



COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

# **Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team**

**Policies and Procedures**

**Last Revised: June 24, 2009**



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## TAC is now BART

The Threat Assessment Committee has a new name, Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team (BART).

At the conclusion of the first full year of implementation, TAC completed an internal audit and review of all policies and procedures. In addition, Dean Reese and Assistant Dean Larkin have attended several conferences throughout the year directed at higher education behavioral intervention teams. Two things have resonated loudly from their training, (1) Columbus State University is moving in the right direct direction with its efforts to provide a safe environment and (2) threat assessment is one element of behavioral assessment.

It was also noted during the TAC audit and review that several members of the committee had been contacted during the year with questions about “threatening behavior”. It appears that some members of the campus community have struggled with what they should or should not report as they look to make a determination of what a threat might be. These struggles may have caused some to withhold information that when melded with other like-minded reports could have a cumulative outcome for threatening behavior. Making such determinations is the purpose of the committee.

Based upon what the committee feels is sound reasoning, TAC has determined that threat assessment is but one function of this committee. Thus, the name *Threat Assessment Committee* has limited its effectiveness. A more accurate representation of the committee’s purpose is to assess individuals’ behavior and make a determination if a threat to self or others may be present. Additionally, it was determined that the committee’s most reasonable action during the past year has been to make recommendations to the appropriate university personnel. For this reason the word *recommendation* has been added to the committee’s name. Finally, the word *committee* has been replaced with *team*. The term committee denotes a certain meeting structure and authoritative hierarchy with motions, votes, and meeting minutes. During the past year this group of campus-wide representatives has operated as a team. Utilizing their expertise, each member has shared an equal voice and led the group at one time or another.

These changes have been implemented to better describe the team’s purpose and assist individuals that may struggle with making a determination for filing a report. BART will receive reports of concerning behavior from faculty, staff, and students. These reports may involve residence life, classroom, student activity, or personal behavior.

## Acknowledgements

The Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team would like to acknowledge the contributions and encouragements of individuals and organizations during the development of this document.

Dr. Frank Brown, Past-President Columbus State University; Dr. Gina Sheeks, Vice President for Student Affairs Columbus State University; John Lester, Director for Public Relations Columbus State University; Dr. Terry Norris, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs Columbus State University; Rick Tew, Director for Administrative Computing Columbus State University; Bob Diveley, Manager for Administrative Support Systems Columbus State University; Captain Mark Lott, Columbus State University Police Department; Sgt. Tess Taylor, Columbus State University Police Department; Chief Jimmy Williams, University of Georgia Police Department; Michael D. Bicking, Director of Public Safety & Chief of Police West Chester University, and Burns Newsome, Vice Chancellor, Office of Legal Affairs, Board of Regents.

### Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team Membership

Dr. Gina Sheeks, Ex-officio member.....Vice President for Student Affairs  
Mr. Aaron Reese, Team Chair.....Dean of Students  
Dr. Dorinda Dowis.....Chair, Criminal Justice Department  
Dr. Dan Rose.....Director, Counseling Center  
Dr. Cheryl Yatsko .....Coordinator, Counseling Center  
Dr. Mark Schmidt..... Faculty Senate Representative  
Mr. Rus Drew.....Chief, University Police Department  
Ms. Dana Larkin.....Assistant Dean of Students  
Ms. Laurie Jones.....Director, Human Resources  
Ms. Rebecca Tew.....Director, Student Health Center  
Mr. Todd Myrick.....Director of Residence Life  
Ms. Robin Peacock.....Student Housing Manager, RiverPark campus  
Ms. Susan Lovell .....Director for Enrollment Services  
Ms. Joy Norman ..... Disability Services, Coordinator

## **Introduction**

Colleges and universities around the country are becoming more diligent and proactive in providing a safe environment for students, faculty and staff, and visitors to their campuses. The University of Georgia recently created the Behavioral Assessment and Response Council (BARC) which will evaluate and respond to reported student and employee behavior. BARC will determine if the individual is a threat to themselves or others and will take appropriate action, as needed (Shearer, 2008). 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. Virginia lawmakers have gone as far as to require notification of parents “if a student receives mental-health treatment from a counselor or some other staff member on a campus” (Hermes, 2008). Changes in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) will give administrators “appropriate flexibility and deference” with regard to the disclosure of educational records and information (Federal Register, 2008).

Columbus State University understands the climate that exists on college campuses in the post Virginia Tech shooting era. Additionally, each public institution in Georgia has been directed by the Chancellor’s office to develop a plan and select a committee to address potential threats of this nature. In response, Columbus State University has established the Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team (BART) to serve as an additional measure for campus safety. That having been stated, it must be understood that even with the best intentions, situations may arise that are unforeseen by any member of the university community. BART will operate in some instances with very limited information while exercising due diligence to protect the university, community and the individual.

## **Mission Statement**

The Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team is dedicated to a proactive, coordinated and planned approach to the identification, prevention, assessment, management, and reduction of interpersonal and behavioral threats to the safety and wellbeing of Columbus State University students, faculty, staff and visitors.

## **Goals**

- Provide a safe physical environment for members of the university community,
- Provide a safe emotional environment for the university community, and
- Promote peace of mind for friends and family of the university community.

## **Overview**

Columbus State University has established the Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team to assist in addressing situations where students, faculty, or staff are displaying behaviors that are disruptive, threatening, or concerning in nature that potentially impede their own or others' ability to function successfully or safely. These policies and procedures are designed to help identify persons whose behaviors potentially endanger their own or others' health and safety or is disruptive to the educational or administrative processes of the university.

It is the responsibility of faculty, staff, and students to immediately report any situation that could possibly result in harm to anyone at the university. Any member of the campus community may become aware of a troubling person or situation that is causing serious anxiety, stress, or fear. However, behavioral assessment should not be confused with crises management. A crisis may be defined where a person may pose an active or immediate risk of violence to self or others. In these cases the university police should be contacted at 706-568-2022.

The Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team consists of university personnel with expertise in human resources/employee assistance, law enforcement/threat assessment/tactical applications, university operations, medical and mental health knowledge, and student affairs. A collaborative process to assess threats and concerns will be used, and depending on the situation, personnel with areas of specialization or responsibility may be called upon to assist the Team. The Team may also consult other individuals as needed, such as a faculty member who has a concern about a student, a professional counselor to share expertise, and/or a manager who has information concerning an employee. The Vice President for Student Affairs will keep senior university officials advised of situations and specifically will communicate with the Director for Public Relations.

University community members will be able to report concerning or threatening behavior to the Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team by speaking directly to a Team

member or submitting an incident report. The electronic incident report can be accessed through CougarNet and will display instructions, a series of drop-down selections, and a box for a descriptive narrative. Once submitted the report will be forwarded to the BART chair and selected members of the Team for review. The submitted report will automatically become part of the electronic database used for active assessment of persons of concern and to generate report data.

The Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team will meet regularly and on an emergency basis to review reports brought forward by faculty, staff, and students concerning disruptive, inappropriate, and/or threatening behavior. For the safety of the campus community any threat, explicit or implied, will be considered a statement of intent.

## **Outputs**

This Team has been established to:

1. Develop and implement educational and training programs for all members of the university community with regard to behavioral assessment;
2. Coordinate and assess information from faculty, staff, students, and local authorities to provide a safe campus, both physically and emotionally;
3. Provide an annual report to the Vice President for Student Affairs.

## **Procedure**

Once a report is received, a preliminary investigation will be conducted by the BART Chair, dean of students, and the BART member having administrative responsibility for the person of concern. These administrators will conduct the preliminary investigation for the submitted report and, if appropriate, convene the Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team. Individual members of the Team may also be consulted during this initial evaluation.

### **Preliminary Investigation may include:**

1. Review of BART database;
2. Review of student's disciplinary record with the dean of students or review employee's records under the custody of the chief human resources officer;
3. Interviews to determine the existence of corroborating evidence;

4. Other relevant information as deemed appropriate to ensure the safety of the university community.

**Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team meeting will include:**

1. Briefing on the preliminary investigation by the BART Chair or designee;
2. Review of documentation, interviews, and other relevant information;
3. General discussion, and
4. Recommendations by the Team.

## **Actions and Recommendations**

The Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team will receive reports of concerning behavior, classroom misbehavior, circumstances of violence, threatening behavior, unwanted pursuit, or harassing behavior. In an effort to protect the university community BART will, by way of the appropriate university office or official, investigate and respond to reported behavior indicating a student, faculty, staff, or other university community member may pose a risk to self or others. BART may recommend some or all of the following;

1. Make recommendations to appropriate university personnel that may include, but are not limited to the actions or sanctions consistent with the Student Handbook, Faculty Handbook, and Staff Handbook. In addition, BART may refer students, faculty, or staff members to professional counseling, make recommendation(s) for the filing of criminal charges, or other actions deemed appropriate;
2. Assign appropriate university personnel to the subject of the incident for follow-up and observation;
3. Recommend that the proper authority notify, within FERPA guidelines, the parents, guardians and/or next-of-kin, and;
4. Make recommendation(s) to appropriate university personnel regarding conditions of consideration for an individual to return as an active member of the campus community. This may include requiring internal or external psychological evaluations of the individual in question.

**NOTE:** Action on any recommendation(s) is the responsibility of the appropriate university personnel. It is expected that this individual report back to BART as to the disposition of the incident. If the Team's recommendation(s) is not followed an explanation should be provided.

**NOTE:** The BART chair will be responsible for making notations to the files concerning recommendations, actions taken, and disposition of each report filed.

**NOTE:** Nothing in this policy is intended to abridge any employee’s rights under established contract, state or federal law.

## **Education and Training**

Colleges and universities today find themselves in a balancing act between students’ rights, parents demands and the “Duty of Care” (Brett, 2006) that the law requires. The pendulum has swung from *in loco parentis*<sup>1</sup> to complete student freedom; and now back to a reasonable *Duty of Care*, the same degree of care that is expected in all areas of society. Courts have held this *Duty of Care* responsibility to all higher education institutions. As seen in *Mullins v. Pine Manor*, 499 N.E.2d 331 (Mass. 1983) “[t]he college had a duty to provide security for its students” and, *Shin v. M.I.T.*, 19.L.Rptr. 570, 2005 WL 1869101 (Mass. Super. Jun 27, 2005), “They [parents] did not know that a school psychiatrist had considered hospitalizing her”, this *Duty of Care* now extends into all areas of the university.

Columbus State understands that by creating a Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team there is an accompanying responsibility or *Duty of Care*, to inform and educate the university community. For this program to be effective, the university community must be aware of the Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team, the need and purpose for intervention, the procedure for filing a report, and how to contact members of the Team with concerns or comments.

BART will provide campus-wide informational meetings that will be incorporated into faculty and staff annual trainings, new employee and student orientation sessions, and regularly scheduled safety programs presented by the university police department. In addition, BART will provide an overview of the program, listing of Team members, and reporting guidance and instructions by way of the CSU Announcement section of CougarNet and through the student newspaper, The Sabre.

### **Established Levels of Education / Training**

- Informational Opportunities: Five minute presentations, brochure distribution, emails to all employees and students and, web page development addressing the following:
  - What is BART,
  - What characteristics to look for in persons of concern and,

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<sup>1</sup> Latin: “in the place of a parent”. (Nuss, 1996).

- How to submit a report to BART.
- Educational Opportunities: Town Hall / Departmental Meetings - Fifteen minute Power Point presentation followed by question and answer session.
- Training Opportunities: In-depth training to assist members of the campus community in developing a skill set for assessing threatening and concerning behavior of individuals.

## **Annual Review and Report**

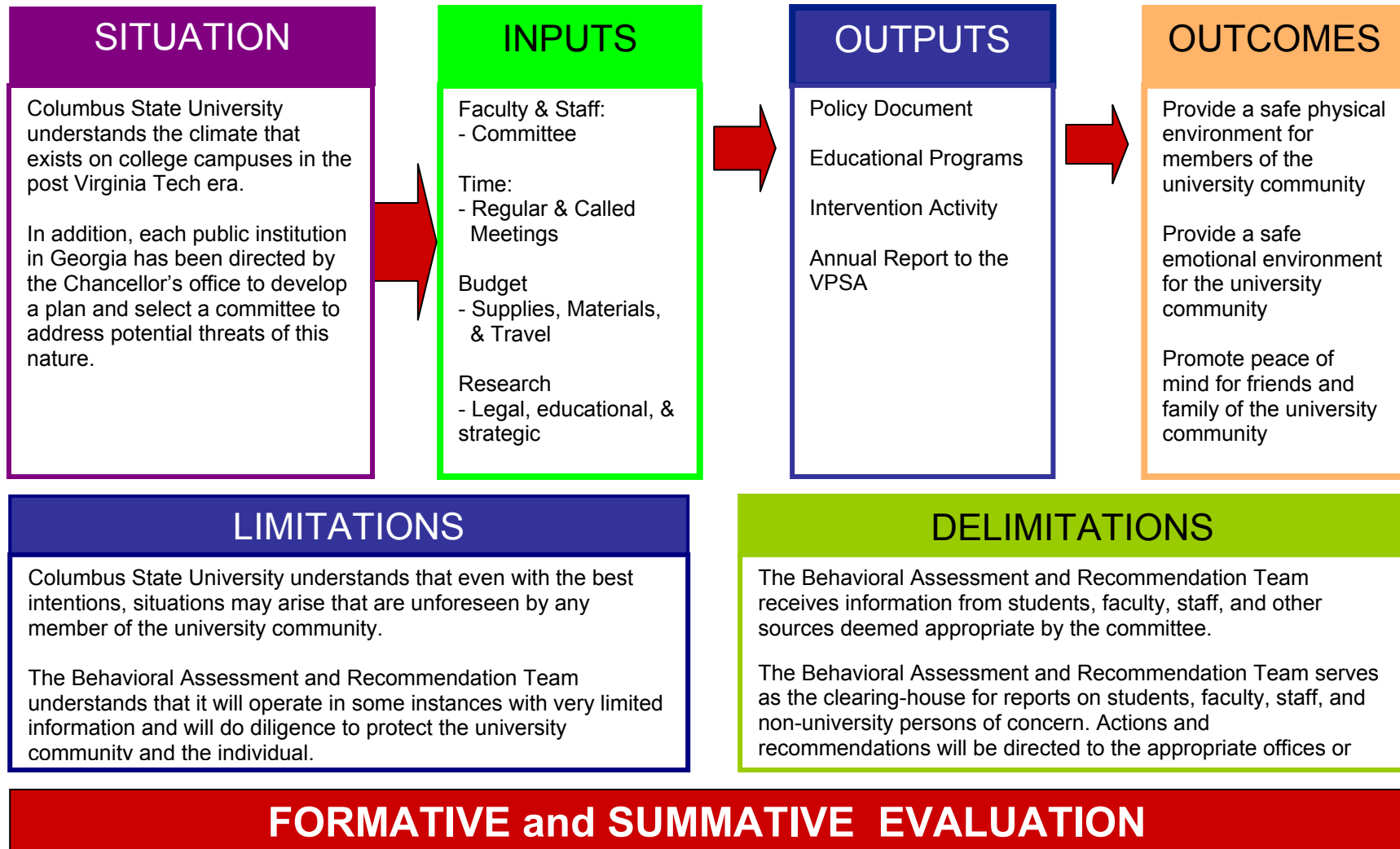
The Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team will provide the Vice President for Student Affairs with an annual review and report during the regular cycle of institutional annual assessment. It is to be determined what, if any, statistical data will be included. However, the report will consist of a campus-wide qualitative survey of BART to include comments related to program awareness, ease of electronic submission, and on-going education and training opportunities. The Team members will also participant in a self-study and review. In addition, the BART database will be reviewed with the possibility of some reports being purged.

## **Conclusion**

While supervisors, managers, department chairpersons, deans, and student affairs/residence life staff are appropriate counsel for general student/employee concerns, they are not experts in responding to threatening or alarming situations. Therefore, it is everyone's responsibility to report situations that could possibly result in harm to the campus community to the Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team. If an incident is currently a threat, the observer should report directly to the University Police Department at 706-568-2022.

# Program Development

## Logic Model: Behavioral Assessment and Recommendation Team



## **Appendix A – Red Flags, Warning Signs and Indicators**

### **RED FLAGS, WARNING SIGNS AND INDICATORS**

**By Roger Depue, Ph.D.**

Virginia.gov (2008). Report of the Virginia Tech Review Panel, Appendix M. Retrieved on May 15, 2008 from <http://www.governor.virginia.gov/TempContent/techpanelreport.cfm>.

Experts who evaluate possible indicators that an individual is at risk of harming himself or others know to seek out many sources for clues, certain red flags that merit attention. A single warning sign by itself usually does not warrant overt action by a threat assessment specialist. It should, however, attract the attention of an assessor who has been sensitized to look for other possible warning signs. If additional warning signs are present then more fact-finding is warranted to determine if there is a likelihood of danger.

Some warning signs carry more weight than others. For instance, a fascination with, and possession of, firearms are more significant than being a loner, because possession of firearms gives one the capacity to carry out an attack. But if a person simply possesses firearms and has no other warning signs, it is unlikely that he represents a significant risk of danger.

When a cluster of indicators is present then the risk becomes more serious. Thus, a person who possesses firearms, is a loner, shows an interest in past shooting situations, writes stories about homicide and suicide, exhibits aberrant behavior, has talked about retribution against others, and has a history of mental illness and refuses counseling would obviously be considered a significant risk of becoming dangerous to himself or others. A school threat assessment team upon learning about such a list of warning signs would be in a position to take immediate action including:

- Talking to the student and developing a treatment plan with conditions for remaining in school
- Calling the parents or other guardians
- Requesting permission to receive medical and educational records
- Checking with law enforcement to ascertain whether there have been any interactions with police
- Talking with roommates and faculty
- Suspending the student until the student has been treated and doctors indicate the student is not a safety risk

Following are some warning signs (indicators and red flags) associated with school shootings in the United States. Schools, places of employment, and other entities that are creating a threat assessment capability may want to be aware of these red flags:

**Violent fantasy content –**

- Writings (Stories, essays, compositions),
- Drawings (Artwork depicting violence),
- Reading and viewing materials (Preference for books, magazines, television, video tapes and discs, movies, music, websites, and chat rooms with violent themes and degrading subject matter), and role playing acts of violence and degradation.

**Anger problems –**

- Difficulty controlling anger, loss of temper, impulsivity,
- Making threats.

**Fascination with weapons and accoutrements –**

- Especially those designed and most often used to kill people (such as machine guns, semiautomatic pistols, snub nose revolvers, stilettos, bayonets, daggers, brass knuckles, special ammunition and explosives).

**Boasting and practicing of fighting and combat proficiency –**

- Military and sharpshooter training, martial arts, use of garrotes, and knife fighting.

**Loner –**

- Isolated and socially withdrawn, misfit, prefers own company to the company of others.

**Suicidal ideation –**

- Depressed and expresses hopelessness and despair,
- Reveals suicidal preparatory behavior.

[See note below by Dr. Cheryl Yatsko]

**Homicidal ideation –**

- Expresses contempt for other(s),
- Makes comments and/or gestures indicating violent aggression.

**Stalking –**

- Follows, harasses, surveils, attempts to contact regardless of the victim's expressed annoyance and demands to cease and desist.

**Non-compliance and disciplinary problems –**

- Refusal to abide by written and/or verbal rules.

**Imitation of other murderers –**

- Appearance, dress, grooming, possessions like those of violent shooters in past episodes (e.g. long black trench coats).

**Interest in previous shooting situations –**

- Drawn toward media, books, entertainment, conversations dealing with past murders.

**Victim/martyr self-concept –**

- Fantasy that some day he will represent the oppressed and wreak vengeance on the oppressors.

**Strangeness and aberrant behavior –**

- Actions and words that cause people around him to become fearful and suspicious.

**Paranoia –**

- Belief that he is being singled out for unfair treatment and/or abuse; feeling persecuted.

**Violence and cruelty –**

- A history of using violence to solve problems (fighting, hitting, etc.), abusing animals or weaker individuals.

**Inappropriate affect –**

- Enjoying cruel behavior and/or being able to view cruelty without being disturbed.

**Acting out –**

- Expressing disproportionate anger or humor in situations not warranting it, attacking surrogate targets.

**Police contact –**

- A history of contact with police for anger, stalking, disorderly conduct;
- Past temporary restraining orders (or similar court orders),
- A jail/prison record for aggressive crimes

**Mental health history related to dangerousness –**

- A history of referral or commitments to mental health facilities for aggressive/destructive behavior.

**Expressionless face/anhedonia –**

- An inability to express and/or experience joy and pleasure.

**Unusual interest in police, military, terrorist activities and materials**

- Vehicles resembling police cars, military vehicles, surveillance equipment, handcuffs, weapons, clothing (camouflage, ski masks, etc.).

**Use of alcohol/drugs –**

- Alcohol/drugs are used to reduce inhibitions so that aggressive behaviors are more easily expressed.

**Note:** Additional information on suicidal ideation provided by Dr. Cheryl Yatsko, Columbus State University, June 4, 2008.

### **Suicidal Ideation**

- Depressed and expresses helplessness, hopelessness, and worthlessness.
- Talking about death.
- Talking about suicide, or making statements like “everybody would be better off without me.”
- Acquiring the means, e.g., buying a gun.
- Giving away possessions.
- Saying goodbye.

## References

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