

March 2009

## At-Risk: Identifying & Referring Students in Mental Distress

### Product Overview

#### 1.0 Product Overview

*At-Risk* is an interactive web-based training simulation designed to help university faculty and staff identify, approach, and refer students in mental distress. In the simulation, users assume the role of a faculty member in a fictional university where they must analyze students' profiles to identify those who are potentially at-risk, engage those students in simulated conversations, and determine whether and how to refer them to the campus counseling center. A demo of the can be viewed at [www.kognito.com/atrisk](http://www.kognito.com/atrisk).



The 45-minute simulation is built upon Kognito's patent-pending and award-winning simulation technology, which enables users to practice having conversations with realistic, virtual characters that possess their own memory and emotions. This innovative and highly effective learning approach results in users who are better equipped and more confident to handle similar situations in real life.

*At-Risk* has been developed in partnership with the Mental Health Association of NYC, a leading behavioral health association in New York that administers the National Suicide Prevention LifeLine (1-800-273-TALK) as well as the 9/11 Mental Health and Substance Abuse Programs.

Launched in November 2008, *At-Risk* has already been adopted for over 7,000 faculty members by New York University (NYU), University of West Indies, City College, Brooklyn College, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and Hostos Community College.

#### 2.0 The Need

According to the 2006 National College Health Assessment, half of all college students report feeling so depressed it is difficult for them to function, and 10% say they have seriously considered suicide in the past year. Students experiencing mental distress tend to exhibit behavioral patterns that are detectable in academic settings. Unfortunately, it is estimated that close to 80% of students who commit suicide go unnoticed, leaving themselves and others at risk. Furthermore, schools realize that early detection of at-risk students can assist in improving their academic performance and retention rates.

The 2007 National Survey by the American College Counseling Association indicates that the leading action taken by universities to overcome the increasing number of at-risk students is to train faculty and staff to identify and respond to students in need and make appropriate referrals. Conducting face-to-face training for this population is both expensive and difficult to administer, especially for part-time faculty.

### **3.0 Benefits for Client**

Universities that utilize At-Risk will benefit in multiple ways:

1. Increase academic performance and retention rates of at-risk students
2. Reduce the number of undetected students on campus by increasing the number of at-risk students who receive help
3. Rapidly and cost-effectively reach all staff with an engaging, standardized learning experience
4. Provide faculty and staff with a quality course that is available 24/7 from any computer with an internet connection, as well as just-in-time training for new hires.
5. Reduce faculty and staff anxiety about approaching and dealing with students in distress while ensuring that they recognize their role versus the role of counselors
6. Reduce negative stereotypes and misconceptions about mental distress and illness on campus
7. Maintain a record of who has taken the training for compliancy and legal purposes
8. In case an emergency situation arises, have the ability to provide faculty and staff with immediate access to training

### **4.0 Learning Objectives**

After completing the simulation, users will be better equipped to:

1. Identify warning signs of mental distress, including verbal, behavioral, and situational clues
2. Manage conversations with students to determine the need for referral
3. Develop awareness of negative stereotypes and misconceptions about mental distress and illness
4. Understand the process by which their university counseling centers operate and know the contact information, location, and referral policy of their specific school.

### **5.0 Program Access**

The simulation is hosted on Kognito's web server with each user receiving a secure log-in and password to view it. The simulation is accessible 24/7 via both PC and Mac. While the simulation takes only 35-45 minutes to complete, users can complete it in multiple sittings.

Kognito will provide the client with an administrator account to the Kognito's web portal where user names and password for each learner can be created. Alternatively, Kognito can provide the institution with a unique link and access code that can be forwarded to all learners. In that case, learners will need to open an account within the Kognito's portal including user name and password. In both cases, the link to the simulation can be provided to learners via email or added as a "course" to the client's Course Management System (e.g. Blackboard). Once activated, each account remains open for unlimited training, retraining, or review over the period of the license (e.g., one year). In both cases, the administrator will be able to log into the portal and view reports on who has launched the simulation, who completed it, and how much time they spent taking the simulation.

### **6.0 Customization and Special Features**

*At-Risk* includes a number of components that will be customized to the needs of the institution as well as a number of components that can assist in marketing the product to stakeholders and learners. This includes:

- A customized "My Counseling Center" HTML page that users can launch at anytime during the simulation. This page will include the counseling center's contact information/location, campus-

specific policies, and emergency response guidelines. Users can print this information for their records.

- An online survey which collects self-reported feedback from users about their learning experience.
- Access to tracking system to view outcome reports on participants' learning activities
- Internal marketing tools, including a PowerPoint presentation about the simulation, a one-page customizable flyer, a suggested e-mail language, and an online, animated trailer to further motivate users to take the simulation. These resources can be viewed at <http://www.kognito.com/atrisk/clientresources/>
- A trainer manual to assist in conducting follow-up group discussions
- Technical support via phone and e-mail

## 7.0 Walkthrough of the Learning Experience

### 1. The Classroom

In this highly interactive simulation, users assume the role of a faculty (Professor Hampton) who is teaching a class where three of the potentially six students are at-risk. Throughout the simulation, users guide Professor Hampton through the task of identifying, approaching, and referring these three at-risk students.



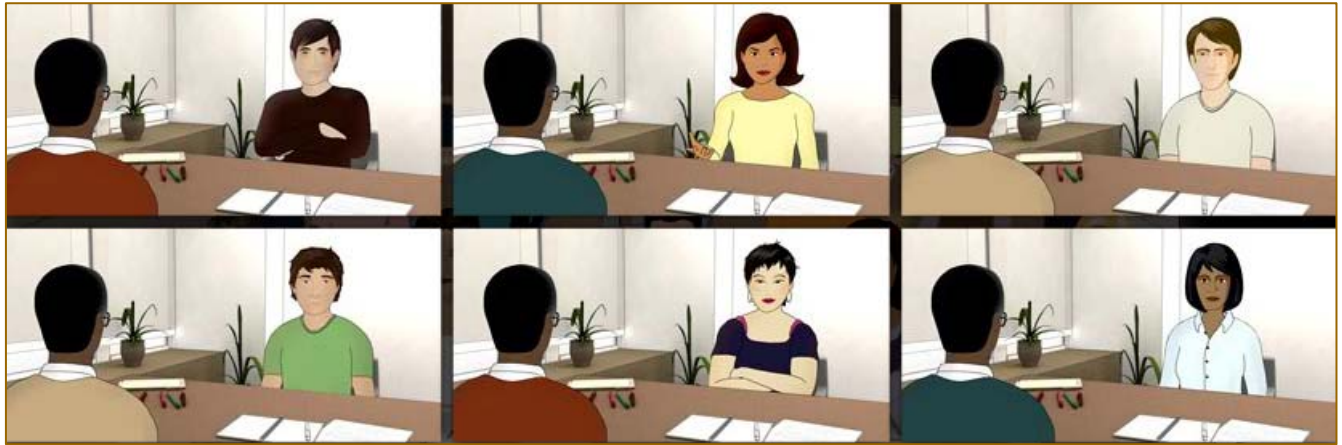
In identifying these students, users first view information about each student's academic performance (e.g., grades, participation, and attendance), behavior in class, and appearance. If they believe there is sufficient information to suggest the student might be at-risk, they can choose "Talk to Student" to engage in a simulated conversation with them to better determine the need for referral to the counseling center.



The symptoms exhibited by the six students in their profiles and during their conversations with the user have been carefully chosen to reflect those that are often indicative of the most common and most severe psychological illnesses among young adults:

- Alcohol/Substance Abuse
- Bipolar Disorder
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Depression
- Eating Disorders
- Panic Disorder
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Social Phobia

It is important to note that the simulation does not communicate to users what psychological illnesses the at-risk students are likely to be suffering from. The main reason behind this conscious decision is that the role of the gatekeeper is not to diagnose students but to become aware of possible indicators, know how to approach students, and understand how to make a referral to counseling services.



Snapshots of the Six Students

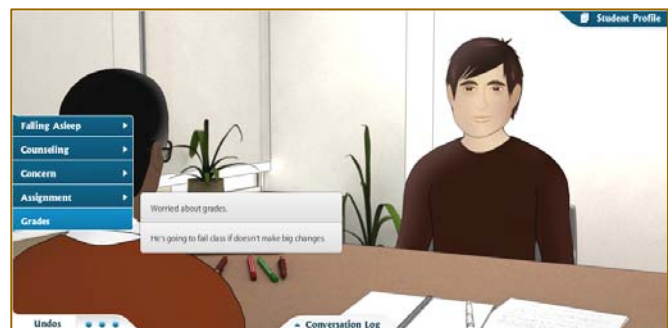
## 2. Approach & Referral

Before talking with the students, users consider Professor Hampton's own emotional reactions to the student's behavior and offer him advice. This important preface to the conversation increases the gatekeeper's awareness of their own emotions towards the student, which may influence their ability to make the best or most objective decisions.



For example, disruptive student behavior could result in the faculty feeling threatened, insulted, or defensive and, as a result, they could be less inclined to approach the student in a positive manner. This could be especially true for new faculty, who do not feel as comfortable in their job role or as confident in their abilities.

Each conversation takes 5-7 minutes to complete. The user controls the conversation by choosing what topic(s) to discuss and what specifically to say or ask. The available topics depend on the student's profile and on the decisions made by the user throughout the conversation (i.e., new topics appear and others disappear as the conversation unfolds).



Snapshot of Conversation Menu

The virtual student is an animated character that responds to the user's decisions via voice and body language. Some statements and questions make the student more comfortable and increase the likelihood that (s)he will open up to Professor Hampton. Other statements and questions make the student more defensive.



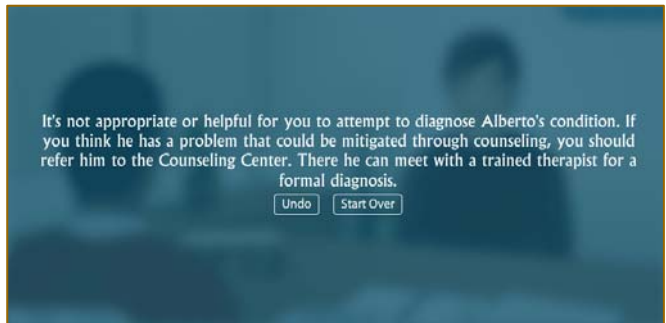
Snapshot of Student's Reaction

Throughout the conversation, users receive advice on their decisions, so they learn what they are doing well and how they can improve. In addition, the student's body language and verbal responses are strong indicators to the user about the effectiveness of their actions.



Snapshot of Advice Provided to User

If the student's comfort level becomes too low, (s)he will end the discussion prematurely (i.e., "game over"). In such cases, users will receive feedback on why the student decided to end the conversation. At that point, they can use one of their three "undos" to go back one choice or to start over. Users have a total of three "undos" and three "start overs" in each conversation.



Snapshot of Feedback Provided to User after Making a Crucial Mistake

As the conversation unfolds, users determine whether the student needs to be referred to the counseling center. If so, they must refer the student and use appropriate language to convince/motivate them to go. In certain situations, the simulation suggests to faculty that it might be best to walk the student to the counseling center themselves.



Snapshot of Faculty Discussing Counseling Services

### 3. Feedback

Upon conclusion of each conversation, users receive narrated and animated feedback, which includes an analysis of the student, including a review of their symptoms in class and in conversation, advice on how to refer other students with similar symptoms, and a reminder to follow up with the student.

#### 4. Back to Classroom

Once the user completes a conversation and views the follow-up feedback, they return to the classroom to identify the remaining at-risk students.

#### 5. Completion

Once users successfully identify the three at-risk students out of the six who are potentially at-risk, they will be notified that they have successfully completed the training.

### **8.0 About Kognito**

Kognito is an award-winning training simulations and games company located in NYC. Our team is comprised of experts in the fields of psychology, learning, instructional design, and simulations. Since 2003, we have worked with leading organizations such as Starwood Hotels, FujiFilm, NYC Office of Emergency Management, NYC Office of Homeless Services, and City University of New York, providing both custom and off-the-shelf training resources.

Our products and solutions have won numerous awards including the prestigious 2007 and 2008 Learning Leader award from Bersin & Associates, an award previously received by companies such as IBM and Accenture. For more information about our company, team, and awards please visit

[www.kognito.com](http://www.kognito.com).

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