Strategies for Supporting Students in Distress

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Introduction

- Mental health is vital to the University’s academic mission
- Mental health needs of students present a growing challenge
- Trends: effective treatment, decreasing stigma
- Increasing recognition of ubiquity of mental health problems as well as our responsibility to reach out and support students who are in distress
"We have a focus here, and we hope to draw you into the focus and bring your strength and spirit and heart along, to develop a caring community everywhere that there is the name Cornell...I urge you, as you move through the wonderful and tremendous life experience that is Cornell, to think about the person next to you, the person across the hall, the person in your class and to help us build an even more caring community."

— From President Skorton's Convocation Address, August 19, 2006
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ARE YOU REALLY THIS MENTAL? I ASKED FOR A CHILL ROOMMATE.

OH, GOOD ANOTHER STRESSOR.
Cornell Data comparable to peer institutions

Over past year (n=1902):

- 44% undergraduates reported feeling “so depressed that it was difficult to function”
- 11% reported seriously contemplating suicide
- 1.3% had attempted suicide (~175 undergrads)
Principles Underlying Strategy

• Clinical services are necessary but not sufficient
• Mental health problems require an institution-wide, community-based network of support
  (Air Force model)
Leadership Structure

Executive Committee on Campus Health & Safety

- President’s Council on Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Council on Mental Health and Welfare
Framework for Network of Student Support

Mental Health

- Clinical Services
- Environmental Support
- Community Based Services
- Educational Strategies
- Support Systems
- Policy Initiatives
• 13% of student body seen last year in Gannett’s Counseling and Psychological Services.
• 6% increase in CAPS visits so far this year.
Environmental Support

- Climate efforts
  - Residential Initiative
  - Caring Community
  - Diversity Initiatives
“Study: Support shields kids from racist slurs”
Gannett News Service 9/26/06

“. . . discrimination can spur depression and behavior problems in adolescents, but it can also be counterbalanced by support from homes, friends and school. . .”
Community Based Services

- CAPS Community Based Services
  - Off-site “Let’s Talk” walk-in hours
  - Reaches out to high-risk populations
    - Asian-Asian American
    - Under-represented minorities
    - International
  - Locations include ISSO, Engineering, Ujaama
LET'S TALK:

Free and confidential consultation and support on a variety of issues. Available to all students. No appointment necessary.

WHEN: Monday-Friday
WHERE: Multiple campus locations
WHO: Counselors from Gannett Health Services

For more information:
www.gannett.cornell.edu/CAPS/offsiteSupport.html
phone: 255-5208

- stress
- academic problems
- anxiety
- relationships
- adjustment to a new culture
- family problems
- depression
- financial difficulties
- other concerns
— CAPS community consultations & interventions for faculty/staff on helping students
Educational Strategies

- New print resources for faculty/staff
  - Caring Community Card
Keep this Card.
You may need to use these resources to help someone.

Know Someone Who Needs Help?

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Utilize the network.

Dean of Students
consultation, support, referral: 255-6839
student-to-student support: 255-EARS

Gannett Health Services
24-hour phone consultation: 255-5155
counseling and psychological services: 255-5208
medical services: 255-5155
victim advocate: 255-1212

Residential Programs
concerns about students living on campus: 255-0677

International Students and
Scholars Office
255-5243

Employee Assistance Program
support for staff and faculty members: 255-1531

Workforce Diversity, Equity,
and Life Quality
bias-related incidents and reporting: 255-3976

Emergencies 911

Academic Advising and
Student Services
Agriculture and Life Sciences: 254-3986
Architecture, Art, and Planning: 255-3616
Arts and Sciences: 255-5004
Engineering: 255-7414
Graduate School: 255-5184
Hotel: 255-6376
Human Ecology: 255-2532
Industrial and Labor Relations: 255-2223
Internal Transfer Division: 255-4386
Johnson School: 255-9395 or 255-0013
Law: 255-5839 or 255-5873
Postdoctoral Studies: 255-5823
Veterinary Medicine: 253-3700 or 253-4448

Cornell Police 255-1111

A Caring Community
You can make a difference to someone in distress.
Notice those around you.
Express your concerns.
Ask questions.
Make a referral.

Find the best resources.
254-INFO
http://cuinfo.cornell.edu
• New web resources for faculty/staff
Assisting Students in Distress: A Campus Network

WHAT TO KNOW: data, signs of distress, key individuals/groups
**WHAT TO DO:** interventions, resources for students
LEARN MORE: common mental health concerns

Mental health is a community responsibility
Communities provide cooperative environments in which individuals make a conscious effort to support one another. Cornell, as a community, provides each of us with opportunities for connection. At times, this means we will experience the joy or the pain of another community member. In certain situations, when an individual is in distress, we may have a personal or professional opportunity to: reach out, lend support and/or make a helpful referral for further assistance. We may also have the opportunity to share our own personal stories and experiences. We do this out of concern and care for the person in distress. We can also be in a position to provide support and encouragement to someone who is feeling confused, uncertain or anxious about a situation or concern.

Caring Community
“We have a focus here, and we hope to draw you in the focus and bring your strength and spirit and heart along, to develop a caring community everywhere that there is the name Cornell...I urge you, you move through the wonderful and tremendous life experience that is Cornell, to think about the person next to you, the person across the hall, the person in your class and to be a friend and supporter and be a friend to the rest of the campus community.”
Noticing Signs of Distress

The following can all be important signs of distress. You may notice a student exhibiting one or more of them and decide that something is clearly wrong. Or you may have a "gut-level feeling" that something is amiss. If the latter is the case, don’t dismiss your feelings or feel that you need to wait for tangible "proof" that a problem exists. A simple check-in with the student may help you get a better sense of his/her situation.

Academic Indicators
- Deterioration in quality/quantity of work
- A negative change in classroom or research performance (e.g., drop in grades)
- Missed assignments or exams
- Repeated absences from class or from research lab
Campus Health Initiatives

Intervention Pathways

There are two pathways to take once you have identified a student in distress: speaking directly with the student or contacting another network resource for referral.

Choosing a pathway

If you have a relationship with (even the smallest amount of rapport) the student and are noticing signs of distress, speaking directly to the student may be the best option. Begin the conversation by expressing your concern. (See “speaking directly with the student.”)

Conversely, if you do not really know the student (e.g., student is in your large lecture class, is a resident in your building, but not on your floor), but are aware of a pattern of concerning behavior, you may prefer contacting another network resource.
Resources for Students in Distress

Sometimes a student needs a listening ear, “normalizing” of a situation or feelings, maybe a little problem-solving and/or a resource or referral. The Cornell campus is full of helpful resources. If you’re not sure who to call, the following is a list of places to start. You can also refer to the campus Help Sheet for additional resources.

- Academic Advising or Student Services Office (see list at right)
- EARS (Peer Counseling): 255-EARS (5-3277)
- The Graduate School: 255-7374
- Their RA or RHD, if living on-campus
- Residential Programs: 255-5533
- Cornell United Religious Work: 255-4214
- Office of the Dean of Students: 255-1115
Educational Strategies

• Presentations at faculty & staff meetings
  — Focus: awareness of problem, roles & resources
• Expanding faculty-staff teams of presenters
• Phase two: skill building sessions
  — Similar to QPR (Question, Persuade & Refer)
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<th>Pre-crisis</th>
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<td>Alert Team</td>
<td>Crisis managers</td>
<td>CSM</td>
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Alert Team

• Weekly meeting of key staff from across campus
• Pre/early crisis coordination of:
  – Communication
  – Fact finding
  – Case management
• Building connections to academic units
• Identification of policy issues
Policy Initiatives

- Communication with parents when students no longer enrolled
- Protocols for early detection (e.g., academic failure) and assessment of functioning
- Coordination with Associate Deans
- Recommendations?