

Faculty Recognition of Students in Crisis: Results from a Pilot Study



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Purpose of Study

- “Behavioral Intervention Teams” have become a popular response to Campus Safety Initiatives since Virginia Tech and NIU tragedies
- Similar efforts are being considered for retention and student success
- Faculty often serve a key role in these systems for identifying and reporting potential student behavioral problems or academic barriers
- No studies conducted yet on faculty experiences and attitudes within this role

Faculty and Staff Behavioral Identification Systems: General (untested) Assumptions

- Student/faculty engagement lends itself to the identification of student psychological issues
- Faculty see recognition of student personal problems as contributing to the academic mission and to individual academic success
- Faculty are skilled at the identification and referral process.
- Faculty naturally engage students.

Key Questions

- What common student personal problems are most faculty able to recognize?
- How are student personal problems brought to faculty awareness?
- What do most faculty do with that knowledge?
- What attitudes exist about faculty involvement in student personal issues?

Expanded Key Questions

- Do faculty experiences or attitudes differ across type of institution?
- Do faculty experiences or attitudes differ across geographic region?
- Could Behavioral Intervention or Faculty Partner Systems be assessed by tracking these results?
- Are there effective approaches to training and orienting faculty and staff to these roles?

Method

- Pilot: Anonymous survey offered to entire faculty at public four-year non-residential institution
 - 12,000 full and part-time students
 - Primarily an undergraduate teaching institution

Comparative sample: Public four-year research institution with graduate and undergraduate populations and a residential campus

Method

- Faculty rate how often they have become aware of a student personal problem or issue
 - 5 Point Frequency Likert Scale
 - Problems ranged from physical, psychological, financial, and family
 - Problems taken from multiple college epidemiological and assessment sources
 - Frequency used to counter “every case is different” reaction – discovered in testing

Method

- Faculty identify any and all “signs” used to indicate a problem/issue
 - Range from (direct or indirect) faculty observation to (direct or indirect) student disclosure
- Faculty identify the frequency of their response actions (assumes not all cases are treated the same)
- Faculty identify level of agreement to statements about knowledge, skills, preferences and attitudes concerning student problems and issues

Expanded Study (still in progress)

- Anonymous survey to five institution types in four geographic regions
 - Large Public Residential Research Institution
 - Medium Public Residential Teaching Institution
 - Medium/Large Non-Residential Teaching Institution
 - Small Private College
 - Community College
- Located in West, North, East, and South regions of the country

Pilot Study Results

- 134 Faculty Responses (60%)
 - 11% Full professors
 - 24% Associate Professors
 - 40% Assistant Professors
 - 25% Adjunct Lecturers
 - .7% Graduate Assistants
- 56% Female, 44% Male
- Average Teaching Experience: 10+ Years
- New Faculty: 2.2%

Pilot Study Results

- Faculty most aware of:
 - Stress/Burnout (93%)
 - Student financial distress (88%)
- Faculty least aware of:
 - Alcohol or drug abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault, hazing, family violence, gambling, sexual addiction (range from 68 – 89% never or rarely)

Pilot Study Results

- Student behavior that most signaled a problem for faculty
 - Poor class attendance (91%)
 - Sudden change in class performance (87%)
 - Student disclosure (83%)
- 59% of faculty believed the disclosure of personal problems were to explain why work was late or missing. 52% of faculty excused a student from some course responsibility due to this disclosure.
- Only 36% ever inquired to the student about their suspicions or concerns.

Pilot Study Results

- Faculty actions once aware:
 - Referred student to on-campus academic resources (62%)
 - Referred student to on-campus non-academic resources (59%)
 - 1 in 4 faculty accompanied a student to the resource.
 - 3 in 4 offered to tutor the student
 - Less than 10% shared the information with a counselor or staff member

Pilot Study Results

- 81% agreed that students with personal problems or issues should be supported by the university
- 53% agreed that faculty have a responsibility to help students find resources
- 64% agreed that they were aware of the resources available for student problems or issues

Pilot Study Results

- 64% agreed that helping students with personal problems was key to academic success
- 69% agreed doing so was key to retention

Comparison Between Research & Teaching Institutions

- Higher percentage of adjunct respondents
- Higher percentage of male respondents
- No significant differences in experience, identification, response action, or attitudes

Discoveries

- Despite knowledge and predisposition, most faculty do not regularly identify or appropriately respond to student personal issues/problems
- Significant difference between student versus faculty initiation of personal needs or issues
- Faculty recognize the importance of assisting students, but are unclear on who/how

Explanations

- Blame it on
 - FERPA?
 - Poor Training.
 - Deeper misunderstandings of roles and rules to student engagement
 - Unclear directives on depth and breadth of disclosure
 - The only standard rules/norms about student-faculty relationships
 - Our only discussion: No sex with students

Implications

- Adopting programs that rely on faculty-student interaction must address existing faculty roles
- Incentives, orientation, and training are critical for faculty in these roles
- Prevention specialists must do a better job identifying key indicators and assist faculty in asking the important questions
- Referral systems must be fully in place

Interested in having the survey done at your campus?

- Need a campus sponsor to write local IRB (using blanket at UHD)
- You have your own institutional data

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