

community policing DISPATCH

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Campus Threat Assessment Training: A Multidisciplinary Approach

Since the shooting incidents at Virginia Tech in April 2007 and Northern Illinois University in February 2008, several prominent organizations and task forces released reports on campus safety and violence-prevention. All recommended that campuses create behavioral threat assessment/behavioral intervention teams as a key measure for preventing violence before it can occur. The threat assessment model is now advocated for use in higher education settings by entities at the federal and state levels, as well as by various international and national associations. They include the U. S. Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services; the National Association of Attorneys General; the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators; and state task forces in Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, North Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin. In early 2008, the Commonwealth of Virginia enacted a law requiring every public college and university in Virginia to establish a threat-assessment team and violence-prevention committee.

Specifically, the *Virginia Tech Special Task Force Report* called for institutions of higher education to implement systems that link:

Troubled students to appropriate medical and counseling services either on or off campus, and to balance the individual's rights with the rights of all others for safety. (Recommendation IV-3)

Furthermore:

Incidents of aberrant, dangerous, or threatening behavior must be documented and reported immediately to a college's threat assessment group, and must be acted upon in a prompt and effective manner to protect the safety of the campus community. (Recommendation IV-4)

The Florida Gubernatorial Task Force for University Campus Safety recommended the following:

That each college and university develop a multidisciplinary crisis management team, integrating and ensuring communication between the university law enforcement or campus security agency, student affairs, residential housing, counseling center, health center, legal counsel, and any other appropriate campus entities to review individuals and incidents which indicate "at-risk" behavior. The team should facilitate the sharing of information, timely and effective intervention, and a coordinated response when required.

As universities and colleges struggle to develop and implement threat-assessment systems in light of these various reports and related legislative actions, a void exists for training. Without standardized training on campus threat-assessment procedures, examples of successful threat-assessment teams and intervention strategies, and workable solutions for common problems, colleges and universities may fail in their efforts to effectively identify and intervene concerning situations and persons on

campus.

The COPS Office funded Margolis, Healy & Associates, LLC (MH&A), a professional services firm with extensive expertise in higher education safety and security, to develop and implement a nationally focused, multidisciplinary curriculum for campus threat- assessment training. The curriculum will be delivered by MH&A subject matter experts at locations around the United States that loosely coincide with the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators' (IACLEA) regions for institutions of higher education, including but not limited to, campus public safety and local law enforcement, university administrators, faculty, staff, student affairs professionals, counseling center staff, campus judicial officers, campus risk management professionals, and higher education attorneys.

In Phase I, MH&A convened a meeting of experts in behavioral threat assessment, campus public safety, campus mental health and counseling, higher education law, student affairs, and campus risk management. The purpose of the summit was twofold: to draw together, in the true spirit of community oriented policing, a cross section of relevant professions to identify elements of a training curriculum; and to create a training program suitable for delivery anywhere in the United States to all interested members of a campus community.

In Phase II, MH&A will deliver the curriculum to targeted sites at locations around the United States. The curriculum will cover operational aspects of campus threat assessment such as empirical data and case studies of campus shootings and prevented incidents, instruction on the behavioral threat assessment process, guidance on creating threat assessment teams, steps for conducting a threat assessment investigation, and examples of successful case management strategies that can prevent harm and violence.

For more information about the project, visit www.CampusThreatAssessment.org or contact Margolis, Healy & Associates, LLC, at 866.817.5817 or info@margolis-healy.com.

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