

## ***Coping with College Series***

### **Reducing Roommate Conflict**

by David Rardin

Returning from Fall Break and looking ahead can feel overwhelming. There are term papers coming due, exams and quizzes to take, and a growing awareness that there are too few hours left to get everything done. Finding quiet space within which to work becomes critical.

Roommates and friends, who have been having a great time together, are now growling at each other. Turning on the stereo or the TV takes on new meaning. Just showing up in your room or apartment at a time different than usual can spark a fight. As the stress increases, the way we deal with each other is critical. We know what we want to say, but how to say it "right?"

Sometimes we just want to demand what we want immediately. We're so fed up all we want are results. But we know that we usually end up with a fight when we do this. On the other hand, when we act like a doormat, just giving in, we rarely get what we want. While the first is being aggressive, the second is being non-assertive. Too often the result of being non-assertive is being angry and frustrated.

When we are assertive, we are being direct, respectful, honest and clear. We take the risk to state clearly what we would like to happen, and listen to the response we receive. Rather than demand that our needs be met, we work together to reach an agreement that works well for both. While the term "compromise" sometimes is seen as giving in, it actually means coming to a jointly agreeable decision that is respectful to all. Usually, when we feel we are being heard and acknowledged, we are more willing to work together. The key to responsible assertive behavior is giving each other mutual respect.

There are many ways to develop assertive communication skills. There are books on the market and in the library that can be very helpful. You can also come to the Student Counseling Services, 320 Student Services Building, to learn more about effective communication skills. Among the resources at the SCS are brochures that give some specific ways to be more assertive. We also have counselors who can help you brainstorm new ways to

master challenging situations. So before you have a major blow out with your roommates, try a different way of getting your needs met!