

# Supporting Students in Digital Spaces

## Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Mental Health

### Proactive Steps to Providing Support:

- Include a list of helpful resources in your syllabus and/or in your Canvas course.
- If relevant, consider including a general disclaimer about course content. The goal is not to protect against any or all distress, but preemptively provide students with information and resources to help them be successful. Example: *Due to the nature of this course, there may be conversations or course material you find distressing. Topics covered include (but are not limited to) sexual assault, domestic violence, and suicide. If you anticipate difficulty engaging with course material, I strongly encourage you to reach out to the instructor to discuss possible adjustments. Below is a list of resources that can provide you with additional support if needed.*
- Send out resource reminders during high-stress times of the semester.
- Convey your care and support to our students.
- Take action and reach out to students in distress.

### When You've Become Concerned:

Below are some guiding principles that can provide some additional support and structure as you navigate supporting your student through online communication.

- Make note of what concerns you.
  - Online courses lack face to face interaction, and red flags may look different than in a traditional classroom. Note what it was that caused you to feel concern for a student and when it happened. This may include: a noticeable lack of engagement, a sudden change in tone/ communication, and/or personal disclosures through student written work (such as a sexual assault, suicidal ideation, abuse, hopelessness, etc.).
- Contact your department chair.
  - There are often specific policies your department follows for reporting students of concern. By engaging with your department you're no longer the only person who knows what's happening, and they may provide you with suggestions for next steps if warranted. You may also learn that others are reporting similar concerns.
- Report it.
  - If you are worried about a student's welfare/ safety/ behavior, you can always use the Dean of Student's REPORT IT system. The site permits you to report on a specific concern, or can generally connect you with the appropriate UWM department.
    - Please note: campus teams may only meet weekly, and may not provide an immediate response or detailed recommendations. This is a resource available to ensure that others within the University are aware of students of concern.
    - You can access the Report It website here:  
<https://uwm.edu/deanofstudents/report-it/>
- Consult.
  - If you are worried about a student's mental health, and would like to consult with a mental health professional, you can call University Counseling Services at 414-229-4133 (ask to consult with the crisis counselor or on call clinician). Please note: UCS is unable to discuss any confidential student information.

### **Engaging with the Student of Concern:**

- Consider what it is that you're already aware of (specific student disclosures) and what information you may be inferring (communicated through a student's tone or innuendo). Although it may be appropriate to gather additional information, *it is recommended that you consult with your department about what and how to go about gathering those details*, if warranted. Keep in mind, engaging with a student about your concerns through online communication is not ideal and can further complicate your involvement. It may be most appropriate to express concern, and provide additional resources to your student.

Below are examples of statements that: identify your concern, express care, acknowledge your role as an instructor, and provide resources for additional support- without inquiring further about circumstances.

- Based on what you've communicated in your (discussion posts/ summaries/ reflections/ etc), it seems that you may be struggling a bit. Although I may not be able to help with "X", I wanted to provide you with some resources that could offer some additional support.
- I've noticed you've commented on (hopelessness/ anxiety/ depression) throughout many of your assignments and I'm worried about you. I'm unsure of your particular circumstances, but wanted to provide you with a list of resources that may be of use.
- When reading through your assignments, you've made reference to (abuse, sexual assault, trauma), and that seems pretty significant. I may not be in a position to provide you with additional support, but wanted to give you a list of resources that may be helpful to you.
- In your last assignment you seemed pretty down, and commented on feeling hopeless. I wanted to remind you of the resources available, and strongly encourage you to reach out to someone for additional support.

### **You Are Not Responsible for "FIXING IT":**

When working with a concerning student, you may feel pressured or pulled to "fix the problem" or become involved. Please remember, that as a staff member or instructor it is appropriate to express concern for their wellbeing, but it is not your responsibility to alleviate their distress. What you can do is encourage them to reach out for additional support from a professional (counselor, doctor, etc.). However, if you become aware of imminent risk (a student discloses suicidal intent), you can call UWM police at 414-229-9911 (9-911 on a campus phone), or local police at 911, for immediate assistance.

**See Resource Sheet for Referral Options**