****

**Counseling & Psychological Services**

2130 Fulton Street

San Francisco, CA 94117-1080

Tel: 415-422-6352

Fax: 415-422-2260

www.usfca.edu/counseling

Jesuit Education Since 1855

**Responding to Disturbing Creative Writing**

The creative writing process necessarily involves allowing freedom of expression. Occasionally, however, student writing can create an unwelcoming environment for peers or raise questions about the author’s mental state. As such, instructor may feel the need to address the student. This is a guideline for helping instructors think through disturbing elements and take appropriate action when necessary.

**Identifying Disturbing Writing**

• People may have differing views of what is disturbing

• Look for themes that warn of potential harm to self or others, or themes that reflect a deep desperation.

• While themes of violence and gruesome details might be markers, they may not in themselves be problematic. Try to determine if the violence seems more expressive of rage and anger than it does of a literary aesthetic or a thematic purpose.

• Look for outright threats.

**Responding to Disturbing Writing**

• Talk with the student before or after class in an informal and non-threatening manner.

• Allow the student to elaborate as much as possible to gain a fuller sense of the person behind the writing.

• Keep an open mind, allowing the student to contextualize what he or she has written

• If the student seems at all threatening, do not meet the student alone.

• Ask the student to discuss the work, noting the motivation of the characters, and his or her sense of how different imagery or actions will function in relation to the overall effect of the work.

• Document your meetings and advice by writing down the date, specific advice given, and any outcomes you discussed.

• If after this meeting you continue to be concerned about the student and his or her writing, consult with your department chair or the Dean of Student Academic Services.

• Remember that the discussion of the student’s writing should be undertaken with deep concern for the privacy of the student and his or her right to free expression. The sole concern of this consult should be the possibility that the student’s writing is so disturbing that further action or intervention may be the wisest course of action.

• If you believe you may be dealing with a student whose writing suggests that he may present a threat to self or other students consult with USF Counseling and Psychological Services at 415-422-6352.

•If the Student’s threat to self or others is imminent, or if you feel in any danger, contact Campus Security immediately.

These suggestions were adapted from Responding to Disturbing Writing: A Guide for Faculty and GTAs 4Virginia Tech Department of English. <http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/victimassistance/quickassist/disturbingwriting.pdf>