ASSESSING THREATS ON CAMPUS
A TOOLKIT FOR STUDENT CONDUCT PROFESSIONALS

Created by: ASCA
Association for Student Conduct Administration
As student conduct professionals, we are all committed to creating safer educational communities and positively impacting the higher education experience. While incidences of violence on campus remain relatively low, threats to students, faculty, and staff members are still present, and many of us regularly face new types of threats for which we, and our campuses, are not prepared. One challenge in responding is that for many of these threats there is limited research available because of lack of access to perpetrators and low numbers of incidents. However, it is incumbent on all of us to become educated about what to look for, how to prepare, and how to prevent situations that may put our students, faculty, and colleagues at risk. While we will never be able to prevent all tragedies, at the end of the day we must make a good faith effort to try.

This toolkit provides the start to that effort. Every institution and every situation is different so the following materials do not have all the answers. However, they do provide a foundation for student conduct professionals on what can and should be done, when to collaborate, how to identify and mitigate potential threats, and how to create a culture of reporting on campus. Ultimately these practices are intended to help would-be perpetrators before they commit a violent or aggressive act, rather than only punishing them once an act is committed. In addition to the resources provided in this toolkit, we recommend you look at the comprehensive trainings ASCA offers throughout the year and the reading list we have compiled to develop a deeper understanding of these issues.

Student conduct professionals are uniquely positioned to collaborate across various departments to prevent, assess, and manage threats. By embracing our commitments to fairness, diversity, inclusion, collaboration, and dialogue over debate, we can make a difference on our campuses. We invite you to use this toolkit as a guide to tackling tough issues on campus and helping to protect your campus from potential threats.

Best,

LAURA BENNETT, PRESIDENT
DR. JENNIFER WALLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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“THE BEST DEFENSE IS EARLY DETECTION. SHOOTERS HAVE TO BE STOPPED BEFORE THEY CAN GET TO THE SCHOOL WITH WEAPONS. THIS MEANS A DIFFERENT STYLE OF PREVENTION THAN PHYSICAL SECURITY.”

On college campuses there can be a "silo effect" in identifying and tracking concerning behaviors. This is when multiple offices at the same institution have information indicating that a student is exhibiting concerning or even threatening behaviors, but no one has a complete understanding of the behaviors of concern or individual exhibiting them. Creating a multidisciplinary campus threat assessment team can "connect the dots" and help offices across the campus work together to evaluate the full context of a concerning behavior.
CAMPUS POLICE/PUBLIC SAFETY
Assess if there is a violation of the law; access to criminal history

STUDENT CONDUCT
Formal avenue for accountability, and insights into student behavior

HUMAN RESOURCES
Translate workplace policies to the team for threats involving employees, recommend support and services for employees

CAMPUS COUNSELING
Assess students’ mental state and identify appropriate resources

TITLE IX COORDINATORS
Investigations of stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, sexual misconduct, and sexual assault

STUDENT AFFAIRS
Identify services and support for students

RESIDENCE LIFE/HOUSING
Access to multiple sources of information outside of class

TEAM MEMBERS, EXPERTISE, & ROLES

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PROCESS

1. Proactively or reactively identify situations or persons of concern

2. Determine level of threat

3. Investigate and gather information

4. Employ interventions

5. Determine interventions

6. Evaluate effectiveness

CRITICAL FUNCTIONS

• Conduct threat investigations and assessments

• Provide recommendations to manage threat

• Collect, assess, and track information

• Provide guidance and best practices for campus violence prevention and response

• Support and advise affected individuals

• Improve the overall college experience for students and the general safety and well-being of the community
CHECKLIST: BE PREPARED TO ASSESS THREATS

When a situation arises, campuses need to utilize a multidisciplinary threat assessment team. The following steps can help schools form the best possible team to address the potential threat and identify the best possible interventions to be implemented.

- Create a multi-disciplinary team
- Define scope of the team – Identify clear roles and responsibilities for team and individual team members
- Adopt/develop and utilize a rubric for evaluating the threat
- Determine a list of possible interventions
- Train the team
- Create a culture of reporting and a way to report
- Educate the campus, including campus leaders and other stakeholders, on the role of the team
- Keep the team prepared and up to speed with annual training
- Continually evaluate referrals and ways to improve assessment and intervention processes

TEAM TRAINING TOPICS
- History of field research
- How to investigate effectively
- How to evaluate information & determine threat level
- How to outreach and advise referring parties
- How to document case information
- Campus specific information
- Team procedures & processes
- Campus and community resources
- Student conduct & HR disciplinary procedures
- Campus procedures (FERPA, disciplinary, etc.)
After a tragic event on a college campus, such as a school shooting, people often say they had no idea the individual could be capable of such an act — that the person must have just “snapped.” On the other hand, sometimes students or employees will say that they are not surprised when they learn a particular person attempted or committed a violent act. While the data is limited in this area, there are still lessons to be learned from the data that does exist. In fact, one study found that 100 percent of school shooters and 90 percent of students of concern exhibited the warning behavior of "leakage," or communication to a third party about their intent to attack. Another study reports that in 81 percent of school shooting incidents at least one other person had knowledge of the attacker’s plan. Among those individuals who knew of a shooter’s intention, 93 percent were students.

To make college campuses as safe as possible, it’s crucial for student conduct administrators and other higher education professionals to know what behaviors to watch for, where to look, and how to properly assess those behaviors.
IDENTIFY CONCERNS

Threat assessment relies on building a culture of reporting, students, faculty, and staff are often the ones to witness and flag behavior of concern. This can include information posted on social media, interactions on campus, and other changes in demeanor or behavior.iii

Behaviors of concern can include:

- Social withdrawal
- Written or non-verbal cues of distress
- Uncontrolled anger
- Intolerance or prejudice
- Intimidation or bullying of others
- Joining a gang or hate group
- Obsession with guns
- Chronic discipline problems
- Low interest in school
- Poor academic performance
- Drugs and/or alcohol abuse
- Violent threats and aggressive behaviors

ASSESS AND INTERVENE

Once behavior of concern has been flagged, a threat assessment team should be formed to start collecting more information in order to evaluate next steps — before the situation escalates. When assessing a student, it’s best to have at least three sources. However, not all sources carry the same weight.iv Each case should be evaluated on its own. If evidence of concern is found, then a more in-depth investigation is needed.

The team can then determine a threat level based on set standards, determine the appropriate interventions, and implement them. It’s important to note that threat assessment is about prevention, not prediction. The goal is not to predict violence based on common factors, but to prevent violence anytime concerns become known. This happens best through an assessment by a well-trained multi-disciplinary team using their professional judgment based on a shared understanding of a threat assessment scale. The campus should then follow their recommendations towards preventing violence.

Follow-up and evaluation in these situations is also crucial. A threat analysis team should determine that the threat has been mitigated, continue to monitor the student, and implement other interventions as necessary.
AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS:

85% FEEL OVERWHELMED
47% FEEL HOPELESS
58% FEEL VERY LONELY
25% HAVE A DIAGNOSABLE MENTAL ILLNESS

WHILE MOST STUDENTS WILL NOT BECOME VIOLENT, EARLY INTERVENTION CAN HELP PREVENT MENTAL HEALTH AND OTHER CRISES.

Incidents of violence may result from a complex intersection of progressively more concerning and aggressive behaviors as well as inadequate supportive influences and coping mechanisms. Changes in behavior can be subtle, students and employees may struggle in silence, and student conduct professionals cannot watch everyone on campus all of the time.

There are limited studies of school shootings, but available information indicates that in most school shooting incidents, at least one other had knowledge of the attacker’s plan; often those individuals who knew of a pending attack were students. The key is to maintain a strong relationship with students, faculty, and staff, create clear and transparent practices and policies, and build trust with all segments of the community.
CLEAR AND TRANSPARENT POLICIES

Often, fostering an environment where individuals feel comfortable reporting concerning, suspicious, or threatening behavior starts with letting them know who to report to and how to make the report. Setting policies and procedures that are easy to understand, and easy to find establishes proper expectations. As research has shown, students often only report incidents if they understand what will happen next and are certain action will be taken. For example, one of the top reasons students who are victims of sexual assault or sexual misconduct do not report incidents is because they didn’t think anything would be done about it. Ensuring that students and others on campus know who to report incidents to, how to make a report, what will be done with the report, and how investigators will follow-up about the incident are critical to promoting bystander intervention. In some cases, institutions have purposefully called a threat assessment team a behavioral intervention team to dissociate any stigma of reporting and increase the likelihood of reports of suspicious behavior.

BUILD TRUST THROUGH ACCEPTANCE

Another key aspect of building a culture of reporting is promoting diversity and inclusion. Student populations who traditionally feel marginalized by society, including students of color and LGBTQIA students, are more often targets of threatening and violent behavior. For example, 21 percent of TGQN (transgender, genderqueer, nonconforming) college students have been sexually assaulted, compared to 18 percent of non-TGQN females, and 4 percent of non-TGQN males. Taking strides to better understand and serve these students will make them feel welcome. For students who are people of color that could include recognition that justice and equality are not always shared equally by all races. For transgender and non-binary students, that could include advocating for their right to self-identify by the pronoun of their preference. Above all else, understanding and acknowledging that these students have unique experiences and providing them appropriate resources are immense and needed first steps.

ADDITIONAL STEPS

Building a culture of reporting takes time, and resources. Colleges and universities should ensure adequate budget is allocated for staff training, confidential resources, and resolution of complaints.

Shifting the culture of an entire campus may seem daunting, but it is doable. When student conduct professionals take purposeful steps to build trusting and caring relationships with students then they increase the likelihood that those individuals will intervene and report threatening behavior and violent incidents.
In 2014, 91% of colleges reported zero incidents of rape on campus, despite the fact that one in five females report that they are victims of sexual assault in college.

THE INTERSECTION OF THREAT ASSESSMENT AND TITLE IX

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. § 1681) requires that institutions of higher education address issues of sexual discrimination, which include stalking, dating/domestic violence, and sexual assault. Unfortunately, there is a connection between sexual violence and other forms of violence. For example, 76 percent of women killed by their intimate partners were also stalked by them. According to the FBI, 37.5 percent of females murdered were killed by their husband or boyfriend. These concerning statistics illustrate the connection between sexual violence and other forms of violence and reflect the need for appropriate collaboration between the Title IX Coordinator and the threat assessment team to evaluate any risks of harm to the victim/complainant during a Title IX investigation or resolution.
A key part of Title IX is establishing effective procedures that reach fair resolutions. However, when it comes to responding to reports of sexual violence, there is no one-size-fits-all model that works at all institutions. With different missions, resources, staffing models, funding sources, system policies, and especially campus cultures and student populations at postsecondary institutions across the United States, each college or university must develop its own policies and procedures. Institutions with the most effective practices know they have an obligation to all students, including students who may have been harmed, students who are accused of causing harm, and the rest of the student body. All students involved in the student conduct process should be treated with honor and basic human dignity. Student conduct professionals in particular should keep in mind the field of student conduct is rooted in ensuring that individual students’ rights are upheld as they engage in an educational process about the behavioral (and sometimes academic) standards of the campus community.

Any campus staff involved in assessing a situation or a student should be intimately familiar with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). FERPA and HIPAA will determine what confidentiality can be protected and when and what information can be released and with whom it can be shared. Campuses should be aware that local law enforcement agencies may have varying levels of understanding of FERPA and HIPAA, so it is incumbent on student conduct professionals and threat assessment teams to understand these laws and communicate their impact on the campus.

Above all else, it is important to remember Title IX compliance is a floor, not a ceiling. Institutions must learn about reporting responsibilities and act quickly to address reports of sexual violence. For more information about this topic read the ASCA report, Student Conduct Administration & Title IX: Gold Standard Practices for Resolution of Allegations of Sexual Misconduct on College Campuses. Read the paper at http://www.theasca.org/whitepaper
Train all employees on the basics of campus policy and resolution processes.

Train all threat assessment team members on FERPA and HIPAA policies.

Remove legalistic language from policies and procedures so students can better understand and relate to them.

Ensure that behavioral standards for employees, students, and community members are compliant with Title IX.

Select a resolution method that fits the institutional culture and promotes the best resolution process for students.

Develop a culture of reporting.

Ensure all investigations are appropriately thorough, equitable, and sensitive to all parties.
CONCEALED CARRY ON CAMPUS: UNDERSTANDING STATE LAWS AND POLICY

Gun control laws are increasingly relevant in higher education, as more states find themselves implementing legislation or court rulings that allow students to bring their legal firearms on campus, and in some cases, into classrooms and residence halls.

Student conduct professionals can be best equipped to serve students by knowing state law, understanding — or in some cases helping to develop — campus policy, and by knowing how to fairly and safely enforce the law. As of 2016, there are nine states that allow concealed guns on campus — Arkansas, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Oregon, Texas, Utah and Wyoming — though five of those states allow for institutions to limit where on campus weapons are allowed. Individual state laws vary beyond those nine states.
Institutions are legally required to follow state and federal laws, but have the power to develop campus-specific policies within the law that make the most sense for their students, faculty, and staff. As a student conduct professional, it’s important to be able to ensure both fair enactment of policy and law, as well as the overall safety of students, faculty, and staff. Conducting an audit of the resources available on campus and online, and starting conversations about what campus carry laws could mean on a campus are difficult, but important steps.

Campus carry laws are in flux, but information is power. Student conduct professionals should know their state laws and campus policy to help every student feel safe on campus.
The mission of the Association for Student Conduct Administration (ASCA) is to advance the student conduct profession. ASCA supports higher education professionals by providing educational materials and resources, intentional professional development opportunities and a network of colleagues to facilitate effective student conduct administration and conflict resolution on college and university campuses.

Membership in ASCA shall generally be open to any person who has a legitimate interest in the mission, vision, core values and activities of the Association and who agrees to abide by the provisions contained in the Association’s Bylaws and Statement of Ethical Principles and Standards of Conduct. Eligibility criteria for each specific category of membership are outlined below. Members will be considered in good standing if they have no outstanding debt with the Association and have paid their dues (if required) in accordance with the dues schedule approved by the Board of Directors.

The Association for Student Judicial Affairs (ASJA) began in 1986 when Don Gehring of the University of Louisville, began to discuss with others his idea for a professional association to serve the needs of campus judicial officers. In January 1987, Don convened a small group of interested persons who were attending the Stetson University Law and Higher Education conference.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns please feel free to contact the ASCA Central Office at 979.845.5262 or asca@tamu.edu.


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