

**West Chester University Faculty Senate Student Welfare Subcommittee:
Issues of Student Behavior and Mental Health
April 2008**

During this academic year, the Student Welfare Subcommittee has focused attention on issues of student behavior and mental health. The past decade has hosted rising numbers of students entering college with serious mental health issues, and rising numbers of students seeking mental health services during college. Recent events such as the Virginia Tech mass shooting have highlighted gaps in the preparedness of college campuses to deal with issues of student behavior and mental health. Our subcommittee has researched best practices for handling issues of student behavior and mental health on college campuses, discussed ways to improve West Chester University's preparedness to deal with these issues, and begun working with other groups on campus, such as the Threat Assessment Team (TAT), to improve our campus' ability to respond successfully to these issues. During the next academic year, we hope to continue work to improve our campus' ability to respond successfully to these issues. What has become clear through our efforts thus far is that successful response to changing issues of student behavior and mental health will require a comprehensive approach that involves multiple disciplines and includes levels of intervention such as:

- **Awareness:** Increasing awareness about issues of student behavior and mental health, decreasing the stigma related to these issues, and providing education about how to identify and handle these issues.
- **Prevention:** Promoting practices that enhance student mental health and well being and decrease the chances of problems, including social networking, successful management of college challenges, and stress reduction activities.
- **Support Network:** Building a support network, involving existing student organizations and activities, to help students deal with typical college challenges.
- **Screening:** Identifying students at high risk for mental health and behavior problems, and actively reaching out to these students to offer mental health services.
- **Threat Assessment:** Assessing issues of student behavior and mental health that may pose a threat to self or others and implementing plans for dealing with these issues, including appropriate ways for students who pose a threat to receive treatment, as indicated, take leaves from campus, if necessary, and return to campus, if possible, while ensuring the well being of the campus community.
- **Restriction:** Restricting access to potentially dangerous materials and activities.
- **Crisis Response:** Developing resources for responding to campus crises related to student behavior and mental health, including having mental health professionals on call 24-hours-a-day, and having plans for immediate response to crises that may affect the campus community as well as plans for post-crisis response.
- **Treatment:** Providing accessible, effective, and efficient treatment for mental health problems, possibly including brief therapy on campus as a matter of routine practice, and referrals for longer term and/or more intensive therapy off campus as warranted.