

# Faculty & Staff Guide For Helping Distressed Students



Anxiety · Depression/Suicide · Sexual Misconduct · Care and Resource (CARE) Team  
Accommodative Services · Substance Abuse · Angry Students  
Grieving Students · Multicultural Issues · Consultation/Referrals & Workshops

# Introduction

The ever-increasing complexity of our society is reflected in the changing needs of the students who attend college today. Every year the staff at the Eppler-Wolff Counseling Center meets with students seeking assistance with concerns such as depression, anxiety, family issues, sexual misconduct, relationship, and academic difficulties.

In recognition of the new demands this places on those who work directly with students, the Eppler-Wolff Counseling Center has prepared this handbook (with permission to adapt and using information from the University at Pittsburgh Faculty/Staff Guide). The purpose of this guide is to provide a resource to assist faculty and staff when a problem or question arises in working with a student. It provides some initial steps that might be helpful in managing a problem until a referral or consultation can be arranged.

This guide is not intended to be all inclusive, nor does it attempt to provide all possible answers to a given situation. In many cases the satisfactory resolution of a problem may only be arrived at after careful consideration of all the circumstances of a particular case.

Most importantly, it is not intended for anyone to do anything they are uncomfortable with. The staff of the Eppler-Wolff Counseling Center is available to consult with you on any questions or concerns that arise.

In case of an emergency  
or a situation in which an  
individual's health, safety, or  
welfare of  
others is threatened,  
contact Campus Safety  
immediately x6911/518-388-  
6911

# Anxiety

Anxiety is the most common mental health concern reported by Union College students (over 60% of students utilizing counseling services indicating anxiety as a concern, and over 62% of the Union student population indicating excessive anxiety within the last 12 months on a generalized campus sample). Anxiety is the feeling of worry, apprehension, fear, and/or panic in response to situations which seem overwhelming, threatening, unsafe, or uncomfortable. Anxiety can be generalized across a range of situations, or it may be situation specific (e.g., test anxiety, social anxiety, performance anxiety).

**Symptoms of anxiety include:** agitation, panic, avoidance, irrational fear of losing control, excessive worry, sleep disturbance, or eating problems.

## *What To Do*

Talk to the student in private and in a caring manner. Remain calm. Try to help the student develop an action plan to address their immediate concerns. Be flexible if you can be.

Refer the student to the Counseling Center, or if you are comfortable doing so, call 518-388-6161 while the student is with you, to set up an appointment. If the student refuses, consult with a Counseling Center staff member to follow up and explore other intervention strategies.

# Depression / Suicide

Depression is another common issue to affect college students, and Union College students are not immune to this. About 52% of students utilizing counseling services indicating anxiety as a concern and 41% of the Union student population indicating that they were so depressed it was difficult to function within the last 12 months on a generalized campus sample). It has been reported that about one-third of college students will demonstrate some symptoms of depression in a given year, and almost half of them will seek help for their depression. Depression is an issue that warrants everyone's attention and as with most problems, it is helpful to intervene as soon as possible.

**Signs of depression:** Flat affect (inexpressive face), slow speech, sighing, difficulty concentrating, not attending class, expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness, agitation, or irritability. Another indicator of a student's depression may be whether YOU feel depressed or somewhat hopeless when speaking with the student.

**Warning signs of suicide:** comments suggestive of wanting to die and of feeling hopeless. Active signs include direct statements about wanting to kill oneself or behavior such as giving away favorite possessions. Passive signs may include statements such as: "I just want to sleep forever," "I don't care if I'm assaulted," or "I don't care if my car hits a tree."

## *What To Do*

- Directly ask the students if they are feeling depressed or hopeless.
- Directly ask the students if they have thoughts or intentions of hurting themselves.

**If the answer is yes to either of these questions, refer the student to the Counseling Center** by calling 518-388-6161 immediately, while the student is still with you, to set up an appointment. If the student refuses, spend some more time examining their objections and if resistance is still present, contact the Counseling Center or Campus Safety (to access the counselor on call if you are meeting with the student after business hours). Do not hide your concern for the student, and do allow the student to remain present when you make the call. Explain why you are concerned and how you feel professionals can be helpful. Be caring, honest, and direct in your communications.

*do not* ignore the expressions of depression or wishes to be dead. People often reach out directly or indirectly to those they think will take them seriously, particularly people older than themselves (professors). Friends may be minimizing their feelings by telling them everything is "all right" or "everything will get better."

*try not* to threaten, admonish, or reproach a depressed student for not attending class or for falling behind in coursework. Attempt to find ways of working out the problem with the student (i.e., alternate projects, extensions, incomplete grades) while making the appropriate referral to the counseling center. **If you are in doubt about the seriousness of the emergency, contact the Counseling Center or Campus Safety immediately.**

# Sexual Misconduct

Union College has an obligation under a federal law known as Title IX to keep the educational environment free from sexual discrimination. This includes allegations of sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking or misconduct occurring both on and off campus, when the conduct impacts the educational environment. Union College is required to take immediate and appropriate steps to investigate what happened, and to resolve the matter promptly and equitably. This guide provides advice on what to do when you learn of alleged sexual misconduct or violence involving a student.

Under Title IX, you are considered a “responsible employee.” As a result, when you learn of alleged sexual violence or misconduct, you are required to take specific actions.

*What should you do when faced with an allegation that a member of the college community has been a victim of sexual misconduct or violence*

1. You are required to contact the College’s Title IX office promptly (518-388-6865). If you believe there is a risk of imminent harm to someone, you should also contact Campus Safety (518-388-6911).
2. Early in the conversation with the student, explain that you are obligated to report the incident to the Title IX office and that you cannot maintain complete confidentiality.
3. If the victim wants to maintain complete confidentiality, direct the victim to confidential resources such as the Union College Counseling Center at 518-388-6161.
4. If the victim wants to tell you what happened, but also wants to maintain confidentiality, you should tell the victim that you must report to Title IX and cannot guarantee that the College will be able to honor the request for confidentiality.
5. If the student proceeds, listen empathetically. Encourage, but do not pressure, the student to seek help, counseling or medical assistance if appropriate, and/or to contact the Title IX Office, Campus Safety, Office of Community Standards or Dean of Students.
6. Encourage the victim to contact law enforcement as another avenue to address the incident and prevent further misconduct in the future.
7. Ask about any immediate needs of the student.
8. After the student leaves, call the Title IX office.
9. Contact/inform your immediate supervisor, Director or Dean.
10. Do not try to mediate or resolve the issue yourself.

*After speaking with a student, to whom do you turn in the administration to help you through the process?*

1. Always contact the Union College Title IX Office (518-388-6865 or titleix@union.edu)
2. Call Campus Safety (518-388-6911) if the student consents or if there is a risk of imminent harm

*After reporting to Title IX, what ongoing responsibilities do you have?*

1. Generally, the investigatory process will play out through the Title IX office, Campus Safety, and/or in the Office of Community Standards. You will have limited involvement but could be called as a witness.
2. Watch the educational environment for any signs of any ongoing problems. Be alert for instances of retaliation, which is prohibited.
3. Immediate interim measures, such as those having the effect of separating the complainant and respondent, may be appropriate. You should consult with the Office of Community Standards as soon as possible regarding interim measures as needed.
4. If interim measures are in place, enforce them.
5. Keep the allegations as confidential as possible (no office chatting).
6. Treat the students fairly and respectfully.
7. Be mindful of the rights of all parties.
8. Do not take sides.
9. Be sure to maintain an academic environment free from discrimination.

Should you learn of alleged sexual violence or misconduct relating to a faculty or staff member, you are also obligated to inform the Title IX Office.

# The CARE Team (Care and Resource Team)

Union College is dedicated to providing a safe and healthy living and learning environment for students. The Care and Resource (CARE) Team accepts referrals, evaluates, and responds to student behavior identified as reasonably causing concern for students' health, welfare, and safety.

## *Referrals to CARE Team*

Students who should be referred to the Union College CARE Team may be students whose ability to succeed academically, or to function within expected standards as a member of the campus community, are negatively impacted by the student's conduct or decisions, or by challenges the student faces of a medical, personal or social nature. The CARE Team is not intended to address emergency situations. If there is an immediate threat to a student or the community, please call 518-388-6911.

A CARE Team referral should be made when communication and collaboration among campus resources is needed to help students who may benefit from collaborative assistance from a variety of departments (for example, Residence Life, Counseling Center, Accommodative Services, Campus Safety, Health Center, Office of International Services, or other offices). If only one service provider is needed, please contact that office directly.

Before communicating with the CARE Team representative or making CARE Team referrals, please follow your own departmental protocol and consult with your supervisors for next steps that may need to be completed within the department. If the concern cannot be addressed within the department, and there is a decision to refer a student to the CARE Team for a collaborative support plan, please fill out this form: [https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnionCollege&layout\\_id=3](https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnionCollege&layout_id=3) or go to this webpage to access the form (<https://www.union.edu/dean-students/crisis-assessment-team>).

# *College Resources for Sexual Assault Response*

## **Title IX Coordinator**

Mary Simeoli, JD

Reamer 306

titleix@union.edu

## **Care and Resource (CARE) Team**

<https://www.union.edu/dean-students/crisis-assessment-team>

## **Eppler-Wolff Counseling Center**

Wicker Wellness Center

2nd Floor

518-388-6161

Counseling@union.edu

## **Health Services**

Wicker Wellness Center

518-388-6120

uhealthcenter@union.edu

## **Office of Community**

**Standards**

Ryan Ribeiro

Reamer 306

518-388-5555

CommunityStandards@union.edu

## **Union College Campus Safety**

Williams Center for Campus and Community  
Safety

518-388-6911 (emergency and  
non-campus phone)



# Accommodative Services

Union College is committed to providing equal opportunities in higher education to academically qualified students with learning differences. A student in distress may also have disability-related concerns to contend with. With that in mind, here are some points to consider.

- Avoid assuming that you understand a student's learning difference(s), even though you may have worked with another student with the same diagnosis. There is a wide variation of symptoms and manifestations within each diagnosis.
- Many conditions that cause learning differences are not static; students may experience an exacerbation of symptoms due to the course of their illness, stress, changes in medications/environmental factors.
- If a student is having difficulties communicating with you, let the student know your level of understanding. Contact Accommodative Services to facilitate communication.
- Listen to a student's concerns, but be aware that the student must adhere to the guidance set forth by the college and federal regulations.
- If students request an accommodation that is not listed on their Notification of Accommodation Memorandum, you are not required to provide the accommodation.
- Remember that it is the student's decision whether to disclose a learning difference. The student may be registered with Accommodative Services but also choose not to disclose to faculty or may request accommodations for one course but not for another course.
- If you suspect a learning difference because of a student's attendance or performance, talk to the student about your observations without labeling. If the student continues to experience difficulties, refer the student to Accommodative Services for consultation.
- Maintain confidentiality regarding all communications with students who have learning differences. Requests for information should be sent directly to Accommodative Services
- Always consult with Accommodative Services with any questions or concerns (518-388-8785)

# Substance Abuse

The use of alcohol and drugs is a problem that is present at many colleges and universities. The serious problems that students can encounter with substance abuse may follow them after college and in some cases cause a student to withdraw from school temporarily or permanently. Students with substance abuse issues are often difficult to influence due to their denial of the usage being a problem. Some warning signs may present themselves in your classrooms and/or during advising, and any one symptom may be misconstrued as its own problem. Identifying symptoms in combination, however, allows one to view the situation as a possible substance problem. Addressing your concerns and sharing your observations with the student may help intervene to avoid further progression of the problem.

*Following is a list of common warning signs of substance abuse*

1. Frequently late or missing classes.
2. Falling asleep in class.
3. Change in quality of work or failing grades.
4. Unexplained mood swings.
5. Manipulating or bargaining behavior.
6. Deterioration of personal appearance and hygiene.
7. Wearing inappropriate clothing, i.e., long sleeves when hot, sunglasses when cloudy or in class.
8. Dramatic weight change.
9. Difficulty walking and talking.
10. Frequent red eyes, runny nose, and sore throat.
11. Smell of substances on the breath, body or clothing.
12. Classmates may also express concerns.

**Addressing the concern will require some patience and persistence, because denial of the problem is a predominant feature of substance abuse issues.** A suggestion for approaching a student about abuse is to communicate your care and concern for their well-being, while speaking honestly about your observations. Sticking to the facts of your observations will help combat the defensiveness you may be met with.

Students may be referred to the Eppler-Wolff Counseling Center for evaluation at 518-388-6161.

# Angry and Upset Students

## *How to Handle Angry and Upset Students*

1. Do not physically touch the student. Respect the student's personal space.
2. Find a quiet corner away from others so you can talk with the student in private.
3. Keep your voice soft and your speech pattern a bit slower than normal so the upset or angry student will have to listen carefully to hear you.
4. Seek clarification of the problem. What is it that the student sees as the real problem? What does the student believe would be the solution to the problem?
5. Apologize if the fault is yours or if the fault is in the system (e.g., students kept waiting for their appointment). "I am sorry you had to wait to see me, but I can give you my full attention now. How can I help you?"
  - In any disagreement remember that a satisfactory conclusion has to leave both parties willing and able to accept the conclusion. It is prudent to do the following:
  - Try to see the problem from the student's point of view, as well as your own. Listen carefully; do not work on counter arguments while the student is speaking.
  - Solicit suggestions from the student about a possible solution to the problem.
6. In extreme situations where it appears that no reasonable compromise can be attained, be pleasant but firm. "I am sorry that you are not satisfied with any of the options we have discussed. Since this is the case, I suggest you think about a different course of action that may meet your needs."
7. If the student's behavior is inappropriate, please contact the Office of Community Standards at 518-388-5555.

# Grieving Students

Losing a loved one is hard at any time. Losing a loved one while in college can be especially difficult because of the inherent stresses of being in school. Reactions to the loss of a family member or friend are varied. Initial reactions are often intense; the student may attempt to deny the loss or possibly “shut down” emotionally. It is important to recognize the additional support your students may need during their time of bereavement. There is no single pattern of how one will grieve. Expect each student to respond in their own manner.

Following are some tips on how to work with a student who is grieving over the loss of a loved one.

## *What to Do*

1. Be willing to listen, especially if the student is talking about a lost loved one.
2. Avoid clichés and platitudes like “time will help” or other things that may minimize or invalidate someone’s experience.
3. Suggest many resources on campus, not just counseling (this avoids pathologizing a normal grief reaction). Other resources include Religious and Spiritual Life, a trusted faculty member or advisor, Intercultural Affairs, or a College Dean.
4. Be flexible and willing to extend deadlines, allow opportunities to make up work, or provide other support.
5. Expect that time will be required for the student to return to the typical level of performance the student was at before the loss occurred.

# Multicultural Issues

Working with students of various backgrounds can be a unique experience. International students are in the position of learning about a new country and culture, while simultaneously trying to excel academically. These students may have different ideas and goals than you typically encounter. Keeping an open mind and paying extra attention to the student's point of view will be especially helpful. Here are some things to keep in mind when working with students from backgrounds different than your own.

1. Be aware of resources offered by different campus organizations, and assist your students in utilizing them.
2. Be respectful of the students' worldview, i.e., what is important to them and what is considered taboo.
3. Understand that there may be a conflict between academic and cultural values.
4. Attempt to determine what the problem is from the student's viewpoint. Be aware of the differences in the meaning of words across various cultures.
5. Be aware that different norms may exist in dealing with male and female students.
6. Ask what might make the student more comfortable to talk with you.
7. Be aware that people from different cultures may have different physical boundaries when engaging in conversation.

# Consultation, Referrals, and Workshops

The Eppler-Wolff Counseling Center staff is available to assist you in different ways of working with student difficulties. First, you may refer students to the Counseling Center for individual or group counseling. Either you or the student should **call 518-388-6161 or email [counseling@union.edu](mailto:counseling@union.edu)** to make an appointment. Second, we are available to consult with you over the phone. Phone consultations often help the faculty/staff member provide the student with the best course of action. Third, we are able to present workshops to your department on a variety of topics and are happy to work with you on creating something specific to your personal or departmental needs.

# Privacy and FERPA

Naturally, you may have some concerns about disclosing student information to various campus constituencies. While appropriate consideration for student privacy should always be given before information is shared, it is important to understand privacy and FERPA restrictions and student safety.

FERPA, the Federal Education and Rights Protection Act, limits the disclosure of information from student "educational records." Educational records include virtually all records maintained by an educational institution (in any format), that identify a student (or where identity can be deduced).

It is important to note that FERPA applies only to information derived from the student education records AND NOT to personal knowledge derived from direct, personal experience with the student. For example, a faculty or staff member personally observing a student engaging in behavior that might indicate the student is a threat to self or others is NOT prohibited from disclosing the observation for the purpose of seeking assistance for the student.

FERPA also permits disclosure of information about a student to other "school officials" who have "legitimate educational interest" in the information. A "legitimate educational interest" includes any college employee for whom the information is relevant and necessary to perform their duties. This can include (but not limited to) the Dean of Students Office, Community Standards, Campus Safety, Health Center, Counseling Center, or Title IX.

# Emergency Numbers

## *Campus Resources*

### **24/7 Emergency Numbers**

Campus Safety	518-388-6911
On-Campus Emergency Number	6911

### **8:30AM – 5:00PM, Monday - Friday**

Dean of Students Office	518-388-6116
Eppler-Wolff Counseling Center	518-388-6161
Health Services	518-388-6120
Office of Residence Life	518-388-6117
Accommodative Services	518-388-8785
Office of Spiritual Life	518-388-6030
Title IX Coordinator	518-388-6865
Office of Community Standards	518-388-5555

Eppler-Wolff Counseling Center  
Wicker Wellness Center  
Union College  
518-388-6161