

# Identifying and Referring Students in Distress: A Faculty/Staff Guide

The college years can be very stressful for many. In the contemporary climate of competition and pressure, some students adequately cope with these stresses, but others find that stress becomes unmanageable and interferes with learning. In some cases, these students may even disrupt the learning of others.

## Your Role

Many students initially seek assistance from faculty or staff members. Below are guidelines for identifying students in distress:

- ◆ Excessive procrastination and very poorly prepared work, especially if inconsistent with previous work.
- ◆ Infrequent class attendance with little or no work completed.
- ◆ Dependency (e.g., the student who hangs around or makes excessive appointments during office hours).
- ◆ Listlessness, lack of energy, or frequently falling asleep in class.
- ◆ Marked changes in personal hygiene.
- ◆ Impaired speech and disjointed thoughts.
- ◆ Repeated requests for special consideration (e.g., deadline extensions).
- ◆ Threats to others.
- ◆ Expressed suicidal thoughts (e.g., referring to suicide as a current option).
- ◆ Excessive weight gain or loss.
- ◆ Behavior which regularly interferes with effective class management.
- ◆ Frequent or high levels of irritable, unruly, abrasive, or aggressive behavior.
- ◆ Unable to make decisions despite your repeated efforts to clarify or encourage.
- ◆ Bizarre behavior that is obviously inappropriate for the situation (e.g., talking to something/someone that is not present).
- ◆ Students who appear overly nervous, tense or tearful.

## Guidelines for Interaction:

- ◆ Talk to the student in private.
- ◆ Express concern. Be as specific as possible in stating your observations and reasons for concern.
- ◆ Listen carefully to everything the student says.

- ◆ Repeat the essence of what the student has told you so your attempts to understand are communicated.
- ◆ Avoid criticizing or sounding judgmental.
- ◆ Consider the Counseling Center as a resource and discuss referral with the student.
- ◆ If the student resists referral and you remain uncomfortable with the situation, contact the Counseling Center to discuss your concern.