A Letter of Support and Solidarity from the Counseling Center Staff

The University of Maryland (UM) Counseling Center staff acknowledges that many UM students, faculty, and staff may be affected by recent international and national tragic events. More specifically, incidents in Paris, France and San Bernardino, California have been distressing, and making sense of the violence and loss of life has been difficult. As a staff of helping professionals, we stand with those who denounce the violence and the senseless loss of innocent lives.

In the aftermath of these traumatic episodes, there has been a dramatic increase in inflammatory, divisive language, including a call to ban Muslims from entering the United States. Additionally, the Council for American-Islamic Relations has reported that in the weeks since the tragedy in France, there has been a rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes. Fear, anger, hurt, and desperation have prompted a rise in Islamophobia and resulted in Muslim individuals being labeled “terrorists.” The UM Counseling Center staff rejects any sentiment that associates Islam and Muslims with “terrorism.” Additionally, we reaffirm our commitment to respect the dignity and worth of all people, including our Muslim students, faculty and staff.

As the news coverage and debates about these incidents continue, you may have strong emotions and intense recurring thoughts related to these tragedies. You may also find yourself having reactions when current events come up in your classroom discussions, student group meetings, or conversations with friends. These reactions vary from person to person and may include anger, hurt, disbelief, outrage, sadness, confusion, fear, grief, denial, isolation, and hopelessness. Your day-to-day functioning could be temporarily impaired, and you could experience anxiety, depressed mood, difficulty concentrating, loss of appetite, or sleep difficulties.

We encourage you to consider the following strategies for coping and maintain a sense of well-being.

- **Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings.** Give yourself permission to feel the way you do. You may be tempted to avoid feelings such as anger and hurt. In fact, it can sometimes be helpful to compartmentalize your feelings in favor of focusing on assignments or exams. However, unaddressed, intense feelings could negatively affect your functioning and create more distress.
- **Take care of your basic needs.** Rest. Eat well. Drink plenty of fluids.
- **Connect with supportive friends and allies.** It is important to recognize that not everyone will share your perspective. Have discussions with those whom you trust.
• Allow yourself to disengage from social media and the 24-hour news cycle. This may be difficult especially if social media provides you with support and affirmation. Consider “blocking” or “hiding” social media feeds that increase difficult feelings and thoughts. To enhance your well-being, it may be necessary to limit your consumption of negative information and distressing images.
• Resist the urge to be the spokesperson for your group. It is not your responsibility to speak for “all Muslims” or any other social group.
• Be gentle and compassionate with yourself and others.
• Talk with a mental health professional or clergy if your reactions become overwhelming.

We wish to remind you that the Counseling Center in the Shoemaker Building provides free and confidential services that include individual therapy, walk-in appointments for urgent situations, and referrals to off-campus community providers. Appointments can be made by calling (301) 314-7651 or by visiting the Shoemaker Building. In addition, University staff, faculty and parents may call the Counseling Center “warmline” to consult with a counselor regarding how to help students, friends, or colleagues who may be in distress.

University of Maryland Counseling Center Warmline
(301) 314-7651

University of Maryland Counseling Center Hours
Monday and Thursday — 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Friday — 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Walk-In Hour for Muslim and Middle Eastern Students: Monday through Friday at 3 p.m.
Students who visit the Walk-In Hour are will be seen without a scheduled appointment by a therapist who identifies as Muslim Middle Eastern-American or as an ally and who is sensitive to the complex struggles of Muslims and Middle Easterners on campus.

On-Line Resources

After Traumatic Events

Challenging Islamophobia Pocket Guide

Controlling Your Anger

Coping with Racial Trauma

Coping with Racism and Discrimination

Managing in the Aftermath of a Shooting

Strengthen Your Social Support Network