THE DEPRESSED STUDENT

Depression, and the variety of ways it manifests itself, is part of a natural emotional and physical response to life’s ups and downs. With the busy and demanding life of a college student, it is safe to assume that many students will experience periods of reactive or situational depression in their college careers. It is when the depressive symptoms become so extreme or are so enduring that they begin to interfere with the student’s ability to function in school, work or social environment, that the student will come to your attention and be in need of assistance. Due to the opportunities that faculty and staff have to observe and interact with students, they are often the first to recognize a student is in distress. Look for a pattern of these indicators:

- Tearfulness/Emotionality
- Markedly Diminished Performance
- Infrequent Class Attendance
- Lack of Energy or Motivation
- Irritability
- Increased Anxiety
- Deterioration in Personal Hygiene
- Significant Weight Loss or Gain
- Alcohol or Drug Use

Students experiencing depression often respond well to a small amount of attention for a short period of time. Early intervention increases the chances of the student’s return to previous performance.

Response:

If you encounter what appears to be a depressed student, the following actions may be helpful:

1. Let the student know that you are aware he/she is feeling down and you would like to help.
2. Reach out more than halfway and encourage the student to discuss how he/she is feeling.
3. Offer options to further investigate/manage symptoms of depression. Encourage the student to seek services with the Psychological Counselor in the Student Health & Wellness Office.

The following actions may not be helpful:

1. Minimize the student’s feelings, “Everything will be better tomorrow.”
2. Bombard the student with “Fix It” solutions or advice
3. Be afraid to ask whether the student is suicidal if you think it is possible
4. Chastise the student for poor or incomplete work.
5. Becoming overwhelmed by or trying to take responsibility for the students’ problems may only provide them with more evidence that they should feel helpless.