Proactive Safety Net: The Critical Role of Behavioral Intervention Teams

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The adoption of Behavioral Intervention Teams (BIT) and/or Campus Assessment Response and Evaluation (CARE) teams may be new in name, but threat assessment as a formal process has been identified as a necessity in higher education for well over a decade. The reason threat assessment has been such a staple to higher education is due to its scientific approach to proactively reducing violence and serious student incidents on campus. Did I mention it improves student success outcomes? Despite the obvious benefits of having a BIT or CARE team on campus, many teams are underfunded, lack updated training, and not all teams use threat assessment tools.

Continued Training and Improvement

When it comes to BIT and CARE threat assessments, constant research continues to improve knowledge and identify best practices. A few weeks ago, I spoke with Brain Van Brunt, an expert in threat assessments and the creator of several best-known industry threat assessment tools. The threat assessment tools he developed utilize the knowledge of experts in psychology, police science, DEI, and other fields. He continues to develop threat assessment tools using new research. As the science of threat assessments improve, so should the College's teams' knowledge improve through training. Training is also helpful to new college employees taking on roles in threat assessment and student support.

Promoting Fair and Equitable Outcomes for Students

Threat assessment tools are built in such a way to ensure student situation outcomes are tiered to match present risks. The evaluation process looks at behaviors by matching the situation with the appropriate level of outcome, recommends available resources, and guides the team in moving forward with supportive measures. The goal of the process isn't punitive or to identify "problem students," but rather to identify those who need urgent support. Conversely, a process that doesn't use a threat assessment tool or inconsistently uses one can be viewed as biased. Outcomes based on personal feelings, views, and opinions from those on the team may disproportionately affect certain groups promoting inequitable treatment. Even if unintended, this unequal treatment is contrary to the excellent work the colleges are engaged in to promote fair treatment of all students. Inequitable treatment is sometimes met with legal ramifications and consequences, so good threat assessment tools are crucial to the work of the BIT/CARE team.

Funding

When considering funding BIT/CARE teams and tools, often colleges approach this topic in the same way as other financial requests by asking, "What does the data demonstrate to support the need?" Well, colleagues, the work of the BIT/CARE team cannot be measured. We

cannot know how many incidents of violence, suicide, and disruption**s** to the campus environment are diverted by their work. There is no way to quantify that which doesn't occur. The same can be said about how many students are led to a better path through the work of BIT/CARE teams who promote mental wellness, classroom success, and financial stability of students. It is immeasurable! However, we can envision terrible campus consequences if an act of violence _were not_ diverted. The effects of an act of violence, suicide or disruption to a college would be immense in terms of monitory costs, human resources, student trust, and many other unintended outcomes.

Conclusion

Support and investment in BIT/CARE teams is arguably the most significant way to reduce threats to the colleges and support student well-being. Through adequate funding of these teams by providing continuous training, resources, and utilizing threat assessment tools, the college can foster an environment where proactive measures stop potential risks and support student success. Moreover, by promoting fairness, equity, and cultural competence within BIT/CARE operations, institutions can ensure all students receive the support they deserve. It is incumbent for the colleges to prioritize and support BIT/CARE teams and recognize them as essential to campus safety and student success.