Awareness Points for Interacting with Male Students

One-on-One Interactions

- Face-to-face discussion about personal issues can be overwhelming for and silence many men. Try talking while sharing activity.
- The more personal the conversation—the more potentially vulnerable a man feels—the less intense the conversation must be to keep him involved.
- Men need and want affection and candor. Be authentic, open up on a personal level (if you expect them to).
- Don’t preach or judge. Don’t assume a parent role unless you really want him to assume a child role.
- Talk, guide and be patient. Let them take ownership of problems, consider solutions, and discover.
- Be direct about and empathize with any obvious awkwardness: “I know this might feel a little awkward for both of us, but can you tell me more about ….”
- Affirm positives and acknowledge effort.
- Frame meetings as informal chats rather than serious discussions and keep them light and informal to reduce threat. Build relationships and deeper talk from there.
- Men may not come to you (office hours, etc.). You might have to go where they are, catching them briefly after class, in the hallway, etc.
- Make information available in non-threatening, private venues—bulletin boards, websites, flyers, telephone hotlines.

Obstacles to Interacting with Men

Many men employ the following behaviors to avoid self-revealing:

- **Minimizing**—“I’m OK. It’s nothing. I’ll get over it.”
- **Silence & Avoidance**—Men often don’t reveal needs and, when asked, often avoid answering by saying, “I don’t know” (i.e., “Leave me alone”).
- **Reticence**—If you ask a man, “How are you feeling?” he’ll say, “I’m fine,” but he may be more open to more direct questions: “Are you having some back pain?” (Even then they’ll often minimize.)
- **Over-Talking**—Men may dominate a conversation or digress to avoid discussing something that could be emotional, revealing, or difficult.
- **Rationalizing**—When asked how they feel, many men will often discuss what they think, so they may not respond as expected to their own or others’ feelings.
- **Dissociating**—Men may disengage from emotional aspects of their lives through compulsive/repetitive activity such as AODA, sexuality/masturbation, over-involvement with work, video games, television, and the internet.
- **Emoter’s Remorse**—Men receiving help often feel shame for revealing needs, strong emotions, or embarrassing aspects of themselves, and therefore may not return to the relationship after a first or break-through meeting.

Handout compiled by Patti See / contact seepk@uwec.edu for more information
• When men may ask for female counselors, consider their motives. Do they anticipate difficulty developing a nurturing relationship with another man? Do they believe they can more easily manipulate a woman? (Ron May)

Programming with/for Men

• Take programs, recruiting, and marketing to men where they are—dorms, locker rooms, frats, clubs—rather than opening invitations and waiting for them to come.
• It often takes men a while to get involved. Establishing on-going programming ensures that programs still exist when men are ready to engage.
• Do activity-based programs. Face-to-face group discussion of personal or help-seeking topics often does not work for men.
• Avoid programming that takes men away from things that are important to them (e.g., work, limited time with children). Try to incorporate what’s important.
• Create positive programs. Try discussing/modeling do’s rather than don’ts to minimize shame.
• Focus on group responsibility and team-work in order to help engage men. Deemphasize focus on or status of the group facilitator.
• Start slow with new programs and groups and keep them non-threatening at first to build comfort and trust before going deeper.
• A good strategy for discussion with men is to put relevant data in front of men and ask, “Why do you think…?” Be abstract and rational before going deeper.
• Men will often dominate groups discussing ideas, thus silencing women. Women will often dominate groups discussing feelings, thus silencing men.
• Men often allow or force female partners to handle any needed emotional work. This can be an obstacle to men’s emotional progress.