



# **FACULTY GUIDE: SUPPORTING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH**

Created by the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, University Health and Counseling Services, and the Office for Prevention and Education at Northeastern

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Dear Faculty,

During faculty town halls, meetings with department chairs, and faculty development workshops, you shared that students often approach you and disclose difficulties that go beyond the academic. Students may share concerns about stressors such as anxiety, depression, and trauma with trusted faculty. We know that mental health issues can interfere with the quality of life for college students and certainly with academic performance.

In the Spring of 2021, the Boston University School of Public Health, sponsored by the Healthy Minds Network and the Mary Christie Foundation, surveyed faculty members across the United States. Results from the 1,685 faculty members indicated that nearly eight of ten professors had spoken one-on-one with a student about mental health during the 2020-21 academic year. However, fewer than 30 percent said they had received training to have such conversations. Almost 70 percent said they would like more training on student mental health concerns, and the majority felt that such training should be required for faculty members.

These data are in line with what we've heard from you. You've shared that students frequently reached out to you and disclosed challenges they were facing outside of the classroom, including concerns related to depression, anxiety, and mental health. You have also asked for resources for supporting students.

We heard you and want you to know that resources are available. This guide was developed in collaboration with University Health and Counseling Services (UHCS) and The Office of Prevention and Education (OPEN) as a resource for you if and when you notice mental health concerns coming up with our students. We've included information about warning signs to look for and information on connecting students with appropriate campus partners when they need extra support. Please know that you are not alone in this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Debra L. Franko". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Debra L. Franko, PhD  
Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs  
Professor, Department of Applied Psychology

# MENTAL HEALTH + COLLEGE STUDENTS

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On the National College Health Assessment Survey in 2020, Northeastern students were asked about issues that might have negatively impacted their academic performance (either impacting their performance in a class or delaying progress towards their degree) within the last 12 months. The following are a few of the top factors students indicated.

## **FACTORS NEGATIVELY IMPACTING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE:**

**34.2% STRESS**

**23.9% ANXIETY**

**19% SLEEP DIFFICULTIES**

**17.4% DEPRESSION**

**8.9% INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS**

% all students in the sample who indicated factor negatively impacted academic performance in last 12 months



# EMERGENCY SITUATIONS REQUIRING IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION

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- **Explicit and immediate comments about wanting to die by suicide or referencing or actively seeking access to means to die by suicide**
  - **The situation with the student feels unsafe**
  - **The student indicates they are in immediate danger**
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## **ACTION STEPS**

If you have an immediate concern for someone's health and well-being, contact NUPD at 617-373-3333. Remain with the student unless doing so would put your safety at risk.

## **SAMPLE SCRIPT**

"I appreciate you sharing this with me. I'm concerned about you and want to make sure I can support you in getting help right away. I need to reach out to Northeastern Police so they can help ensure that you're safe. I'll share with them what you shared with me (mirror whatever language student has used)."

# SIGNS THAT INDICATE NEED FOR URGENT INTERVENTION

- **Non-immediate references to suicide or thoughts of death**
- **Severe hopelessness, despair or isolation**
- **References to self-harm (e.g., cutting, burning)**



## **ACTION STEPS**

If you believe the student needs urgent assistance but is not in immediate danger, call UHCS at 617-373-2772 to consult with a mental health clinician.

View UHCS's hours at <https://www.northeastern.edu/uhcs/about-uhcs/contact-us/>.

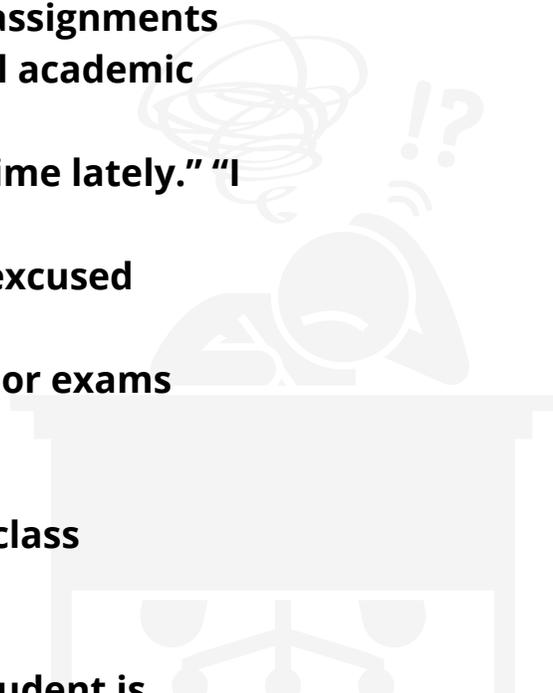
If it is after hours, contact Northeastern University Police Department for guidance at 617-373-3333. If possible, notify the student you are reaching out for help and encourage them to participate in the consultation. Both UHCS and NUPD can assess the situation and determine appropriate next steps.

## **SAMPLE SCRIPT**

"Thank you for sharing this with me. I'm concerned about you and want to make sure I can support you in getting help right away. I need to call University Health and Counseling Services to let them know what you're experiencing to make sure you get help. I plan to tell them what you've shared with me. I'll tell them that you've been feeling really down lately and feel like giving up/(mirror language student used). We can call a clinician or walk over together. Or, I can call and request that a clinician reach out to you to check in. It's important that you answer that call or follow up as soon as possible. If UHCS isn't able to reach you they may need to initiate a well-being check and come to your room."

# SIGNS SOMEONE MAY BE STRUGGLING

- Change in academic performance, personality or behavior
- Uncharacteristically missing class or assignments
- Noticeable change in student's typical academic engagement
- Direct comments "I'm having a hard time lately." "I blew this semester." "I'm struggling."
- Repeated requests for extensions or excused absences
- Distressing content written in papers or exams
- Deterioration in personal hygiene
- Noticeable cuts or bruises
- Under the influence of substances in class
- Anger/agitation/ irritability
- Withdrawal or isolation from others
- Reports from other students that a student is struggling
- Significant change in class attendance or responsiveness/communication with faculty



## **ACTION STEPS**

If you notice one or more of these warning signs, we recommend you check in with the student and/or consult with the appropriate campus resource for guidance on next steps.

# SCENARIO 1: CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

**You notice concerning behaviors from a student in your class or a student directly tells you they are struggling.**

## 1 EXPRESS CARE AND CONCERN.

Talk with the student about your concerns discreetly and non-judgmentally.

### **Strategies:**

- Thank the student for coming to you (if they have) and acknowledge the situation.
- Reference the specific behavior you have noticed and that it is out of the ordinary.
- Ask an open-ended question (cannot be answered with yes or no).

### **SAMPLE SCRIPT**

**Faculty: I noticed that recently that you haven't been turning assignments in on time. I know that's not like you so I wanted to check in. How are you doing?**

**Student: Thanks- I'm so sorry about that. I've had some mental health stuff going on and it's been hard to get it all done.**

**Faculty: I'm sorry that's been happening.**

## 2 REFER TO RESOURCES.

Offer to assist with connecting the student to available resources.

### **Strategies:**

- Be clear what the resources are.
- Give the student choice about if/how they'd like you to refer them when possible.
- Bring the conversation back to the initial academic-related request and discuss options for support and assistance.
- Summarize/ reflect back what they're saying to show you're listening.
- Avoid judgement if the student doesn't want to use the resource or isn't ready.

## SAMPLE SCRIPT

**Faculty:** I can help get you connected to some mental health resources if that would be helpful.

Student: That actually might be helpful.

**Faculty:** 24/7 mental health support is available through Find@Northeastern. They can connect you to ongoing, free therapy. I can give you that number or I could have a therapist from UHCS reach out if that would be easier.

Student: Actually, yeah. Can you have someone reach out?

**Faculty:** Sure- I'll reach out to them later today, and someone should reach out to you soon. How can I support you in this class?

Student: I'm not sure. I just got behind in a lot of classes because I've been feeling kind of depressed, and I'm trying to catch up but I feel like I've been late on everything.

**Faculty:** It sounds like things have been really hard lately.

Student: I know, it feels kind of overwhelming.

**Faculty:** There's another office I want to suggest- they are called We Care. Their role is to support and guide students going through challenging times.

## 3 FOLLOW-UP

Check back in with the student at a later time to see how they are doing and if they need any other support getting connected to the referral.

### Strategies:

- Be non-judgmental. The student may not have followed up with referrals you provided.
- Bring it up discreetly or over email (not in front of others).
- For example, you could say something like, "I just wanted to check in to see how you're doing since we last talked. Is there anything else I can do to help connect you with resources or to help support you?"

If consultation is needed at any point, call UHCS at 617-373-2772 to consult with a mental health clinician. Clinicians from UHCS can reach out to the student, if appropriate, to check on their well-being.

# SCENARIO 2: REQUEST FOR ACADEMIC HELP

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**A student emails you. They reference a mental health concern and ask for an academic accommodation (e.g., extension, grade change, excused absence).**

## **1 ASSESS THE SITUATION.**

In emergency situations call NUPD right away. If needed, call UHCS at 617-373-2772 to consult with a mental health clinician. Staff from either office can help determine appropriate next steps.

## **2 RESPOND AND EXPRESS CARE.**

Respond in a timely manner. Express appreciation for the student trusting you with this information and/or acknowledge what they have shared.

## **3 REFER TO RESOURCES.**

Share appropriate campus resources with the student. If you are unsure of resource options, consult with appropriate campus partners.

## **4 ADDRESS THE REQUEST FOR AN ACCOMMODATION**

We understand there are boundaries/limits to what may be possible, but there may be times when flexibility is appropriate. It can be helpful to consult with a colleague, your department chair, or We Care to explore possibilities. Where can you be flexible? If accommodations are not possible, what other supports are available?

## **5 FOLLOW-UP**

Check back with the student at a later time to see how they are doing and if they need any other support getting connected to the referral.

## EMAIL SCRIPT



**From: Student**  
**To: Professor**  
**Subject: extension?**

Hi Professor,  
I'm really sorry I missed class today. I've been having a really hard time lately and haven't been able to get out of bed because I've been so down. Is it possible for me to get an extension on the paper that is due tomorrow? I don't think I'll be able to get it to you before the deadline.  
Thanks,  
Student

**From: Professor**  
**To: Student**  
**Subject: Re: extension?**

Dear (Student),  
Thank you for reaching out. I'm so sorry to hear that you've been feeling so down. I'm concerned about you and want to make sure you have the support you need.  
I'm aware of some campus resources that might be helpful.

Find@Northeastern (<https://www.northeastern.edu/uhrs/find-at-northeastern/>) offers 24/7 mental health support. They can be reached by calling 877-233-9477. You'll be immediately connected with a licensed mental health clinician who can provide in-the-moment support and recommendations. They can also help get you connected to free, ongoing therapy.

University Health and Counseling Services (<https://www.northeastern.edu/uhrs/>) is also available to help. They have therapists available to talk with students and also offer support groups.

We Care (<https://studentlife.northeastern.edu/we-care/>) is a support system for students in times of difficulty or challenge. They provide connections to resources to address many different concerns including academic support and exploration of options.

I can offer you a 3-day extension on the paper you referenced and I'm happy to meet with you to talk about ways to get back on track.

Sincerely,  
Professor

# RESOURCES

**You are not alone. Reach out to campus partners for support.**

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Why refer?</b>	<b>Information</b>
<b>University Health and Counseling Services *</b> 617-373-2772 Forsyth Building, 1st Floor	A student is looking for medical care or mental health services or you are concerned about their mental health and well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mental health clinicians are available for same day visits.</li><li>• You can also call UHCS and request to consult with a clinician.</li><li>• If appropriate, a clinician can reach out to students of concern.</li></ul>
<b>Northeastern University Police Department</b> Emergency: 617-373-3333 Non-emergency: 617-373-2121 716 Columbus Ave.	A student shares information that indicates a need for urgent intervention including immediate concerns for health or well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• NUPD officers can respond urgently to emergency situations and conduct well-being checks.</li><li>• NUPD can provide after hours guidance.</li></ul>
<b>Find@Northeastern *</b> 877-233-9477 (U.S.) +1-781-457-7777 (Int'l).	A student is looking for immediate or 24/7 mental health services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students can access an immediate connection to a licensed mental health clinician, available at any time from any location.</li><li>• Find also offers referrals to free therapy in the local community.</li></ul>

*\*Indicates a confidential resource. Staff do not have an obligation to report disclosures of sexual violence to the Office for University Equity and Compliance/Title IX.*

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Why refer?</b>	<b>Information</b>
<p><b>We Care</b> 617-373-7591 wecare@northeastern.edu 226 Curry Student Center</p>	<p>A student is looking for support or assistance with a difficult circumstance (e.g., interpersonal problems, academic concerns, medical or mental health issues, a personal tragedy).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We Care is a network of administrative offices, university faculty, and staff that serve as a support system for students during times of difficulty or challenge.</li> <li>• We Care staff are able to facilitate well-being checks and student outreach.</li> <li>• We Care can also assist when a student appears to be non-responsive to outreach from faculty/staff.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Office for University Equity and Compliance</b> ouec@northeastern.edu 125 Richards Hall</p>	<p>A student is looking to make a report or considering making a report related to sexual violence or any other form of harassment or discrimination.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The OUEC investigates all allegations of discrimination.</li> <li>• If a student shares that they've experienced sexual violence, you must make a report. This does not commit students to future action—the hope is for OUEC staff to explain their rights and reporting options.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Office of Prevention and Education at Northeastern *</b> open@northeastern.edu 307 Ell Hall</p>	<p>A student is struggling with substance use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can consult with OPEN staff if you are concerned about a student's substance use and aren't sure what to do.</li> <li>• Students can self-refer to OPEN to talk about their substance use.</li> <li>• OPEN can make referrals for more high level care.</li> </ul>

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Why refer?</b>	<b>Information</b>
<p><b>OPEN's Sexual Violence Resource Center *</b>  open@northeastern.edu  407 Ell Hall</p>	<p>A student is looking for resources and referrals related to sexual violence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SVRC can be a place for students to start if they don't know what to do.</li> <li>• Staff can explain options and connect students to resources.</li> <li>• The SVRC is not an ongoing counseling service.</li> <li>• The SVRC offers resources for faculty including the Faculty Guide on Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Violence and the "RESPOND: Trauma Informed Response to Disclosures of Sexual Violence" Canvas course, available at <a href="http://northeastern.edu/open">northeastern.edu/open</a>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Disability Resource Center</b>  617-373-2675  TTY: Contact DRC via Relay 711  20 Dodge Hall</p>	<p>A student is seeking accommodations for a disability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DRC staff can guide a student through the process of applying for accommodations and navigating university systems.</li> <li>• The DRC has resources for faculty on their website at <a href="http://northeastern.edu/drc">northeastern.edu/drc</a>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Office of the Graduate Ombudsperson</b>  617-373-6904 (office)  617-545-7989 (cell)  graduateombuds@northeastern.edu</p>	<p>A graduate student wants to discuss concerns related to university experience, speak off the record about concerns, and identify options for resolving conflicts informally.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ombudsperson for Graduate Students serves as a confidential, neutral, and informal resource for graduate students seeking to address concerns that may be impacting their studies.</li> </ul>

*\*Indicates a confidential resource. Staff do not have an obligation to report disclosures of sexual violence to the Office for University Equity and Compliance/Title IX.*

This guide was created by the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, University Health and Counseling Services, and the Office for Prevention and Education at Northeastern. It was last updated in August 2021.

