Recognizing and Responding to Student Distress

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Let’s Discuss…

• What’s so stressful about being a student at WPI?

• What are some additional stressors that students encounter while away from campus on a project?
Today’s program will...

- Characterize certain mental health reactions to stress that can be problematic
- Talk about what to do when concerned about a student’s mental health distress
- Review resources available to faculty when travelling with students
- Engage scenarios which help to bring the discussion to life
Data on College Student Mental Health

- **Annual suicide rate on College campuses**
  - 7.5 per 100,000 students (Silverman et al, 1997)

- **ACHA-NCHA Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the last 12 months, have you:</th>
<th>Fall 2000</th>
<th>Fall 2004</th>
<th>Fall 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felt very sad</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>76.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt so depressed it was difficult to function</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriously considered attempting suicide</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted Suicide</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Have you ever:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been diagnosed with depression</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>16.0</td>
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</tbody>
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Observations on the Human Condition

• We all struggle
  • Individual reactions to stress differ
  • We tend to keep our struggles to ourselves
• Our attempts to cope with struggles often make the situation worse
• Our attempts to help others by “fixing the problem” most often are not helpful
What is Depression?

- Mood
- Decreased pleasure
- Weight changes
- Sleep disturbance
- Loss of motivation/fatigue
- Impaired cognitive functioning
- Worthlessness/guilt
- Psychomotor agitation/retardation
- Thoughts of ending life
Forms of Anxiety

- Specific phobias
- Social phobias
- Panic attacks
- Agoraphobia
- Post Traumatic Stress
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
Bizarre Thoughts and Behaviors

- Paranoia
- Delusional thoughts and behaviors
- Hallucinations
  - Auditory
  - Visual
- Reality testing
- Consult...
Behavioral Issues

- Attempts to escape from suffering
  - Substance Abuse
    - Self Harm
    - Suicide
When to be Concerned

- How are they functioning?
- Are you concerned about safety?
- How are others in the community being impacted?
Concerns about Student Safety

- Warning signs for student suicide
  - Disconnection/isolation
  - Direct or indirect verbal clues
  - Behavioral clues
  - Situational clues

- Asking the question...

- Consult...
Faculty Support for Students

- How does travelling with students affect your roles and responsibilities?

- What are some of the more common mental health related challenges you see when travelling with students?
Responding “in the moment” to student distress

- What do you want?
- Don’t just do something...sit there.
  - The importance and challenge of empathy
- Role play
Practicalities of Supporting Students

- Time and place
- Change as a process
- Listening/understanding
- Consult, consult, consult
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