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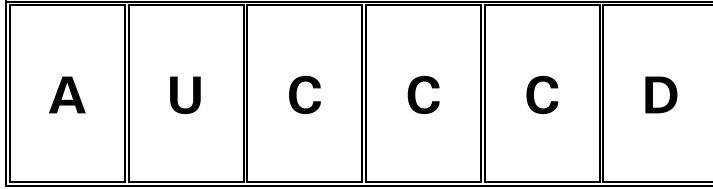
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PRESS RELEASE CONCERNING THE TUCSON SHOOTING TRAGEDY

The Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD) joins the nation in expressing sympathy to the families touched by the tragic violence that occurred in Tucson in early January. We offer our condolences to families, friends and communities for their heartbreaking losses, and we extend our prayers to those who are healing. We also look inward as we reflect on the steadily increasing demands for mental health services on campuses, the limits of campus-based mental health systems both within the campus setting and in the greater community, and the challenges faced by campus counseling centers to manage serious mental illness in addition to the developmental and transitional concerns of our students.

The nearly 800 members of AUCCCD are involved in the daily promotion of health, safety, and resiliency among our nation's college students. Our college and university mental health professionals are well aware of the potential impact of our most vulnerable students on campuses and surrounding communities. While our campuses vary in the professional resources available to support students' mental health, we are united in our commitment to strengthening the campus and community safety net of support and mental health resources in the service of students' academic success in preparation for their future roles in our society.

In supporting students' academic success, our counseling centers must play an integral role in the network of campus departments striving to maintain safe, healthy, and effective learning communities. In addition to the counseling, therapy and other treatments we provide students, we lead or collaborate with campus health services, crisis and threat assessment teams, student conduct panels, campus and community police departments, campus housing, campus deans and other campus partners. We consult daily with concerned faculty, staff, administrators, families, and other students to connect at-risk students to professional mental health resources in order to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the campus' learning environment. Our counseling centers collectively provide services to hundreds of thousands of students annually across a range of ability and functioning, increasing their academic, career, and relationship success.

Among the many students seen in our counseling centers, an exceedingly small percentage struggle with severe mental illness and are unable to consistently and safely function within the campus community. Safety concerns among our most vulnerable students are most often related to suicidal behaviors and life-threatening eating disorders, and alcohol and substance disorders. An even

smaller percentage of students develop thought disorders or psychosis, but individuals with mental illness are rarely violent and are more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violence. In treatment, our campus mental health professionals work to increase students' adaptive and relationship skills, emotional self-regulation strategies, and social support. When needed, we provide medication and other adjunctive treatments, all with the intent of increasing safety for both the student in treatment and the campus community.

When identified students cannot function safely on campus despite our available treatment services, counseling centers act in concert with other involved campus departments to strengthen the support and monitoring of these students to the degree allowed by law. If we determine that a student represents an immediate danger to health and safety in the campus community, we work with campus police, and available hospitals to restore safety by connecting students with higher levels of care through inpatient hospitalization or other means. When students cannot return safely to campus, counseling centers work to transition their care to the community, where mental health services can often be underfunded and difficult to access.

While developing our campus responses to student mental health demands remains a work-in-progress, we applaud the efforts of campuses to (a) clearly articulate the boundaries of appropriate student conduct and behavior, (b) take action when these behavioral expectations are violated, and (c) apply codes of conduct and existing laws to ensure that students experience appropriate consequences and are connected to appropriate levels of care. A student's ultimate inability to function within campus conduct code requirements may lead appropriately to the termination of student status, but the need for mental health and other services in the community may remain. While our campus counseling centers serve a vital and central role in these processes, our primary focus must be to support the academic mission of our campuses.

AUCCCD acknowledges the complexity of these circumstances, given the resource limitations of both our counseling centers and our service partners in the community mental health system. Our counseling centers provide excellent and effective services to steadily increasing numbers of students with increasing levels of need each year; but our counseling centers average fewer than one counselor per 2,000 students. Some campuses have no mental health professionals whatsoever. In the wake of this national tragedy, we urgently voice our support for (1) increasing mental health services, in higher education and across communities; (2) providing funding for preventative as well as crisis services; and (3) increasing mental health care management to help individuals with mental health needs to become productive and healthy contributors to our society.

The AUCCCD Board of Directors