

HOW TO HELP A STUDENT OF CONCERN

A guide for faculty and staff

ABSTRACT

Learn more about how to manage difficult situations and behavioral signs that warrant concern, as well as resources for assisting students in accessing resources and services at the University of Montana.

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Part I – Introduction

University of Montana is committed to the health and safety of all members of our community. To safeguard our community, the Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) has developed a comprehensive reporting system to share appropriate information so students can receive or stay connected to the academic support and student wellness services they need. This reporting system is one element of a safe and supportive campus community. This guide is designed as a resource for faculty and staff members. It specifically provides faculty and staff with information about how to seek assistance and report behaviors of concern. Additional information is provided about managing difficult situations and behavioral signs that warrant concern, as well as resources for assisting students in accessing resources and services at the University of Montana.

Mandatory reporting to Title IX

University of Montana employees, with the exception of confidential employees, are Mandatory Title IX Reporters. Mandatory Title IX Reporters are required to report to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX any information you learn about a student regarding the following conduct: sex-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, relationship violence and stalking.

You must include all relevant details necessary to determine what occurred and to resolve the situation. This includes the name(s) of the alleged perpetrator(s), the affected individual(s), other individuals involved in the incident, as well as relevant facts, including the date, time and location. You should notify the Office of Equal Opportunity (EO) and Title IX (TIX) within 24 hours of receiving the information. Mandatory reports are confidential.

You can file a mandatory report with EO/TIX by calling, emailing, submitting a form online, or stopping by the office on the garden level of Main Hall EO/Title IX Office (406) 243-5710 eoaa@umontana.edu umt.edu/eo

Responding to students of concern

Within the academic setting various manifestations of student behavior can cause great concern to faculty and staff. The purpose of this guide is to provide faculty and staff with basic tools to respond to these concerns.

- Part I (this section) includes general guidelines for responding to students, identifying and accessing UM resources and documentation procedures.
- Part II includes strategies for dealing with disruptive students in the classroom and in other settings – on campus or in the online environment.
- Part III includes a brief description of behavior patterns, suggestions for appropriate responses and decision trees for specific interventions.

The decision trees and information are designed to assist you in formulating a plan of action based on the student's behavior and to identify campus resources to help. It is important to note that the University does not expect you to assume the role of counselor, therapist or police officer. For those responsibilities, UM has trained professionals who are ready to assist you with students who are of concern.

In situations when a student is severely impaired or potentially dangerous, University of Montana Police (UMPD) must be alerted. UMPD is also available to assist individual departments in formulating their own safety plans in accordance with their physical layout, as well as the degree, nature of student contact and their role within the University.

Faculty and staff can play an invaluable role in helping students who are in distress. Your expression of interest, concern and compassion is an important factor toward students seeking the assistance they need. The Office for Community Standards, Counseling Services, Disability Services for Students, UMPD, Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT), Student Advocacy Resource for Students (SARC) and other administrators stand ready to assist you. We hope this guide will help you to identify a potentially difficult situation and provide you with specific ideas and resources when you encounter student behaviors that are of concern.

We encourage faculty and staff to document incidents using the online <u>BIT</u> Form. When describing an incident, please focus on explaining the student's observed behaviors. A student will have a right to see the BIT Form. Potential interventions will be determined on a case by case basis. The BIT meets weekly and is not an emergency response team. If an emergency is happening, and there needs to be a response, UMPD is the department to call.

It is important to recognize that dealing with disruptive or distressed students can be psychologically and emotionally difficult. Consequently, it can be very helpful to discuss these issues with a colleague or supervisor or seek professional stress debriefing assistance.

University of Montana resources for students

UM provides many services to support academic and personal success. A brief conversation with a student in which you point him or her in the right direction can sometimes be sufficient to reduce stress. The Division of Student Affairs offers a wide variety of support services including:

Community Standards

Turner Hall within the UM Housing Office (406) 243-2611

https://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/default.php.

The Student Conduct program within the Office of Community Standards is committed to an educational and developmental process that balances the interest of individual students with the interests of the University community.

Curry Health Center Counseling Services

Curry Health Center, 624 Eddy Ave., garden level (406) 243-4711 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday

Counseling assists students by addressing their personal counseling and psychotherapy needs for the purpose of helping them gain the most from their time on campus. When a student's mental health care needs are beyond the scope of our services, we will assist with referrals to community-based providers for specialized or longer-term care.

Curry Health Center Medical Services

Curry Health Center, 624 Eddy Ave. (406) 243-2122

Curry Health Services offers acute, chronic and urgent care on site and refer to the local Emergency Department for emergency care. Follow-up care is provided after discharge to facilitate recovery.

Equal Opportunity and Title IX

University Hall 006 (406) 243-5710 eoaa@umontana.edu umt.edu/eo

The Office of Equal Opportunity (EO) and Title IX (TIX) responds to reports of discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct in accordance with UM's Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, Stalking, and Retaliation Policy. In addition to conducting fair and thorough investigations into reported misconduct, the EO/TIX team can arrange supportive measures to help students feel safe on campus (including No Contact Orders and housing/class accommodations) and to ensure students receive the necessary support for continued access to their educational programs. EO/TIX also addresses concerns through climate surveys, training, workshops and facilitated mediation. Faculty can seek confidential advice from EO/TIX regarding any student or employee matter involving potential discrimination, harassment, or sexual misconduct. Call, email, submit an anonymous form online or stop by for more help or information.

Global Engagement Office (GEO)

(406) 243-2288

https://www.umt.edu/global-engagement/about/default.php

GEO promotes and provides international life-changing experiences and related educational opportunities for students. GEO advances the exchange of ideas and culture through advocacy, education, engagement, and service. To learn more about Education Abroad, the English Language Institute, and International Students and Scholars (ISS), visit GEO's website, or call.

Office for Disability Equity

Aber Hall 1st Floor (406) 243-2243

The Office for Disability Equite is a resource for UM faculty members, departments and schools. Staff are available for consultations on accessibility in the curriculum and on teaching and interacting with students with disabilities. Staff can meet individually, or provide a presentation to a class, departmental meeting or a larger group. To request a consultation, please reach out via email or phone.

Office for Student Success (OSS)

Aber Hall 3rd and 4th Floors (406) 243-2800 http://www.umt.edu/oss/

The Office for Student Success helps students to meet three goals: transition smoothly to college, remain enrolled and progress in a program of study and graduate in a timely manner.

They do this by providing programs and services that support students' academic growth and personal development. To learn more, visit their website, contact them via phone or drop in their office.

SARC (Student Advocacy Resource Center)

Curry Health Center (East entrance) (406) 243-4429 http://www.umt.edu/student-advocacy-resource-center/

The Student Advocacy Resource Center (SARC) offers confidential advocacy and counseling for students impacted by discrimination that includes sexual assault interpersonal violence and stalking. SARC also offers a number of training opportunities in support of a safe and welcoming campus environment. SARC trainings seek to provide important information, support and connection with students. Faculty or staff can actively support this ongoing effort by inviting SARC to teach a class — either when the curriculum lends itself to our particular expertise, or when faculty are otherwise unable to meet with their students on a particular day or time.

Behavioral Intervention Team

https://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/BIT-Behavioral%20Intervention%20Team/default.php

BIT is a campus -wide team of appointed professionals responsible for assessing, and responding to serious concerns, distress and/or disruptive behaviors related to students that may threaten the health or safety of the campus community. BIT serves an important role in the prevention and management of difficulties related to harm to self or others. If a classmate or roommate shows a sudden change of behavior such as missing classes, or poor self -care, a concerned faculty, staff or student could contact a BIT co -chair or complete a BIT referral form. The BIT team reviews and discusses the best strategies to both help the student and manage the situation. And, if determined to be in their best interest, students of concern are contacted and referred to appropriate resources.

When to call UMPD

You should call UMPD emergency at (406) 243-4000 if the incident is nearing the level of crisis. A crisis exists whenever a person's behavior poses imminent danger of:

- causing or threatening harm to self or others,
- impeding lawful activities of other members of the campus community,
- interfering with the health, safety, or wellbeing of other members of the UM community and/or,
- experiencing a health emergency.

If you are ever unsure of whether or not a crisis exists, err on the side of caution and call UMPD non-emergency at (406) 243-6131 for assistance. A dispatcher will either coordinate a police response or give you information and/or referrals to assist the student in need.

To reach UMPD call:

(406) 243-6131 for guidance or advice on issues of concern 4000 from campus phones for emergencies.
911 will also work if you need medical or fire emergency.

If you need to file a report online to UM Police, use this link UMPD report.

Withdrawal from the University

UM Business Services Student Accounts staff can assist students with this process if requested.

Student privacy

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. Generally, post-secondary institutions must have written permission from the student in order to release any information from a student's education record. However, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to the following parties or under the following conditions:

School officials with legitimate educational interest;

- Other schools to which a student is transferring;
- Specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes;
- Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student;
- Organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school;
- Accrediting organizations;
- To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena;
- Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies; and
- State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law.

For more information, please see http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

A major goal of the HIPAA Act is to assure that individuals' health information is properly protected while allowing the flow of health information needed to provide and promote high quality health care and to protect the public's health and well-being. The rule strikes a balance that permits important uses of information, while protecting the privacy of people who seek care and healing. UM Curry Health Service health records are protected under HIPAA. For more information, please see http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/

Part II – General guidelines for students of concern

Preventing classroom disruption

Faculty members recognize the special responsibilities placed upon them to encourage learning, demonstrate respect for students and observe the regulations of the University to promote the advancement of knowledge. Students are expected to demonstrate appropriate behavior toward other members of the college community. Disruptive students, whether in the classroom or online, hinder the academic process and negatively impact student learning. Disruptive student conduct is prohibited by UM's Student Conduct Code.

What constitutes disruption?

Disruption, as applied to the academic setting, means behaviors that interfere with the right of other students to learn or of the instructors to teach.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Persistently speaking without being recognized
- Persistent use of cell phones, beepers, etc.
- Personal insults
- Interrupting other speakers

- Distracting the class from the subject of discussion
- Refusal to comply with faculty direction
- In extreme cases, physical threats, harassing behavior (contact UMPD)

Prevention

The best time to deal with disruption is before it begins. Faculty can take steps to reduce the likelihood of disruptive behaviors in the classroom.

- Explicitly state expectations for conduct in the syllabus. This may include:
- Participation in class activities
- Guidelines for communication
 - Expectations about the use of cell phones and pagers
 - Attendance/tardiness policy
 - Late assignment policy
- Explain consequences of inappropriate behavior
 - o Review these expectations with students during first class meeting
 - o Model respectful communication with your students
- Facilitate respectful exchange of ideas among your students
- Respond to problems consistently and in a timely manner

Guidelines for responding to students of concern

Distressed behavior

Student demonstrates **distressed behavior** but is not disruptive. **Distressed behavior** includes: tearfulness, anxiety, irritation, depression or inability to concentrate.



Obtain consultation from Curry Health Center Counseling Services, if needed. Speak with student privately about what you are observing and your concerns if feasible.



Inform student of assistance available on campus (pages 4-5). If possible, help the student call for an appointment or walk them over to Counseling Services



File a BIT form



If distressed behavior persists and/or the student is unwilling to seek assistance, submit a BIT form.

Disruptive Behavior

Student demonstrates inappropriate behavior that is **disruptive or abusive in nature. Disruptive behavior** includes: Unrelated or bizarre comments, defiance, use of inappropriate/offensive language abuse, anger or focusing attention on self. Bullying or harassment of other students (please see guidelines below on mandatory reporting).



Act immediately to stop inappropriate behavior and to Call UMPD at (406) 243-4000 prevent escalation. Speak with student confidentially when possible; clarify appropriate behavior, set expectations and consequences.

Consult with BIT for assistance. You may ask the student to leave for the remainder of the class or activity as a result of the disruptive behavior, or at any point if the behavior continues. If student refuses, call UMPD (406) 243-4000



File a BIT Report. Provide your observations to UMPD for their incident report.

Dangerous Behavior Crisis Event

A **crisis event** exists whenever a person's behavior poses imminent danger of:

- Causing harm to self or others,
- Impeding the lawful activities of other members of the campus community or causing significant property damage, or
- Interfering with the health, safety or well-being of other members of the UM community.

Call UMPD (406) 243-4000

Protect the safety of others and self.

Depending on incident, buy time with the student by talking calmly and with concern, if possible, until assistance arrives.



Provide your observations to UMPD for their incident report.

File a BIT Report

Obtain assistance as necessary for crisis debriefing from UM's EAP

Strategies for dealing with difficult situations

Office and front-line staff often have face-to-face contact with students. They may be the initial responders to students who are in crisis, angry, verbally abusive or potentially dangerous. These general suggestions can be utilized with the behavior pattern dos and don'ts identified in Part III of this document. The following guidelines provide general principles for effective verbal intervention.

1. Remain calm

Remember that the verbally escalating person is beginning to lose control. If the person senses that you are also losing control, the situation may get worse. Try to keep your emotions under control, even when challenged, insulted or threatened. This may be easier said than done, especially when a student is making threats, or using abusive language, but it is important in deescalating the situation.

2. Be empathetic

Try not to judge or discount the feelings of others. Whether or not you think the feelings are justified, those feelings are real to the other person. You may want to acknowledge them by saying things like, "I understand that this is very frustrating for you." or "I'm sorry that you're feeling distressed about..."

3. Watch your body language

As a person becomes increasingly agitated, he or she will pay less attention to your words and more attention to your body language. Be aware of your use of space, posture and gestures. Avoid gestures that might seem threatening. Make sure your nonverbal behavior is consistent with your verbal message. Typically, it is NOT recommended to touch someone, even if it seems like it might be comforting.

4. Respect personal space

Maintain a safe distance (2 to 3 feet) from an agitated person. Invading personal space tends to increase the individual's anxiety and may lead to increased agitation.

5. Keep it simple

Be clear and direct in your message. Avoid jargon and complicated choices. A person who is beginning to lose rational control may not be processing information as he or she usually does. Complex messages may increase anxiety and make self-control more difficult.

6. Set and enforce reasonable limits

If the person becomes belligerent, defensive or disruptive be sure to state limits and directives clearly and concisely. When setting limits, offer choices and consequences to the individual. For example, "If you calm down, I can continue to assist you. If not, you will need to leave."

Consider saying "It's not my role to make that kind of decision here at the University. Let me locate someone who can help you." or "It's hard for me to understand what you are saying when you are shouting. Please lower your voice so that I can better help you."

7. Request assistance when necessary

If you perceive any threat, call UMPD at (406) 243-4000. In such situations your safety and those of others in your area are of utmost importance. The use of telephone code words or alarm buttons may be a good strategy and should be discussed and developed within your department.

If the student is **angry or demanding** but you do not sense an immediate threat, he or she can be referred to your supervisor, your department chair, DSS or to Counseling Services.

8. **Document the incident** and submit the BIT Form.

Core elements of communicating with a student in distress

- Confirm you have heard what the student has said.
- Express concern for the student
- Refer the student to UM resources or contact UMPD

Part III — Student Behaviors

The distressed student

You may become aware of students in distress in a variety of ways. Students may directly communicate their issues and distress to you in private or in front of others. You may also sense there is something amiss with a student on the basis of the behavior they exhibit or if there are changes in their demeanor.

- Distressed students may express heightened apprehension and fear verbally or behaviorally. These concerns will likely interfere with their learning and ability to appropriately participate in class activities. You may notice agitation, physical shaking of hands, or a trembling voice with students who are anxious.
- Distressed students may appear tense, anxious, and mistrustful. These students may tend to interpret minor oversights as significant personal rejection or may overreact to insignificant occurrences. They may be overly concerned with fairness and being treated equally.
- Distressed student behavior may be indicated by a change over time from actively engaged and involved to a noticeable loss of interest in classroom or other activities. Normally outgoing students may seem to retreat from interaction and involvement. Attendance issues may become a problem for students in distress. Depending on your relationship with the student, he/she may verbally communicate their distress with you.
- Distressed students may share events or incidents of discrimination, harassment, sexual or physical violence. This may be expressed through various forms of communication.
- Distressed students may appear to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol in your class or at your office or an event.
- Distressed students can also be students who are physically ill or who are experiencing a medical emergency event.

DO

- Express compassion without intimate friendship.
- Communicate your concern, if appropriate.
- Be specific and clear regarding the standards of behavior you expect if the student's behaviors are interfering with classroom activities.
- Listen for indications the student may be suicidal such as statements like "life doesn't seem worth living" or "I just feel I can't go on anymore." If this is unclear, please consult Counseling Services or BIT.
- Share your intention of referring them for assistance.
- In cases where behavior or other signs of drug or alcohol abuse is evident, contact UMPD.
- In cases of medical emergencies always contact UMPD (emergency 243-4000 or 911)

DON'T

- Take responsibility for their emotional state by saying "I'll take care of it for you."
- Discount their distress by saying "it's not really that bad" or "you've really got nothing to worry about."
- Assure the student that you are a friend.
- Be overly warm and nurturing.
- Be cute or humorous.
- Challenge or agree with any mistaken or illogical beliefs.
- Say anything else that might discount the personal significance or intensity of the student's feelings.
- Agree to maintain student's confidentiality.

Distressed student decision tree

If appropriate, speak with the student privately about what you are observing and your concerns. Inform the student of assistance available through Counseling Services. If appropriate, help them call for an appointment or walk them over if possible.

If there is potential for harm contact UMPD.

Seek consultation from Counseling Services, BIT co-chairs or Community Standards Office, if needed.

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If the appropriate offices are not available, and/or if behavior or verbal expression of distress is severe, or there is the potential of harm, contact UMPD at 243-4000

If alcohol or drugs are evident, contact UMPD.

If the student discloses events or behavior involving sex-based harassment or discrimination, inform the student of resources such as SARC (243-4429) and Counseling (243-4711).

If the student discloses events or behavior involving harassment or discrimination, contact the EOAA/Title IX Office, 243-5710.

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File a Student of Concern Form to BIT Online BIT **or** provide your observations to UMPD for their incident report

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Obtain personal assistance as necessary for crisis debriefing from UM's EAP

The disruptive student

Often, large amounts of time and energy are given to students who make excessive demands on your time or class time. They may seek to control time and unconsciously believe that the amount of time they receive is a reflection of their worth. Some students may also have difficulty keeping their comments consistent with the activities or with the topic or issue being discussed. Disruptive behavior can include, but is not limited to, verbal aggression. Be aware that psychotic states and in some cases, substance abuse, can involve extreme emotion or lack of emotion and unusual ideas or comments; however, not all are dangerous or harmful to one's self or others. Remember, you can always consult with Counseling or BIT on the options for responding.

DO

- Set limits: "Excuse me; I need to attend to other things." "I am happy to set another time to speak with you."
- Remain calm and professional. Be sensitive to both verbal and nonverbal cues exhibited by a student who seems to be verbally aggressive or difficult.
- Intervene as soon as you hear or see the undesirable behavior.
- Be consistent with your intervention as best as you can.
- If you feel too fearful to intervene, this may be indication to call the police. If you are uncomfortable but not fearful, delay responding and consult with BIT or Community Standards about options for managing the behavior after the incident.

- If necessary, give the class a break and ask the student to meet outside of the class to speak privately. If not in a classroom situation, get the assistance of a colleague to provide more support to you.
- You can briefly and directly convey to the student that verbally aggressive or problematic behavior is unacceptable and that the matter must be addressed. However, you may want to manage the moment and seek consultation and support later on how to best this address the behaviors. Let the student know that you (based upon your decision of what is best):
 - o need them to leave the class/situation to ensure others can be served; and/or
 - o will set a meeting at a later date to address the behaviors of concern.
 - o Then consult with: your supervisor or chair; BIT and/or Office of Community Standards.
- If, in your best judgment, the student's behavior creates a safety risk, contact UMPD immediately. Use a phone out of sight/hearing of individual if possible or request someone else call. Report details of the incident.

DON'T

- Wait until you have become too involved or the student has created numerous class disruptions to seek assistance.
- Assure confidentiality.
- Let them use you as their only source of support.
- Get trapped into giving advice, "Why don't you ...etc.?"
- Get defensive.
- Engage in a power struggle with the student.
- Respond with anger.
- Allow the disruptive behaviors continue.

Disruptive student decision tree

Seek consultation from BIT, Counseling Services or Office for Community Standards, if needed.

Speak with the student privately about what you are observing and your concerns. You can meet with the student and a supervisor or chair instead of meeting alone. Establish or reinforce behavioral expectations or limits as necessary.



If the student is excessively demanding, threatening or refuses to comply with faculty or staff direction, contact UMPD at (406) 243-4000.



File a BIT Form online BIT form or provide your observations to UMPD for their incident report.



Obtain personal assistance as necessary for crisis debriefing from UM's EAP.

The potentially dangerous student

Certain behaviors may signal imminent danger to self or others. For example: physical or verbal threats, harassment, expressing personal insults, refusal to comply with directions of University officials or faculty members and continued escalation of threats might signal imminent danger.

Dramatic changes in behavior over time may indicate the potential for dangerous behavior or harm to self. Actively engaged and involved students may begin to demonstrate a loss of interest in classroom or other activities. Normally outgoing students may seem to retreat from interaction and involvement.

Depending on your relationship with these students, they may communicate their sense of despondency or outline a specific plan to do harm to themselves.

You may also experience students whose behavior may be bizarre, eccentric or erratic. They may display disorganized speech and behavior, an inappropriate or complete lack of emotion, bizarre behavior that may include expressing hallucinations, strange beliefs that involve a serious misinterpretation of reality, social withdrawal or an inability to connect with or track normal communication. While these behaviors by themselves may not indicate a potential for violence or danger, they may indicate the need for treatment or hospitalization. It should be noted that students who are experiencing these behaviors may be unpredictable and should be approached with caution or additional support.

DO

- Contact UMPD in situations where you believe violence is imminent.
- Immediately report students who share suicidal thoughts to your supervisor, BIT and/or Counseling Services. Contact UMPD if you believe the student shouldn't be left alone.
- Recognize that psychotic states can involve extreme emotion or lack of emotion and intense fear to the point of paranoia.
- Respond to the student with concern and kindness, and with firm reasoning. "I can see you're very upset. Please tell me how I can assist you."
- Articulate your specific concerns and state that you can see they need help.
- Be aware that the student may show no emotions or intense emotions.
- Ask another staff or student to call for help if needed.

DON'T

- Assume the student will be able to care for him/herself.
- Agitate the student by arguing with their unrealistic beliefs.
- Assume the student comprehends what you are saying or doing.
- Release the student to the care of a roommate or friend without seeking professional consultation.
- Attempt to probe the delusional thinking.
- Assume responsibility by personally trying to resolve their issues.

Potentially dangerous student decision tree

If the student is expressing or acting out behaviors that demonstrate the potential for imminent harm to self or others seek immediate assistance.



Contact UMPD at (406) 243-4000.



If the student is expressing or exhibiting behaviors that do not demonstrate the potential for imminent violence seek consultation or refer the student to get assistance with Counseling Services. This may include walking the student to Counseling Services, if possible. Counseling Services is located in Curry Health Center on the west end of the building.



File a BIT Form online BIT form or provide your observations to UMPD for their incident report

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Obtain personal assistance as necessary for crisis debriefing from UM's EAP

Appendix

Campus and community resources

(406) 243-2611
(406) 243-4711
(406) 243-2122
(406) 243-5710
(406) 243-4429
(406) 243-2097
(406) 243-2243
(406) 243-2800
(406) 243-2611
(406) 243-6131
(406) 243-4000

If offices noted above are closed when you attempt to contact them, contact UMPD.