Dear, [name]

Cornell faculty can influence students’ lives well beyond the teaching of course material. Gannett’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff appreciate and rely upon faculty’s opportunity to influence students’ attitudes about (and willingness to seek) mental health care. As providers, we know how stigma impacts willingness to access mental health services resulting in some students suffering needlessly.

Setting the stage for dialogue about mental health concerns early in the semester alerts students that you are someone they can talk to should troubles arise. One of the ways to do this is by including a clear statement about accessing mental health resources in your course syllabi. The two statements provided at the end of this document are examples that members of the Cornell faculty may choose to adapt for inclusion in their syllabi.

Reducing the stigma about accessing mental health care can help students seek professional care when it is needed. In addition to being proactive with your syllabus messages, we urge you to partner with us in identifying and reaching out to students at risk. Faculty guidance in doing so is available on the Gannett website, as well as your faculty handbook entitled, “Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress.” Please share concerns about a student with your academic advising office and our staff at Gannett Health Services.

We thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,
Greg Eells, PhD., Director Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
Gannett Health Services

Faculty feedback during the past 2009-2010 academic year included a request for syllabus language to address student mental health. Below are two examples you may wish to adapt for the fall 2010 semester.

**Syllabi Insert #1:**

Diminished mental health, including significant stress, mood changes, excessive worry, or problems with eating and/or sleeping can interfere with optimal academic performance. The source of symptoms might be largely related to your course work; if so, I invite you to speak with me (or your other professors) directly. However, problems with relationships, family worries, loss, or a personal struggle or crisis can also contribute to decreased academic performance, and may require additional professional support.
Cornell provides a variety of support resources, including an Academic Advising office in each college, EARS peer counseling, and Gannett’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Each of these resources can help you manage personal challenges that threaten your well-being or ability to thrive at Cornell. Accessing them, especially early on, as symptoms develop, can help support your academic success as a Cornell student.

In the event I feel you could benefit from such support, I will express my concerns (and the reasons for them) to you and remind you of our resources. While I do not need to know the details of what is going on for you, your ability to share some of your situation with me will help me connect you with the appropriate support.

Syllabi Insert #2:

If you are experiencing undue personal or academic stress at any time during the semester or need to talk with someone about a personal problem or situation, I encourage you to seek support as soon as possible. I am available to talk with you about stresses related to your work in my class. Additionally, I can assist you in reaching out to any one of a wide range of campus resources, including:

- Your college’s Academic Advising or Student Services Office
- Gannett Health Services at 255-5155, www.gannett.cornell.edu
- Let’s Talk Drop–In Consultation and Support www.gannett.cornell.edu/Let’sTalk
- Peer Support provided by Empathy Assistance and Referral Service at 255-EARS

DISABILITY-RELATED CONCERNS: Students with either an ongoing or short-term disability are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services (SDS) for a confidential discussion of their need for academic accommodations. SDS is located in 420 CCC building; phone number is 254-4545.

Additional suggestions for consideration when writing your course syllabus can be found on pages 34-35 of the Faculty Handbook entitled “Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress.”