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To: Temple College Faculty and Staff

Subject: **Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress**

Purpose: to provide information and procedures to assist in recognizing and responding to students in distress.

Goal: to promote safety, mental health awareness, and wellness on Temple College campuses.

Introduction: Undetected or neglected mental health issues can interfere with academic success. We want to promote wellness and assist students with remaining enrolled. Early intervention and prevention decreases the risk for undesirable outcomes. Early intervention in a distressing situation is a key strategy to helping students remain healthy and productive throughout their college career.

The next section of this document contains three sections: **1. Recognizing a Distressed Student**, **2. Safety Risk Indicators**, and **3. Responding to a Distressed Student**. Please read all sections.

1. Recognizing a Distressed Student. Often faculty and staff are the first to notice a student who is experiencing difficulty. You do not have to take on the role of counselor or diagnose a student, but you may express concern and offer resources for referrals. Here is a list of some indicators of distress.

Academic Indicators

- Repeated absences
- Missed assignments or exams
- Deterioration in quality or quantity of work
- Extreme disorganization or erratic performance
- Written or artistic expression of unusual violence, morbidity, or suicide and death

Emotional Indicators

- Direct statements indicating distress, family problems or loss
- Angry or hostile outbursts
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Excessive crying or tearfulness
- Expressions of severe anxiety or irritability

Physical Indicators

- Deterioration in physical appearance or personal hygiene
- Excessive fatigue or exhaustion
- Noticeable cuts, bruises, or burns
- Disorganized speech, rapid or slurred speech or confusion
- Coming to class bleary-eyed or smelling of alcohol

Please note that this list does not contain all behaviors associated with severe distress.

2. Safety Risk Indicators. Behaviors that require immediate attention or action.

- A. Written or verbal statements of suicide or death.
- B. Severe hopelessness, depression, isolation, and withdrawal.
- C. Any statement that threatens harm to self or others.

If a student is exhibiting any of these safety risk indicators, they may be in an immediate danger of harming themselves. The student should be offered assistance immediately. You should stay with the student and seek professional help immediately. If the student presents an immediate threat to your safety, you should call campus police immediately by dialing 8291 or 8911 from any on campus telephone. Officers are on duty 24/7.

Direct or indirect threats to commit suicide or homicide should never be ignored.

3. Responding to a Distressed Student. There are three ways suggested to handle students in distress.

A. You may talk directly with the student. If you have already established rapport or a relationship with the student this may be the best course of action. Begin by expressing your concerns about specific behaviors. Listen to the responses and make a decision about resources or referral options.

B. Consult with campus resources. If you do not have an established relationship with the student you may choose to consult with others about your concerns. A faculty member may want to consult with another faculty member who also knows the student. Staff may consult with a supervisor or director about students in distress. You may choose to consult with student enrollment and retention services, the student counselor, or advising to assist with deciding the best way to help a distressed student.

C. Refer directly to the student counselor on campus. If you choose to refer the distressed student directly to the student counselor, sensitive information should be shared carefully and appropriately. You may walk the student to the counselor's office, call or email the counselor while the student is in your office, or, with the permission of the student, provide contact information. You can still be part of the student's support network, but it's important to bring in other resources when the student needs more than you can offer. The student counselor will come to the Taylor or Hutto campuses to counsel with students.

If you would like more information on responding to distressed students, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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