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STUDENT AFFAIRS *Connections*

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS
SPECIAL EDITION

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Violence on University and College Campuses

To place the incident at Virginia Tech in context, according to the data from the US Department of Education census bureau and the FBI, the murder rate on college campuses was 0.28 per 100,000 people compared with 5.5 per 100,000 nationally (US News and World Report, April 30, page 49). Unfortunately, because of the scope of the Virginia Tech shootings, where 32 people were killed, this event has overshadowed the actual data. In fact, the total number of students murdered in American college campuses fluctuated between 9 and 24 per year between 1997 and 2004 (Virginia Youth Violence Project, School of Education, University of Virginia, 2007).



“... college students in the traditional age range of 18-24 experience violence at lower rates than average for non-students...”

It appears that in general, college students in the traditional age range of 18 – 24 experience violence at lower rates than average for non-students at the same age group and, except for rape and sexual assault, the average rates were lower for students than for non-students in each type of violent crime measured. Rape and sexual assault did not differ statistically between these two groups. It is also important to note that 93 percent of the crimes occurred off campus of which 72 percent occurred at night, (Violent Victimization of College Students, 1995 and 2002). It seems clear to us that while we should always be diligent in worrying about disturbed or disruptive students who may make us feel uncomfortable in class or bring attention to themselves because of their behavior, it is highly unlikely that violence occurs on

the college campus and in the class room.

Appropriate awareness and watching for important signals of change in behavior can become very helpful to bring assistance to your classroom through our Counseling Center and Division of Student Affairs. The Division of Student Affairs is prepared to assist you and is prepared along with the University Police Department, to respond to your request for assistance in working with an individual via consultation with you or through direct intervention with the student.

This information is taken from an article originally published in May 1st, 2007 Synfax Weekly Report which is an electronic publication of College Administrative Publications. Gary Pavela, a noted scholar in law and higher education teaches in the honors program at the University of Maryland and writes law and policy newsletters to over a thousand Colleges and Universities in the United States and Canada. He has served previously as a law clerk to Judge Alfred P. Murrah of the United States Court of Appeals for the 10th circuit and a faculty member of the Federal Judicial Center in Washington DC, the training arm of the United States Courts. He served for many years as the Director of Judicial Affairs at the University of Maryland in College Park.

“... 93 percent of the crimes occurred off campus ...”

A Message From:

Dr. Mike Rollo, Vice President

of Student Affairs, regarding campus tragedies -

Much has been written and observed about the tragedy that took place at Virginia Tech University last spring in which 32 students, faculty and staff were killed as a result of the actions of a very disturbed student. This extremely rare occurrence has raised the anxiety of college campuses across the United States as faculty, and staff in Student Affairs, struggle to make sense of how a tragedy like this can occur and how it might be avoided in the future. This edition of *Student Affairs Connections* is dedicated to sharing information about this issue and how it is being addressed on this campus, as well as providing general facts about the historical nature of tragedies and crises such as this, to place the incident in context with what typically occurs on college campuses. The Division of Student Affairs will continue to host training sessions and in-service training opportunities. Using web technology and personal contact to assist faculty and staff we hope to better understand the role of a University in dealing with disruptive and disturbed students, to minimize problems that could occur, and unfortunately sometimes do occur, on college campuses today.

For comments or suggestions regarding this issue, please contact:

The Office of the Vice President
for Student Affairs at (239) 590-7910

Connections is available online at
studentservices.fgcu.edu

Connections may be obtained in an alternative format by contacting the Office of Institutional Equity & Compliance at 239-590-7405 or 800-590-3428, or the Office of Adaptive Services at 239-590-7956.

Level of Risk for Faculty and Staff

The possibility of faculty and staff becoming at risk of harm from the actions of a student is a common concern since the Virginia Tech shooting. In reality, the Bureau of Justice statistics from 2001 show that the employees of Universities and Colleges have the lowest victimization rate of any professional field. The statistics show that 1.6 per 1,000 university and college employees are victims of violent crime as compared to 16.2 per 1,000 for physicians, 20 per 1,000 for retail workers, 54.2 for Junior High teachers, 68.2 for mental health professionals, and 260 for police officers

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per 1,000. While violence does occur, it is very unlikely that it will occur. Bringing disruptive incidents to the attention of the BCAT and the Student Affairs Division in a timely manner can minimize this even further.

One of the common questions faculty ask is: How can we identify potentially violent situations? It is unfortunate that the experts who have reviewed all available information and who work with and study this issue have concluded that there is no useful profile of what has been called the “School Shooter.” Experts can give some general guidelines that provide a range of characteristics, but they do not definitively identify who these individuals might be. The students who have committed violence on college campuses have come from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and range in age from 11 to 21. Their academic performances range from excellent to failing; they have varied histories of behavioral problems from zero to multiple incidents, and few of them have showed any change in their academic performance or levels of relationships across campus prior to their attack. On a local level, at Florida Gulf Coast University we use the BCAT to assess the potential level of threat to address such questions as:

- What kinds of communications are occurring between these students and the faculty?
- What actions have been taken by an individual?
- Where and when did these actions occur?
- Did anyone observe the behavior and was there any indication from the student why they did what they did?

An assessment of the level of threat may be much more useful than simply trying to identify the person in the crowd who may be problematic. Again, the diligence of addressing disruptive behavior early and the relationships faculty develop with students will maintain better opportunities for us to hone our assessments to become more accurate. Using the BCAT as a consulting group can assist you in further refining collective information for those of us who work with potentially disruptive or disturbed students on our campus.

Disruptive Act or Disturbed Student?

When looking at student disruption in the classroom or on campus, it is preferred that we address the behavior as disruptive in nature with an understanding that there is a possibility that the student may also be disturbed. Many disruptive acts by students are simply that, and can be addressed informally and resolved quickly by the faculty member. In the instance that a student has more significant personal problems that result in difficulty controlling his/her behavior, then the need for professional intervention is more likely and can be accessed through the Dean of Students Office and the Counseling Center at Florida Gulf Coast University. If at any time faculty or students feel threatened during an incident, the University Police Department stands ready to respond immediately and will activate all of our crisis response mechanisms to assist a faculty member in a difficult situation. We believe that consistently addressing disruptive behavior will more likely identify the truly disturbed student earlier and will help to distinguish between them and those who are clearly just having developmental issues and/or having trouble understanding appropriate University and community standards of behavior in the classroom or on the University campus. It is common to hear anecdotal tales of students being rude and disruptive in a classroom, but most likely they are not a danger to anyone and confronting them about their behavior after class may be, in most cases, the most appropriate response. For a listing of resources and contact numbers, use the *Eagle Emergency Guide* available from the Division of Student Affairs.



The Behavioral Consultation and Assessment Team (BCAT) at FGCU

The Behavioral Consultation and Assessment Team (BCAT) has been formed by the Division of Student Affairs to bring together faculty, staff and the University Police Department to meet on a regular basis to discuss students who may be in need of special assistance because of their reported behavior. Comparing reports from Housing, the Counseling Center, The Dean of Students Office, the University Police Department and Faculty can be very beneficial in determining whether students are having difficult developmental problems that can be addressed individually by our respective services or have risen to the level in which other University resources must be brought to bear. The BCAT will meet weekly and is available to respond to any requests for assistance from faculty or staff. To contact a member of the BCAT, call the Dean of Students Office (590-7900), the Counseling Center (590-7950), or the Residence Hall program 590-1700). The BCAT meets regularly and reviews police reports and any report made to the University Police Department that is referred to the Dean of Students Office.

The Division of Student Affairs - Completing the University Experience

ADAPTIVE SERVICES
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CAREER DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
COUNSELING & PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES
DEAN OF STUDENTS OFFICE
EAGLE PARENT OFFICE

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FIRST YEAR ADVISING
GREEK LIFE
HOUSING & RESIDENCE LIFE
JUDICIAL AFFAIRS
MULTICULTURAL STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

OFFICE OF CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT
PREVENTION & WELLNESS
STUDENT GOVERNMENT
STUDENT SUPPORT & OUTREACH
STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES
TESTING SERVICES