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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