

# **The Student Intervention Team (SIT)**

## **Purpose**

The Student Intervention Team (SIT) at The University of Mississippi exists to address student behavioral concerns which are not supportive of the faculty's pursuit of the University's central function and are not addressed by an existing agency of the University. Included in, but not limited to, the list of behaviors are threats, aberrant or strange behavior, violent or perceived violent behavior, repeated threats of suicide or violence against others, etc. SIT shall make recommendations to the Chancellor, Provost, and Vice Chancellor for Student Life with regard to a student's ability to continue at The University of Mississippi. The SIT does not preempt any other University department in performing its duties in enforcing the law or managing student situations.

In addition, it shall be the responsibility of the SIT to develop and review University policies which address such situations and behavior.

The team shall consist of a representative of the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Life (chair), the University Police Department (UPD), the Provost's Office, the Registrar's Office, the University Counseling Center, the University Attorney's Office, and the Office of the Dean of Students. Other ad hoc members may be added as dictated by individual situations.

## **Objectives**

- To serve as a resource for the University community in addressing student behavior which is not addressed by an existing agency of The University of Mississippi;
- To develop and review policy which addresses aberrant or threatening student behavior;
- To provide educational opportunities for University departments about managing aberrant or threatening student behavior;
- To gather information about select situations and to assess the need for intervention;
- To provide support for academic and University departments in dealing with difficult student behavioral situations; and
- To make recommendations to the Dean of the student's college or school, the Vice Chancellor for Student Life, the Provost, and the Chancellor of The University of Mississippi with regard to special student situations and aberrant student behavior.

## Goals:

- To balance the educational needs of the student and the academic mission of the University;
- To provide structure for an effective method of addressing student behaviors that impact the University;
- To manage each case individually;
- To initiate appropriate intervention;
- To eliminate fragmented care; and
- To be a resource for students, faculty, administrators, and staff.

## Faculty Rights and Responsibilities

- ***Reporting troublesome behavior:*** Faculty members should report to the Student Intervention Team (SIT) any student behavior that they believe indicates a student may represent a danger to self or to others. Reports can be sent via email to [sit@olemiss.edu](mailto:sit@olemiss.edu) or by telephone (662-915-7248). If the faculty member believes that the threat of danger is imminent, the **University Police Department (UPD) should be contacted immediately (662-915-4911).**

The SIT receives information from across campus; therefore, faculty members also are encouraged to report problematic, disruptive, or anti-social behavior that, although might not trigger serious concerns in isolation, may raise concerns if combined with reports from other sources.

- ***Dealing with disruptive students in the classroom:*** Faculty have the right to prevent disruptive students from interfering with their right to teach and the right of other students to learn. To this end, faculty may ask a student to refrain from certain behaviors in the classroom, require a student to meet with them before returning to class, or, when necessary, ask a disruptive student to leave the classroom and not return until meeting with the faculty member. In most situations, behavior that requires a student to be removed from a class should be reported to SIT. As always, faculty members retain the right to file a judicial complaint with the Dean of Students. (See <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/dos/judicial/> for complete information about judicial processes.)
- ***Dealing with students who refuse to leave the classroom when asked:*** If a student is asked to leave a class because of his or her disruptive behavior and the student refuses, the faculty member must determine whether it is possible to continue to conduct class. For example, a faculty member should not feel a need to continue a class session when a student has the potential to become violent or when a student's behavior has been so

insubordinate and disruptive that attempts to continue class will be futile. In this case, a faculty member may immediately dismiss class. If the student appears violent or dangerous, the faculty member should call UPD or ask someone else to place the call. In any case, if class must be dismissed because of the behavior of a student, then the SIT should be informed, and the student should not be allowed to return to class until cleared to do so by the Dean of the college or school in conjunction with the SIT.

- ***Permanently removing a student from a class:*** Faculty members may not permanently remove a student from a class without permission from the Dean of the college or school. Any permanent removal of a student from a class based on non-academic reasons should be reported to the SIT. Although faculty members have a right to teach in a classroom free from disruption, they should bear in mind that removing a student from a class permanently may have a negative impact on the student's status in other ways, such as affecting financial aid or health insurance eligibility. If it is determined that it is appropriate for a student to be permanently removed from a class, the department head and/or Dean of the college or school may wish to work with the SIT to find an alternate solution or placement. However, this is not mandatory and a disruptive student may simply have to "suffer the consequences" of his or her removal from class.
  
- ***Avoiding confrontation in the classroom:*** While in the classroom, faculty members are encouraged to avoid confronting angry students in a manner which may escalate the potential for violent behavior. Meeting with an angry student after class is usually preferable to confronting the student in front of a classroom of students. If the faculty member is uncomfortable meeting with the student one-on-one, arrangements should be made to have another faculty member present. Students with severe anger management problems should be reported to the SIT to determine if the behavior represents a pattern for the student or an isolated incident.

# **Student Intervention Team Suggestions for Faculty and Staff**

## **I. Responding to Angry or Disruptive Students**

Classroom instructors face many challenges in teaching a diverse student population, and it is expected that students at a university will experience a wide variety of emotions. While many students will be attentive and engaged in the classroom activities, others may be day-dreaming, bored, distracted, or pre-occupied. Many instructors have their own effective techniques for working with these students. Those students who come to class under the influence of drugs or alcohol, express extreme anger, or become disruptive, present a greater challenge.

On occasion a faculty member may recognize that a student is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Faculty members may handle this situation as they choose, but should be mindful that they have the option to refer the student to the University Judicial Council by sending a written complaint to the Office of the Dean of Students. Those faculty members reporting such behavior should be as thorough as possible in providing details of the incident. The University Counseling Center and the Health Promotion unit in the University Health Center provide support for students with alcohol or drug use problems.

It is more likely that faculty members will encounter students who become angry in class. This anger might derive from differences among classmates, discussion of a controversial topic, or a disputed grade on a paper or test. This is to be expected. Anger in a student is not a violation of the Student Code of Conduct nor is it necessarily a threat to classroom order. When a student's anger manifests itself into disregard for University authority or disorderly conduct, the faculty member retains the same right to report that student to the Office of the Dean of Students.

### ***Tips for dealing with angry or disruptive students:***

- Do all that you can to discourage further anger by the student.
- If the student is angry and wants to discuss something, or if you want to discuss the student's anger, do so in private.
- Call the student by name.
- Acknowledge that you recognize his or her anger.
- Discuss the behavior, not the person.
- Try to determine the source or cause of anger.
- If the student's anger results in a violation of the Student Code of Conduct, contact the Office of the Dean of Students.

## II. Responding to Emotionally Troubled or Difficult Students

As a member of the University community, you have ongoing and direct contact with students. This places you in a position to identify students who are struggling with personal and/or academic concerns. How involved you want to be in the student's problems will likely depend on how you see your role in the University, your training, your experience, and your personality. These guidelines, your knowledge of the services available, and your awareness of your personal attributes can help you become more comfortable with determining when and how you wish to intervene with students.

All students will experience some level of stress. Some will face life events that are more challenging such as significant changes in a relationship, the death of someone close, family crises, or physical illness. Others will face severe difficulty with anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, anger, addictions and even psychotic episodes. How students respond to these challenges and how these challenges impact their academic functioning will vary greatly based on their coping abilities and personal situations.

### *Signs and Symptoms Warning of Student Distress:*

- Excessive procrastination and poorly prepared work, especially if inconsistent with previous work.
- Infrequent class attendance with little or no work completed.
- Inability to focus or concentrate.
- Unusual dependency: hanging around or making excessive demands for contact outside of normal periods of association.
- Listlessness, frequently falling asleep in class or general lack of energy.
- Repeated requests for special consideration.
- Marked changes in personal hygiene.
- High levels of irritability, including unruly, aggressive, violent, or abrasive behaviors.
- Inability to make decisions despite your repeated efforts to clarify or encourage.
- Excessive weight gain or loss.
- Normal emotions that are displayed to an extreme degree or for a prolonged period of time: for example, tearfulness or nervousness.
- Impaired or garbled speech and disjointed thinking.
- Threats to others.
- Reference to suicide as a current option.
- Bizarre behavior that is obviously inappropriate, such as talking to "invisible people."
- Social withdrawal.

***Consider making a referral when:***

- The issue is outside your range of knowledge or expertise.
- Helping the student could compromise or change the status of your relationship with the student (perhaps it is too personal).
- The student feels uncomfortable talking with you about the issue.
- You feel the differences between you and the student are such that you cannot help him or her.
- You feel overwhelmed, overly responsible for and worried about the personal safety of the student.
- The student's behavior is a significant and ongoing disturbance to others.
- You are extremely busy or are experiencing stress in your own life and are unable or unwilling to handle the student's needs.
- You have talked to the student and helped as much as you can but further assistance is needed.
- You think that your personal feelings about the student would interfere with your ability to be helpful.
- The student admits there is a problem but does not want to talk to you about it.
- The student asks for information or assistance which you are unable to provide.

***How to approach the student:***

- Ask to see the student in private.
- Speak to the student in a straightforward fashion that shows concern for his or her welfare and focuses on observable behaviors.
- Express your concern in a non-judgmental manner. (State what you observed).
- Ask if the student is talking with anyone (friends or family) about the problem, pointing out that isolation is rarely useful when dealing with problems.
- Listen carefully.
- Let the student know that counseling is accessible, free and confidential.
- Suggest that the student go to the Counseling Center or call for an appointment while he or she is in your office.
- Encourage the student that if counseling didn't help in the past to try it again.
- Don't attempt to coerce or intimidate the student into counseling.

***How to assist the student who is reluctant to seek counseling:***

- Acknowledge and discuss the student's fears and concerns about seeking help.

- Remind the student that counseling sessions are confidential.
- Remind the student that counseling at the Counseling Center is free.
- Point out that a situation does not have to reach a crisis state for him or her to benefit from professional help. A medical analogy may be useful.
- Emphasize that, although some people believe that seeking counseling is an admission of weakness and failure, in fact it often takes considerable courage to face oneself and acknowledge one's limitations.
- Offer to accompany the student to the Counseling Center.
- Emphasize counseling as an empowering tool of change for those who choose to use it.

***How to help a student make an appointment at the Counseling Center:***

- Offer the use of your phone for the student to call and make an appointment.
- Consider making the call for the student if the student wishes for you to do so while in your presence.
- If you feel the situation is an emergency, call the **Counseling Center (662-915-3784)**, identify yourself, and inform the person who answers of the student's need to be seen immediately.
- If necessary, walk the student over to the Center. The Counseling Center makes it a priority to see immediately any student in crisis.
- Once a student becomes a client at the Counseling Center, the terms of confidentiality apply fully. Unless the student signs Consent for Release of Information, the Counseling Center may not release information about the student. That means you, as the referral source, will not be able to obtain any further information about the student.

***Should a faculty member walk with the student to the Counseling Center?***

Sometimes offering to accompany a student over to the Center will greatly reduce the student's anxiety about going to see a counselor. If you do agree to accompany the student, ask the student if he or she would like you to remain in the waiting room until he or she is seen by the intake counselor.

If the student does not want you to walk over with him or her, or if you decide this is not an option for you, it is often helpful to provide the student with a brief description of the walk-in/intake procedure or to offer to call ahead and let the Center know the student is coming.

***What to do if the student resists or refuses to seek counseling:***

Unless the student is at risk for harm to self or others, counseling remains a voluntary option for students. Despite every effort on your part to facilitate a referral, the student may choose not to follow through on your suggestion that he or she seek counseling. If you find yourself in this

situation, continue to express your belief that counseling could be beneficial, and keep your offer of help available to the student. Document the process for your personal files should you need to verify in the future your assistance to this student. If a student is at risk for harm to self or others, please report this information to the **Counseling Center (662-915-3784) or UPD (662-915-4911)** as soon as possible. If the student is with you, tell the student that you will arrange for him or her to be seen as soon as possible by a counselor. If the student leaves with the intent to disregard your referral, you should call the Counseling Center or UPD immediately.

***Consultation is always an option:***

If you have a concern about a student, feel free to call the Counseling Center and ask to consult with one of the staff members. Staff counselors will be glad to discuss specific options for you and the student. This does not obligate you or the student and often helps to answer your questions and concerns.

***After a referral:***

Once a student has been referred to the Counseling Center, he or she is in a confidential relationship. Often students will come back to you and let you know about their experience. If appropriate, a representative of the Center may contact you to follow up or to gain additional information.

A referral to the Center does not mean the student necessarily will be removed from class or school, face judicial sanctions or remain in treatment. Should you feel additional actions are necessary as a result of the student's conduct, you should contact the Dean of Students Office, UPD or your academic dean.

*The University Counseling Center is open Monday-Friday from 8:00 to 5:00. To make an appointment, call 662-915-3784. If you need to reach a counselor after hours, contact UPD (662-915-7234) and explain that you need to speak to a counselor. UPD will contact the person on call and you will be contacted by the counselor.*

### **III. Responding to the Aggressive or Potentially Violent Student**

Aggression varies from threats to verbal abuse to physical violence. It is very difficult to predict aggression and violence; however, the following can be indicators or "Red Flags" of potential violence:

- Paranoia.
- Dramatic change in work or study habits.
- Decline in personal grooming.
- Deterioration in social relationships.
- Impulse control problems.
- Argumentative; talks about revenge or vengeance.
- Grandiose; always has to be right.
- Psychotic, delusional.

- Emotional expression that doesn't match context.
- Highly disruptive behavior (hostility, aggression, etc.)
- Strange or bizarre behavior indicating a loss of contact with reality.
- Suicidal or other self-destructive thoughts or actions: direct or indirect; verbal or in written materials (assignments, journals, emails, etc.)
- Homicidal threats.

***What should you do when faced with a student in crisis, or one who is aggressive or potentially violent? Immediately:***

- **Assess your level of safety. If a student expresses a direct threat to him-or-her-self or others, or acts in a bizarre, highly irrational or disruptive manner, call or have someone call the University Police Department (662-915-4911).**
- Ask the student to leave the classroom so that you may speak away from the other students. Remain in an open area with a visible means of escape.
- Remain calm. You stand a better chance of calming the student if you are calm.
- Be respectful but set clear and firm limits: "I see that you are upset. I need you to sit down. For us to have a conversation, I need you to..."
- Explain to the student the behaviors that are unacceptable.
- Be clear and precise in the words you use.
- Acknowledge the student's feelings when appropriate; be reassuring.
- Be patient and listen carefully to find out whether the student understands what you are saying. You may have to repeat yourself.
- Be concrete. Try to identify a specific issue and suggest something that can be done to address it. For example, you may suggest that the student accompany you to the Counseling Center.
- Use a time-out strategy (i.e. ask the student to reschedule a meeting with you once he or she has calmed down) if the student refuses to cooperate and remains agitated.
- **Contact SIT ([sit@olemiss.edu](mailto:sit@olemiss.edu)) or the University Counseling Center (915-3785).**

***Avoid:***

- Staying in a situation in which you feel unsafe.
- Meeting alone with the student.
- Engaging in a screaming match or behaving in other ways that escalate the situation.
- Ignoring signs that the student's anger is escalating.
- Crowding the student; observe his or her sense of personal space.
- Treating the person with hostility or condescension.
- Criticizing the student.
- Making sudden movements.

***Express your authority with non-verbal cues:***

- Sit or stand erect.
- Smile and make eye contact.

- Speak clearly and distinctly.

***Do not:***

- Touch the student.
- Slouch, glare, or sigh at the student.

After the incident, debrief with department chair or dean, UPD officer, and/or a member of SIT.