A Mixed Methods Evaluation of a Regional University’s Behavioral Intervention Team

By Aaron Chip Reese, Ed.D.

Introduction

After the mass shootings at Virginia Tech in April 2007, all public institutions of higher education in Georgia were directed by the Chancellor’s office, by way of the USG Report of the Student Health and Behavioral Issues Task Force (University System of Georgia, 2008), to develop a plan and select a committee to address potential threats. In the fall semester of 2008, Columbus State University held its first meeting of the newly formed behavioral intervention team. After nearly three years of operation, this author (and chair of Columbus State University’s BIT) began to research evaluation methods for BITs. While many colleges and universities have implemented behavioral intervention and threat assessment teams, after a review of literature, I could not find a formal program evaluation that had been conducted. Therefore, a mixed methods pilot study was developed and conducted in an effort to determine the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention team at Columbus State University.

Scott Lewis, partner with The NCHERM Group, stated, “When asked how many violent acts a behavioral intervention team prevented, the response should be: all of them that didn’t happen” (Sokolow et al., 2012). His comments illustrate the conundrum practitioners find when attempting to assess what did not happen. This exemplifies the need for developing a method of collecting empirical data on BITs to determine their effectiveness, allowing BITs to articulate what did happen.

In this paper, the reader will find abridged versions of the literature review, methodology, findings, and recommendations for the research study An Evaluation of the Behavioral Intervention Team for a Georgia Regional University (Reese, 2013).
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods pilot study was to determine the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention team at Columbus State University. To accomplish this, the researcher collected quantitative data from the University’s counseling center and office of institutional research, and through the U.S. Department of Education. Members of the student government association, faculty senate, and the staff counsel were interviewed to collect qualitative data. Six research questions were addressed, of which two were quantitative and the other four were qualitative in nature.

Setting

This study was conducted at a Georgia regional university and the participants were limited to those who were current members of the campus community. The University’s local service area has a population of 189,885 (U.S. Census, 2010) and is considered a tier two, regional university within the University System of Georgia (USG) which grants undergraduate and graduate degrees. As there is no community college in the service area, Columbus State also serves as the access institution for underprepared students. In the fall of 2009, the University employed 261 full-time faculty members of which 72% have earned doctorate degrees. The faculty consists of 144 males and 117 females, with 21 Asian; 26 Black; 7 Hispanic; 197 White, 3 Multi-racial, and 7 Non-Resident Aliens. The student body’s average age is 23 with 12.5% of the 8,179 students living in on-campus housing. The University employs 25 police officers who patrol both the main and downtown campuses 24 hours a day.

Research Questions

RQ1: Is there a significant difference between the number of new clients entering the campus counseling center from the 2007-2008 academic year prior to implementation of the behavioral intervention team, as compared to the 2009-2010 academic year?

RQ2: Is there a significant difference between the reported criminal acts against persons from the 2007-2008 academic year prior to implementation of the behavioral intervention team, as compared to the 2009-2010 academic year?
RQ3: What are faculty members’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention team on the University climate?

RQ4: What are students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention team on the University climate?

RQ5: What are staff members’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention team on the University climate?

RQ6: What are perceptions of the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention team by campus community members who have submitted BIT reports?

Summary of Major Findings

1. While campus community members are concerned about their safety, they do feel safe on this university campus.

2. Other than being aware of their surroundings, campus community members have not changed their personal behaviors regarding safety due to incidents of violence in higher education.

3. Other than the staff and the faculty who had filed a BIT report, campus community members have very little knowledge of the current behavioral intervention team.

4. Regardless of their knowledge of the BIT prior to participating in this study, participants feel that having a BIT on a college campus is a good idea.

Background

Colleges and universities today find themselves in a balancing act between students’ rights, parents’ demands and the duty of care (Sokolow, 2006) the law requires. Courts have held higher education institutions to this duty of care responsibility, as seen in Mullins v. Pine Manor, 499 N.E.2d 331 (Mass. 1983) where a student filed suit against the college in an effort to recover damages for injuries she received during an on campus rape. The court stated, “adequate security is an indispensable part of the bundle of services which colleges, and Pine Manor, afford their students” (p.54). Targeted violence on college campuses has been viewed on television and the internet, and covered in newspapers. These mass killings have alarmed
parents and spurred a call to action by college and elected officials. Even before the deadly shootings at Virginia Tech, the Secret Service and Department of Education jointly published *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Manage Threatening Situations and to Create Safe School Climates* in 2002 (Drysdale, Modzeleski, & Simions, 2010). While this guide was written with K-12 in mind after the attack on Columbine High School, many of its findings and recommendations have now graduated to college for use with their behavioral intervention teams. The guide focused on institutions’ reaction to targeted violence, giving some attention towards identification of pre-attack behavior. Most of the school-safety programs have developed in reaction to a crisis or have focused on how not to become a victim (Fein et al., 2002). “Duck and cover becomes cover and die in an active shooter scenario,” stated Jesus Villahermosa, a veteran of the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department SWAT, when speaking to a group of university administrators at Stetson University’s annual conference on higher education law. Villahermosa added, “we must not only teach people what to look for in relation to threatening situations, we must also teach people how not to die in those situations” (personal communication, February 23, 2009).

Institutions of higher education around the country are becoming more diligent and proactive in providing a safe environment for students, faculty, staff, and visitors to their campuses (Shearer, 2008). State and federal legislation is currently being enacted and amended to allow local authorities and university employees the ability to communicate vital information concerning possible threats. It was reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that Virginia lawmakers went as far as to require notification of parents “if a student receives mental-health treatment from a counselor or other health staff member on a campus, and if the student is identified as posing a threat to himself or herself or to others” (Hermes, 2008, 4). Changes in the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA) have given administrators “appropriate flexibility and deference” with regard to the disclosure of educational records and information (Federal Register, 2008, p.15590).
Historical Overview

Gathering historical data related to violence on college campuses proved difficult. Until recently, reporting this information was not required (Security on Campus, 2008). On June 13, 2007, the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation began a joint investigation after the Report to the President on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy was issued. These three organizations also found there was limited research done concerning targeted violence in higher education (Drysdale, et al., 2010).

College students many times do not report crimes as they feel it is a personal issue, not significant enough to report, or they did not realize a crime had been committed (Carr, 2007).

Acts of violence and threatening behavior continues to be a growing concern on college campuses around the country. Violence in society and on college campuses is not necessarily a new phenomenon (Jablonski, McClellan, & Zdziarski, 2008). Starting in 1901 through 2008, there have been 272 reports of targeted violent acts related to college campuses with 30.5% occurring from 2000-2008 (Drysdale, et al., 2010). From the tower shooting at The University of Texas and the Kent State massacre, to the mass shootings at Virginia Tech and the University of Northern Illinois, student affairs personnel have been compelled to examine past policies and to open discussions as to best practices. College students, especially first years, are more susceptible to violent crimes than the general population, as they are in new settings away from their parents’ protection and guidance. These young adults are in unfamiliar situations in new cities, experimenting with alcohol, and sexual interest which could place them in a victim or perpetrator role they did not plan, nor ever expect (Kitzrow, 2003). Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 was amended in 1990 to include The Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act (Public Law 101-542) (NCES, 2008). Much of the credit for passage of this law can be attributed to Thomas and Constance Clery, founders of Security on Campus, Inc (now the Clery Center for Security on Campus). Their daughter, Jeanne was murdered in her dorm room at Lehigh University on April 5, 1986. Jeanne’s assailant was able to walk through several unlocked doors in the residence hall where she slept before killing her. He was later sentenced to death for his crime (Security on Campus, 2008).
The country has witnessed both random and targeted acts of homicide on college campuses. According to Wood (2008), many of the homicides that occur on college campuses are academically related. Such was the case when Jens Peter Hansen was dropped from the doctoral program at the University of Florida. In August of 1989, he went to the home of Professor Arthur Kimura where he shot and killed him. In a similar incident, James Kelly walked into Professor John Locke’s classroom in 2000 and shot him three times after Kelly had been dismissed from the Ph.D. program in 1996. On August 15, 1996, Fredrick Davidson shot his Master’s thesis committee during his second attempt at defending his thesis. Davidson killed all three professors with a 9-mm pistol he had placed inside a first-aid kit within the room prior to his defense. Later, he would tell police his advisor had “bogged him down with extraneous assignments” (p. 277). Wayne State Professor Andrzej Olbrot was shot and killed by Wlodzimierz Dedecjus, while he was giving an exam to another class. Dedecjus later said he killed his teacher because he was not doing well in school. Nursing student Robert S. Flores at the University of Arizona entered the nursing school and killed Professor Robin Rogers and then went to the classroom of Professor Barbara Monroe who had told Flores he had failed his clinical experience. Flores shot and killed Monroe and a third professor, then told the students to leave the classroom before killing himself (2007).

While most campus murders are by students, faculty members are not immune from committing these acts. This was the case when Dr. Gang Lu at the University of Iowa who shot himself and five others when he did not receive an award for best dissertation work in 1991 (Wood, 2007). More recently, after performing her regular teaching duties on February 12, 2010, Dr. Amy Bishop shot and killed three fellow faculty members, wounding three others during a faculty meeting (Meloy, 2012). Many deadly acts on campus are targeted at one or more particular individuals. According to Drysdale, Modzeleski, and Simoms (2010), in 79% of the cases of targeted violence, the targeted individual was the only person harmed.

However, this was not the case on April 16, 2007 when Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 people at Virginia Tech before turning the gun on himself in what is the worst mass murder in the country’s history (Wood, 2007). Cho’s struggles with mental illness were well documented, but that information was not shared with university officials as Cho’s deviant behavior was kept
separate between departments (Wood, 2008); there was a failure to “connect the dots” (Virginia.gov, 2008, p.10). Looking back, officials at Virginia Tech discovered Cho had been removed from his poetry class for what Professor Nikki Giovanni has called “menacing behavior” (Wood, 2008, p. 284). The Report of the Virginia Tech Review Panel made more than 70 recommendations for changes after the deadly incident. However, two conclusions have resonated with college administrators around the country more than any of the recommendations. Cho had exhibited numerous signs of mental instability on campus in several departments, but none of the events were connected with one another. This created independent silos of information which, on their own, may have appeared bizarre or strange, but if pooled together most likely would have drawn a picture of an individual in distress. Also, university officials saw conflicts about sharing information across campus or speaking with Cho’s parents because of federal laws preventing such communications (Virginia.gov, 2008).

It should be noted that individuals who are identified with mental illness seldom resort to violence. Most are able to complete their collegiate experience with no incidents of behavioral misconduct (Dunkle, Silverstein, & Warner, 2008; Gecker, 2007).

**Legal Precedence**

State and federal legislation is being enacted and amended to allow local authorities and university employees the ability to communicate vital information concerning possible threats. Cases such as *Ho v. Harvard University*, *Grace v. Howard University*, and *Shin v. MIT* have shaped current law and higher education policy. Trang Ho was a student at Harvard University who was murdered by his roommate, Sinedu Tadesse who had been diagnosed with mental illness. The court found Harvard to be negligent for failure to monitor a troubled student and for failure to provide a reasonable *duty of care* to Ho by warning and protecting him from danger (Kitzrow, 2003).

During his freshman year at Howard University, Mathew Grace and several of his classmates were ordered out of a resident hall lobby by the police during the late hours of the night. The students encountered a drug-addicted gunman who shot Grace five times and another student, Gary Johnson, several times also. While Howard University argued that the
officer could not have foreseen the impending danger, the court stated regardless of the unforeseeable event, the university had a *duty of care* for the students and became negligent in that duty when the students were ordered out of the lobby with no additional instructions (Kitzrow, 2003).

Elisabeth Shin’s family was awarded $27 million when the court found MIT did not provide a reasonable duty of care by notifying the parents of their daughter’s suicidal ideation. Even though the student’s parents had knowledge of their daughter’s mental illness prior to her setting herself on fire in her dorm room, the university did not notify them that they had considered hospitalization as a treatment for Shin (Kitzrow, 2003). While this theme of *duty of care* harkens back to a time of *In loco parentis*, today this duty takes on a more cooperative approach that includes the student, the university, and the parents.

As colleges become more vigilant in their efforts to prevent violent acts, they must also be careful to acknowledge and protect the rights of the individual. In April of 2007, in what this author feels was an overreaction, Hamline University suspended Troy Scheffler and ordered him into counseling. Following the Virginia Tech shooting, Scheffler sent a letter to the president of the university expressing his view that properly permitted students should be able to carry concealed weapons on campus. He stated that if this had been the policy at Virginia Tech, many of those who perished may have lived. Upon being suspended, Scheffler filed suit against the college and the dean of students (Wood, 2007).

At the time of this writing, the author has not found where any college or university’s behavioral intervention team has been named a party to any lawsuit. However, due to tragic events at Pima Community College and the University of Colorado, BITs have come under public scrutiny. The Pima Community College Police had seven reported contacts with Jared Loughner prior to the behavioral intervention team being notified of his behavior. College officials met with Loughner and his mother on two occasions to discuss his behavior; in both instances, Loughner was cooperative. Loughner was later removed from Pima Community College for concerning and threatening behavior and notified by college officials he would be required to undergo a psychological evaluation before being considered for readmission. During his time of separation from the college, he shot and killed six people, while wounding 14
others at a political rally being hosted by Congresswoman Gifford (Sanchez, 2012, November). Former University of Colorado student James Holmes killed 12 and wounded 58 people on July 29, 2012 during the premiere of The Dark Knight Rises at a theater in Aurora, Colorado. A little more than a month prior to the shooting, Holmes had withdrawn himself from the university. Even though Holmes’ psychiatrist had told the university’s Behavioral Evaluation and Threat Assessment Team that he may be dangerous, he was not a registered student at the time of the psychiatrist’s report (Meloy, 2012, December).

While both gunmen were former students when they committed these deadly acts away from their respective college campuses, each institution’s behavioral intervention team was questioned. Thousands of emails were requested and produced through open records acts, and Pima Community College and the University of Colorado incurred great financial burdens in staff time and professional fees. Both institutions responded with public statements that the individual in question was not a student at the time of the incident (Sanchez, 2012, November; Meloy, 2012, December). According to Sokolow (2012, December), the questions being posed to the behavioral intervention teams in these instances are: (1) does your institution have a behavioral intervention team, (2) was the student known to your team, (3) what was the level of assessment your team assigned to the student, (4) what threat assessment tools does your team use, and (5) what are the policies, protocols, and guidelines your team uses to make determinations or recommendations? In an effort to become prepared for this scrutiny, but foremost to provide for safer college campuses, Sokolow expressed concern for and a commitment to develop methodologies for evaluating these teams at the 4th Annual NaBITA Convention (Sokolow, Schuster, & Lewis, 2012).

Whatever the institutional response, college officials should always remember to comply with due process procedures. Students have rights that are established through the college or university, as well as state and federal laws, and constitutionally protected due process rights (Dunkle, et al, 2008). The minimum requirements for student due process as established under Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education, 294 F.2d 150 (5th Cir. 1961) (Kaplin and Lee, 1995, p. 485) stated that a student has a right to be notified of the alleged violation and be afforded an opportunity to be heard by an appropriate hearing officer. In the
2010 decision of Willis v. Texas Tech Univ. Health Sciences Center, 394 Fed. Appx. 86 (5th Cir. 2010), the courts expanded on the Dixon ruling by stating, “[S]tudents who are subject to discipline by a public institution are entitled to notice of the charges, an explanation of the evidence supporting the charges, and an opportunity to tell their side of the story” (Roth, 2011, p. 13).

Violent acts on college campuses are not a new phenomenon. Criminal acts such as robbery, assault, and rape are all part of society, and sadly enough now part of the higher education experience. Parents of college students today not only send their children off with a check for tuition and a new computer, they offer advice on safety and how not to become a victim. Keels (2004) stated, “Crime is increasingly characterizing the contemporary college experience” (p.27). Hindsight has shown that random acts of violence are not as random as once thought. Many times they are directed at a particular individual. However, the collateral damage and unrelated deaths are not a new phenomenon. A closer look at many of the violent acts committed indicates that there were signs of disturbed and deviant behavior prior to the act, and, with the right training and reporting devices, some of these incidents may have been avoided (Sokolow & Lewis, 2009). As higher education moves forward with a new framework for identifying possible threats and the technology to report concerning behaviors, preventing some deadly encounters is possible. In NaBITA’s 2011 whitepaper, Preventing the Preventable (Sokolow, et al., 2011), the authors state that while effective admission screening is important, it is creating a culture of reporting, prevention and caring which will allow BITs to “get out ahead of violence” (p.4).

**Methodology**

A sequential transformative strategy was used in addressing the problem, which created two distinct phases (Creswell, 2009). Phase one consisted of quantitative data being gathered to examine the new clients seen by the counseling center and the number of reported crimes against persons; phase two gathered qualitative data by conducting interviews with selected members of the student body, faculty, and staff. The rationale for first gathering quantitative
The quantitative component of the program evaluation relied on data obtained from the University’s counseling center and crime statistics from the United States Department of Education. The qualitative component relied on a case study approach to add depth and understanding to the research. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews employing standardized open-ended questions based on the research questions posed in the study. Layering of cases is expected when conducting most case study program evaluations. Patton (2002) described layering as gathering data on the individual and individuals within a defined subgroup, and then comparing and contrasting these experiences.

**Quantitative**

The quantitative portion of this program evaluation was conducted utilizing archival data. Data concerning the number of new clients entering the counseling center and the number of crimes against persons as reported in the university’s annual crime reports were retrieved for the academic years 2007-2008 and 2009-2010. These academic years were selected because 2007-2008 is the year prior to the establishment of the university’s behavioral intervention team, while 2009-2010 was the most recent year completed with available data. Crimes against persons are defined as murder, manslaughter, sex offenses, robbery, assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

To address research questions number one and two, a Chi-square test was performed to determine if there is a significant difference between the number of new clients entering the counseling center and the number of reported crimes against persons, with respect to the years identified for the study. A Chi-square test is used to make a comparison of what is observed and what is expected by chance. In addition, Chi-square should be used when there are fewer than 30 samples to consider (Salkind, 2005). Data was collected from the academic year 2007-2008, the year prior to implementation of the behavioral intervention team as compared to the academic year 2009-2010. Statistical tests were conducted at α ≤0.05 level of significance.
Qualitative

The interview participants for the qualitative portion were limited to those who are currently members of the campus community. Members of the student government association, faculty senate, and staff council were selected for interviews through voluntary participation. The student government association consists of an executive council, senators at-large, and representatives from student organizations totaling approximately 80 currently enrolled students ranging from freshman to graduate students. The faculty senate is a representative group of 50 members from the teaching faculty, while the staff council represents non-faculty employees of the University. Interviews were conducted with 10% of each of the three groups, which equates to eight student government association members, five faculty senate members, and six staff council members.

Establishing qualitative reliability for the study posed a challenge. Understanding that I am a member of this campus community as the dean of students, a member of select faculty committees, serve as the chair of the institution’s BIT, and the sponsor of the student government association, it was imperative that a research assistant be used to conduct the interviews. This addressed the possibility of research bias by the manner in which questions were asked of participants, and avoided risks associated with ethical issues of participants’ perceived coercion (Creswell, 2009; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Additionally, I remained cognizant and vigilant in the knowledge that being the chair of this behavioral intervention team had the potential for researcher bias. Personal beliefs, experiences, age, gender, and race were constantly in the forefront of my thoughts. Continued communications with the outside readers provided opportunities for peer debriefing (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen, 2004). The outside readers were a white female college professor with a Ph.D. in Biology and a black male college administrator with an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, Policy and Law. Neither of the readers worked at the institution where the research was conducted.
Findings of the Study

The perception of a safe campus environment is paramount to a student’s academic success and cannot be achieved until the student is free from threats as indicated in the second level of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (freedom from threats and danger). Once a safe environment is established, an individual may move on to higher levels of personal actualization (Keels, 2004; Sergent, 2010). One of the faculty members interviewed for this study, Paula, was a middle and high school principal prior to coming to the university. She stated, “… people will not learn and will not be able to function well if they do not feel safe or if they feel threatened in some manner” (Reese, p.127). College students’ sense of security, or the lack thereof, has an effect on their academic performance (Keels, 2004).

The institutional climate reported by the students, faculty, and staff at this regional university indicated the participants overwhelmingly feel very safe on campus. However, it was troubling to discover that participants also reported they did not believe targeted violent acts could be predicted or prevented. As Elizabeth (student) put it, “…it [Virginia Tech type of incident] can happen to anyone, it can happen anywhere… it’s just life” (Reese, p.89).

Quantitative Findings

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference between the number of new clients entering the campus counseling center from the 2007-2008 academic year, prior to implementation of the behavioral intervention team, as compared to the 2009-2010 academic year? There was a significant difference between the number of new clients entering the campus counseling center from the academic year 2007-2008, the year prior to implementation of the behavioral intervention team, as compared to the academic year 2009-2010.

The counseling center identified six categories as a reason for a visit. The Other category is where referrals from the BIT are logged into the counseling center’s database. While the director of the counseling center declined to provide a more in-depth breakdown of the Other category, it did realize a substantial increase (8:2008, 48:2010). The director did indicate that since the creation of the behavioral intervention team, the counseling center had received a “fair amount of referrals related to the Team” (D. Rose, personal communication, November
30, 2012). In fact, Rose stated that within the years of the study (2008 -2010) there had been a 23% increase in overall contact hours at the counseling center.

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<th>Reason for Visit</th>
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<tr>
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<td>48</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>225</td>
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While there was a significant increase in new clients to the counseling center during the years of the study and there appears to be supporting anecdotal evidence, the researcher cannot definitively state that this increase was related to the operation of a behavioral intervention team. The researcher has no knowledge of any specific event or intentional marketing that may have had an impact on students’ visits to the counseling center. However, inferences can be made that a variable or set of variables does exist which influenced the difference between the two years of this study. This bench-marking may assist other similarly situated colleges performing BIT evaluations as they compare observed outcomes (Salkind, 2005).

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference between the reported criminal acts against persons from the 2007-2008 academic year, prior to implementation of the behavioral intervention team, as compared to the 2009-2010 academic year? There is no significant difference between the number of reported criminal acts against persons from the academic
year prior (2007-2008) to implementation of the behavioral intervention team, as compared to the academic year (2009-2010).

While violent crimes against college first year students tend to be greater in number than in the general population (Kitzrow, 2003), many crimes go unreported as students feel these are personal issue, not significant enough to report or did not realize that a crime had been committed (Drysdale et al., 2010).

Educational and awareness programs may bring a volley of reports which at first glance appear to be an increase in crimes against persons, however, in reality, these programs have only brought the truth to the surface. As college administrators become more aware of the problem of unreported crimes, caution should be taken with any inferences of this new research.

Qualitative Findings

The overall perception of campus safety and the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention team from the interview participants were: (1) campus community members are concerned about their safety, but do feel safe on this university campus; (2) other than being aware of their surroundings, campus community members have not changed their behavior due to incidents of violence in higher education; (3) other than a few staff members and the faculty who filed a BIT report, campus community members have very little knowledge of the behavioral intervention team; and (4) the interview participants felt that having a behavioral intervention team is a good idea.

Research Question 3: What are faculty members’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention team on the University climate?

Of the faculty \( n = 5 \), 3 had some knowledge of this university’s BIT and felt it to be effective. Doris and James appeared to have the best understanding of BIT. This is most likely associated with the fact that both had submitted a BIT report in the past, also, Doris is on the behavioral intervention team. James stated, “[BIT] was very accommodating and professional and I have nothing but good things to say about that” (Reese, p.74). Paula stated, “…it seems like the people [BIT] that do jobs like that are very sincere about the jobs they do. I just trust them to do what they should” (Reese, p.80). While all faculty members interviewed had some
knowledge of the behavioral intervention team at the university, only 20% indicated they had a clear understanding and 40% reported their understanding as vague at best.

Most of the faculty members interviewed focused their comments on being aware of students’ behavior. For example, Terri’s expressed concern with the political environment around the debate over guns on college campuses. Terri also commented the university should address the problem of students who enter with mental health issues. In the aftermath of the Virginia Tech incident, the Virginia legislature enacted a law that would require notification of parents when a student sought out mental health counseling (Hermes, 2008). While such legislation addresses Terri’s concern, this type of law brings with it ethical concerns for professional counselors relative to the counselor/client relationship (D. Rose, personal communication, June 10, 2009). Those in the mental health field speculate that such legislation will discourage students in need of counseling from seeking help.

The faculty appears to have a passion for ensuring a safe environment by teaching safety. Several mentioned they had safety statements in their syllabi, instructed students to put the campus police number in the cell phones, and encouraged students to walk in groups to their cars, especially at night. This cautious and watchful approach to safety on campus appeared to be present in each of the interviews with the five faculty that participated in the study.

Research Question 4: What are students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention team on the University climate?

Of the eight students interviewed, seven had never heard of BIT until being involved in this study. The remaining student reported a vague understanding. The student stated, “Is that the program dealing with cases? Like reporting cases? I don’t know it thoroughly. Right, I know you can report cases of theft, sexual abuse, um, harm – any type of harm, whether verbally or physically, and that’s all I’ve heard about it concerning it. Based on that though, I do wish they would put that out a little bit more. I know they’re trying to – I know a group that – something outreach – I know about task force – I don’t know if they’re with them” (Reese, p.128).
Students’ perception of the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention team can be characterized as having no perception at all. Students in the study reported they felt overwhelmingly safe on the campus, with 75% stating that the time of day or night had no influence on their feelings of safety. Students tended to refer to questions regarding their safety by responding that the university was doing a good job. Such was the case with Carolyn when she shared, “[the university] does a fairly good job of keeping students safe…” (Reese, p.129), or as Mark stated, “This school is like really secure…” (Reese, p.90). Sonya spoke of the police officers “running around [being available]” (Reese, p.129) and the university doing a good job with security.

The students’ abdication of their safety was in contrast to that of the faculty and staff who repeatedly spoke of personal responsibility for their own safety. College students are away from the protection and guidance of their parents, some for the first time. Many have relied on parents to keep them physically safe or to be that subconscious voice of safety they would be answering to in a few hours when they returned home. The experiences in these new cities and towns, and their experimentation with alcohol and sexual interest are not monitored by parents. Students do not come home to safety-concerned parents; instead, they return to their college dorm. This newfound freedom could place young college students in a victim or perpetrator role they never expected (Kitzrow, 2003). Additionally, many of today’s college dorms are apartment style living. While these are attractive living spaces for the seniors heading off into the adult world, unless properly monitored, students can seclude themselves in their private rooms/private baths. Building a sense of community in the residence halls is one of the most effective methods to combat violence on a college campus (Carr, 2007).

Research Question 5: What are staff members’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention team on the University climate?

Of the three groups interviewed, staff members ($n = 6$) had the greatest understanding of the behavioral intervention team with 50% responding they had a clear understanding of the team. Sandy’s comment, “I feel it’s part of my job, so I know a lot about it” (Reese, p.130) is indicative of this group’s commitment. However, that commitment appears to be more of a legal duty of care as opposed to the faculty’s paternal responsibility approach (Sokolow, 2006).
Ed stated, “[BIT] is a way for anybody on campus, faculty, staff, and students, to report any behavior or verbal comments that may make somebody uncomfortable” (Reese, p.130). Sarah, who has filed a BIT report, summed up the team’s effectiveness when she said, “decision always revolves around what [is] the best decision for the campus community as a whole” (Reese, p.130). While the staff who took part in the study feel the behavioral intervention team is effective in its efforts to provide a safe campus environment, it is also apparent that staff members view safety as being job related. This may be because staff members provide the programming for safety to students. As program developers and presenters, they understand and deliver the talking points when asked. For instance, in the interviews, staff members shared these thoughts with the interviewer:

- “[the university] takes all reasonable precautions to keep students safe.” (DeShaun)
- “I know that there is constant communication between police and student affairs and the dean of students and public relations.” (Ed)
- “I feel our campus is doing an excellent job as identifying areas of concern for both students and staff as well as quickly diffusing situation, because of the excellent relationship university police has with multiple departments on campus (Sarah)” (Reese, p.131).

These statements, in the opinion of the researcher, do not make the staff any less concerned for campus safety than the faculty; they simply show the differences in approach between the two groups. Faculty viewed their responsibility towards safety as one of education and policy making through shared governance with the university’s administration. The staff saw a responsibility for providing programming, responding to situations, and ensuring policies are followed. Each of these viewpoints is important and necessary to the overall safety of the campus community.

Research Question 6: What are perceptions of the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention team by campus community members who have submitted BIT reports?

Four of the 19 individuals interviewed had submitted a BIT report at some time (two faculty, two staff). Through their participation in the reporting and follow-up processes, they
appeared to have the greatest understanding of the BIT at the University. Sandy and Sarah, both staff members, feel BIT should continue to educate the campus about the team while investigating each reported incident.

Sandy and Sarah encouraged others to report anything that makes a person feel uncomfortable. James agreed as he stated, “There is a part of the administration you can go to if you feel uncomfortable” (Reese, p.132). The strongest vote of confidence in BIT comes from Doris who said, “Use the policy and processes that are available...It works” (Reese, p.132).

I am confident the BIT at Columbus State University is perceived, by the faculty and staff who have knowledge of the team, to be organized, responsive, professional, and effective. Furthermore, the researcher concludes that the campus community members feel safe on this university’s campus and believe the administration is both diligent and proactive about providing a safe environment. It must be noted that 87.5% of the participating students were not aware of the existence of the behavioral intervention team with the remaining 12.5% having a vague understanding, and only 20% of all participants said they had clear understanding of the team.

However, each participant in this study, regardless of his or her previous knowledge of the institution’s behavioral intervention team, indicated that having a BIT would provide an additional layer safety to the campus. Additionally, college administrators should understand that both the student and employee populations are constantly refreshing their membership. Institutional awareness of a behavioral intervention program does not equate to individual awareness.

NOTE: It should be understood that this case study was conducted on a small sampling of the university’s population, which limits the generalizability of the results.

Discussion
Institutions around the country are looking at ways to become proactive and intentional in creating a safe environment for their campus community. Even though it has been shown that violence on college campuses is generally lower than their surrounding communities, when these events occur they draw intense media attention and sharp criticism (HEMHA, 2012). This
attention, coupled with real concern for campus safety, has brought about legislative changes, system mandates, and the creation of a national organization to assist college officials in identifying and reducing threats to students, faculty, staff, and visitors to campuses (HEMHA, 2012) (Federal Register, 2008; Security on Campus, 2008; Sokolow and Lewis, 2009; USG, 2008).

Violent acts on college campuses can occur suddenly and without warning, taking the life of a student, faculty or staff member. While no act of violence is predictable, some are preventable (Drysdale, et al., 2010; Maloy, 2012; Sokolow, et al., 2011). Background checks for admissions and employment provides a history for an individual. Mandating that students and employees report any arrests other than minor traffic violations provides a glimpse into recent activities. While this information does allow insight, these are not predictors of violence. However, research does show that in most cases of violence and deadly attacks on college campuses some leakage did occur: someone other than the perpetrator had some knowledge of the intent to do harm to others or was extremely upset at somebody (Sokolow et al., 2011).

Forensic psychiatrist, Reid Meloy (2012, December) explains, while he is able to look backwards and see how an individual progressed towards committing a violent act, there is no definitive predictor that such a person will indeed commit an act. He does suggest it is possible to observe and assess current behaviors that have been shown to precede violence. However, there must be a method for gathering information and assessing these behaviors. Meloy recommends institutions create teams and committees to serve this function. As these teams are developed, this researcher suggests institutions should be very cognizant that most campus community members have no intrinsic need to understand or seek out knowledge about campus safety unless they or someone they know has been the victim of a violent crime. To that end, colleges and universities should direct programming and marketing towards the extrinsic motivation of an individual or group.

Seventy-three percent of deadly attacks on college campuses are targeted towards a specific individual for various reasons. Six percent of those killed in these attacks are considered collateral, where an errant shot or attack of some type at a specific target struck an unintended victim. In adolescent mass murders and school shootings, 58% of the perpetrators had some degree of leakage of the attack prior to the violent act. These numbers should speak to college
administrators, faculty, and students. Through educational efforts, centralizing reports on persons of concern, and monitoring behavior through BITs, institutions of higher education should be able to reduce the number of targeted violent acts, and, in turn, reduce the number of collateral victims (Drysdale, et al, 2010).

Prevention education is a critical component to campus safety also. A recent study by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (2013) found that 1,825 deaths, an estimated 599,000 injuries, and some 97,000 sexual assaults or date rapes involving college students between the ages of 18 to 24, can be associated with alcohol consumption. As Kitzrow (2003) points out, college students do not head off to school in the fall with the notion of being a victim or perpetrator, but it continues to happen. In addition to programs on self-defense and others like the Department of Homeland Security’s If You See Something, Say Something campaign, college administrators should look for ways to collaborate in alcohol and drug prevention, and sexual assault prevention and awareness programs. Peer educator programs, such as BACCHUS and PaperClip Communications provide outstanding resources and materials for prevention education.

While locks, cameras, and safety programs are musts in efforts to provide a safe environment on college campuses, the human intelligence information gathered from those in contact with the individual in the midst of an aggression escalation are the best tools campus community members have at their disposal. This is an investment in prevention prior to an event occurring on campus. Behavioral intervention teams provide a method for collecting and analyzing information, and for identifying and monitoring persons of concern. I believe all colleges and universities should develop, train, and support behavioral intervention teams on their campus and suggests that each institution should:

1. Join The National Behavioral Intervention Team Association (http://www.nabita.org), The Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (http://www.atapworldwide.org), or similar state and national organizations: Membership with these organizations provides training and support for behavioral intervention teams.
2. Purchase a professional software package for collecting, storing, and providing administrative assistance with reports of academic and non-academic misconduct, and
reports of concerning behavior for faculty, staff, students, and non-students. While there are several outstanding products available such as *Advocate by Symplicity* and *EZappt*, Sokolow (2012) recommends the software package offered by *Maxient*.

3. Purchase and obtain violence risk assessment tools. The WAVR-21 (White & Meloy, 2007) or the SIVRA-35 (Van Brunt, 2012) are excellent examples of risk assessment instruments available to BITs. These tools have been developed to evaluate individual persons of concern and are setting the standard of care that is becoming expected on college campuses and in the workplace.
References


Sokolow, B. (2006). Duty of care is a duty to care. Campus Safety & Student Development, 7,
pp. 1-2.