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Behavioral Intervention Teams: A Campus Wide Collaboration

Douglas Bell

Campus behavioral intervention teams vary greatly from campus to campus, guided by their institution's mission statement, ensuring a safe, educational environment for all members of the campus community. Assessments and interventions of distressed students and students exhibiting disturbing behavior provide a unique opportunity to collaborate with constituents of the campus community. This collaborative approach will assist in eliminating information silos and allow meaningful student interventions to take place.

Student behavioral issues have been and will continue to be, a topic of discussion for student affairs administrators. At an extreme, the tragic mass shooting that occurred at Virginia Tech received national attention and led students, parents, lawmakers, and the media to ask whether campuses were safe (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008). The attention also compelled institutions across the United States to re-think how they address students of concern within the campus community. After the tragedy at Virginia Tech, institutions around the country convened committees and task forces to review policies and to answer questions related to campus safety and security. There was also increased attention paid to the role of threat assessment and behavioral intervention teams (referred to as behavioral intervention teams from this point forward) within the campus communities. Some states' legislatures passed laws mandating the establishment of these teams on public colleges and university campuses (Penven & Janosik, 2012). The call for these teams' intervention mechanisms to be put in place, with the knowledge of disturbed students or student exhibiting disturbing behavior, has become common on campuses (Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2011).

Behavioral Intervention Teams

The Assessment-Intervention of Student Problems (AISP) model, introduced in 1989, describes a way to balance the delicate needs of students of concern (Delworth). Students who lack the skills in establishing close, age appropriate relationships, are often considered disturbing. These students exhibit behaviors such as overreacting to minor problems, abuse of alcohol, testing of limits, and manipulation and control (Delworth, 1989). Disturbed students appear out of sync with other students: they may seem angry and destructive towards themselves and others, and may display highly dualistic thinking (Delworth, 1989).

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The goal of the AISP Model was to create interventions that address these different behaviors exhibited by students. The AISP model outlines a collaborative team approach to assess students in order to develop an appropriate intervention. As stated by Delworth (1989), one of the responsibilities of the campus intervention team is to work toward a more integrated plan of interventions, which will help the student successfully integrate into the campus community. These interventions can be part of the student disciplinary process or mental health treatment, or they may occur in conjunction with those approaches. The components that are key functions of an effective behavioral intervention team include the assessment of the student and the intervention (Delworth, 1989).

Formulation of a Collaborative Team

Professional organizations have provided guidance on standard practices of the behavioral intervention team. An example of such a document is *In Search of Safer Communities* (National Association for Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 2009), which includes practices and provides a framework of planning for, and responding to campus violence and students of concern. Though a formulation of teams has varied throughout the country, some of the basic functions remain the same. Changing laws, attitudes, demographics, and relationships all contribute to the complexity of the answer to the question: “Who is responsible for the lives and welfare of students?” (Sandeem, & Barr, 2006). As an example, courts require colleges to provide reasonably safe campus environment for students and other people by attending to foreseeable dangers (Lake, 2013). The responsibility to ensure the safety and welfare of students extend beyond just student affairs administrators; it is the responsibility of the entire campus community. This creates a unique opportunity to collaborate with stakeholders throughout the campus community to assist in creating a safe environment.

Mission Guided Collaboration

Behavioral intervention teams are multifaceted, and its developed mission statement guides its focus and creates meaning. (Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2011; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Eells and Rockland-Miller (2011) outlined three types of teams that may have overlapping functions, but different missions. The first type serves as a way campus administrators assess and support troubled students. The second focuses primarily on crisis management. The third addresses both behavior intervention and threat assessment. All three require a collaborative focus from the team members involved. Establishing a clear mission statement for the team is an important contextual feature for such collaboration because it informs the interdisciplinary work of the behavioral intervention team (Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2011; Kezar & Lester, 2009).

Implementation of a Collaborative Team

The institution's chief student affairs officer is typically responsible for the coordination of a collaborative behavioral intervention team (Dunkle, Silverstein, & Warner, 2008). When establishing a collaborative behavioral intervention team, it is important to define the members' roles and responsibilities (Dunkle et al., 2008). Team membership varies from institution to institution. Typically, membership includes representatives from an institution's counseling center, public safety, housing and residence life, dean of students, office of student conduct, and a faculty representative (Mardis, Sullivan, & Gamm, 2013). When identifying potential members to collaborate on the behavioral intervention team, it is important to have clear roles and responsibilities in order to conduct effective, informed interventions. Having clearly established roles, such as who will communicate directly to the student and remain the student's point of contact, allows the team to work swiftly and intervene on behalf of a student at a moment's notice.

The team must also possess knowledge of institutional policies and procedures and ensure compliance with legal and operational standards (Higher Education Mental Health Alliance, 2013). Members of the team must review policies in order to gauge whether the policies that exist either support or serve as a barrier for the team to work effectively. Team members must also develop protocols that outline the authority of intervention team. Randazzo and Plummer (2009) noted that the mission statement provides context to what a team will handle; the protocols dictate how the team will handle specific cases.

It is also important to build strategically your behavioral intervention team through a network of staff members who can collectively address student behavioral issues (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Having a team that has developed an effective network is necessary to ensure smooth team function and clear communication around potentially challenging issues (Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2011). It is important to note that individuals chosen to represent certain offices do not necessarily have to be the highest-ranking person within their respective offices. If an administrator is better suited because of his or her personality or specific skill base, that person should serve on the team (Randazzo & Plummer, 2009). When considering the collaborative nature of a behavioral intervention team, it is equally important to communicate the time constraint involved with serving on such a team (Randazzo & Plummer, 2009). Administrators outside of student affairs may not be aware of the time commitments required to execute effective interventions.

One of the behavioral intervention team's basic functions is to make collaborative decisions in order to address students' behavior. Cooperative systems are critical to threat assessment. Using other departments or agencies provides more input on the process of both assessing and managing potentially violent situations. Effective communication, collaboration,

and coordination are necessary for the reception, assessment, and response to critical information (Deisinger, Randazzo, O'Neill, & Savage, 2008). In particular, it is critical to consider collaborative involvement from members of the academic campus community. This article explores ways to use behavioral intervention teams as an effective collaboration with members of the academic community.

Academic Affairs and Behavioral Intervention Team

An important function of a behavioral intervention team is to collaborate in order to improve coordination and communication across various campus departments; this team is stronger when they are multi-disciplinary (NASPA, 2009). Teams must blend administrators with proximity to campus and community with those who have expertise in assessing and managing troubled or troubling students, as well as those who have the authority to recommend or take action (NASPA, 2009). Due to their expertise in working with students, student affairs administrators should serve as leaders of a campus behavioral intervention team (Dunkle et al., 2008). Traditionally the collaboration between many different constituents on campus strengthens the effectiveness of a behavioral team. Some of the offices typically included in a behavioral team are law enforcement/campus safety personnel, mental health providers, university administrators, and student affairs administrators (Delworth, 1989; Dunkle & et al., 2008; Penven & Janosik, 2012). In a recent study, only 27% of the teams whom responded included a representative from academic affairs to serve on a behavioral intervention team (Mardis et al., 2013). Other administrators may enter and exit the behavior intervention team to provide contextual information as needed (Delworth, 1989; Dunkle & et al., 2008). Though academic personnel may be one of the constituents that may have a revolving role on behavior intervention teams, administrators should consider their involvement on a permanent basis.

Academic Affairs Involvement on Behavioral Intervention Teams

Why is including academic affairs so important on a behavioral intervention team? First, faculty members and academic advisors are often the first to identify students who are troubled or in distress (NASPA, 2009). Having faculty and academic advisors collaborate on a behavioral intervention team will allow the group to assess a student holistically. Having information, as it relates to students' in class behavior, will allow the team to provide an intervention that will assist students as well as the campus community (NASPA, 2009). Faculty members, as well as an administrator such as an academic advisor, will be able to provide perspective on a student's academic performance within the classroom. Indicators such as repeat absences from class and missed assignment provide academic indicators of student distress (Higher Education Mental Health Alliance, 2013). Having all of the information possible provides a behavioral intervention team the ability to provide the student with the best intervention to meet his or her needs for future success.

Secondly, academic affairs members on the behavioral intervention team assist in avoiding information silos (Randazzo & Plummer, 2009). Often, different departments and offices take steps on their own to handle situations without knowing the bigger picture (Randazzo & Plummer, 2009). One of the most important roles for a behavioral intervention team is to facilitate information sharing across departments and offices and to break down some of those silos. Breaking down the silos enables the behavioral intervention team to become truly multi-disciplinary. It ensures consistency when addressing a student's behavior throughout the campus community.

Academic Partners Perspective

Academic affairs units provide unique perspectives when serving on a behavioral intervention team. There are ways to utilize the perspective of these professionals effectively on the team. First, utilizing academic advisors and faculty when developing behavioral intervention procedures can improve the team's effectiveness. Training faculty and academic advisors throughout the campus community on how to identify disturbed students and disturbing behaviors is a major component of behavioral intervention procedures. Members from academic affairs serve as consultants to various campus constituents who may have concerns about students based upon their interactions with these students (Dunkle & et al., 2008). Academic affairs representatives may be instrumental in communicating and training other faculty members on the proper procedures of reporting such behavior to the proper members of the behavioral intervention team. Academic affairs administrators, as well as faculty, are perhaps better equipped than student affairs professionals at training and communicating to the academic affairs subculture. (Magolda, 2005).

Additionally, academic affairs perspective can assist with a student's intervention. One such intervention may involve facilitating a sense of connection with one or more persons in the campus community (Delworth, 1989). An example of such an intervention would be a mentorship program that connects a student exhibiting behavioral issues with a faculty member. It is important to have a collaborative team that is aware of the resources available to the student throughout the entire campus community so that such an intervention may take place. In order to maintain connections with a campus community, academic affairs and student affairs collaborators must design learning experiences that deliberately personalize interventions appropriate to an individual student's circumstances and needs (American Association for

Higher Education [AAHE], American College Personnel Association [ACPA], & National Association of student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 1998). Research has noted that frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Having academic affairs involvement through an effective partnership will assist in the overall intervention taking place with students.

Considerations

There are issues an administrator must consider when implementing the inclusion of a faculty member or an academic advisor on a behavioral intervention team. The number of members on the team, privacy issues, and the process of selecting a member of academic affairs to join the behavioral intervention must be considered.

One of the first considerations to think through is how the inclusion of an administrator from academic affairs or faculty member affects the size of the behavioral intervention team. The behavioral intervention team should remain at a size that will permit for swift action when a student behavioral issue arises. Experts recommend keeping the intervention team relatively small (Higher Education Mental Health Alliance, 2013). If the size of the team is a concern, consider having an administrator from academic affairs included on an ad hoc basis. Including members on an ad hoc basis allows the intervention team to seek the inclusion of academic affairs, depending on the specifics of an individual's case. Regardless, the recommendation is to keep the collaborative group small enough to share information comfortably. The size of the team should take into context the institution in which it serves.

The second consideration that should be addressed is the issue of student privacy and concerns. All members must be aware that most documents created, including emails, personal

notes, and other informal documentation would be subject to disclosure in the event of a lawsuit (Higher Education Mental Health Alliance, 2013). Misunderstanding about state and federal privacy laws of students creates unique challenges for behavioral intervention teams seeking to share information (Higher Education Mental Health Alliance). All members of the collaborative team must have thorough training of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as well as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). “Under FERPA, information from a student’s education record can be shared if sharing the information is necessary to protect the health and safety of an individual student or those around him or her.” (Higher Education Mental Health Alliance, 2013, p. 23) These trainings ensure that all team members are aware of the privacy laws that govern the sharable information.

Lastly, administrators must consider how the selection of the academic affairs member will take place. Ideally, the behavioral intervention team will blend members with proximity to information about what is going on around campus, with those who have expertise in addressing students of concern. As mentioned previously, the senior-most member of an academic office is not necessarily the best individual to serve on the team. The person most appropriate would include the academic affairs administrator who is attuned to the student needs of the campus community, regardless of their title. The selection of this person may prove to be more difficult at larger institutions. One suggestion is to have an academic affairs administrator appointed to the behavioral intervention team by the chief student affairs or academic affair officer. On some campuses, the president of the university may also make this appointment. Another suggestion is by appointment from the institution’s faculty staff council. It is imperative to have a member from academic affairs that is mindful of the time commitment associated with serving on a behavioral intervention team (Randazzo & Plummer, 2009).

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are advantages to having a representative from academic affairs included on a behavioral intervention team. The behavioral intervention team allows for a collaborative approach to creating a safe campus community for all students (AAHE, ACPA & NASPA, 1998). As mentioned in *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (AAHE, ACPA & NASPA, 1998), collaborations with faculty and staff must incorporate deliberative personalized interventions appropriate to individual student's needs. When creating behavioral intervention team to address students of concern, it is important to consider the context of the institution. The development of a behavioral intervention team must address the needs of the students at the individual institutions. It is important to consider a collaborative work of a behavioral intervention team that includes student affairs administrators and academic affairs administrators to develop appropriate interventions.

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