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To Whom it May Concern
Letter of Reference for Brian Van Brunt, EdD

We are pleased to enthusiastically recommend Dr Van Brunt as a speaker and facilitator for schools and others who are seeking to enhance their ability to assess the kinds of threats becoming, alas, far too common these days.

The following is an article I wrote for the URMIA Insights newsletter, which will give you a sense of the content and capacity that Dr Van Brunt could offer you.

Catching the Cues

He's shouting and cursing. He's flying off the handle! Is he gonna shoot us all?

Not very likely, says Dr Brian Van Brunt, a nationally recognized expert in threat assessment.

Van Brunt spent a full day at Westmont College training people how to recognize the cues that people give before they start pulling triggers—and how to know which people are the most likely to begin spraying bullets.

According to Van Brunt, aggressors are either primal or cognitive—either flamboyant or cunning—but rarely both.

The primal ones, in your face and causing heads to turn as their anger boils over, usually spend their energy quickly, and with *relatively* less harm.

The quiet ones, though, are the ones to watch for. Their simmering, festering anger is often nearly imperceptible unless you've learned to pay attention to their subtle indicators.

Both types of aggressors proceed thru stages from the trigger that sets them off, to an escalation of fury, and ultimately to a crisis mode.

People can be trained to recognize the escalation, assess its stage, and respond accordingly. Cycle breathing is one technique. The

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“Universal Approach” is another. Van Brunt showed Westmont employees and students how to apply these tools in the classroom, among co-workers, in living areas, and elsewhere on and off campus.

The day started with a keynote session for managers and supervisors, and included separate times with the entire faculty, with the counseling center staff, the Care Team, and the Situation Readiness & Response Team, and with student leaders (invitees included student government, residence assistants and athletic team captains). The seventh session that evening included ample time for interaction and mutual story-telling with the Public Safety officers.

The college got a lot of value out of having engaged Dr Van Brunt for this intense string of meetings. In a survey of faculty who attended, a remarkable 88% agreed that “the information provided was valuable and useful.” And an average of 92% said Van Brunt’s Speaker Style and Speaker Knowledge were above average or excellent.

Brian Van Brunt, EdD, is director of the Counseling & Testing Center at Western Kentucky University, and is often sought for comment in national media venues. The day-long series with him was arranged through the National Center for Higher Education Risk Management (nchem.org), and all of the coordination and logistics factors went smoothly.

Westmont doesn’t regard itself as a hotbed of hotheads, or as a place where a lot of fury foment. Still, we’re glad to have a better sense of how to catch the cues that someone might be headed in a very dangerous direction.

Feel free to contact me if you have questions or to further elaborate.



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* Submitted for the February 2011 issue of the electronic newsletter published by the University Risk Management & Insurance Association (www.urmia.org).