



Special Situations Team: Handling Life's Not-So-Little Problems

Presented by:

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Introductions



- How many here have a Threat Assessment Team?
- How many teams discuss the behavior of faculty, staff and students?

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Why did we establish the team?



- Events at Northern Illinois/Virginia Tech
- Virginia Governor's Panel Report after the Virginia Tech Shooting
- Lack of communication between campus/local entities
 - Pro-active - Some state legislatures have mandated institutions to have teams

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Background



- Threatening Behavior
- Violence
 - affective/predatory

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Research



- **Student Behavioral Issues Committee**

- SBIC has been in existence for many years. Continues to meet. More in-depth conversations about students of concern whose behavior may or may not rise to the level of the special situations team.
 - Comprised of OVPSA, SHS, SCS, DS, UPD
- Task Force for Campus Emergencies
 - Code Maroon – Text messaging system
 - Subcommittee to establish a team

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The Special Situations Team



- **Considerations in Establishing the team**

- After much discussion and research of best practices, it was decided that this team would deviate slightly from the traditional student focused model to include addressing faculty and staff behavior. Several reasons drove this decision:
 - Efficiency/Conserving Human Resources – 3 teams versus 1. It was recognized that many key players (UPD, general counsel, HR, etc.) would need to be involved in two or more of the teams.

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Considerations Continued



- Intertwined populations – The University community is constantly interacting. The community that is affected by concerning behavior may impact several of the populations. All populations are a potential threat to themselves or the campus community.
- Enhanced communications/synergistic approach – having all players around a table (physically or virtually) mitigates the risk of poor communication.

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Considerations Continued



- Name
 - beyond threat assessment. Wanted to make sure that the university community sees the team as a pro-active responder to concerning and not necessarily “threatening” behavior. Catching behavior before it rises to the level of crisis.

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Charge



- The charge of the Special Situations Team is to assess circumstances, enhance communication, and initiate appropriate responses to specific behavioral problems that may involve threats to the safety and security of the University Community. The team deals with troubled and/or at risk faculty, staff, and students. Attempt to minimize risk and get individual connected to resources.

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Composition of Team



- Due to the fact that the team addresses faculty, staff and student behavior, the composition of the team draws representatives from multiple areas that serve/work with these populations.

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Composition of Team Continued



- Student Counseling Service
- Office of the Dean of Student Life
- Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs
- Student Health Services
- Disability Services
- Dean of Faculties
- Representatives from the Faculty Senate
- Human Resources
- Human Resources Employee Assistance Program
- University Police Department
- Office of General Counsel

All members have a back-up team member

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Authority/Power



- The authority is derived from the already existing authority of the individuals who comprise the team. Each individual operates on the team within the role and scope of their current position.
 - The Team is not endowed with any additional authority and it does not create new policies or rules, rather it works within the existing rules and polices.
 - The team can, as an individual can, propose any new rule or policies through existing processes.

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Tools in the tool chest – Rule 30



- **TAMU Student Rule 30 - Dangerous or disruptive behavior caused by manifestations of a serious psychological problem**
 - Primary reason for the rule – to get students help
 - Several triggers must be met in order to invoke the rule.
 - Potential rule violation
 - Psychological problem

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Student Rule 30 Continued



- Allows us to compel a student to complete an assessment through the Student Counseling Center
- Based on assessment/recommendation, student may be withdrawn voluntarily or involuntarily from the university. Student has the right to appeal this decision.
- Sets a behavioral threshold to return to the university.
 - Application to remove readmission block
 - Treating doctors questionnaire and letter of recommendation.
 - Signed release
 - Team reviews paperwork and (based on information gathered and expertise of the reviewers) determines if the student is prepared to re-enter the university community.
- Rare (only 2 cases in the past 8 years) where the decision to leave is involuntary.

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Tools in the Tool Chest - Conduct System



- **Interim Suspension – More of an immediate threat**
 - 26.6 A student may not be expelled, dismissed or suspended prior to a student conduct proceeding except when the Dean of Student Life or, if the student is a member of the Corps of Cadets, the commandant, believes that the presence of a student on campus poses a continuing danger to persons or property or presents a threat of disrupting the academic process, an interim suspension may be imposed. A student conduct proceeding will be scheduled as soon thereafter as practicable.

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Tools in the Tool Chest



- Human Resources
 - Fitness for Duty certification (for staff)
- Dean of Faculties
- University Police Department
 - No Trespass

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Protocol/operations



- Regular meetings – once a month
- Any member can call a meeting at anytime to respond to a situation
- Sub area meetings – after initial triage it can be determined that only certain members of the team need to meet depending on the circumstances surrounding the incident.
- Examines Cross Threshold behavior
- Use of existing protocols – similar to authority, the team uses existing protocols to address an issue.

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Training of Team Members



- Recognized that there is emerging trends, best practices, trainings in this area. University dedicated a budget to the team for additional training for team members. Examples include purchasing of books/resources, webinars, conferences, etc.

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Records/Case Management



- Still developing in this area.
- Current practice, records are retained in the areas of the team members who are working with a particular incident. Record keeping practices are governed by their office/department protocol.
- Other Considerations:
 - Growing number of cases
 - FERPA/Open Records Act considerations
 - Longitudinal Case Management

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Tell Somebody Campaign



- “Concerned about someone’s behavior? Tell somebody.”
- <http://tellsomebody.tamu.edu>
 - Reminds person that emergency situations should be referred to 911
 - Point of Contact depending on individual exhibiting the behavior
 - Reporting Form – Freedom of information act
 - We encourage people to submit only behavior... not diagnosis.
 - Sends report to all members and back-up members of the team
 - Submitter can remain anonymous if desired
 - ~20 have been submitted online since the creation of the team 1 year ago.
 - Resources Section
 - Explanation of the Special Situations Team

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Tell Somebody Campaign Continued



- New Undergraduate and Graduate Student Orientation (family members during College 101)
- New Faculty Orientation
- Reaching Existing Community Members
 - Brief presentations
 - Academic Advisors
 - Faculty Senate
 - Department Heads Council
 - Undergrad/Grad Academic Deans Council
 - Individual Department Faculty Meetings
 - Division of Student Affairs Monthly Meeting

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Extended Training - Uh Oh Training



- Training offered on a regular basis
- Includes “Shots Fired” video
- Talks about common campus problems for faculty, staff, and students
- Delineates three levels of distress
- Talks about pathways to violence, both affective and predatory
- Shares resources

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