want to help you get through difficult experiences. A student does have a network of emotional support available, even if it isn't the type to console with casseroles. You just have to be willing to tap into it.

I still have that insulated cup of grief. I drink deeply on a regular basis ... largely because a bicycle is my current mode of transportation. No one in my family rode for five years following my dad's death; now it is a daily opportunity to pay mental tribute. Time has cooled the brew, but it still packs a fair bit of heat. The loss will last a lifetime, but I'm fine with that.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH GROUPS SOUND OFF

Cornell University
Empathy, Assistance and Referral Services (EARS)
ears@cornell.edu
www.rso.cornell.edu/ears
Drop in: 527 Willard Straight
Phone: 255-3608

Anonymous Interviewee:

“EARS is the place to go if you're having a problem. If you feel like you need to confide in more than just your friends, talking to a peer in EARS about an issue is as easy as talking to someone who's your same age and impartial but is still like a friend whom you can trust. We're not psychotherapists, but we are trained to make you feel comfortable. We have a room in Willard Straight Hall if you want to talk to someone face to face. You just come in during our hours, sit with a counselor, and talk. The entire process is peer to peer. You can phone in if you can't or don't want to come in person. The most important aspect is that because the counselors are students, we know what other students are going through. We don't necessarily give advice, but we are taught to ask leading questions and get students to delve into problems themselves. More often, by talking through their issues, they come to solutions themselves. It really helps to speak about the problem and explain it to someone else. Once they are thinking more about it, the situation tends to become clearer and the solution will reveal itself. The service is 100% confidential. The certified counselors are wonderful people and very private; they actually don't reveal who they are to you. EARS is definitely easier than going to Gannett on campus. You don't

need to fill out paperwork or have insurance; you can just call. We may refer you to Gannett if it's the first step to getting help regarding a serious problem that requires a professional. But at EARS we help you take the mess in your head and boil it down to a few specific issues and then we give you the resources and tools necessary to help you work through those issues.

“EARS can sometimes be underused; it takes a lot to come out and talk. But the person you're talking to isn't going to tell anyone, and we're here for you. It takes 3 semesters of training for a student to be a certified EARS counselor, so we truly know how to deal with almost any topic you can throw at us. I would encourage students to use this program ... if you just sit on your problem, it'll only get worse.”





Ithaca College
Active Minds
Meetings are held weekly
Email: activeminds@ithaca.edu for more information

Caitlin Bango, Class of '09, Co-president of this chapter for two years told us the following:

“Active Minds focuses on raising awareness about mental health issues, reducing the stigma about seeking help. We also can point students in the right direction to get help by raising awareness about the counseling center.

“The focus of our activities on campus is to promote awareness through a variety of events. In February we hold an event called Stomp Out the Stigma. We reserve a central location on campus and invite performance groups to entertain students, and we have informative speakers between the acts. It’s a night to have fun, but primarily to raise students’ understanding and acceptance of mental health issues. We also regularly invite Cornell Minds Matter, a similar but unrelated group, to participate.

“We hold a variety of events during Mental Health Awareness Week and Stress Out Week, which are nationally observed by other collegiate chapters of Active Minds. Around finals we hold a De-stress Fest. One year we had a professor talk about and demonstrate hypnotism, and it really seemed to be a hit! Stomp Out the Stigma is my favorite because it tends to draw so many people. Two years ago we put on a really successful play. Last fall we also attended the national conference of Active Minds chapters held at the University of Pennsylvania, and it was really awesome to talk to people from other chapters, to know that we’re not just working on this alone.

“We also have a desk in the student center, and we have office hours during which you can visit if you want to come and talk. We’re not therapists, but we can refer people to where they need to be.

“Our main goal of reducing stigma involves getting people to talk more openly about mental illness, but not only about their own issues. We also want students to have the courage to go to the counseling center if something is affecting them emotionally. You can go even if you don’t have a really intense problem. We’ve had articles in the IC newspaper with a picture of a student in the counseling center. Someone came up to me and said that when she saw a regular student actually in the center, it wasn’t scary to her anymore. Making a difference like that is what it’s all about.

“It’s natural to feel like you need to figure it out on your own, but it doesn’t have to be like that. Don’t be afraid to seek help yourself, or for a friend who is having a problem. Educate yourself about mental illness so that you can recognize the signs, and be aware of those around you who might need you. Have an open mind.”

Tompkins Cortland Community College
Counseling, Career and Transfer Services

Excerpted from an interview with Amy Trueman,
Director :

“The Counseling, Career and Transfer Services office at TC3 provides a full range of counseling services. Personal counseling is offered regarding diverse issues, including adjustment to college, relationships, stress management, alcohol and substance abuse, coping with loss, self-esteem, and many others. Students come in to make an appointment or may be referred by faculty, staff, or other students. Counseling is confidential and free of charge to TC3 students. Students with need for a mental health agency are assessed and referred to an appropriate community agency.

“Academic and career counseling are also provided. Lines between personal, academic and career counseling are vague. Issues that are causing concern or distraction in one area of a person’s life affect all aspects. Making difficult decisions, seeing options clearly, or just feeling more comfortable with the realities of life can often be done more easily with assistance.

“Counselors help students accomplish their goals by :

- **Providing processes that help students identify/clarify their goals,**
- **Helping students identify and use their strengths which will help to reach those goals,**
- **Developing students’ ability to strategically manage the challenges that they may face.**

“Many students are coming from some distance and don’t have the support system that they had at home. Others feel like they have never had an adequate support network. As people approach or progress through adulthood, it is important for each student to feel safe enough but also to take the responsibility to get the assistance they need. The Counseling, Career and Transfer Services office at TC3 is one place where students can do both.”

Thank you to all our donors!

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In Memory

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**COLLEGE COUNSELING CENTER
CONTACT INFORMATION**

CORNELL UNIVERSITY

607-255-5155

Emergency: 607-255-5208

ITHACA COLLEGE

607 -274-3136

Emergency: 274-3177

TC3

607-844-8222 Ext. 4261

(TOMPKINS COUNTY)

SUICIDE PREVENTION CRISIS HOTLINE:

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Mental Health Association
in Tompkins County

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September, 2009

Dear Students, Families and Friends:

Welcome to this special issue of States of Mind: "The College Conundrum, Student Life and Mental Health."

Here at The Mental Health Association in Tompkins County, we realized that there is a very important demographic we have overlooked—students on college campuses in our neighborhoods. The mental health needs of young adults are frequently minimized by our nation, and it is only when something unpleasant or shocking occurs that we wonder aloud, and often too late: "What could we have done to prevent this, and how can we avoid having it happen again?"

We have tried to put together an issue that not only will educate, please, and entertain you, but one that includes concepts and resources that will point the way toward help and hope for the college student in your life. (Especially if YOU are that student!)

Ithaca and Tompkins County are fine places to be a student, but conversely, this part of upstate New York may often be cloudy, snowy, lonely and isolating. So from all of us here at the MHA to all of you, as the new school year starts, we wish that you:

STUDY IN GOOD (MENTAL) HEALTH!

