



MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 16, 2002

TO: **Members of the University Affairs Board**

AGENDA ITEM: **Annual Report from the Co-ordinator, Student Crisis Response Programs**

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

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Jurisdictional Information:

- ◆ The Student Crisis Response Project was established as a pilot project two years ago in response to the growing need on campus for preventive strategies to assist students in crisis, and to help staff develop additional skills and resources to respond to students in need. Student services are an area of responsibility under the University Affairs Board's terms of reference.

Previous Action Taken:

- ◆ The Board received the first report of the Co-ordinator at its meeting of January 16, 2001.

Action Sought:

- ◆ The report is presented for information only.

Highlights:

- ◆ The Co-ordinator outlines progress on several projects, including staff development, the enhancement of crisis response teams, a critical incident response strategy, a student-in-difficulty project, and the development of new written material for staff and faculty.

Financial Implications:

- ◆ There are no significant financial implications. The Student Crisis Response Project is funded by the Vice-Provost, Students.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
STUDENT CRISIS RESPONSE PROGRAMS

ANNUAL REPORT

2001-2002

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INTRODUCTION

Background

In January of 1999, a group of concerned students and staff met to consider options for responding to crisis situations at the University of Toronto. The members defined a mutual need to provide a timely and informed response to students dealing with acute traumatic stress, acute situational distress, and personal crisis. Out of the discussions of this group, and in consultation with other members of the University of Toronto community, the need for an accessible contact point for students in personal crisis and a comprehensive and systematic on-site critical incident response was identified.

Subsequent to that initial meeting, a Student Crisis Response Advisory Committee was formed, and in July of 1999, the Committee approached the Vice-Provost, Students for project development funding. A two-year pilot project was approved, with funding provided entirely through the office of the Vice-Provost, Students. A .60 staff-appointed Co-ordinator was hired in March 2000. Under the general direction of the Director, Student Affairs, and in consultation with members of the Advisory Committee, the Co-ordinator is responsible for the development and implementation of a series of initiatives related to students in difficulty.

The first year of the Student Crisis Response Programs was a time of orientation, organization, and outreach. Several key initiatives were implemented, and some related initiatives were developed through consultation with members of the University of Toronto community. These programs have been refined through use and experience during the second year of the project, resulting in some shifts in programming. The following programs are currently active under the Student Crisis Response Programs umbrella:

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES

DONS-AT-LARGE PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Dons-At-Large program is an after-hours peer support program. It shares a series of offices with the Student Health Outreach Program (SHOP) at the Sussex Clubhouse in 21 Sussex

Avenue, and provides peer support, information and referrals to students in difficulty. Staffed by a team of about fifteen student volunteers and two work/study students, it operates weekday evenings from 5pm to 10pm during the school year.

This program underwent a structural shift this year - from a “drop-in” format to an “on-call” format. Due to the very small number of students accessing the service, this change in format allows student volunteers to use their volunteer time more constructively. In an effort to increase service usage, an Outreach Co-ordinator was hired 12 hours a week through the Work/Study program. In addition, all Dons-At-Large volunteers engage in focused outreach projects to help make the service better known and more accessible to the University of Toronto community.

STUDENT-IN-DIFFICULTY PILOT PROJECT

The Student-In-Difficulty project is hosted by University College, and began operating in January of 2001. The project involves the formation of an internal Committee, composed of Registrarial staff, Dean of Students staff, Residence Life staff, University College faculty, and student representatives. This Committee provides case consultation to any University College staff working with students in various stages of difficulty or crisis. It also acts as a local forum for the development of strategies and protocols designed to assist those students.

As the Committee “seasons”, it is hoped that it will support the development of local expertise on crisis and critical incident issues as they affect University College students specifically, and serve as a resource both to committee members and to the University College community as a whole.

An evaluative component has been built into the project, and a report of the program evaluation will be published in March. If the project proves to be of value, a template of the project model will be made available for use by other divisions within the University.

NETWORK TO ENHANCE STUDENT SUPPORT THROUGH INFORMATION EXCHANGE (NESSIE)

Created in response to an expressed need for an alternative resource to replace the discontinued Association of Counsellors, NESSIE provides ongoing opportunities to share ideas, information, and support for individuals across the University who work with students in crisis.

This year, NESSIE has offered the following workshops:

- *Professional Self-Care for Front-Line Staff*
- *Non-Violent Crisis Intervention®*
- *Dealing with Students at Risk of Suicide and Self-Harm*
- *Orientation to the Student Crisis Response Programs for Front-line Staff*
- *Orientation to the Student Crisis Response Programs for Registrarial Staff*

In cooperation with the Family Care office, NESSIE has also offered workshops on:

- *Referring Students in Difficulty*
- *Resources for Students in Crisis*

All events have been well-attended and well-received, and there are plans to offer many of these workshops again, as well as to continue to expand the program to include other topics of interest and concern.

CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE

In response to the identified need for a systematic on-site response to critical incidents affecting University of Toronto students, the Student Crisis Response Programs and the Community Safety Office have worked together to develop an organized response existing within a network of connected teams.

The Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) works in tandem with the Crisis Management (Red Book) Team and the Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) Trauma Response Team as part of the overall Critical Incident response at the University of Toronto. It is designed to supplement existing local resources in the event of a serious event or crisis – for example, the unexpected death of a student. Composed of a volunteer roster of about 25 staff members, it responds to critical incidents involving the University community, and provides immediate on-site support and trauma management to students affected by the incident. For example, members of the CIRT team were called to provide support and information to University College students immediately following a break-in at one of the residences this fall.

The Co-ordinator of the Student Crisis Response Programs has also provided practical and organizational support to staff and students dealing with critical incidents that occur on campus. These include the death by suicide of two graduate students, the murder of a faculty member, several student suicide attempts in residence, a break in and sexual assault in residence, and the accidental death of a student at the Scarborough campus. The tragic events of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing concerns about war, terrorism, and anthrax contamination have also required the development of a number of strategies for supporting the student community.

ADDITIONAL SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff training and education on issues related to students in crisis is an important focus of the Student Crisis Response Programs, as it raises awareness in the University of Toronto community about these issues, as well as informing staff about the existence of these programs. The following outlines some recent staff development activities:

- *Emotional First Aid* workshop for the Staff Development Program
- *Responding to Students in Crisis* panel for the Teaching Assistants Training Program
- *Responding to Students in Crisis* panel for the Writing Centre Staff Development Program
- *Orientation to Student Crisis Response Programs* for incoming University Police officers

In addition to educational seminars and presentations, the Student Crisis Response Programs has also produced a 16-page guide, entitled *Connections: Identifying and Referring Students in Difficulty*. This booklet is intended to assist staff and faculty in identifying when professional assistance might be beneficial to a student, how to make an effective and appropriate referral, and provides information on consultation and emergency resources available to the University of Toronto community.

STAFF OUTREACH

The Co-ordinator meets regularly with key personnel in different departments on all three campuses of the University, and attends meetings of related committees and working groups. These developing liaisons allow the Co-ordinator to become more informed about current issues and efforts, and to co-ordinate the Student Crisis Response Programs efforts with those initiatives. Some of these committees include the Student Affairs Advisory Committee, the Criminal Harassment Committee, the Sexual Assault Support Group, the Family Interim Room Planning Committee, the Status of Women Advisory Council, and the Scarborough Campus Committee on Safety and Security. Ongoing liaisons with numerous individuals and offices help to enhance the effectiveness and visibility of the Student Crisis Response Programs project.

CASE CONSULTATION

In addition to general staff outreach and education, the Student Crisis Response Programs Co-ordinator is also available for case consultation to staff and faculty with specific questions or concerns about students with whom they work. The Co-ordinator has been consulted on over forty incidents and crisis situations since the program began, including a number of consultations on crisis prevention with students known to be aggressive or disruptive, and several more consultations with staff and faculty concerned about suicidal students. These requests for assistance have come from Academic Departments, Residences, Registrars, Student Services and other departments.

STUDENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The Student Crisis Response Programs are committed to offering educational resources to support the development of student leaders at the University. This includes developing and implementing a comprehensive training program in crisis-related issues for student volunteers in the *Dons-At-Large* peer support program, presenting seminars to student volunteers in the *Student Health Outreach Programs*, and presenting a workshop for *Residence Staff Training*.

STUDENT OUTREACH

Effective outreach to students will be key to the ongoing success of the Student Crisis Response Programs initiatives. To date, this outreach has occurred both informally and through the following forums:

- Attendance at a number of University of Toronto student fairs and orientation events, such as U of T Orientation Day, the U of T Student Health Fair, and the OISE and U of T Student Services Fairs.
- A workshop on crisis prevention and self-care for a group of students at the Faculty of Medicine.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- *Self-Care for Professionals* workshop presented at the Canadian Association of Medical Colleges Annual Conference
- Consultations with staff at the *Gerstein Centre*, the *Centre for Addiction and Mental Health*, and the *Distress Centres of Ontario*.

PRIORITIES FOR 2002-2003

- Implementation of the recommendations arising out of the program evaluation report at the end of the two-year term for the pilot project in March 2002.
- Ongoing training and development of the Critical Incident Response Team, and the refinement of its role within the overall critical incident response at the University.
- Continued staff development through the expansion of NESSIE programming.
- Continued development of crisis-related educational materials for University of Toronto faculty and staff.
- In concert with local staff and students, the further development and implementation of Crisis Response strategies tailored to the needs of the UTM and UTSC campuses.
- Expansion of connections with community crisis response agencies and services, i.e. the Gerstein Centre, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

SUMMARY

Serving the diverse needs of students in crisis requires not only adequate resources and effective programming, it also requires an increased sensitivity and comfort level among the many individuals at the University who regularly encounter students in difficulty or distress. The Student Crisis Response Programs endeavour to address both of these needs – by offering student-centred programs and centralized resources to fill in some of the identified gaps in service (such as after-hours support, specialized case consultation, and on-site critical incident response), as well as by providing opportunities for local communities to develop their own knowledge and expertise in assisting students in crisis.

Over the past two years, the Student Crisis Response Programs have continued to develop and refine the initiatives originally conceived by the Advisory Committee. The response to these programs from members of the University of Toronto community appears to validate the need for a resource of this kind. Awareness and use of the programs in the University of Toronto student, staff, and faculty communities continues to grow, and the needs of students who might otherwise have fallen through the cracks continue to be addressed.

PERSONAL OBJECTIVES FOR 2001-2002

As Co-ordinator of a new series of initiatives, research and professional development has been key in developing programs that reflect best practices. Over the past year, I have attended conferences and training events related to crisis intervention, trauma management, and critical incident stress. Other topics of research and education include suicide prevention and intervention, grief and mourning, and work rage. In addition, I have undertaken study in legal and supervisory issues related to the provision of supportive services.

My personal objectives for the upcoming year will focus on integrating the initial research and education of the past year into contexts more specifically related to the University of Toronto. For example, the Arthur Sommer Rotenburg Chair of Suicide Studies here at the University of Toronto conducts ongoing research into the many dimensions and issues surrounding suicide. Developing liaisons with that program will allow us to share knowledge and resources, and enhance the ability of the Student Crisis Response Programs to provide information that is reflective of current research and practice in the field.