

# Behavioral Threat Assessment: Best Practices for Institutions of Higher Education



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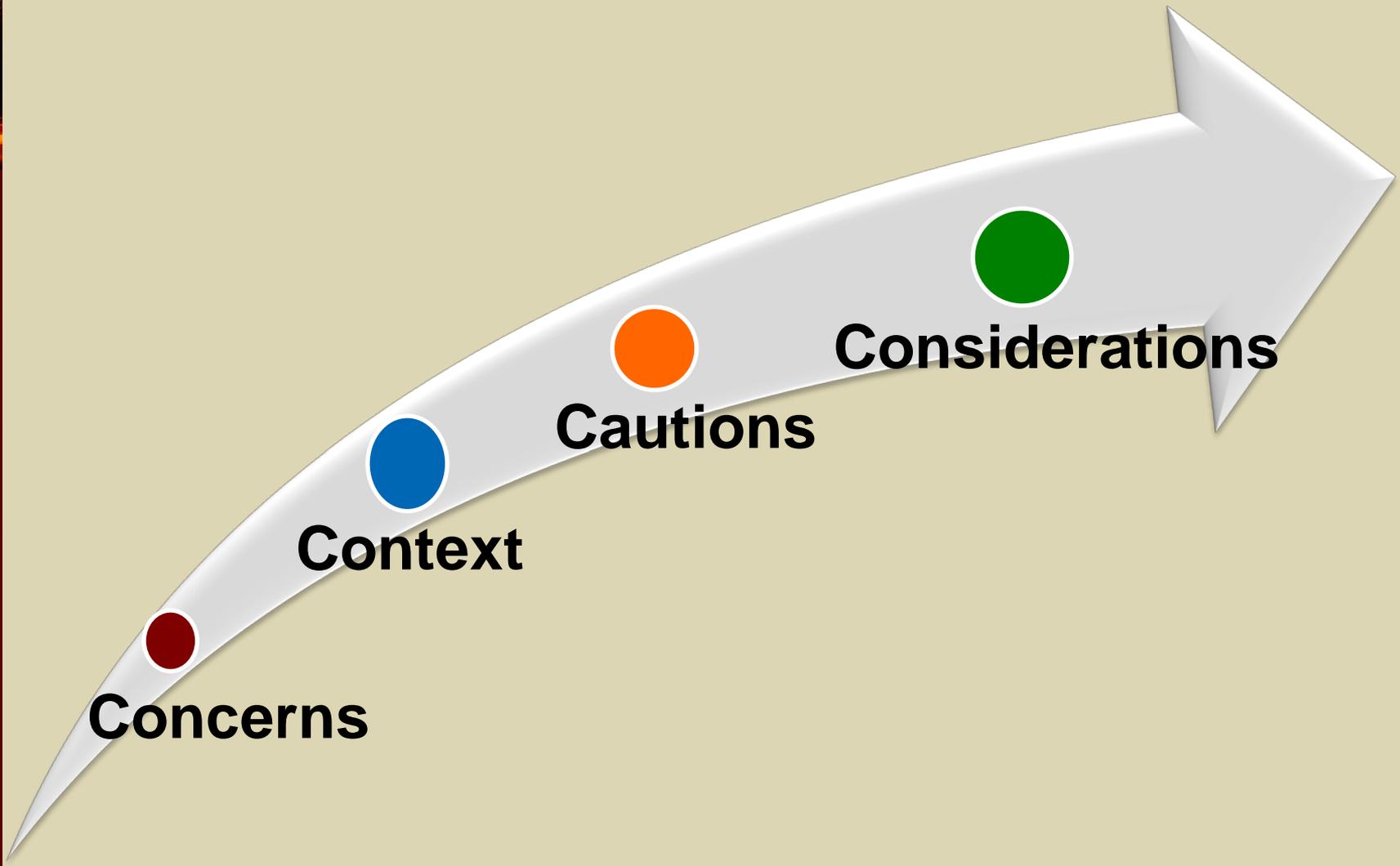


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# Roadmap for Discussion





# **CONCERNS:**

## **What do our communities fear?**

# Virginia Tech: April 16, 2007

- 32 victims dead
- 27 victims wounded or physically injured
- Perpetrator suicide
- ~100 witnesses or directly impacted individuals
- ~33,000 impacted individuals on the Blacksburg campus





# Northern Illinois University Dekalb, IL: February 14, 2008





# CONTEXT:

## What do we face?

# On-Campus Violence

<u>Type of Violence</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>
Murder	16	11	8	46
Forcible Sex	2689	2722	2717	2704
Robbery	2077	2055	1981	1962
Aggravated Assault	2995	2906	3022	2834
Arson	1072	1024	975	790
Injurious Hate Crimes	30	32	51	31
Illegal Weapon Arrests	1377	1450	1412	1446

*Source: US Dept. of Education Office of Post-Secondary Education*



# Beyond The Tip of the Iceberg

## Beyond Mass Shootings

- A broad range of issues impact the safety and well-being of college campuses.
  - Harassment
  - Bias-related incidents
  - Stalking
  - Domestic abuse
  - Sexual assault
  - Substance abuse
  - Mental illness
  - Suicide

**Keep the Big Picture in Mind**



# Mental Health on Campus

<u>Counseling Center Clients Reporting:</u>	<u>Percent*</u>
Non-suicidal self-injury	21
Seriously considered suicide	25
Prior suicide attempt	8
Seriously considered harming others	8
Afraid of losing control & acting violently	7
Intentionally harmed another person	5

*\*Note: Includes prior to and after starting college.*

*Source: Center for the Study of Collegiate Mental Health (CSCMH):  
2009 Pilot Study*





# Mental Health on Campus

<u>College Students Reporting:</u>	<u>Percent*</u>
Felt so depressed, difficult to function	43
Diagnosed with depression	5
Seriously considered suicide	9
Attempted suicide**	1

*\*Note: Includes 1 or more times in the last school year.*

*\*\* Approximately 1100 college students suicides each year.*

*Source: American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment (Spring 2008; N=80,121)*





# CONTEXT:

## What do we know?



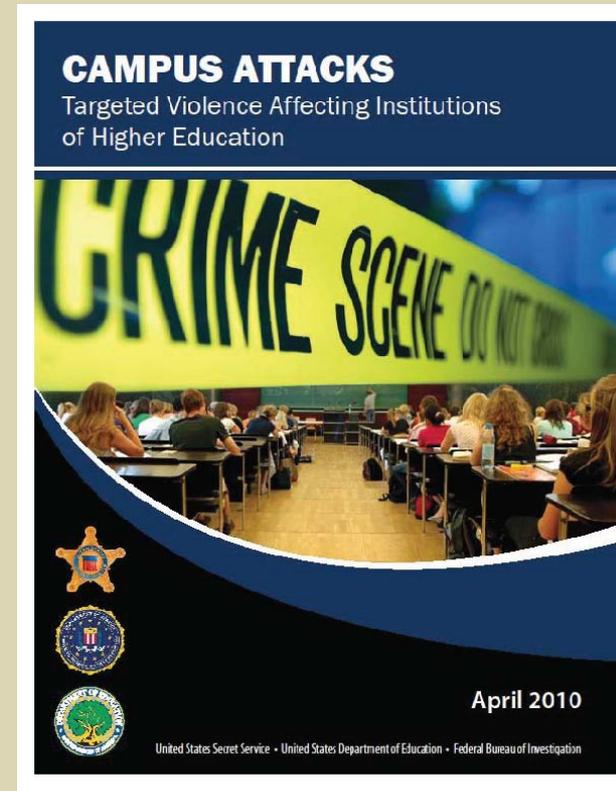
# Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education

Joint Project of the

- US Secret Service
- US Department of Education
- Federal Bureau of Investigation

Attacks: 1900 – Present

- 272 incidents
  - Rate rises with enrollment



Source: U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Dept. of Education, & Federal Bureau of Investigation (2010). *Campus Attacks: Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education*.

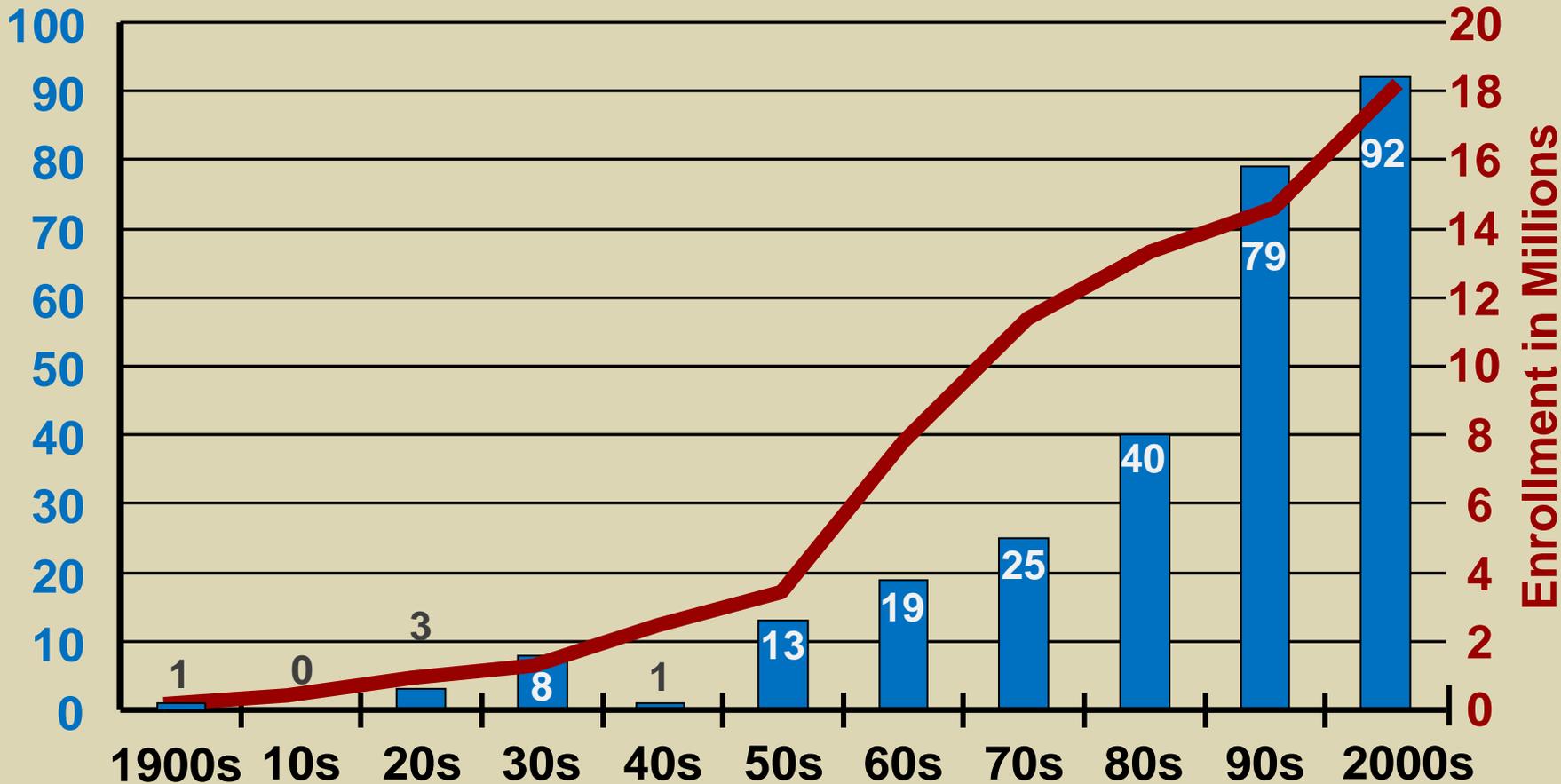




# Number of Incidents 1909-2009\*

(n = 281)

Number of Incidents



\*Data collected through 2008, projected for 2009 based on average per year for decade.





# Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education

## About the Incidents

- Occurs on and off-campus
  - 80% on-campus (residence, grounds, class/admin)
  - 20% off-campus (residence, public area)
- Precipitating events present: 83%
- Targeted one or more specific persons: 73%
- Pre-incident threat/aggression to target: 29%
- Pre-incident concerns reported by others: 31%

Source: U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Dept. of Education, & Federal Bureau of Investigation (2010). *Campus Attacks: Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education*.





# Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education

## About the Perpetrators

- Age: 16 – 64
- Gender: Male (80%); Female (20%)
- Status:
  - Current / Former Student: 60%
  - Current / Former Employee: 11%
  - Indirectly Affiliated: 20%
  - No known Affiliation: 9%

Source: U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Dept. of Education, & Federal Bureau of Investigation (2010). *Campus Attacks: Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education*.



# Facts About Campus Attacks

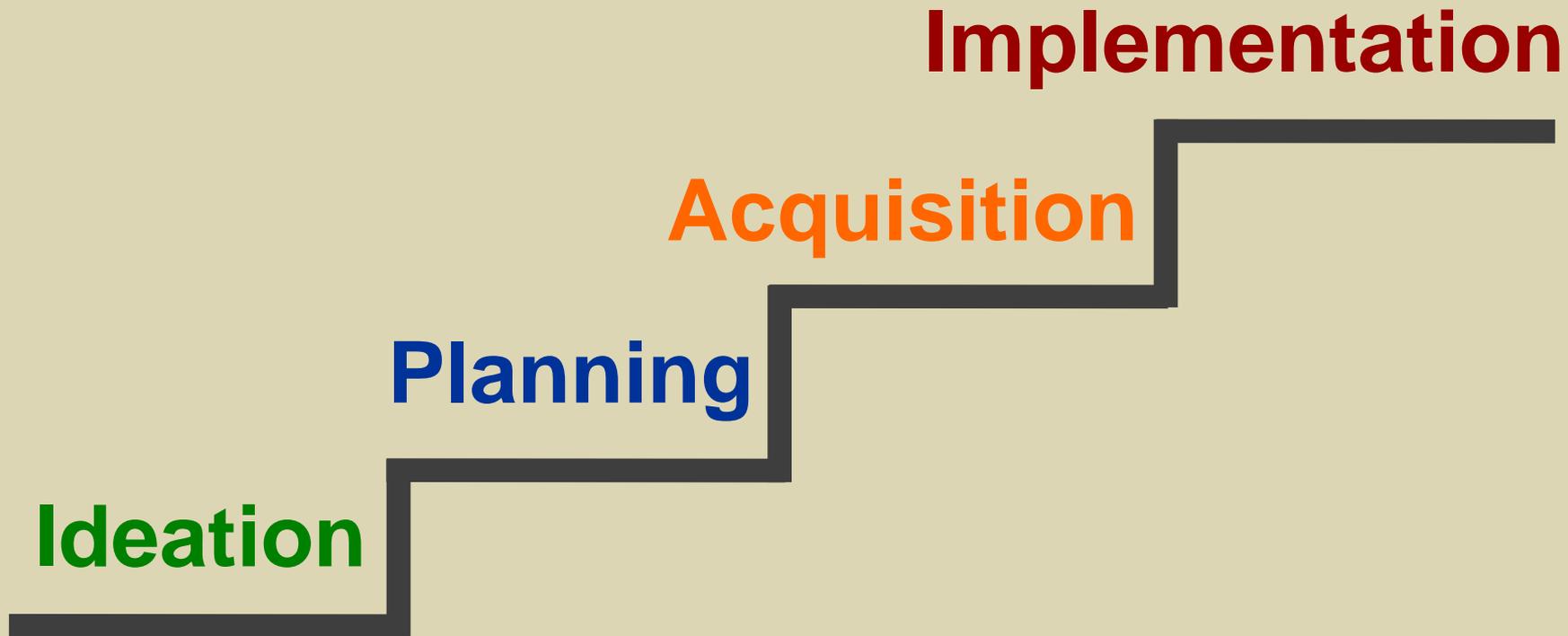
**Perpetrators of serious campus violence don't "just snap."**

**These incidents are not impulsive or random.**

- Most (over 75%) consider, plan, and prepare before engaging in violent behavior;
- Most (over 75%) discuss their plans with others before the attack.

Source: U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Dept. of Education (2002).  
*Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative.*

# Pathway to Violence





# Facts About Campus Attacks

**We cannot know whether to be concerned by a subject's appearance – but we can tell by their behavior.**

- No unique profile of the campus attacker.
- Most have concerned several others with troubling behavior before their attacks.
- Most are suicidal or at a point of desperation prior to their attacks.

Source: U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education, (2002)  
*Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative.*

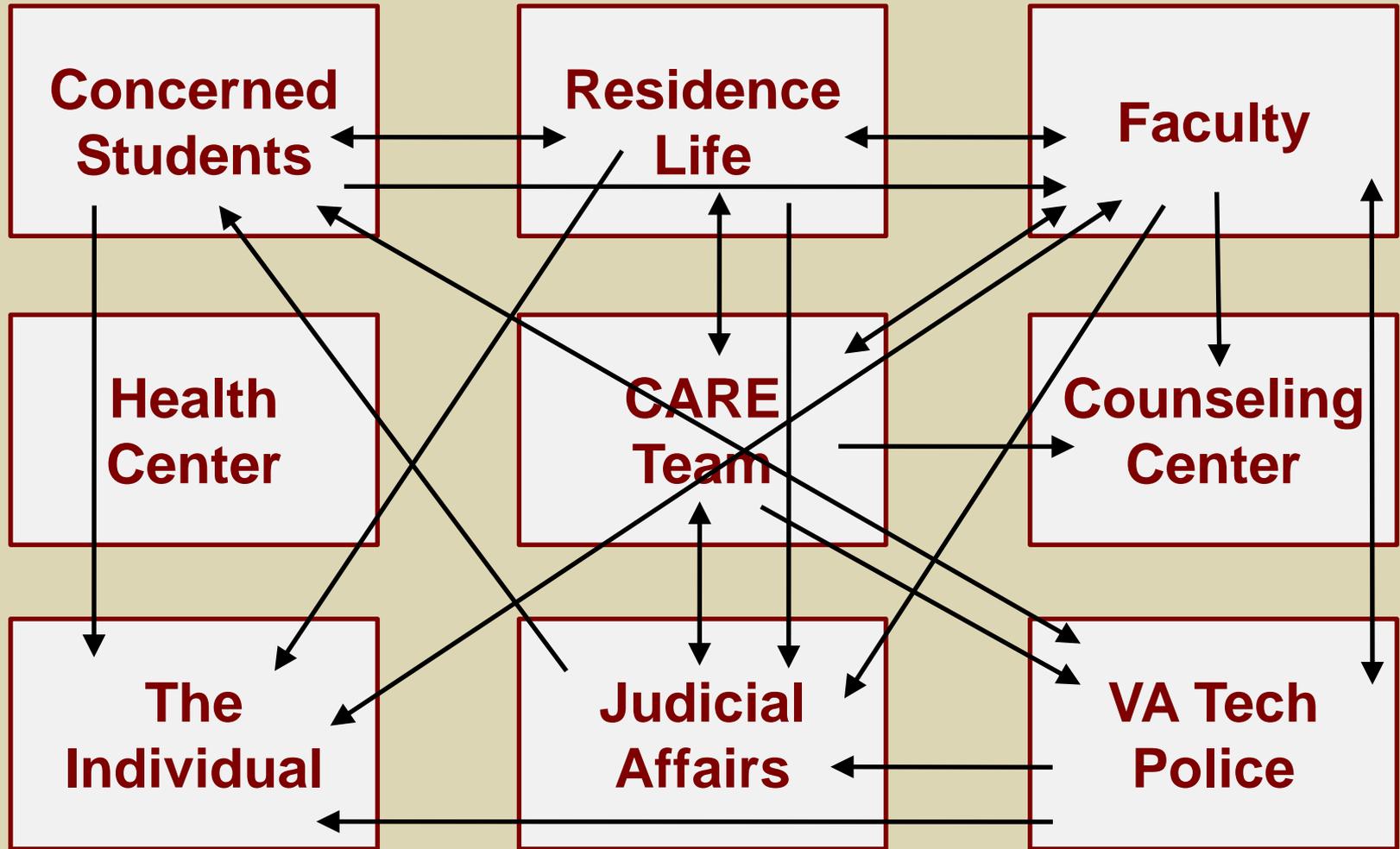




# Implications

- Many campus and workplace targeted attacks can be prevented.
- Information about a person's ideas and plans for violence can be observed or discovered before harm can occur.
- But information available is likely to be scattered and fragmented.
- Key is to act quickly upon an initial report of concern, see who else has a piece of the puzzle, then pull all the information together to see what picture emerges.

# Where to Report?



SOURCE: OIG Report #140-07: Investigation of the April 16, 2007 Critical Incident at Virginia Tech. Prepared by: Office of the Inspector General for Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services – Commonwealth of Virginia



# Implications

- Assessment involves asking: Is this person on a pathway toward violence?
- Using a team can be particularly effective for gathering and evaluating information, and intervening if necessary.
- Threat assessment and case management is not an adversarial process. Engagement with a person of concern can be critical to preventing violence or harm.



# CAUTIONS & CONSIDERATIONS



# Current Prevention Approaches

- Mental health violence risk assessment/  
(Clinical assessment of dangerousness);
- Automated decision-making;
- Profiling;
- Threat assessment;



# Mental Health Risk Assessment

- Also known as a clinical assessment of dangerousness
- Evaluates a person's risk for more general/prevalent types of affective violence
- Not intended (nor effective) for evaluating risk of a targeted attack
- May supplement threat assessment process but is not a replacement



# Automated Decision-Making

## Two Areas of Concern:

- The statistical or mathematical process for making the evaluation is unknown
- No correlation between satisfaction with using the automated tool and the accuracy of the decision made



# Profiling

- Most commonly used as an investigative tool to describe the person or type of person who committed a particular crime
- It is retrospective in that it uses clues from a crime that has already occurred to narrow down possible suspects
- When used with respect to evaluating risk of violence, profiling is prospective, not retrospective

# Prospective Profiling

**Gather data on offense characteristics**



**Identify common characteristics to generate composite**



**Compare the person in question with the composite**



**Closer the match, the greater the cause for concern**



# Individual Profile

- Male (80+%);
- White (75%) / Majority race (85%+);
- Age:    Social violence:                               15-24  
            School violence:                               15-17  
            Workplace violence:                           30-45  
            Stalking violence:                            35-40
- Military / Weapons experience;
- Power & control oriented;
- Obsessed / Identifies with violence.



# Profiling – Two Major Failings

- It identifies far more people that match a profile but do not pose a threat
- It fails to identify a person whose behavior suggests real concern but whose traits or characteristics do not match the profile



# Beware the lure of the Black Swan

## Attributes of Black Swan Events:

- Rarity,
- Extreme impact,
- Concocted, retrospective predictability.

*The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*

Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2007)

Goal:

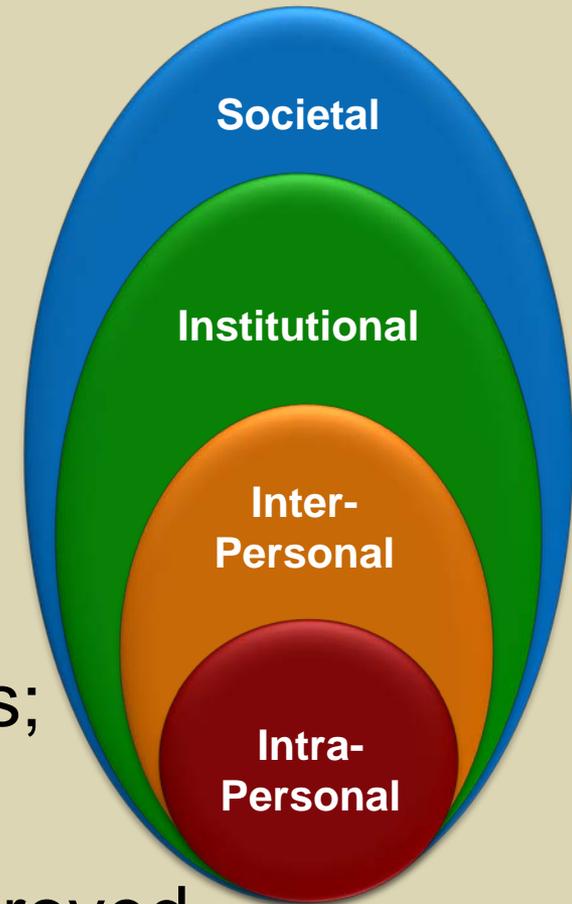
**Case Management**

**Vs.**

**Prediction of Violence**

# Effective Prevention Strategies Are:

- Comprehensive;
- Systematic and theory driven;
- Collaborative;
- Socio-culturally relevant;
- Appropriately timed;
- Delivered by well-trained staff;
- Utilize multiple & varied methods;
- Sustained over time;
- Continuously evaluated and improved.



Nation, M., et al (2003). What works in prevention: Principles of Effective Prevention Programs. *American Psychologist*, 58, 449-456.



# Overview of Threat Assessment

**A systematic process that is designed to:**



- **Identify persons of concern**



- **Gather information/investigate**



- **Assess information and situation**



- **Manage the situation**



# The Threat Assessment Process

Threat assessment is an objective process:





# Why Threat Assessment?

- Evidence-based and derived from:
  - Student development (Ursula Delworth, 1989);
  - U.S. Secret Service model;
  - FBI recommendations regarding workplace violence;
  - Safe School Initiative.
- Used successfully to prevent campus, school, and workplace shootings.
- Broadly applicable for identifying people in need.
- Low-cost and effective.
- Legally defensible approach.
- Involves the community.



# Why Threat Assessment?

## Recommended by:

- Virginia Tech Review Panel (governor's panel)
- Report to President from U.S. Departments of Education, Justice, Health & Human Services;
- Numerous professional associations:
  - AASCU, ASJA, IACLEA, MHEC, NAAG, NASPA
- Several state task forces on campus safety:
  - CA, FL, IA, IL, KY, MA, MO, NC, NJ, NM, OK, PA, WI.



# Why Threat Assessment?

## Required by legislation:

- Commonwealth of Virginia –public institutions
- State of Illinois – All institutions

## American National Standards Institute Report:

- “A Risk Analysis Standard for Natural and Man-Made Hazards to Higher Education Institutions



# Threat Assessment Principles

## 1. Prevention is possible

- Acts of targeted violence typically follow a logical progression of behavior:
  - Idea
  - Plan
  - Acquisition
  - Implementation
- This allows opportunities for behavioral progression to be observed.



# Threat Assessment Principles

## 2. Violence is a dynamic process

- Not asking whether this is a “violent person.”
- Looking at changes in circumstances, situation, and its impact on the person in question.



# Key Points about Violence

***Dangerousness is not a permanent state of being nor solely an attribute of a person.***

Dangerousness is **situational** & based on:

**J**ustification;

**A**lternatives;

**C**onsequences; and

**A**bility.

*Source: Gavin de Becker  
The Gift of Fear*



# Threat Assessment Principles

## 3. Targeted Violence is the product of an interaction among four factors:

- S** The **subject** who may take violent action;
- T** Vulnerabilities of the **target** of such actions;
- E** An **environment** that facilitates or permits violence, or does not discourage it; and,
- P** **Precipitating events** that may trigger reactions.

# Components of Risk

**Subject**

**Target**



**Precipitating Events**

**Environment**



# Threat Assessment Principles

## 4. Corroboration is critical

- Check facts
- Use multiple sources
- Gauge credibility of sources
- Maintain a healthy skepticism



# Threat Assessment Principles

## 5. Threat assessment is about behavior, not profiles

- There is no accurate or useful profile of a “workplace shooter.”
- Focus is on behavior that suggests a potential for harm OR some need for assistance.



# Threat Assessment Principles

## 6. Cooperating systems are critical resources

- Multiple, communicating systems facilitate all aspects of threat assessment
  - Identification
  - Information-gathering
  - Assessment
  - Management or referral
- Team can facilitate liaison with local agencies.



# Threat Assessment Principles

## 7. Determine if situation poses a threat

- Critical question is about behavior along a pathway toward harm.
- Focus is not solely on whether the person made a threat.
- Expressed threats (or the lack thereof) are not reliable indicators.



# Threat Assessment Principles

## 8. Keep victims in mind

- Threat assessment involves victim concerns as well.
- Victims are typically more concerned about case management than threat assessment.
- Team members should focus on victim safety and well-being, as well as assessment and management.



# Threat Assessment Principles

## 9. Early identification and intervention helps everyone

- Early identification allows greater range of options for case management.
- Law enforcement involvement may not be necessary.
- Alliance is more likely.
- False positives are cleared more rapidly.



# Threat Assessment Principles

## 10. Multiple reporting mechanisms enhance early identification

- Simple, easy, direct access to the threat assessment team is critical for effective reporting.
- Multiple ways to report can enhance likelihood of reporting.
- Can counter-balance normal reluctance to report.



# Threat Assessment Principles

## 11. Multi-faceted resources can provide effective intervention

- Maximize effectiveness through multiple, sustained, and coordinated efforts.
- Address the major contributing factors to change the equation.



# Threat Assessment Principles

## 12. Safety is a primary focus

- Safety is guiding mission of all threat assessment and management efforts.
- Assessment and management steps are all tools toward the goal of safety.



# Context of Safe Campuses

## Comprehensive Safety Planning

Pro-active plans in place to:

- **Prevent and mitigate** violence
  - Identify at-risk situations
  - Assess situations
  - Intervene & manage concerns
- **Prepare** for potential violence
- **Respond** to violent acts and
- **Recover** from the event.





# Enhance Capacity

Use organizational resources and processes more effectively to enhance:



**Communication**



**Collaboration**



**Coordination**



**Capitalization**



# Threat Assessment Team: Functional Authority and Role

- Understand threats / concerns;
- Evaluate legitimacy of concerns;
- Identify motivations for violence;
- Assess likelihood of physical harm;
- Develop strategies for risk reduction;
- Guide implementation of strategies;
- Re-evaluate threat;
- Evaluate needs of community.



# Threat Assessment Team: Scalable Capacity

- Utilize existing resources / mechanisms;
- Identify gaps in services;
- Evaluate & maximize communications;
- Involve relevant components;



# Threat Assessment Team Membership:

- Academic Affairs / Provost / Graduate College;
- Employee Assistance;
- Human Resource Services;
- Media Relations;
- Police / Security;
- Residence Life;
- Student Affairs / Dean of Students;
- Student Health / Counseling Service;
- University Counsel;



# Conceptualizing the Team

- Players (First-string);
- Players (Second-string, specialty units);
- Team Leadership;
  - Owners;
  - Coaches;
- Trainers;
- Marketing;
- Scouts;
- Fans.



# Skills of Effective Team Leaders

- Passionate about the goals of the team;
- Familiar with threat assessment principles and practices;
- Demonstrates an inquisitive and skeptical mindset;
- Exercises good sense of judgment, objectivity, and thoroughness;
- Relates well with others;
- Effectively facilitates team discussion;
- Advocates for necessary resources.



# Case Management

Use “crew resource management”\*:

- Consensus-driven decision making;
- Team leader may make ultimate decision, but everyone is obligated to share opinions and raise concerns and ideas;
- Focus on what still works – for the person and their situation;
- Focus on what the team, or institution, can change or fix;

Source: NASA and major airlines



# Case Management

## “Crew resource management” (Continued):

- Think creatively about resources, as well as “eyes and ears.”
- Anticipate likely change in the short and mid-term, and how the subject may react.
- Monitor using available resources. Who sees the person regularly, inside work/campus, outside, on weekends, online, etc.?
- Document decision-making, implementation, and progress.

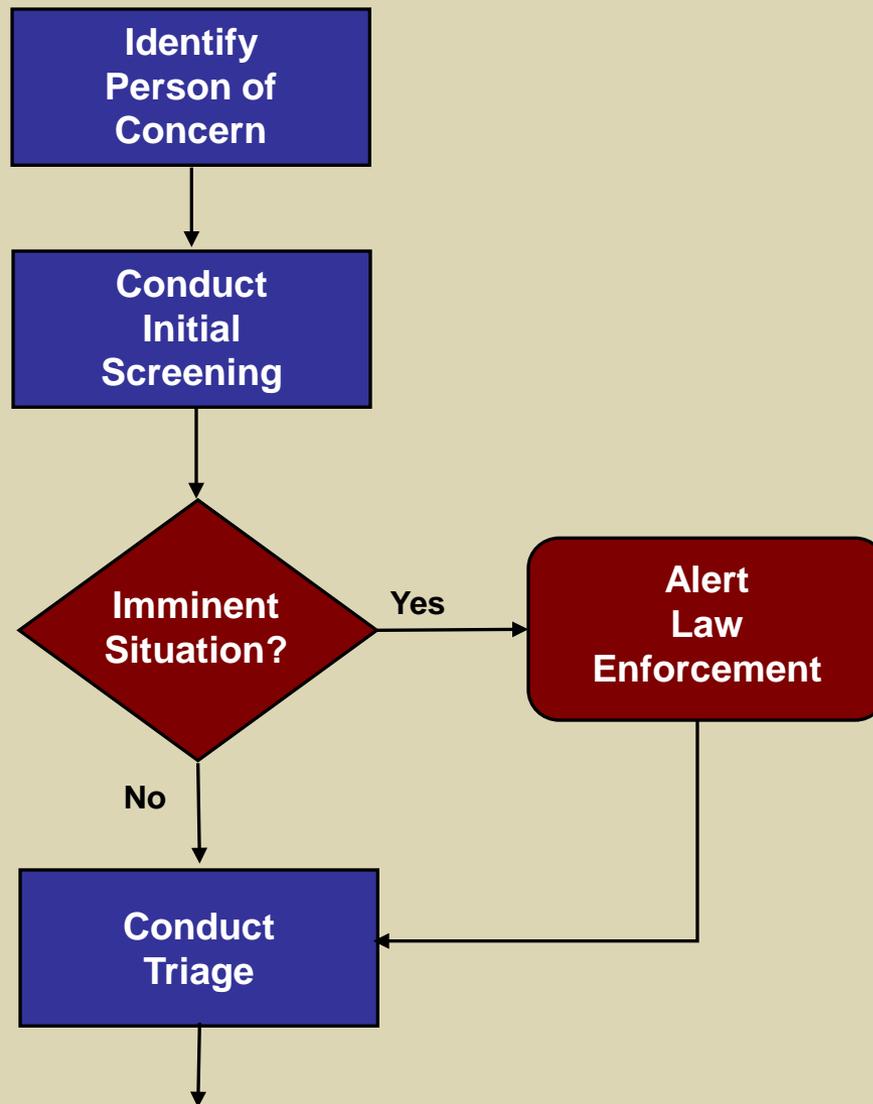
Source: NASA and major airlines



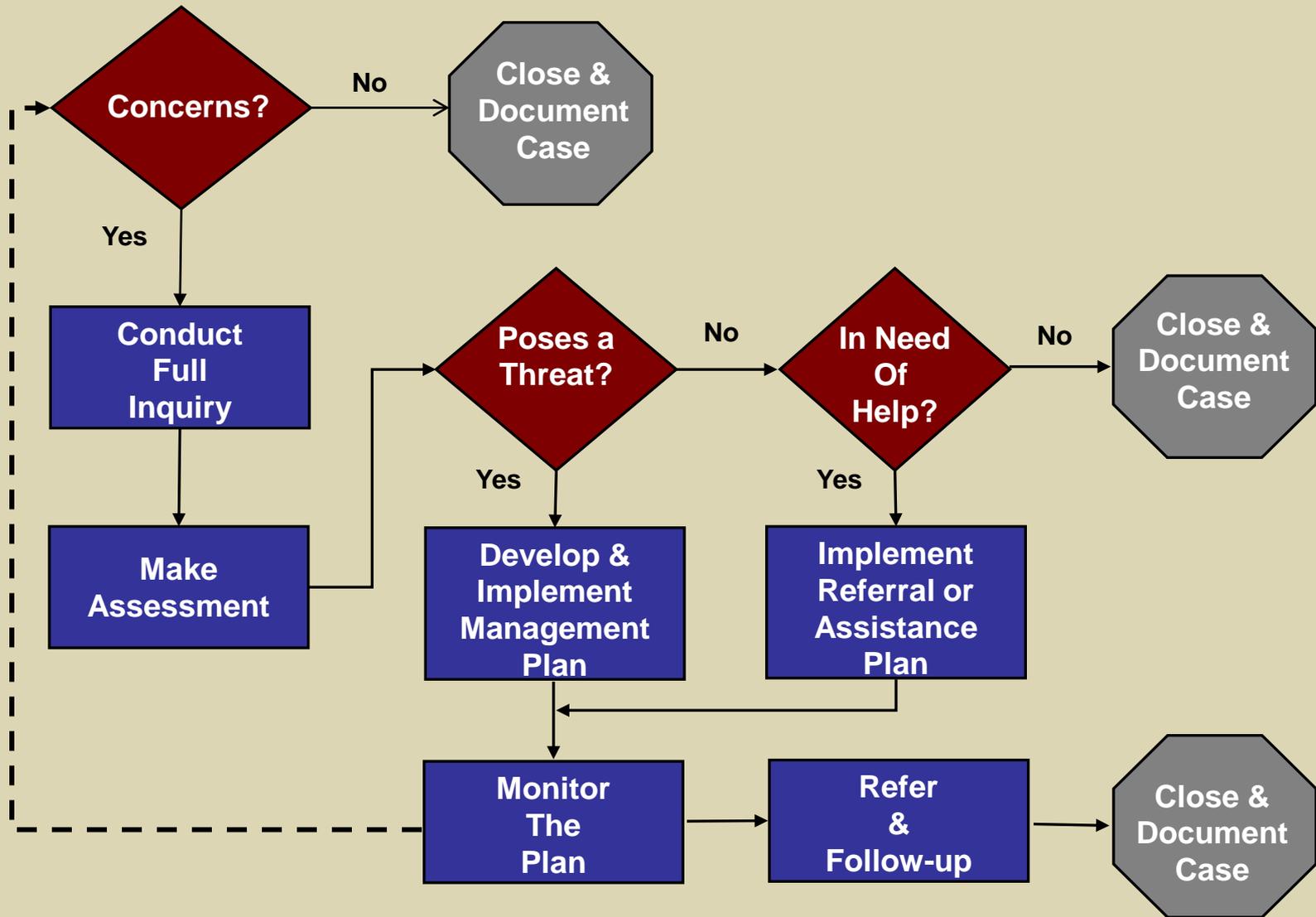
# The Threat Assessment Process

- Facilitate reporting to team
- Utilize systematic process to:
  - Identify / learn of person at risk
  - Gather information
  - Evaluate person/situation
  - Implement threat management plan
  - Monitor and re-evaluate plan to ensure safety
  - Refer and follow-up as appropriate

# Threat Assessment Process:



# Threat Assessment Process:





# Facilitate Reporting

For reporting to be effective, people need to know:

- Their role and responsibility to report
- What to report
- Where to report
- Reports are wanted
- Something will be done
- Regular reminders of issues and process

*“If you see something, say something.”*

Source: NYC Metropolitan Transportation Authority



# Setting a Threshold for Team Involvement

## Participant Exercise:

- What information do you want reported to your threat assessment team?
- What “threshold” do you want to establish for reporting?
- How will you communicate this with your campus?



# What to Report

- Persons at risk of:
  - Harm to others
  - Harm to self
- Persons who demonstrate inability to take care of themselves:
  - Serious mental health concerns
  - Substance abuse
- Behavior that is significantly disruptive to the learning, living, or working environment

# Where to Report?





# Initial Screening

Gather initial information from key sources:

- TAM Team database;
- Student Affairs;
- Academic Affairs;
- Human Resources;
- Campus police/security;
- Local law enforcement;
- Online searches;
- Other\_\_\_\_\_



# Initial Screening

## Helpful Internet sites include:

Google.com

Bebo.com

MySpace.com

Xanga.com

Facebook.com

Snopes.com

YouTube.com

thehoodup.com

Technorati.com  
(searches blogs)

craigslist.com  
(search the relevant city/town)

Twitter.com

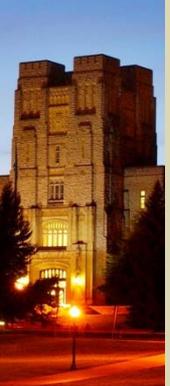
JuicyCampus.com

Blackplanet.com

RateMyProfessor.com

MiGente.com

Cuil.com



# Imminent Situation?

- Determine if situation is emergency/imminent, E.g., Subject has:
  - Displayed a weapon;
  - Indicated intent to use it;
  - Has access to target;
  - Attempted to gain access.
- Threat Assessment vs. Crisis Management;
- If imminent/emergency, call law enforcement;
- If not, move on to Triage;



# Triage

- Triage questions can include:
  - Have there been indications of suicidal thoughts, plans, or attempts?
  - Have there been indications of thoughts/plans of violence?
  - Does the person have access to a weapon or are they trying to gain access?
  - Are there concerns about the well-being of the subject?
  - Are there concerns about the safety of the community?
- If yes, a full inquiry is recommended.



# Gather Information (Full Inquiry)

- Think broadly and creatively about those who might have information:
  - Co-workers
  - Other staff
  - Friends
  - Family
  - Online friends, web sites, etc.
  - Previous schools / employers
  - Others?
- Document information and use it to answer the Key Investigative Questions.



# Key Investigative Questions

- 1. What are the person's motive(s) and goals? What brought the subject to our attention?**
  - Does the situation or circumstance that led to these statements or actions still exist?
  - Does the person have a major grievance or grudge? Against whom?
  - What efforts have been made to resolve the problem and what has been the result?
  - Does the person feel that any part of the problem is resolved or see any alternatives?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002)  
*Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates.*



# Key Investigative Questions

## 2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?

- What, if anything, has the person communicated to someone else (targets, friends, co-workers, others) or written in a diary, journal, email, or Web site concerning his or her grievances, ideas and/or intentions?
- Has anyone been alerted or "warned away"?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002)  
*Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates.*



# Key Investigative Questions

## 3. Has the person shown any inappropriate interest in campus attacks/attackers, weapons, incidents of mass violence?

- Workplace/school attacks or attackers;
- Weapons (including recent acquisition of any relevant weapon);
- Incidents of mass violence (terrorism, rampage violence, mass murderers).

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002).



# Key Investigative Questions

## 4. Has the person engaged in attack-related behaviors?

- Developing an attack idea or plan;
- Making efforts to acquire or practice with weapons;
- Surveilling possible sites and areas for attack;
- Testing access to potential targets;
- Rehearsing attacks or ambushes.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002).



# Key Investigative Questions

## 5. Does the person have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?

- How organized is the person's thinking and behavior?
- Does the person have the means (e.g., access to a weapon) to carry out an attack?
- Are they trying to get the means to carry out an attack?
- Do actions indicate their belief in their ability?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002).  
*Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*



# Key Investigative Questions

## 6. Is the person experiencing hopelessness, desperation, and/or despair?

- Is there information to suggest that the person is feeling desperation and/or despair?
- Has the person experienced a recent failure, loss and/or loss of status?
- Is the person having difficulty coping with a stressful event?
- Has the person engaged in behavior that suggests that he or she has considered ending their life?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002).  
*Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*



# Key Investigative Questions

## 7. Does the person have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible person?

- Does the person have at least one friend, colleague, family member, or other person that he or she trusts and can rely upon?
- Is the person emotionally connected to other people?
- Has the person previously come to someone's attention or raised concern in a way that suggested he or she needs intervention or supportive services?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002).  
*Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*



# Key Investigative Questions

## 8. Does the person see violence as an acceptable, desirable – or the only – way to solve a problem?

- Does the setting around the person (friends, fellow guests, colleagues, others) explicitly or implicitly support or endorse violence as a way of resolving problems or disputes?
- Has the person been "dared" by others to engage in an act of violence?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002).  
*Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*



# Key Investigative Questions

## 9. Are the person's conversation and "story" consistent with his or her actions?

- Does information from collateral interviews and from the person's own behavior confirm or dispute what the person says is going on?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002).  
*Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*



# Key Investigative Questions

## 10. Are other people concerned about the person's potential for violence?

- Are those who know the person concerned that he or she might take action based on violent ideas or plans?
- Are those who know the person concerned about a specific target?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002).  
*Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*



# Key Investigative Questions

## 11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of an attack?

- What factors in the person's life may increase or decrease the likelihood that the person will engage in violent behavior?
- What is the response of others who know about the person's ideas or plans?
  - Actively discourage person from acting violently,
  - Encourage the person to attack,
  - Deny the possibility of violence,
  - Passively collude with an attack, etc.?

Source: U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education, (2002).  
*Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and  
Creating Safe School Climates*



# Key Investigative Questions

## 12. Where does the subject exist along the pathway to violence? Has the subject:

- Developed an idea or plan to do harm?
- Taken steps toward implementing the plan?
- Developed the capacity or means to carry out the plan?
- How fast are they moving toward engaging in harm?
- Where can the team intervene to move the person off that pathway toward harm?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002).  
*Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates.*



# Evaluate Situation

- 1. Does the person pose a threat of harm, whether to himself, to others, or both? Is he or she is on a pathway toward harm?**
- 2. Does the person otherwise show a need for help or intervention?**



# Assessment: Case Priority Levels

**PRIORITY 1 (Extreme Risk):** Appears to pose a clear/immediate threat of violence or self-harm and requires immediate containment. Needs law enforcement notification, target protection, and case management plan.

**PRIORITY 2 (High Risk):** Appears to pose a threat of violence or self-harm but lacks immediacy or access to target. Requires active monitoring and case management plan.

**PRIORITY 3 (Moderate Risk):** Does not appear to pose a threat of violence or self-harm, but exhibits significantly disruptive behaviors and/or need for assistance. Requires active monitoring, case management plan, and appropriate referrals.

**PRIORITY 4 (Low Risk):** Does not appear to pose a threat of violence or self-harm at this time, but may exhibit some disruptive behavior and/or need for assistance. Requires passive monitoring. Utilize case management and referrals as appropriate.

**PRIORITY 5 (No Identified Risk):** person/situation does not appear to pose a threat of violence or self-harm nor is there evidence of disruption to community. No case management or monitoring required.



# The Only Thing We Have to Fear...

## Fear Driven Responses:

- Fuel misunderstanding:
  - “Epidemic of campus violence”
  - Role of mental illness
- Foster reactive and ineffective strategies:
  - “Zero Tolerance”
  - Profiling
  - Action imperatives
  - Isolating interventions



# Goal of Threat Assessment

The primary goal of violence prevention is the safety of all persons involved.

Counseling, support, confrontation, termination, arrest, prosecution, etc., are tools to reach that goal.



# Case Management Options

**Effective case management incorporates interventions in each of the (relevant) factors:**

- S** De-escalate, contain, or control the **subject** who may take violent action;
- T** Decrease vulnerabilities of the **target**;
- E** Modify physical and cultural **environment** to discourage escalation; and,
- P** Prepare for & mitigate against **precipitating events** that may trigger adverse reactions.



# Subject-Based Strategies

Implement appropriate strategies:

- Utilize less intrusive measures first;
  - Driven by effective case management vs.
  - Documentation & liability management.
- Maintain channel of communication and information gathering (with subject).
- Subject interview;
  - De-escalate, contain, or control subject.
- Subject referral for assistance;
- Subject confrontation or warning;



# When Your Only Tool is a . . .

## **Over-Reliance on Control-Based Strategies**

- Discipline
- Student conduct
- Criminal prosecution
- Suspension
- Expulsion
- Termination

**Never equate separation with safety**





# Subject Control Strategies

Leave, suspension, or termination options that focus solely on controlling the person do not solve the long-term problem of:

- Moving person away from thoughts and plans of violence;
- Connecting them to resources;
- Providing options once person is no longer connected to campus.



# Relationship Management

Utilize key relationships (with subject) as channel of communication for:

- Information gathering;
- Intervention.



# Target Management Strategies

## Coaching regarding personal safety approaches

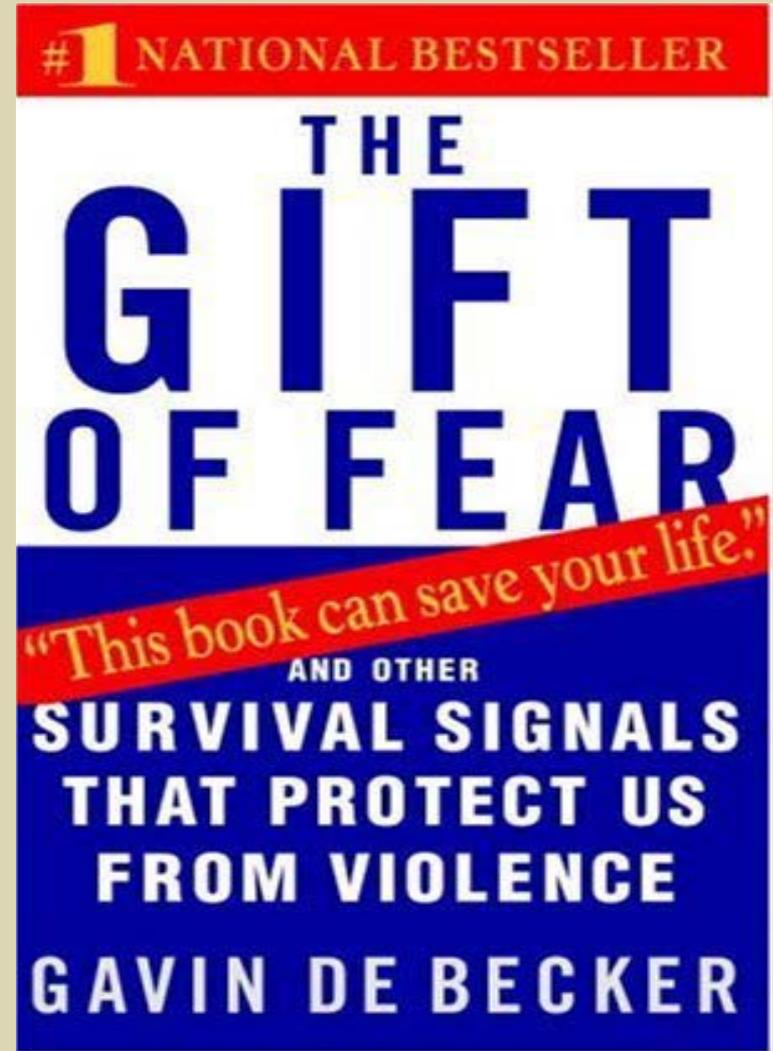
- Clear statements to subject:
  - Relationship/contact is unwanted
  - Stop all contact and/or communication
- Avoid subsequent contact / response
  - Document all further contacts
- Minimize public information
- Maintain awareness of surroundings
  - Vary routine
- Develop contingency plans
  - Escape / shelter, support
- Utilize support systems



# Victims are People Too

## What victims want:

- Care;
  - Certainty;
  - Consistency;
  - Communication;
- Gavin de Becker  
“The Gift of Fear”





# Environmental Management Options

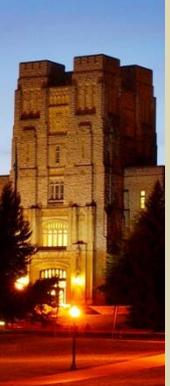
- Address systemic, policy or procedural problems that may serve as triggering conditions
- Bullying prevention/intervention programs
- Enhance campus climate – caring community
- Intervene with associates that support violent behavior
- Enhance conflict management skills



# Managing Potential Trigger Events

## Monitor and manage precipitating events:

- Loss (real, perceived, or anticipated)
  - Job or income;
  - Loss of status;
  - Significant other;
- Perceived rejection;
- Perceived injustice;
- Ostracized by others;
- Health problems;
- Violation of a court order.



# Times of Increased Risk

Increased risk during “dramatic moments”:

- Changes in relationship or residence status;
- Arrests;
- Issuance of protective orders;
- Court hearings;
- Custody hearings;
- Anniversary dates;
- Family-oriented holidays.



# Implement, Monitor, Follow Up

- Once the plan is developed, it needs to be implemented and monitored.
- Team should include implementation and monitoring responsibilities as part of the case management plan.
- Further referrals may be necessary.
- Team should continue to follow up as necessary.
- Can close the case once threat level has been reduced for an acceptable period of time.



# Closing a Case

Threat management cases generally:

Remain open until the person in question is no longer reasonably assessed to pose a threat or in need of case management and/or monitoring.



# Closing a Case

## **While the case is open the team should:**

- Continue to monitor and modify the plan as long as the individual still poses a threat
- Recognize that a person can continue to pose a threat even after he/she ceases to be a member of the campus community
- Continue to monitor the situation through its relationship with local law enforcement agencies and mental health agencies, as well as in direct cooperation with the person, if possible

# What Rules May Apply?

- Federal Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act;
- State public accommodations laws / disability-related employment laws;
- Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act;
- Federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (“HIPAA”);
- State Patient-Health Care Professional Privileges;



# Information Sharing: FERPA

- FERPA is not an impediment to effective threat assessment and case management.
- FERPA governs records only, not observations, communications, etc.
- FERPA does not govern police records.
  - If created & maintained by law enforcement, for law enforcement purpose.
- New guidance from ED encourages information sharing where public safety is a concern.
- FERPA does not permit a private right of action.

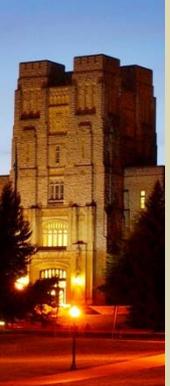


# Information Sharing: HIPAA

- Check with legal counsel as to which laws govern counseling center records.
- Confidentiality is held by client, not MH provider.
- In cases where privacy laws apply, can try these strategies:
  - No legal prohibition against providing information to health/MH professionals.
  - Inquire about *Tarasoff* - type duty.
  - Ask subject for permission to disclose.

# Record Keeping

- Centralized incident tracking database;
- Document reports and actions - include date, time, subjects, targets, behaviors of concern, witnesses;
  - Data;
  - Assessment;
  - Plan;
- Preserve evidence: Keep copies of email, memos, etc.



# Record Keeping

## Incident tracking database;

- Incident Information:
  - Date, location, nature of incident, means of approach;
- Subject information:
  - Name, DOB, sex, description, affiliation, status, etc.
- Target / Victim Information;
  - Name, DOB, sex, description, affiliation, status, etc.
- Witness/Reporting Party Information:
  - Name, DOB, sex, description, affiliation, status, etc.

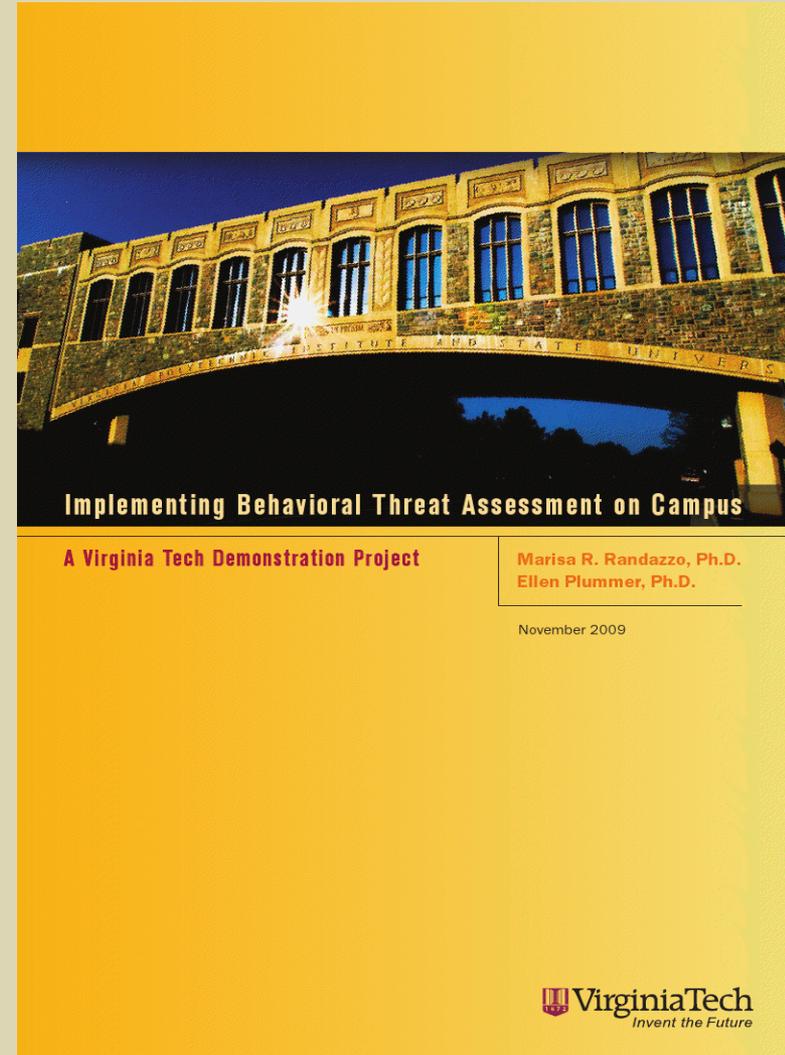
# Lessons Learned:

## Implementing Behavioral Threat Assessment on Campus:

A Virginia Tech  
Demonstration Project

Grant funded by U.S.  
Department of Education

Free download at:  
[www.threatassessment.vt.edu](http://www.threatassessment.vt.edu)



 VirginiaTech  
Invent the Future

 VirginiaTech  
Invent the Future



# Case Management at Virginia Tech

- Human Resources
  - Faculty/staff assistance
- Office of the Dean of Students
  - CARE Team – student assistance
- Cook Counseling Center
  - Hospitalizations, specialized services
- Police Department
  - Threat Assessment Team coordination



# Ongoing Challenges

- Team complacency
  - Smaller case load and/or few serious incidents can impact threat assessment process, decision-making
- Team name selection
  - Consideration of team name and potential impact on reporting
  - Helps to distinguish from other teams (e.g. Care Team, Employee Assistance Team)



# Ongoing Challenges

- Training
  - Basic training for new team members & backups
  - Advanced training
  - Tabletop exercises/case study reviews
  - Professional organization
    - Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP)



# All that Glitters, is Not Gold

## Beware:

- Focus on reactive methods
- Sudden “expertise”
- Untested and unsupported approaches

## Caveat Emptor!

- Emphasize proactive methods
- Vet vendors carefully
- Integrate tested approaches



# Ongoing Challenges

- Continuing silos/Information obstacles
  - Clear mission statements aid referral to correct team
  - Same personnel on multiple teams can enhance info flow
  - Exploit existing relationships, create others
- Case management resource availability
  - Identify list of resources on- and off-campus early on, amend regularly
  - Identify community support, solicit involvement before a crisis



# Counseling Center Involvement

- Insure that the nature of psychological difficulties is understood, i.e., individuals with a mental illness are far more likely to be victims than perpetrators.
- Utilize knowledge about human behavior to inform the TAT
- Make suggestions as to when mental health evaluations would prove useful
- Interpret findings of mental health assessments



# Consultation with Administration

- Advocate for the TA process – including resources for training
- Advocate for management decisions made by the TAT
- Maintain the confidentiality of clients
- Strongly suggest dual referral of individuals of concern (counseling & administrative)

# Contact Information:

**Gene Deisinger, Ph.D.**

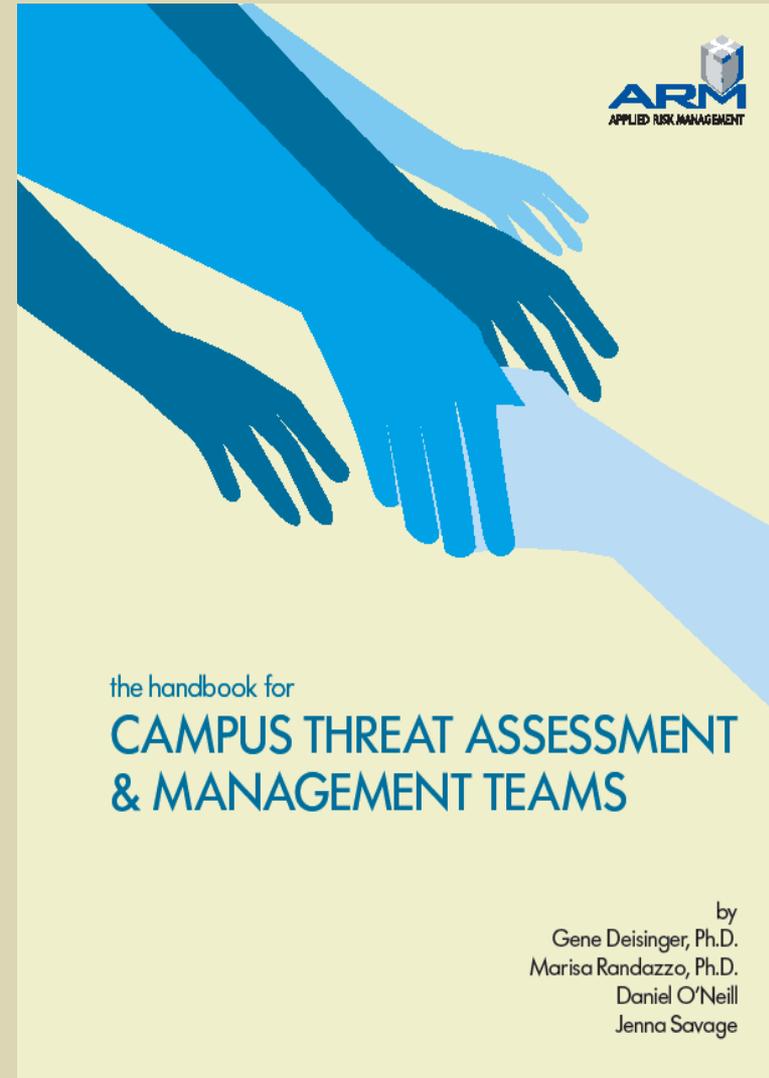
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**Book available at:  
[www.arm-security.com](http://www.arm-security.com)**



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