

DATE: July 26, 2007

SUBJECT: Summary of Roundtable Discussion on Campus Security and Crisis Management

ACTION RECOMMENDED: Approval

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: At the last Commission meeting, Commissioner AC Wharton requested that staff provide a report on institutional efforts to improve campus security and crisis management, in the wake of the Virginia Tech tragedy. Mr. Wharton raised two key questions to frame the discussion:

1. Are campus administrators aware of policies at their disposal for identifying potentially violent behaviors and situations and are campus personnel acting on these policies?
2. Are laws and policies adequate for ensuring the safety of students and campus personnel and overall crisis management?

The THEC staff convened a conference call roundtable of participants from the Tennessee Board of Regents and University of Tennessee system offices and campuses. Participants in the call were legal, fiscal, and student affairs officers along with campus security directors. The attached summary report is an account of their responses to the two key questions.

**Campus Security and Crisis Management
Tennessee Campus and System Office
Roundtable Discussion**

**Tennessee Higher Education Commission
July 2007**

Background

At the last meeting of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Shelby County Mayor and Commission member AC Wharton asked for more information about how Tennessee institutions are positioned to act in situations like the Virginia Tech tragedy. Mayor Wharton's question deals more with crisis management in circumstances like that at Blacksburg rather than in natural disasters or pandemics, though of course campus preparedness plans must address all possibilities. In response to Mayor Wharton's request, we have looked at campus safety policies including, for example, policies pertaining to student counseling referral and campus affiliation with local law enforcement.

A notable "grey area" spun from federal law is when an institution can take action to remove a student from campus versus when it encourages the student to use the counseling and health resources available through the institution. There are uncertainties for educators, mental health professionals, and law enforcement officers about what they can disclose under student privacy laws. In fact, the recent "Report to the President on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy" called on the federal Departments of Education and Health and Human Services to issue guidelines clarifying how colleges, police departments, and social-service agencies can share information legally under current federal laws governing student records. The report said it is the differing interpretations of federal law that must be clarified.

Mayor Wharton framed for our immediate Tennessee discussions the two most important questions that should direct higher education to examine its policies and practices regarding student safety and crisis management:

1. Are campus administrators aware of policies at their disposal for identifying potentially violent behaviors and situations and are campus personnel acting on these policies?
2. Are laws and policies adequate for ensuring the safety of students and campus personnel and overall crisis management?

As Mayor Wharton also wisely observed, the collision we are really discussing is where a person's individual rights to privacy end and where the public's right to protection begins.

As these discussions continue, we must take all care not to stigmatize individuals suffering from mental illness, for to do so is to "profile" and to discourage people from seeking professional help. It is not safe to imagine that individuals who are mentally troubled are committing most violent acts on campus. In fact, the mentally troubled may more often be victims than perpetrators.

Role of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission itself does not have jurisdiction over campus security and crisis management policy, though the Commission should rightly be able to respond to the general public, parents, and students about the measures individual institutions and the Tennessee Board of Regents and the University of Tennessee systems take to ensure safety on campuses. We have looked more at the adequacy of policy and the adequacy of campus employment of it rather than listing campus-specific crisis management and security measures, such as email and text-messaging alerts and other types of broad-scale technology interventions. To informally assess the adequacy of policy and practice, we have undertaken, with the two systems, a conversation with "front line" campus personnel and system office decision makers regarding the existence and sufficiency of security-related laws and policies framed around Mayor Wharton's two questions.

THEC Roundtable on Campus Security. The THEC has coordinated a roundtable discussion through conference call involving system legal, financial, and student service officers and campus security chiefs, student affairs administrators, and

technology coordinators. The purpose of the roundtable was to gain some insight into the vital few principles that should drive campus security assurance.

Summary of Roundtable Discussion: Key Observations

In responding to the two target questions -- are campus policies adequate and are they being properly carried out -- the roundtable participants observed that policy is in fact in place and adequate, but policy is no protection unless supporting procedures are properly executed. Again, the “grey area” of interpretation of federal law makes clarity on the line between privacy and public protection difficult, and it is likely that, even in the best case, subjectivity cannot be totally eliminated from decision making. The roundtable group underscored the point that campuses have been very intentional in assessing procedures, identifying gaps in planning and operations, and instituting change. The institutions of both systems are evaluating the effectiveness of emergency preparedness and security plans and are taking steps to improve these plans. It was observed that, while policy is itself adequate, there may be possible “gaps” in planning. Two planning gaps identified are: (1) instituting a system-wide regular update and reporting of campus preparedness plans for both the Tennessee Board of Regents and the University of Tennessee Trustees and (2) assessing security and preparedness planning for the Tennessee Technology Centers (recognizing that the majority of TTCs call upon local law enforcement to handle complex security matters). The interviewed roundtable believed that, in every instance, institutions are committed to protecting the balance between the rights of the individual and the public good.

The group found consensus on two primary points:

1. The best campus security measure is funding, establishing, and sustaining safety education and communication and the personnel to maintain these activities.
2. Technology is an important tool in making a campus safe, but without investing in the manpower and training to maximize technology, campuses will not be able to sustain improvements.

First Point: The best long-term preventive solution lies in education and communication and the investment in personnel to make it happen.

Institutions must first invest in health and safety resources, especially personnel, and then invest in educational processes to make students and the entire campus community aware of resources available to them. Long-term investment in a personnel infrastructure (from police officers to counselors) is the most powerful approach to protecting the rights of individuals and the security of the whole. It is understood that resource allocation is difficult. However, the discussion group found investing in the following strategies essential:

- Hire, train, and retain security personnel in sufficient number and quality to make a visibility impact. The presence of a well-trained security force, especially one integrated into campus events, such as orientations for new students and parents, will go a long way toward creating a sense of security. Just the presence of strategically deployed officers on campus can deter crime. Too often, however, campuses are unable to compete with other law enforcement agencies in officer pay in hiring and retaining individuals, some of whom have been trained at the expense of the institution.
- Hire, train, and retain student counselors and professional mental health staff in sufficient number to meet the student needs. These professionals will be equipped with the knowledge to provide guidance to individual students and also serve as a campus resource for student referral to off-campus medical attention where warranted.
- Conduct campus information sessions on student right to privacy laws to clarify how the laws do or do not block communication about student behavior. FERPA, the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, is a federal law that protects the privacy of student academic records, such as grade reports. A new Tennessee law permits parents, after the student has agreed that the institution can release this information, to know more about the student's academic records. The law does not extend to release of information about student health, counseling, or financial records. The roundtable discussion revealed that campuses can generally navigate FERPA and HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability ACT) in emergencies through provisions allowing

exceptions to confidentiality, but often the provisions are themselves confusing and campus personnel may be unaware of the provisions. It is likely that institutions will want to consult legal counsel to weigh the risks of breaching confidentiality against the risks of keeping it.

- Train and retrain faculty and staff to understand and carry out established procedures for helping students get assistance, alerting the administration of potential problems, and acting in crisis situations to protect themselves and others. Too often the perception of liability in intervening in a potentially difficult situation may deter faculty and staff from acting. A familiarity and comfort with process, through effective training and retraining, will enable individuals with direct contact with students to act appropriately.
- Do a better job of educating all campus personnel and students about procedures they should follow in referring students to counseling as a preventive measure and addressing emergency response actions in the event of a campus incident. Again, all campus personnel must be educated about procedure, about health and counseling resources available to them, and about alert technologies.
- Assess the protocols that faculty, student services, campus mental health professionals, and the administration employ to evaluate students in distress. Particularly important is assessing the feedback loops for follow-up with students returning to school after hospitalization and medical leave for psychiatric care. The purpose of the review is to lessen the likelihood that contact with such students will be lost.
- Make campus safety a centerpiece of student orientations to inform parents of processes. Parents need information about the reasons for privacy of student information and the limits of the responsibility of the campus in making decisions regarding student health care. Security officers, counselors, and administrators should be engaged in such events to ensure that parents and students receive appropriate information about the jurisdictions of campus police and that of local law enforcements.

- Proactively use campus crime statistics to communicate with the broader community about prevention and process. It is important for campus security to form partnerships with local law enforcement agencies, realizing that not all campus crime is student-related, and not all student law violations occur on campus.
- Instill in students the fact that they have a personal responsibility for their own safety. Students must be taught to make good choices about their own well-being, and campuses must provide safety and awareness education, not just to new students but routinely for all.
- Commit personnel and other resources to crime prevention through environmental design in building construction and space control. Institutions are giving greater attention to secure buildings, lighted paths, police patrols and escorts, surveillance cameras, and alarm systems as part of the overall safety environment planning.
- Develop, update, and publish effective preparedness plans that have engaged the entire campus community in their development.

As a caveat to these specific recommendations, the roundtable group pointed out that increases in violence on campus are not unlike increases in violence in society that we see in the malls, in neighborhoods and public places, or in any other location. However carefully security plans are constructed and resources dedicated to a safe campus, violence can still occur anywhere. Therefore, it is critically important to look at the root causes of behaviors and when they begin, not just when they result in violent acts.

The conversation also revealed that the concept of *in loco parentis*, where the institution is expected to act in the authority of the parent, probably belongs to an earlier time. The group observed that the primary principle upon which campuses must now build a safe campus is “due process,” specifically in communicating and observing processes within the law for getting students help who need help and for taking action to get individuals who should be removed from campus out of the

system. Due process can also be an inhibitor, as administrators navigate through decisions of immediacy against more deliberate action.

Second Point: Technology is an effective tool, but it is only a tool and must not be seen as a stand-alone solution.

A thoughtful and surprising observation of the roundtable group was that investing in technology may satisfy a natural inclination of campuses to take immediate action to allay fears of students and parents in the wake of a tragedy such as that at Virginia Tech. Money is going into technology because technology is immediate, expected to produce faster results, conveys to the public that campuses are up-to-date, and is perhaps easier to justify than long-term expenditures, such as increasing the number of counselors or strengthening the security force. Technology is sometimes expanded without sufficient manpower and training to integrate the technology into the overall security plan, an integration which is needed to achieve maximum impact. Sometimes the technology is implemented with the idea that training and education will catch up later, but it may be difficult to ensure that the follow-up will receive the right resources.

The roundtable observed that adding impressive technological tools may have unintended consequences, such as giving the campus a false sense of security and lulling it into complacency. Also, the use of the technology requires careful judgment about the threshold at which alarms, text messaging, and other alert systems will be employed. While both technology and communication with solid security education are both needed, much will be lost without the investment in personnel and training needed to make the entire preparedness plan operational. In a sense, education and training help to prevent personal and campus crises before they occur while some technologies are valuable as alerts after a disruptive event.

Campuses certainly vary on the comprehensiveness and methods of alerting students and personnel about emergencies, such as tornadoes or bomb possibilities, as well as those related to violent behaviors. It is clear that the size of the campus, the size of its enrollment, its technological capacity and other factors influence its decisions. Some of the technological warning and notification methods in place or being enhanced are instant text messaging, police and security force communication through satellite

phones, campus emergency call boxes used as broadcast devices, and siren systems. Institutions are making facilities security improvements, such as installing card-swipe entry systems and magnetic locking systems. Institutions are also adding high security corridors, lighting in walkways and parking areas, staffing in buildings after hours, and video surveillance.

In summary, the roundtable discussion clearly reinforced the perception that University of Tennessee and Tennessee Board of Regents institutions are very seriously and quickly taking measures to improve safety and security. The discussion emphasized the importance of committing to education/communication and the personnel needed as well as dedicating resources to technology that can be maintained and effectively used. The group determined that ambiguities of federal law actually accentuate the importance of systematic training and security maintenance. Finally, the group underscored the fundamental point that continuing vigilance is essential in keeping campuses safe, and continued regard for diversity and difference and respect for the individual is essential in keeping campuses the special places that they are.