



TO: University Affairs Board

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DATE: April 11, 2006 for April 25, 2006

AGENDA ITEM: 7

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

Annual Report from the Coordinator, Student Crisis Response Program

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

The Student Crisis Response Program was established by the Vice-Provost, Students six years ago in response to the growing need at the University for preventive strategies to assist students in crisis. The Program has a mandate to help staff and faculty develop additional skills and resources to respond to students in difficulty and difficult students. Student services are an area of responsibility under the University Affairs Board's terms of reference.

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

The Board received the last report of the Coordinator in April 2005.

HIGHLIGHTS:

The Coordinator outlines her work over the past year, and identifies goals for the coming year.

FINANCIAL AND/OR PLANNING IMPLICATIONS:

The Student Crisis Response Program is funded by the Vice-Provost, Students.

RECOMMENDATION:

The report is presented for information only.



University of Toronto

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Student Crisis Response Programs

Annual Report

2005-2006

Rae Johnson,
Program Coordinator



Introduction

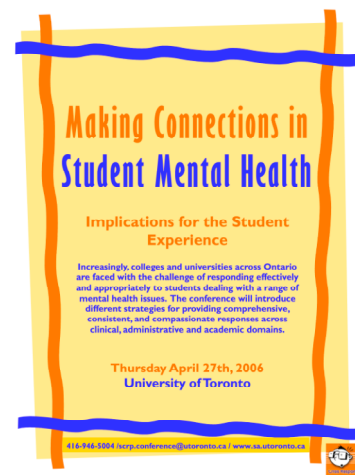
The University of Toronto Student Crisis Response Programs are designed to enhance support and access to resources for students in difficulty or distress. Through a series of programs and initiatives, we focus on connecting students in need with the services that can assist them in resolving the difficult or critical situations they may encounter while engaged in their studies here. More broadly, we work to build capacities and develop networks across the university that facilitate connection, communication, and support for all students at the University of Toronto.

In January of 1999, a group of concerned students and staff from across the university met to consider options for responding to crisis situations. Out of the discussions of this group, and in consultation with other members of the University of Toronto community, the need for a coordinated response to students dealing with acute situational distress and personal crisis was identified, as was the need for a comprehensive and systematic on-site critical incident response.

Subsequent to that initial meeting, a Student Crisis Response Advisory Committee was formed, and in July 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 Coordinator was hired in March 2000, and the position increased to .80 in July 2002. The programs were reviewed and positively evaluated at the end of the pilot period in March 2002, and continued program funding was secured through the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students. The Programs operate under the general direction of the Director, Student Affairs.

Current Programs

Education Training and education on issues related to students in crisis is an important focus of the Student Crisis Response Programs. These educational programs work to build capacity and develop networks to assist students in difficulty, and provide ongoing opportunities to share ideas, information, and support for individuals across the University who work with students in crisis. Programming is designed to reflect the real-life needs and issues of the university community.



This year, the Student Crisis Response Programs will host an inter-university conference entitled *Making Connections in Student Mental Health*, to be held April 27th, 2006 (see above). The conference is designed to provide a forum for administrative and teaching staff to bring their best thinking about student mental health issues to develop comprehensive and consistent responses across clinical, administrative and academic domains. We anticipate about 200 conference delegates from colleges and universities across Canada.

CONNECTIONS:
Identifying & Referring
Students in Difficulty



A guide for faculty & staff at the University of Toronto

The Student Crisis Response Programs also produce 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. Requests for this booklet have come from all over University of Toronto, as well as from other universities in Canada and the United States. The booklet is available online, and the third edition is now in print.

Educational programming offered in the 2005-2006 academic year also included sessions for:

- Residence Staff Training
- UTM Academic Appeals Board
- St. George Staff Development Program
- UTSc Staff Development Program
- Clinic staff in the Faculty of Physical Education and Health
- Doctoral students in THE500, Teaching In Higher Education
- Site Coordinators in the Teacher Education program at OISE/UT
- New Academic Administrators Orientation

Critical Incident and Emergency Response

In response to the identified need for a systematic on-site response to serious incidents affecting the University of Toronto community, the Coordinator of the Student Crisis Response Programs and the Manager of the Community Safety Office coordinate the Crisis Support Team (CST).

This team works in tandem with the Crisis Management Team, the Emergency Response Team, the Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) Trauma Response Team, and Student Services as part of the overall emergency response plan at the University of Toronto. The Crisis Support Team is designed to supplement existing local resources in the event of a serious event or crisis, and provide immediate on-site support and trauma management to those affected by the incident. For example, this past year the CST Coordinators were called onsite to respond to the death of a faculty member in a professional faculty, two incidents of assault in a student residence, and an attempted suicide. The Coordinators also provided consultation and support on a number of other serious incidents in which on-site intervention was not required.

The CST Coordinators provide practical support in dealing with critical incidents on all three campuses.

Case Consultation

The Student Crisis Response Programs Coordinator provides case consultation to staff and faculty with questions or concerns about students in difficulty. Together with staff in Academic Departments, Residences, Registrars, Student Services, and other divisions, the Coordinator works to develop strategies and options that will both support the student and resolve the crisis. Depending on the particular requirements of the situation, the Coordinator may intervene directly to assist a student, and can provide interim case management and follow-up as needed.

The program caseload has doubled since last year.

The Coordinator responds to a range of student crisis situations, and works with local staff to provide the degree and type of intervention that will assist students in crisis in maintaining satisfactory academic progress and functioning successfully within the campus community. Typically, the Coordinator deals with three main types of crisis – individuals in personal crisis, individuals with behavioural issues that precipitate a local crisis, and groups of students affected by a crisis situation.

Case Examples

1. A fourth year student comes into her Registrar's office, distraught, saying that she has lost all hope of finishing the last course that would allow her to complete her program. She has met all of her program requirements satisfactorily so far, but says that she has been so consumed by worry about other issues – including a learning disability, financial difficulties, a history of depression, and trying to adapt to a new culture - that she not been able to attend classes this term. In Clara's words, she is "juggling so many balls that I can't possibly keep them all in the air for much longer". She is terrified that if she is unable to attend classes her student visa will be withdrawn and she will be forced to return to her family overseas in disgrace.

Student Crisis Response Programs can help by:

- Consulting with registrarial staff to identify issues, resources, and develop strategies for the student
- Meeting with the student directly to assist her in coordinating multiple demands and planning next steps
- Coordinating with the International Student Centre around visa issues and cross-cultural counselling resources
- Offering or securing case management services until the student is able to manage ongoing challenges on her own
- Providing staff and faculty with an opportunity to learn more about cultural issues in crisis situations through educational programming

2. *A student in residence has become increasingly agitated over a period of several days, and is making bizarre statements about an elaborate international conspiracy against him. Although a few close friends and residence staff attempt to get him to see a counsellor or physician, he flatly refuses. Eventually, his behaviour deteriorates to the point where everyone on the floor is concerned and alarmed.*

Student Crisis Response Programs can help by:

- Consulting with senior residence staff to identify issues, resources, and develop strategies for the student, including the development of an intervention plan for after-hours and weekends
- Consulting and coordinating with campus and community resources both pre and post intervention – in this example, liaising with community mental health providers in a local hospital, the student’s family, and members of the student’s church group were critical to comprehensive case management.
- Debriefing residence staff post-intervention
- Providing information, support, and follow-up for students affected by the situation
- Providing staff and faculty with an opportunity to learn more about disruptive behaviour and serious mental health issues through educational programming
- Working with residence staff to develop residence guidelines on student crisis situations

3. *A second year student in a small graduate program has died suddenly over the weekend in her off-campus apartment, apparently of natural causes. Her best friend, a fellow student, was on site when police discovered the body. The family lives in another province and has not yet been reached. The department was notified Monday morning at 9am, and the first class that the student would have attended is scheduled for 10am.*

Student Crisis Response Programs (in concert with the Community Safety Office) can help by:

- Arranging for someone from the CST team to be on-site to provide information and support for students in the 10am class, and in subsequent affected classes
- Working with senior staff and faculty in the department to develop a comprehensive response strategy, including arranging for staff and student support and debriefing sessions, one-to-one student support and referrals, and coordinating with campus and community resources
- Assisting in the organizing of a community memorial service
- Providing staff and faculty with an opportunity to learn more about critical incident response issues through educational programming

Campus and Community Involvement

The Coordinator 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 Coordinator to become more informed about current issues and efforts, and to coordinate the Student Crisis Response Programs efforts with those initiatives. Ongoing liaisons with

numerous individuals and offices also help to enhance the effectiveness and visibility of the Student Crisis Response Programs. This year, the Coordinator has been involved with the following initiatives:

Interim Room Program

The Interim Room program provides short-term transitional housing to University of Toronto students facing violence or abuse, where no other housing arrangements are immediately suitable. Along with confidential on-campus housing, students work with a designated case manager to assist in addressing the complex issues these situations often involve. The SCRP Coordinator is an active member of the Interim Room Steering Committee, participates in Interim Room Intake Worker training and orientation, and is one of several designated Case Managers for the Interim Room Program.

Women's Safety Network

This informal but active network of University of Toronto staff, students, and faculty meet regularly to plan and implement initiatives related to the promotion of women's safety on campus. The Student Crisis Response Programs and the Interim Room Program are examples of such initiatives, and the SCRP Coordinator maintains an ongoing participation in this network.

ODA Planning

The Student Crisis Response Programs Coordinator has served on two sub-committees related to planning for the implementation of the Ontario Disabilities Act – the International Students and Mental Health group, and the working group on Mental Health Inventory.

Program Priorities for 2006-2007

Since the inception of the programs, the consultation and case management work undertaken by the SCRP Coordinator has steadily and significantly increased. For example, the caseload this year is expected to be twice that of last year. Despite this increased demand for case-specific support and assistance, crisis prevention remains a fundamental part of the vision of the Programs. To that end, next year's Program priorities will include:

- Continued capacity and network building through educational programming, with a particular focus on outreach to faculty.
- Continued development of crisis-related educational materials for University of Toronto faculty and staff, including planned revisions for the fourth edition of Connections.
- Expansion of connections with community crisis response agencies and services, such as the Gerstein Centre and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.
- Ongoing training and development of the Crisis Support Team, and the refinement of its role within the overall critical incident response at the University.

Summary

Serving the diverse needs of students in crisis requires not only adequate resources and effective programming; it also requires increased sensitivity and capacity 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 specialized case consultation and case management, 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.