Identifying a Student in Distress

Mental health is everyone’s business. As members of the campus community, we have all made a commitment to recognize and assist students who demonstrate behaviors that indicate they may be struggling. Know these indicators so you can direct a student to the appropriate resource.

Students who are struggling may often present changes in key areas. Warning signs include:

Academic signs:
• Deterioration in quality or quantity of work
• Repeated absences or lateness from class or commitments
• Disorganized or erratic performance
• Falling asleep in class
• Disorganized or erratic performance
• Repeated absences or lateness from class
• Change in energy level—either an increase or decrease

Physical signs:
• Change in energy level—either an increase or decrease
• Change in personal hygiene or appearance
• Deterioration in quality or quantity of work

Emotional signs:
• Emotional outbursts including anger, irritation, sadness or extreme happiness
• Withdrawing from friends or previously enjoyed activities
• Expressions of hopelessness and fear
• General low mood

Warning signs that someone may be considering suicide:
• Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself
• Looking for ways to kill oneself (e.g., searching online)
• Talking about feeling trapped
• Behaving recklessly
• Writing about death, dying or suicide
• Giving away favorite possessions

A sudden and dramatic increase in mood can also indicate that an individual is considering suicide.

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Determining the Level of Urgency: Who Do You Call?

There are many different resources available on campus, and knowing when to use them is key. To gauge whether a student is at risk to themselves or others, answer the following questions:

• Are they willing to access support from others?
• Have they stated an intention to die or cause harm?
• Have they reported a previous suicide attempt or self-injury?
• Have they left you with an uneasy feeling with respect to their safety or the safety of others?

If you have any concerns for a student’s safety, do not feel that you have to make that determination. Call Campus Police and let them assess the level of urgency. Always err on the side of caution.

If you’re concerned about a student’s general well-being but are not concerned for their immediate safety, contact the STARs team (Students At Risk). The STARs team will offer a network of staff to assist the student.

In addition to contacting STARs, encouraging the student to connect with a resource has been shown to be helpful.

If you have a concern for a student’s immediate safety do not hesitate. Let Campus Police assess the level of urgency. Call 978-934-4911.

www.uml.edu/reach out
What about FERPA?
The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) permits communication about a student of concern if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health and safety of the student or other individuals.
UMass Lowell faculty and staff may disclose personal identifiable information from an educational record to appropriate individuals in connection with a health and safety emergency. Additionally, information can be shared with university personnel when there is a specific need to know and should be limited to the essentials of university business. Such information should be shared with appropriate consideration for student privacy.
If faculty or staff are not sure whether information should be released or to whom it should be released, questions or concerns should be directed to the Office of Student Affairs. If it is an emergency, Campus Police should be contacted immediately.

Response Tips
Safety First—The welfare of the campus community should always be top priority. Do not hesitate to call Campus Police if someone is displaying threatening or violent behavior.
Listen Sensitive and Carefully—Use a calm voice and non-threatening body language. Maintain eye contact and avoid judgmental or threatening responses.
Be Proactive—Early intervention is best; engage a student as soon as you notice something and set limits on behavior.
Be Direct—Don’t be afraid to ask the question. Ask students directly if they’re under the influence, feeling confused or thinking of harming themselves.
Follow Through—Direct a student to the appropriate resource.
Consult and Document—Always share concerning interactions with your supervisor and feel free to document an incident through a STARS report.

Sexual Violence Contacts and Confidential Support
A student may want to seek support but may not yet be ready to report the incident. There are several spaces on campus designated to offer the support that a student needs without the mandate of reporting.

Confidential Supports:
Counseling Services: UCrossing, Suite 300 Counseling@uml.edu; 978-934-6800
Health Services: UCrossing, Suite 300 Health_Services@uml.edu; 978-934-6800
Campus Ministries: UCrossing, Suite 380 uml.edu/campusministry

Where Do You Report?
Every department has its own chain of command and method of reporting. It’s imperative that all reports of sexual violence get brought to the attention of the Title IX Coordinator, which can be done directly or through your department.

Workshops and Additional Training Opportunities
Knowing the warning signs for someone in distress is just the first step. Take the next step and learn about high-risk groups, risk factors and how to navigate difficult conversations. Please note that all workshops can be tailored to meet department needs.

Connect
A workshop that focuses on identifying the warning signs of suicide, discussing how to intervene and identifying campus resources.

Ally Space
LGBTQ students are at higher risk for suicide due to the environmental struggles they may encounter. Learn how you can be an ally to students in need.

Bystander Awareness Training
Active Bystanders play a key role in valuing diversity and creating an inclusive workplace. This program will empower you to take this challenging but important role. A student-specific version, Bringing in the Bystander, is also available.

Dealing with Disruptive Students
This workshop will assist faculty and staff in understanding why students may become disruptive, how to address behavior in the moment and how to report incidents. You will learn about STARs, the University’s behavioral intervention team, and what happens when you report a student to the team.

Understanding Title IX
Learn the far-reaching implications of women’s equity at UMass Lowell means for you: equal access to all programs and scholarships, prevention of sexual violence, reporting responsibilities of employees regarding sexual violence or harassment, and resources that are available for possible victims. We will discuss the differences between a police investigation, a Title IX investigation and the student conduct process.

Active Shooter Training
Presented by the UMLPD and Student Affairs, this teaches what to do in an active shooter situation. The presentation begins with prevention and then explains what happens as a situation unfolds; what should you do, where should you go, and how to contact the police safely. This workshop can be done for colleges, departments or classes.

For a digital and up-to-date version of the Red Folder, please go to: uml.edu/RedFolder

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