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Preventing **Campus** and **Workplace Violence**

What Sets NC State's Risk Management Model Apart

By David Rainer and Barbara Carroll

In the wake of incidents of violence on American campuses in recent years, institutions across the country are wrestling with the issue of best practices to identify and manage persons and situations that might represent threats to the campus community. At many campuses, dealing with risk threats and consequences has historically been narrowly focused within specific divisions — student affairs deals with student issues, campus police handles potentially criminal issues, HR manages employee relations matters, academic affairs typically handles faculty issues.

With campuses trying to assimilate risk information about students, faculty, staff, contractors and visitors from so many different sources, the questions have become: What are best practices for gathering, assessing, tracking,

sharing and managing resources to control risks presented by individuals? What tools can be used to evaluate potential concerns and what training is needed? How, in decentralized campus environments, is information shared and tracked, and how is such risk managed?

At North Carolina State University (NC State), we found that our separate campus divisions didn't have the structures, or even the expectation, to regularly communicate with one another about individuals of concern. As a result, persons might be presenting risk behaviors in multiple environments, but that critical information might not be shared with relevant other units, leading to missed opportunities for risk identification and intervention. It was clear that the campus offices that dealt with behavioral risk issues needed better ways to collaborate.

An Integrated Approach to Risk Management

As a land-grant public institution and the largest university in the state, NC State enrolls more than 34,000 students and employs 10,000 regular and temporary workers on its 2,200-acre campus near downtown Raleigh, as well as in its extension offices and research stations located in all 100 counties in the state.

In order to identify and manage risk situations involving students, staff, faculty and others at the institution, in 2008 NC State established a formal violence prevention policy and adopted an integrated approach to behavior assessment and violence risk mitigation. Policies and protocols apply to all members of the university community, including employees, students and campus visitors. This approach was chosen to support consistent and comprehensive risk management practices that enhance campus safety and help identify any person who could represent a threat, whether they are affiliated with the campus or not. To facilitate this, the institution standardized its recordkeeping practices, established a behavior assessment process, and formalized operating procedures. A risk case manager position was created and criminal background checks are conducted on all individuals hired for employment (including faculty).

Many campuses around the country have established risk/behavior assessment teams, alert teams, safety intervention teams and the like to identify individuals who may pose a risk to the institution. Many campuses also have “care teams” to provide support to those individuals who pose a potential threat to themselves or others. There are various models and publications that discuss the organization and structure of such teams, including *Balancing Safety and Support on Campus: A Guide for Campus Teams*; *Implementing Behavioral Threat Assessment on Campus*; *Workplace Violence Prevention and Intervention*; and *The Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment and Management Teams*.

Like some other institutions, NC State has implemented several divisional threat assessment teams — one that primarily handles student issues, one that focuses on faculty, staff, temporary workers and non-affiliated individuals, and another that assesses the risk of accepting applicants for admission who have been convicted of a crime, dishonorably discharged from the military or have had pending criminal charges dismissed. Unlike many institutions, the teams communicate. The teams are also governed under a single regulation, Campus and Workplace Violence Prevention and Management

(<http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-04-05-02>).

This regulation describes violent behavior, the reporting responsibilities associated with observation of violent behavior, actions that constitute a violation, and institutional responses. Most importantly, the regulation designates a single individual, NC State’s associate vice chancellor (AVC) for environmental health and public safety (EHPS), as the coordinator for the overall implementation of the campus violence prevention and management program. As coordinator, the AVC for EHPS is delegated the authority to create and oversee an integrated system that identifies and mobilizes appropriate consultative resources to implement the program. As a result, NC State’s program of risk assessment and violence prevention intentionally encompasses faculty, students, staff and others on campus.

The AVC for EHPS worked with human resources and student affairs to develop a role that would serve as “mission control” for behavioral risk assessment and be a central point of communication. The group settled on a risk case manager position, which would serve as a central point person for the associated teams and would maintain a central tracking system of cases.

The university’s behavioral assessment team (BAT) is composed of a group of core multidisciplinary representatives who analyze potentially threatening situations and advise administrators as to recommended courses of action to mitigate risk. The AVC for EHPS or his designee acts as official chair of the BAT. The core team members serve on both the student and employee threat assessment teams to ensure overlap and communication, and include the risk assessment case manager, a representative from university police and a designated attorney from campus general counsel. In addition to the core BAT team members, the employee threat assessment team also includes representatives from HR employee relations and the office of institutional equity and diversity, as needed, and the student threat assessment team includes representatives from student conduct, student counseling and student housing.

The Stats

One of the clear limitations of many university risk assessment processes is that many threat assessment teams are student-centric, and campuses do not necessarily have clearly-defined processes to evaluate risks from faculty, staff and non-affiliates. Although data points are few, according to the Higher Education Mental Health Alliance (HEMHA), of 175 schools who responded to

its 2010 survey on risk management responsibilities on campus, senior student affairs officers and counseling center directors most commonly served as chairs of behavior assessment teams, which seems to indicate that most BATs deal only with student issues. The HEMHA report does, however, acknowledge that “an important decision about the campus team’s scope and purpose involves how broadly or narrowly to define the population on which the team will focus. The behavior of any member of the campus community — students, faculty or staff — could become a concern of the campus team.” (See the full report at www.jedfoundation.org/campus_teams_guide.pdf).

Today’s reality is that targeted violence on campus comes from many sources, including domestic violence, stalking, disgruntled former students or employees, sexual assault, hazing and drug- and alcohol-induced attacks. Depending on the source, statistics indicate that violence is precipitated by individuals not affiliated with the institution 20 percent of the time, faculty and staff 11 percent of the time (50 percent currently employed, 50 percent former employees) and students 60 percent of the time (66 percent enrolled, 34 percent former students) (statistics gleaned from *The Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment and Management Teams*).

Why the NC State Model Works

A key element of the NC State program is that EHPS and HR recruited a licensed clinical social worker as the risk assessment case manager. The case manager has specific training in risk and threat assessment, including violence risk assessment, forensic interviewing, advanced threat management, advanced forensic sex crimes investigations, counterterrorism, domestic violence, and workplace violence assessment and management. The case manager is also responsible for writing the BAT’s standard operating procedures and selecting the assessment tools that are used.

Some assessment tools we’ve considered for our program include the Behavioral Pathway Model (Fein and Vossekuil), MOSAIC (de Becker), the Assessment and Response Grid (Cawood), the Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk (WAVR-21), the Spousal Abuse Risk Assessment Guide (Kropp, Hart, Webster and Eaves), the Structured Interview for Violence Risk Assessment (Van Brunt), and Dynamic Risk Assessment (Hoffman and Roshdi).

All of our threat assessment team members and BAT members have been trained in assessment protocols and how to use the specific assessment tools. Our goal has been, and continues to be, to assure that all team members receive consistent, high-level training, that they receive practice in using the assessment tools, and that they are trained to employ fact-based decision making based on a standardized risk ranking and rating system.

There are many other program elements that make our risk assessment initiative successful. These include a standardized application for NC State prospective students that includes six questions related to whether they have been convicted of a crime. The office of the university registrar has a process to review academically qualified candidates who answer yes to one or more of the six questions. As noted previously, HR conducts background checks on all new hires and on certain internal job transfer applicants. Training is provided for faculty, students and staff on the university violence prevention policy as well as classroom management, conflict resolution, dealing with concerning behaviors and working with student veterans.

And our violence prevention and threat management website (<http://vptm.ehps.ncsu.edu>) provides the campus community with up-to-date information about best practices and resources, opportunities for training, a link to the campus’s incident report form, findings from the latest research and copies of reports related to campus safety and workplace violence, and more.

Attend the concurrent session “Collaborating on Campus Risk Assessment and Violence Prevention” at the CUPA-HR Annual Conference and Expo 2014 in San Antonio this fall to learn more about HR’s role in keeping our campuses safe. Visit www.cupahr.org/conference2014.


Unable to attend the conference? No worries! We’ll be live tweeting and blogging from sessions and events, so be sure to follow along! The conference Twitter handle is [#cupahr14](https://twitter.com/cupahr14), and you can find The Higher Ed Workplace blog at blog.cupahr.org.

Be Prepared

Establishing an effective risk assessment process for a campus requires breaking down silos while following several key guiding principles to move the program forward. These include:

- Reviewing organizational structure to assure overall administrative coordination of all campus health, safety, security and risk management programs.
- Establishing an overarching threat management process that encompasses faculty, students, staff and non-affiliates.
- Developing a comprehensive campus/workplace violence prevention and management program and training personnel so they understand how violence is defined and how and when to report potential threats or acts of violence (signs and indicators of violence; suicide risk and mental illness; when, where and how to report).

- Communicating with potential targets in a professional and confident manner and providing defined safety plans.

As we all know, violence knows no boundaries and follows no logic. Though there's no guarantee that your campus won't someday be touched by violence, your human resources organization is in a prime position to help mitigate the risk by partnering with other campus units to create a cohesive, comprehensive risk management and violence prevention program. 

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