Annie N Christensen
Office of the Dean of Students
Annual Report
June 2007- through June 2008
Mission Statement

The mission of the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS) of the University of Utah is to provide an innovative, student-centered, co-curricular environment that enhances the academic mission of the university and promotes the personal development of students. By providing information, services, and programs, the Office of the Dean of Students facilitates learning and student development in the areas of academic scholarship, personal integrity, multicultural awareness, community responsibility, and practical leadership.

New Personnel

In June of 2007, Annie Christensen, L.C.S.W., began her inaugural year as Dean of Students. With two very successful searches last year, Lori McDonald, M.A., was selected as the Associate Dean of Students in September of 2007 and Jay Wilgus, J.D., was chosen as the Assistant Dean of Students in November 2007.

Lori’s responsibilities included advising ASUU and serving as the Chief Student Conduct Officer. Jay’s job duties include managing and supervising the University Greek sororities and fraternities and advising two honors societies and the Greek Hearing Board. With energy, enthusiasm, and trepidation, we plunged into creating a new Dean of Student Office with a new focus on managing students at risk and supporting the academic mission of the University.
2007-2008 Highlights of the Office of the Dean of Students

- Created new processes and brochures for faculty and staff that included flow charts to assist campus personnel in identifying and managing difficult students.

- Membership on the Campus Safety Task Force brought about new changes in the campus' terminology of difficult students. In order to better coordinate with the department of Human Resources, three categories for students and employees were developed. These categories assisted us in categorizing students in campus and were “troubled,” “disruptive,” and “threatening.”

- In consultation with Housing and Residential Education, and the University Police, we developed a procedure for interacting with students who openly displayed firearms.

- Met with the Deans and administrative staff of nine different colleges to introduce our Dean of Students office staff and ask for their feedback on our processes and procedures.

- Our office was invited to present to department chairs during fall 2007 and spring 2008 semesters. In recent years, this was the first time that the Office of the Dean of Students had presented at this meeting with faculty administrators.

- For the first time in several years, Directors reporting to the Dean of Students began to meet together once a month. This brought together Directors from the Dean’s Office, the Union Building, Campus Recreation and Child Care.

- Consultations with faculty and staff appeared to increase as campus community members became more aware and more willing to report students who were troubled, disruptive and/or threatening.

- By January of 2008, the Dean of Students Office became fully staffed with new Associate and Assistant Deans and an executive secretary.

- The Dean of Student Office had 11 “Student of Concern Meetings” where different university personnel came together to share information and devise strategies to support students at risk.

- In conjunction with the Office of General Counsel and Dr. Barbara Snyder, we were able to successfully manage a campus crisis where a seriously mentally ill student made threats to harm another student and was reported to have several (legal) weapons in his possession on campus.
• Tracked and responded to 12 student deaths including 4 student suicides. University faculty and/or staff personally met with ten of these students’ families.

Dean of Students Office Organization

Our office has three deans, an administrative assistant, and an executive secretary. Services that we provided were organized into four broad areas: faculty consultation, student advising, student conduct, and student advocacy.

Faculty Consultation

While there is not current data to compare with, it appeared that faculty consultations with staff from the Dean of Student Office were up considerably last during 2007-2008. While our office worked to promote our information and services, the impetus behind faculty being more willing to consult with us appeared to be driven by the tragedies at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University. Our office presented for the very first time to department chairs. We introduced our services and a new Dean of Students brochure, “Managing Difficult Students,” at fall training for chairs in October of 2007. We again presented to the chairs on “Engaging Difficult Students Early” during spring semester of 2008. These trainings were well-received and department chairs were very willing to share their feedback about how we could better serve them and support the academic mission of the university.
Based on our consultations with faculty and staff, the consensus of our Dean of Students team reported that faculty and staff appeared to be more frightened of students and at times, willing to think of the worst of all possible outcomes if they interacted with a troubled or difficult student. In addition, faculty and chairs were much more likely to request that the Dean of Student arrange for a University police presence in or directly outside of their classroom to contain troubled or difficult students. This posed some difficulty for the University Police and our office because a police presence was often not necessary or in the best interest of solving student problems.

Student Group Advising
The Office of the Dean of Student Office has three primary advising roles with student groups on campus. The Associate Dean of Students advises ASUU which is comprised of over 200 elected and appointed student leaders, 300 student groups, and a budget of approximately $1.4 million. The Assistant Dean of Students manages 5 sororities and 8 fraternities which include 650 members and a budget of $60,000. In addition, Phi Kappa Phi and Mortar Board are advised by the Assistant Dean of Students. We have also been requested to begin advising Phi Beta Kappa and will start working with this group in fall of 2008.

Student Conduct
Student Conduct was directed by the Associate Dean of Students and administered by the Office of the Dean of Students. All three of the deans heard
a variety of student conduct cases and also serve as hearing officers. The bulk of all conduct cases were heard by Housing and Residential Living and their hearing officers. The most frequent student behavior violation was a minor aged student possessing or using alcohol. Last year we met with 46 students in formal processes with student conduct charges.

In addition, there literally dozens of minor violations of the Student Code that the Dean of Students Office resolved informally without the need for a formal process. We have found that effective outcomes can result from a one-on-one discussion with students. In these discussions, we advise students that a future student code violation may result in student behavioral charges and a formal procedure that may include a student's suspension or dismissal.

**Student Advocacy**

We are fortunate to work on a campus where we are able to spend more time advocating for students as opposed to disciplining them. The range of student advocacy activities that we addressed included working with worried parents, explaining an appeal process to a student accused of plagiarism, or walking a distressed student down to the counseling center. Another role of student advocacy is writing letters of recommendation for our student leaders. Student advocacy is a role that we all enjoyed and we are hopeful that we made a positive impact connecting with students and assisting them in finding resources that supported their personal and academic lives.
Tracking and Monitoring Students

Based upon the recommendations of the literature and our professional associations, the Office of the Dean of Students endeavored to track and monitor students at risk. We further attempted to better track student deaths in order for us to be responsive to student families and loved ones.

Managing Students at Risk

Based upon the findings of the Virginia Tech report, we decided to better centralize and coordinate information about students who were troubled, disruptive, and/or threatening with the Counseling Center and the University Police. Because of the confidentiality restrictions faced by these two campus departments, the Dean’s office has the ability to communicate more openly with these agencies and provide information that may be helpful to agency staff and help our cumulative efforts in sustaining a safe and healthy campus community.

Our “Student of Concern Meeting” was where we shared information and coordinated strategies for supporting students who appeared to be troubled, disruptive or threatening. Our process was to invite agencies and/or department that expressed concern and/or difficulty in working with a particular student. We included Deans, Associate Deans, chairs, faculty and staff in these meetings to ensure that we were holistically addressing student behavior in and out of the
classroom. At one meeting, we had 13 different campus agencies represented to work with one challenging student.

The procedure of these meeting included discussing the student’s history of difficulties, student conduct violations and interventions and strategies for support. The standing members of this 2007-2008 committee were Robert Payne from the office of General Counsel, Lois Huebner from the Counseling Center, George Foss from the University Police, and Lori McDonald and I from Dean’s Office.

The average age of a student that we were met about was 37.8 years of age. Complaints or concerns about a student’s behavior originated in a multitude of different academic and campus departments. Fifty-five percent of the students we discussed were undergraduates, 45% were graduate students. Seventy-three percent were male and 27% were female. Sixty-three percent of the students had some sort of involvement with the University or Salt Lake Police. It is important to note that all but two of the students (82%), were believed to be struggling with significant mental health or substance abuse issues and therefore most likely have some kind of psychological/psychiatric disability. This is important to our efforts as it would appear that a mentally ill student is more likely to violate the student code and this dramatically influences our course of action. The most common referrals to the Committee resulted from student making suicidal threats of gestures and stalking issues.
Our most common interventions for student of concern were consultations with family members, mental health providers, the University Police and the student’s academic department. Of the 11 students that we consulted about, one student was immediately suspended from the University. Another student was evicted from campus housing and subsequently left the university. Another undergraduate student left campus after she became very impaired and required inpatient psychiatric hospitalization. A male graduate student also chose to leave the university because of continued issues with substance abuse.

It is important to note that due to the presence of a mental health disorder, often our interventions were intended to be supportive in nature as opposed to disciplinary. With the support of Kay Harward, we also tried to encourage students who were struggling with severe mental health issues to take a leave of absence from the University and get the appropriate medical treatment. In order to encourage students to take this course of action, we often refunded tuition and deleted or withdrew students from their classes.

A graph below is presented to highlight some of the data of the students we intervened with.
### 2007-2008 Students of Concern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Demographics</th>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Student Status/Concern From:</th>
<th>Police Involvement</th>
<th>Mental Health Concerns</th>
<th>ODOS Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31 y.o., white male</td>
<td>Suicidal threats (email)</td>
<td>Undergrad (PRT)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Consult with psychiatrist &amp; wife &amp; faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 y.o., white male</td>
<td>Victim of hate crime (email)</td>
<td>Grad (Counseling Psych)</td>
<td>U of U PD, SLC PD, Austin Community College PD</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Consult with FBI, police departments, academic department &amp; General Counsel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 y.o., International male</td>
<td>Making personal death threats</td>
<td>Grad (Mech Engineering)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>SB Warning, consult with previous college admin, and UCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 y.o., International male</td>
<td>Stalking</td>
<td>Undergrad (Music)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>SB Warning, consult with UCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 y.o., white male</td>
<td>Criminal charges- Sexual assault against another student off campus</td>
<td>Grad (Health Sciences)</td>
<td>SLC PD</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Voluntary leave, SB process possible dismissal, consult with department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 y.o., white male</td>
<td>Threats to harm another student &amp; stalking female students</td>
<td>Undergrad (Architecture)</td>
<td>U of U PD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>MH treatment, SB charges, consult with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57 y.o., white female</td>
<td>Misuse of resources &amp; disruptive to departments</td>
<td>Undergrad (HRE)</td>
<td>U of U PD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>SB charges, HRE eviction, consult with DS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54 y.o., white male</td>
<td>Suicidal threats &amp; self-destructive behavior</td>
<td>Grad (Higher Ed)</td>
<td>U of U PD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>UCC intervention, medical treatment, SB charges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64 y.o., white female</td>
<td>Threats to harm others &amp; discrimination</td>
<td>Undergrad/ HB 60 (Art)</td>
<td>U of U PD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>SB warning, consult with police and UCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 y.o., white female</td>
<td>Threats &amp; stalking a faculty member</td>
<td>Undergrad (Languages &amp; Literature)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>SB Warning, psych hospitalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 y.o., white male</td>
<td>Suicidal threats &amp; stalking a female student</td>
<td>Grad (Physician Assistant)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Support from academic dept, &amp; mentors, continued monitoring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2007-2008 Student Deaths

The most heartbreaking part of our work in the Office of the Dean of Students is to respond to student deaths. Our procedure is to try to immediately contact the families of these students, express our condolences and then hand deliver or mail a posthumous degree if the student qualifies or a “Certificate of Achievement” if the student is not near the completion of their degree requirements. We also send flowers to the funeral or memorial services on behalf of President Young and the students, staff, and faculty of the University.

Addition interventions included working with the counseling center in order for their staff to debrief student groups and academic departments and offer ongoing counseling services to those individual close to these tragic events. Our office also attempts to monitor students who have been profoundly affected by these deaths and offer them counseling and academic support if necessary.

Sadly, we had twelve matriculated student die last year. Four students died due to medical illness or medical conditions. recently completed her Ph.D. in physical therapy and died from a chronic illness that she had endured since the age of 4. had just completed the requirements for her Ph.D. in social work when she died of cancer. , a music major, died from a long standing heart condition. , a Ph.D. chemistry student, unexpectedly died of a heart attack after surviving a heart transplant at
the age of 16. Two students died in car accidents. 

, a superlative graduate student pursuing a joint JD/MBA degree, died in a car accident on a snowy road in Pennsylvania. , an outstanding freshman from Bountiful, Utah also died in a car accident. 

died in a military training exercise when his Apache helicopter crashed in Utah country. 

was a mid-career aviator who had been deployed in Afghanistan during 2004-2005 and was looking forward to a career in dentistry. 

, a gifted and generous modern dance student died after an accidental overdose during fall semester 2007. 

Four University of Utah students committed suicide last year. Two students were male and the other two students were female. These were confirmed reports of suicide from the family members that we interacted with. Students who took their lives ranged in age from 29 to 19. Parents of the two female students who suicided reported their daughters were having difficulty with medication or had recently gone off their medication. One male student was reportedly very devastated that his psychiatric history and use of medication could potentially affect his desire to have a career in the military. Two parents expressed to me that their children had endured horrific childhood trauma and had made previous suicide attempts. For the two male students, relationship break ups or conflicts with significant others reportedly had a devastating impact on their well-being. 

To my knowledge, three of the students were heterosexual and one student self-
identified as being gay. The means of death were overdosing, shooting, hanging, and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Of these four students, two students were currently in therapy and receiving counseling and/or psychiatric treatment. One student had been in counseling and saw his psychiatrist when necessary. Another student had seen a counselor several months prior to his death. Here is a graph of all student deaths for 2007-2008.

**2007-2008 Student Deaths**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Date of Death</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>25-Nov-07</td>
<td>Accidental Overdose</td>
<td>Modern Dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>20-Aug-07</td>
<td>Helicopter Crash</td>
<td>Pre-Dentistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>18-Feb-08</td>
<td>Medical - Heart condition</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>07-Oct-07</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>Pre Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>02-Jan-08</td>
<td>Auto Accident</td>
<td>Pre-Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>10-Oct-07</td>
<td>Medical-Cancer</td>
<td>Social Work-PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>16-Oct-07</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>28-Apr-08</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>Chemical Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>20-May-08</td>
<td>Medical - Heart Attack</td>
<td>Chemistry - Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>16-Dec-07</td>
<td>Auto Accident</td>
<td>JD/MBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>11-Aug-07</td>
<td>Medical-Chronic Illness</td>
<td>Physical Therapy - PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>24-Jan-08</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Response Efforts

The staff in the Office of the Dean of Student personally met with five families of deceased students. Deans and/or department chairs met or interacted with an additional six families. We responded to one family by mail as there was no funeral or memorial service and the family did not respond to our outreach efforts. We were also honored to award five posthumous degrees to student families and loved ones.

2008-2009 New Initiatives

In completing this report, I have become more aware of areas that I need to address personally and with support and assistance of my very capable staff. Here are a few of the efforts that I hope to focus on in the coming year.

New Initiatives

- Create a shared mission statement with strategic objectives with all ODOS staff members.
- Define, clarify, and coordinate all Dean of Student staff members’ roles and responsibilities.
- Track and compile data on faculty consults, student advocacy cases, and student behavior warnings.
- Track time spent dealing with students monitored through the Behavioral Intervention Team.
- Update the look of the Office suite in order for our staff and community members to enjoy a professional, functional, attractive office space.
- Have a well-designed, informative, and user-friendly Dean of Students website.
- Better coordinate student information sharing with the University Police.
- Meet with different University departments including Continuing Education, Honors College, Social Work, Nursing, and Undergraduate Studies.
- Hire a new Associate Dean of Students to be the secretary to the Behavioral Intervention Team and assist with student mental health assessments throughout campus.
- Develop new literature and resources for staff and faculty to assist them in dealing with students who are depressed and/or suicidal and students with disabilities.
- Formulate new documentation requirements for readmitting students who have left the University due to egregious student behavior violations.
- Working with the Union and Student Development, create a new student resource center that has staff to support and advise student organizations and clubs.

**Conclusions**

As I complete this report, I am reminded what tremendous efforts our staff has made in the past year. We all continue to develop professional and every day our challenges and tasks are very different and the work is extremely interesting
and thought provoking. We have excellent staff with innovative ideas and remarkable skills. I am pleased and grateful for the excellent individual staff members that surround me. I am also delighted that I work on a campus with such fine and (mostly) responsible students.