MEMORANDUM

TO: Faculty Members and Teaching Assistants

FROM: Pat Lampkin, Vice President and Chief Student Affairs Officer

DATE: September 25, 2012

RE: Recognizing and Assisting Students in Distress

As we approach midterms and Fall Reading Days, we know this can be a stressful time for students. Because you frequently see or interact with students, we want to be sure you have the tools needed to identify individuals who could benefit from support or assistance. In addition to employing those tools, we hope you will follow up with a student who may be in crisis to insure s/he is connected to appropriate resources.

This e-mail provides information regarding potential warning signs of depression or mental illness in students, as well as signs that a student may be in an abusive relationship. We have also included information on what would constitute an appropriate response from you if you become concerned about the well-being or behavior of a University student. These guidelines are not all-encompassing in scope; they focus on those signs that are most likely to be observed in a traditional classroom setting or in an advising relationship. For more detailed information and additional indicators of distress, please visit: http://tinyurl.com/GordieFacStudGuide.

Another excellent support resource may be found at the “Beyond the Day of Dialogue – Toward a Caring Community” Web site, www.virginia.edu/dayofdialogue/. This site was created following the Day of Dialogue based on the needs and requests identified at that event. We hope these resources are helpful as we continue to work to create a caring community here at the University. The site is designed to be dynamic, so if you know of relevant efforts or resources that should be included, please contact my office through the “Contact” page.

**Important:** If you have concerns about something you have witnessed in a student's behavior or class work, please contact the Office of the Dean of Students or Counseling and Psychological Services immediately to talk through your concerns. Dean of Students staff and CAPS counselors are available to faculty for consultation in both emergency and non-emergency situations.

*If you are worried about imminent harm, please call 911 first,* before following up with the Office of the Dean of Students. Police are well-trained in psychiatric emergencies and can take students to the Emergency Room for a full psychiatric consultation immediately.

You will find telephone numbers and Web sites for the Office of the Dean of Students and for Counseling and Psychological Services on the attached sheet. Thank you for your assistance in maintaining the health and well-being of our community.
Recognizing and Assisting Student in Distress

A few general tips:

• **Trust your instincts.** If you experience unease about a student, it is important to pay attention to those inner signals. If a student talks about painful feelings or suicide, it is important to take that student at his or her word. If a student talks about feeling afraid of or controlled by a partner, that could be a sign that he or she may be in an abusive relationship. Changes in mood or social behavior are also frequent signs of an abusive relationship or significant emotional difficulty.

• **Listen carefully.** Many students will have trouble articulating their real difficulties. Be available. Show interest and offer support. Try not to get upset or communicate your own personal judgments. Be calm, receptive and serious, conveying that you can tolerate hearing about their painful feelings. Sometimes what is not said is as important as what is said.

• **Help them get help.** The most effective means of suicide and violence prevention is a referral for professional help. Call the Office of the Dean of Students or Counseling & Psychological Services. If appropriate, offer to walk them there right away.

What to look for:

**Academic indicators may include:**
- Deterioration in quality of work or a drop in grades
- A negative change in classroom performance
- Repeated requests for extensions or missed assignments
- Repeated absences
- Disorganized or erratic performance
- Writings that indicate extremes of hopelessness, social isolation, rage, fear or despair

**Communication indicators may include:**
- Direct statements indicating distress, abuse or coercion, family problems, or other difficulties
- Disproportionate anger or hostility
- Becoming more withdrawn or more animated than usual
- Excessive dependency
- Tearfulness
- Expressions of hopelessness, helplessness, fear, or worthlessness
- Expressions of concern about a student in the class by his/her peers
- Marked changes in eye contact

**Physical indicators may include:**
- Deterioration in physical appearance or worsening personal hygiene
- Visible physical marks (although the lack of such marks does not mean the absence of relationship violence)
- Excessive fatigue
- Visible changes in weight

**Safety risk indicators may include:**
- Written or verbal statementsshowing a sense of finality or a suicidal tone
- Written or verbal communications that indicate fear of or coercion by another person
- Essays or papers which focus on despair, violence or abuse, suicide, or death
- Statements to the effect that the student is "going away for a long time," or giving away possessions
- Self-injurious or self-destructive behaviors

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**Important Phone Numbers & Websites:**

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<tr>
<th>Emergency</th>
<th>911</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Office of the Dean of Students</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Main number</td>
<td>924-7133</td>
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<tr>
<td>After-hours, on-call staff (cell)</td>
<td>243-3326</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.virginia.edu/deanofstudents/">www.virginia.edu/deanofstudents/</a></td>
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| **Counseling and Psychological Services** |
| Main phone numbers for appointments or for daytime contact with the on-call clinician: |
| 924-5556 and 243-5150 |
| After hours or weekend on-call: 972-7004 |
| www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/caps.html |

For more detailed information and additional indicators of distress, please visit: [http://tinyurl.com/GordieFacStudGuide](http://tinyurl.com/GordieFacStudGuide)

For resources about supporting a survivor of suspected sexual assault or sexual violence, go to: [www.virginia.edu/sexualviolence](http://www.virginia.edu/sexualviolence)