

From Blah to Brilliant: Taking Your BIT to the Next Level

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Abstract

This paper provides suggestions for Behavioral Intervention Team leaders to consider in further enhancing their team approach to supporting students and preventing or limiting student-related crises. The authors suggest the value of both formal and informal self-evaluation methods. These include an examination of the goals of the BIT on your campus and how well those goals are reflected by your team's name and materials. The authors also offer ideas for widely distributing information about BIT services and improving communication across campus departments and with stakeholders. In addition, effective practices for data management; holding productive, efficient case conferences and team meetings; and improving team follow through/response are suggested. This paper concludes with cautions about how enhancing your team may also increase both your workload and need for resources. To address this latter point, the final section offers ideas about supporting your BIT.

Introduction

In the U.S., following the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, many college and university campuses committed time and resources to the establishment and improvement of Behavioral Intervention Teams (BITs). These teams generally meet on a regular (e.g., weekly) basis to prevent, contain, and effectively respond to crisis situations. The National Behavioral Intervention Team Association (NaBITA), which was launched in 2009, has provided support to institutions of higher education to improve crisis prevention and management through an integrated team approach. Prior to the more widespread development of BITs, some campuses convened other types of groups, such as CARE teams or Students of Concern committees to identify, discuss, and support students who were in or heading toward substantive distress. BITs are the second iteration of this type of team approach, most often adding more formalized procedures and systems of documentation (Sokolow & Lewis, 2009). As more information about BITs becomes available and national organizations such as NaBITA and the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP) reach more audiences, BIT compositions, best practices, policies and procedures, team recognition, and integration with other aspects of the college experience are improving.

The composition and status of BITs varies from campus to campus, often in direct relationship to different aspects of each specific campus setting. These aspects include the availability of funding and person-power to support the BITs, visibility and reputation of the programs, and the availability of supporting resources both on and off campus (Sokolow, Lewis, Van Brunt, Schuster, & Swinton, 2014). BITs also range from neophyte to well established. That said, even when reviewing comparably-established programs, it is not uncommon to notice that teams may differ in their philosophy of support, organizational/reporting structure, rigidity of procedures, and relevant state and agency policies (Parfitt, 2016). Beyond these factors, other elements such as varied campus cultures, student profiles, and leadership are three likely reasons why BITs look and function distinctly across different college campuses (Nicoletti, Spencer-Thomas, & Bollinger, 2010). As such, although every BIT has an opportunity to improve its services, a broad solution or strategy is not the goal.

The first author of this paper established a BIT/CARE Network from the ground up; therefore, she has been privy to understanding the many features associated with creating, sustaining, and improving a network used to identify and support students of concern. The second author of this paper has worked extensively with members of a BIT/CARE network related to mental health concerns and sexual assault prevention and response. Together, we offer potential areas for team improvement that are likely to be easy

to assess and advance. We also offer two specific cautions. First, this is not an exhaustive list of opportunities. Second, these strategies will be most effective for BIT leaders who have had at least one to two years of experience in a functioning program and who believe their team is on the cusp of being able to advance its services. BITs at this level tend to have enough of a foundation to determine what is and is not working in their teams and feel stable enough to step into another level of support; in contrast, newer BITs without a consistent number of student encounters may feel overwhelmed by these suggestions.

Self Assessment

We recommend that you understand your program's current level of functioning and future goals and direction prior to implementing any of these potential areas for improvement. The CORE-Q10 Checklist (Van Brunt, Sokolow, Lewis, Schuster, & Swinton, 2014) is a free resource available through NaBITA that allows each BIT to rate itself on 10 core intervention team qualities. This process of self-assessment will likely help you identify other areas of improvement not listed in this article and also provide a platform upon which to begin the advancement of your team.

Potential Improvement Areas

Once you've completed a self-assessment, you should have a clear understanding of the future direction of your BIT. If you feel that your team is currently on the cusp of further development, it is time to consider the potential areas for improvement that can move your team in a positive direction. The aim of this section is to inspire new ways of thinking about your work. You may encounter new ideas to advance systems that are already put in place, or you may think differently about your current methods to determine if another strategy would be more effective or efficient.

Identifying Stakeholders

For any of these strategies to be effective, each BIT must first be clear about who is allowed to use the care referral system associated with the BIT. Some teams only allow faculty and staff to submit the names of students of concern; thus, the strategies suggested to advance your BIT do not necessarily need to include the student stakeholder perspective. Other BITs allow students as well as faculty and staff members to submit care referrals about other students. On these campuses, students should also be seen as primary stakeholders and considered when making BIT improvements. Still other teams are even more wide reaching. At Central Michigan University, for instance, anyone can submit a care referral about anyone. That is, students can submit referrals about students, faculty, and staff; faculty and staff can submit concerns about each other, etc. (www.cmich.edu/ess/studentaffairs/CMUCares/Pages/CARE-Team-.aspx). Being

clear about your scope of care, the accessibility of your referral system, and the current and future stakeholders of your BIT are necessary when making decisions to improve your current functionality. For the purposes of this article, we consider students to be key stakeholders in the BIT process.

Advertising

Team Name. One of the most prominent ways that a BIT can advertise its services is by selecting an appropriate team name. Common names associated with BITs include Behavioral Intervention Team (most popular), Care Team, Students of Concern Committee, Student Behavior Consultation Team (SBCT), and Campus Intervention Team (“A Rose by Any Other Name,” n.d.). The most successful BIT names are easy to remember, broad enough to encompass varied student concerns, and specific in terms of their charge, which should be clearly identified in the name of the team. Using the word “threat” or “crisis” in the team name may deter referrals from or about students who present as concerning, but who are not currently aggressive or in crisis. Identifying the actual roles and responsibilities of the team also is required in order to choose a name that accurately supports the work of the group.

Team Logo. After selecting an appropriate team name, creating a team logo will allow faculty, staff, and students to visually associate your BIT with support for students of concern. When considering a logo design, your team may choose to run a student contest or consult with a marketing and advertisement specialist on your campus. Some institutions chose a shape (e.g., a heart, lotus flower, or open hands) to be associated with their program. For example, the University of Rochester chose a puzzle piece as its logo to visually represent the tag line, “Are you the missing piece?” (www.rochester.edu/care). The logo and tagline suggest that any member of the community may be in a position to have helpful information. The logo and tagline also encourages community members to assist the team to better understand the issues that a potential student of concern may be facing. Other institutions incorporate their school crest, turn the name of the team into a logo, or associate the team with a scene (e.g., a bridge over water). Including input from members of the campus community in the decision about how to represent your team will give you valuable insight into what works and what doesn’t from the consumers themselves.

Tchotchkes. Even with a limited budget, BITs can often afford to purchase a few give-away items that become hot commodities at student orientation, information fairs, office waiting rooms, in the library, and in the residence halls, or that can be handed out randomly to students passing by. Many advertising companies offering retail products will compete for your business. After identifying

your stakeholders and deciding upon an item to give away, send the description or image to five or more companies and ask that they provide you with a price per unit, a list of comparable products, and personal suggestions of popular giveaways.

When selecting a tchotchke, try to think outside the box. Pens, sewing kits, and stress balls (this also includes any other shape associated with a stress squeeze toy) are incredibly common and may not bring unique attention to your team. Instead, we recommend that you choose items that make your stakeholders want to know more about your service. A few examples of recently popular, fully customizable giveaways for students are:

- Multi colored USB bracelets;
- Cell phone pockets (a silicone pocket students can add to the back of their phones for conveniently holding money, credit cards, and their student IDs);
- Color-changing cups;
- Home button iPad/iPhone stickers;
- T-shirts;
- Cell phone loop lanyards;
- Earbuds in a unique shaped case;
- USB adapters;
- Water bottles; and
- Laundry bags (great for freshman and transfer students).

When you want to alert faculty and staff members to the services your team provides, other options may be more effective. A few examples of customizable giveaways you may consider include: a mini office stationary set, a book of Post-It notes, a laser pointer, a reusable coffee mug, a mini stapler, or a business card holder. Choosing giveaways that are useful to your specific audience members increases the probability that the students, faculty, or staff members will have quick access to information about your team — and that’s the goal. You want your team’s contact information to be readily available to those who will refer students to your services.

Publications. For very little cost, your BIT can produce publication materials that will improve the visibility of your team and help support your students, faculty, and staff. Creating a BIT brochure is a relatively easy way to share information with families, students, offices, and faculty members. A well-written brochure should include:

- A flowchart of what to do if someone is concerned about a student;
- A list of crisis resources and responses;
- Indicators of distress;
- Tips to help refer students to appropriate resources; and
- Clear and easily identifiable contact information.

Brochures should be colorful, easily accessible, and have your team's logo displayed prominently on the front and back of the document. A downloadable version of your brochure should be available on your BIT website, with links to access the brochure displayed on related office websites (e.g., Counseling Services, Academic Support, Disability Support Services, the Dean of Students' Office, Career Services, etc.). To reduce the need for re-orders, brochures should not contain person-specific information (i.e., the names of the BIT members and personal email addresses). Instead, positions should be listed rather than people. In addition, to facilitate continuous contact despite potential staffing changes, a general BIT email, which can be assigned to a member of the team, should be created.

If you or one of your BIT members offers regular trainings to colleagues at your institution, consider creating a workbook for participants. A BIT-related workbook might include case studies for participants to work through, along with any related survey data that has been gathered, a self-assessment for participants, information about how your BIT functions, resource information, and BIT process flow charts. Creating a workbook with this information will save you from having to gather these materials each time you offer a staff presentation or workshop.

On every college campus, students and their parents/caregivers are provided with office-specific information in many ways. Student Orientation, for example, is a key event in which offices engage with students and families. Identifying these information-sharing opportunities is half the battle. Once you have identified how students are being contacted (e.g., via postcards, admissions booklets, emails, listservs, monthly newsletters, brochures, bulletin boards, videos, etc.), determine if your BIT has a place in each. The admissions booklet, which consists of a booklet or folder of information sent to every student who has been accepted to a college or university, is a great place to start. Speak with your director of admissions to determine whether your team can be included. It might be possible to enclose a postcard about your BIT in this mailing or to include a paragraph about your services in the booklet. Ask the director of parent and family relations if you can include a short article about your BIT and its purpose in an upcoming publication of the newsletter sent to families. Contact the editor of your campus's quarterly college publication and see if the paper could run a story on your BIT and the effect it has on supporting students of concern on your campus. If a full-inclusion of the BIT services is not possible in these formats, simply asking offices to include your team's logo and a link to your website can spark enough interest to push referrals to your team.

Finally, consider less traditional ways of displaying information about your BIT. A traditional 8.5 x 11-inch poster may not be as noticeable

as a uniquely sized, bright-colored option. Would your team consider window clings instead of posters? Window clings can be as tall as eight feet and adhere to conference room windows or doors. Banners that can hang from a balcony in the college union during specific, high-traffic times of the year may also generate positive attention. And don't forget your campus vehicles; one of the more successful marketing strategies used at the University of Rochester was Student Care Services advertisements on buses that shuttled students around campus. A large, poster-sized advertisement sat to the right of the bus driver, and a banner displaying BIT services ran across the top interior display. If you think outside the box when it comes to advertising your message, you are sure to reach a wider audience.

Disseminating Information About Your BIT. In addition to creating or identifying publication resources, also think about "worker bees" on your campus who can do some of your advertising for you. Tour guides are a great resource. On any given week, Admissions Department tour guides are offering incoming students and their families information about why they should select your college. Scheduling a meeting with your campus tour guides to share information about your BIT, and how your services help keep students safe, is a simple way to inform students of your services before they set foot on campus. Consider providing tour guides with a short, one-paragraph explanation of your services that they can reference while on a tour.

Members of certain clubs and organizations such as Healthguards, Active Minds, or Greek life can also be great resources. Determine if there are ways in which you can partner with these organizations to share information about your services. You can partner by bringing speakers to campus, sharing a table during information fair, co-presenting at conferences with members of your fraternities or sororities, or apply for a grant with multiple campus resources. Any time you can partner with students to support the goals of your team, your visibility and credibility will increase — and so will your referrals.

Residential Life staff, including resident assistants (RAs), may serve as another wonderful resource to help spread the word about your BIT. RAs on most campuses are required to complete a certain number of programs each semester and keep their bulletin boards current with helpful information. Why not provide interested RAs with materials for a ready-made bulletin board? You might include a picture of your team's logo, BIT process flow charts, information about your team and services, information about how to submit referrals, and pictures. Business cards, giveaways, and resource information can also be included and used, or handed out at the RAs' discretion. Regardless of the specific approach taken, the overall goal is to make dissemination of your BIT information as easy as possible for students and "worker bees."

BIT members may also consider speaking with individual offices on campus (e.g., Equal Opportunity Program, Financial Aid, Counseling Services, Academic Support, Registrar Office, etc.) during their staff meetings to offer specific ways in which your teams can work together. Instead of giving a generic presentation about your BIT to every office, help staff members bridge the gap between your two services. When speaking with Financial Aid staff, for example, you can explore potential ways that your team can be of assistance to students who do not have money to go home during break. When speaking with the registrar's staff, you can offer to inform them when you have met with a student who has lost a parent so that parent's name can be removed from future mailings. The student billing staff may also want to know if a student has recently lost a parent or a sibling, so they can hold off on sending that student bill for a month or so, to give the family some time to recuperate. Any time your team members can identify direct ways that your two services can combine forces, the chance of improving student support is increased.

Streamlining Communication between Departments

When the first author started in her student care services role, she was genuinely surprised when staff members from other offices were not eager to use these services. During the first six months, referrals rates were lower than expected. A conversation with the assistant dean of academic support revealed a key source of resistance: a great deal of student support was already integrated within the overall roles and responsibilities of other college staff. For example, academic advisors had been speaking with students who were significantly struggling during their academic advisement meetings. The International Studies Office had daily conversations with students from other countries who were struggling to transition or falling behind academically because English was not their first language. Career counselors met with students who came to discuss their future plans but ended up in a pseudo-psychotherapy session talking about their parent's disapproval of them changing career paths in their junior year.

During face-to-face conversations with staff and directors of multiple campus offices, BIT members may realize how invested each of these departments already are in the work of helping students who are at risk. It will be necessary for your team to work slowly and methodically with each department to increase their trust in the expertise of the team and for the team to partner with these offices in a way that will help ease the transition of appropriate work to your BIT from other offices. The usefulness of the BIT may not be realized without the purposeful relationships you build with each department and without the deliberate attention you pay to the overlap of services.

Monthly Gatherings. A majority of BIT work revolves around building and maintaining relationships with professional staff and faculty members on campus. Many are curious as to what types of concerns the BIT is seeing, and this curiosity must be appropriately managed, given that a BIT usually strives to protect student privacy as well as to maintain autonomy when making decisions about how to manage students in distress. To keep all interests adequately informed, consider hosting a monthly Student Support Network (SSN) meeting composed of one to two representatives from respective departments on campus. Invite participants to these regularly scheduled meetings in advance and offer coffee service or a light snack. Frame this meeting in such a way as to provide relevant, yet nonspecific, information about students of concern; engage stakeholders in the process of identifying and supporting students; and provide time for those in attendance to ask questions or participate in some aspect of your BIT process.

Sharing relevant, but nonspecific information about students of concern may take many forms. You may choose to use a general case study associated with a common concern your BIT has been working through. One recent example of such a concern occurred after the 2016 presidential election, when many BITs were discussing behaviors and actions associated with students' reactions to the election result. Your Student Support Network meeting may offer participants the opportunity to work through a case study associated with the general concerns your team saw during that week or thereafter. As another example, your team may also track the types of concerns that members have been seeing during the month and share that data with the entire group. Alternatively, your team may offer a presentation on a common concern or some other topic of current interest to your campus or local community. If there has been an increase in heroin or other opioid use either on your campus or in your surrounding community, for instance, you may choose to have a presenter provide information about this topic. A death of a student may invoke a group discussion about what resources are available to students, faculty, and staff during the time of need, while also providing attendees with the opportunity to express their own concerns about the incident. As these different examples illustrate, monthly meetings can provide a range of information to your colleagues, who have a vested interest in student support, while simultaneously supporting the mission of your BIT.

Share Responsibility Of Support. The more your team can engage stakeholders in the support of students of concern, the more likely they are to provide the input that will allow your team to succeed. Once a month at your Student Support Network meeting, you may choose to pass around a hard-copy list of the first initials and last names of students of concern, along with a very generic idea of

the type of concern (e.g., mental health, substance, or financial). Ask your stakeholders to speak with one of your team members privately if they have any information about a student on the list or if they believe they can be of assistance in reaching out to a student of concern. This invitation accomplishes two goals: 1) it lets your SSN members know that they are important to your work as a BIT; and 2) it gives your attendees a general sense of the number and scope of concerns your team is addressing. You may be surprised at how beneficial this level of transparency can be to the support of your team. In our experiences, when stakeholders feel that they are playing an active role in the assistance of students, they are more likely to stand behind you when you need an ally. They are more apt to speak up for your team in administrative meetings to offer financial or other support, and they also may be more apt to encourage others to make appropriate referrals to the BIT.

Transparency. In our experiences, BITs that are clear and appropriately open about their processes are more likely to build a sense of trust and responsibility that will assist in their ability to support students. Consider positing a general flow chart of how your team accepts and reviews referrals, and the options your team has for getting students the support they need on your website or publication materials. To state the obvious, BIT cases are often unique and require personalized responses. For this reason, it is ideal to offer general procedural guidelines to allow for digression when appropriate. Providing even this general type of information to someone who has referred a student of concern may help alleviate the reporter's worry and associated excessive follow-up questions, while promoting trust that the BIT has systems in place to effectively support students in need.

Depending on how cases at your institution are referred to the BIT, it is also suggested that you follow up with the individuals who made reports. Follow-ups may confirm receipt of the referrals, and indicate that your team will be looking into the concerns reported. When cases are "closed," it is helpful to let the reporters know that you have followed up with the students and have "closed the case." This communication lets the reporters know to reach out again if they happen to see additional concerning behaviors. It is possible to be transparent and still selective about the information you share. Being overly secretive about the purpose and response of your BIT is likely to evoke a sense of curiosity and skepticism that may adversely affect your referral rate. In most cases, reporters just want to know that the students referred are in good hands and have received or will receive support. Offering this information helps build trust and accountability that will increase referral rates.

Case Conferences. The judicious use of a case conference format

can be incredibly beneficial to your BIT. A student of concern may be in need of support from multiple campus offices or may have had interaction with multiple offices (e.g., Academic Advisement, International Student Services, Counseling Services, and Disability Support Services). When this occurs, it is advantageous to pull representatives from each of these offices together into one meeting to discuss the general details of the case, and to compare and integrate different sources of relevant information to determine the best course of action for the student. As a general rule, case conferences are most effective when three or more campus offices are involved. Starting the case conference with introductions of who is present and individuals' relationship with the student of concern is recommended. A BIT member or case manager then takes the lead and reviews relevant details about the student of concern and the goal of the meeting. At the conclusion of the meeting, the BIT representative or case manager should memorialize the meeting and action items via email to send to all participants, as well as copying the memo to the student's file.

It may also be advantageous to include the student of concern in the case conference when it is appropriate. When the student is receiving a lot of support from many offices but does not appear to be actively engaged in integrating advice from these offices, including the student in the case conference may increase engagement or clarify why there is a lack of investment by the student. A student's family members or parents can be invited to a meeting to generate a collaborative dialogue regarding how to move forward. However, teams should be wary of including the student in a case conference in certain situations (e.g., if the student is unaware of all parties trying to assist, or if the current situation is beyond repair) or with certain types of students (e.g., those who are suicidal or otherwise very emotional).

Organizing, Managing Student Data, and BIT Meetings

Most BITs use student data management software such as Maxient Conduct Manager or Simplicity Advocate for maintaining records of students of concern. If your team has not yet purchased software, consider contacting colleges and universities who use these or similar products to determine which system is right for your team. You might benefit from checking with other on campus offices (e.g., Residential Life, Disability Support, and Conduct Office) to determine what type of data management software they currently use. Data management groups may provide a discount to schools that are using the company's software in more than one department on campus.

While data management systems are helpful in hosting information about students of concern, your BIT may have its own process

associated with following a student from referral to resolution. At the first author's former institution, there were three staff members working in the system at any given time. On many college campuses, multiple staff members may be responsible for following up on referrals. If your data management system does not easily accommodate your team's specific process for following up with students of concern, you may want to create a Microsoft Access database (see Table 1) that can be placed on a shared server where individualized security access can be granted. An Access database is suggested over a Microsoft Excel document because Access allows more than one person to be working in the document at a given time. This Access database should accompany a more formalized policy regarding how referrals will be received, reviewed, and delegated as appropriate.

An Access database also may be used as a separate organizational tool to get a snapshot view of your students of concern, notes about the team's last contact with students (i.e., where we "left off," instead of going into each individual record), and information about who was assigned to follow up.

This database can be printed and used during BIT meetings to quickly identify and discuss the BIT's current caseload. A less detailed version of this document can be shared during monthly meetings. Some student data management systems offer ways of compiling this information that does not require a separate document. It is important to keep in mind that as your BIT referrals increase, developing alternative organizational solutions that assist with your team's specific strategy may be beneficial.

Discussing Students of Concern. In addition to identifying organizational strategies, your team should determine the best way to share information about students of concern during your regularly scheduled team meetings. A common concern we have heard when consulting with colleges and universities about their BITs is how much time is spent talking about individual students'

cases for no real purpose other than rehashing the students' experience. It is important to understand that this work is challenging. Much like therapists who get supervision for their most extreme cases, opportunities should be made available for staff members to discuss cases that are disconcerting or weigh heavy on their heart. The time for that discussion, however, is not during the BIT meeting.

It is either the case manager's or BIT leader's responsibility to focus the discussion of BIT cases on action items that need the support of the group. Cases should be presented with limited and relevant background information, details about what strategies have been tried, and specific questions for the team about how to move forward. The goal of the BIT is not to discuss every student case, in detail, during every meeting. Doing so may fatigue your participants and may understandably make it difficult for them to stay present during the times when you genuinely need their support and guidance. Following are a few ways you may consider (re)focusing your BIT discussions:

- Discuss with your team the best ways to share information about a student of concern, and do your best to keep the BIT member on track with their discussion.
- Consider reading a confidentiality statement at the beginning of every meeting in addition to your group's agreed-upon way of presenting cases as a way to focus the group.
- Set the precedent at every meeting by being the first person to discuss a case in the team's agreed-upon method.
- Identify a phrase or word that will help re-focus the participants if they get off-track.
- Draw attention to the amount of time remaining in your meeting. If you only have 45 minutes left and multiple students' cases remain to be discussed, this is an indication that time has not been appropriately allotted. Consider what didn't go as planned and adapt your strategy for the next meeting.
- Ask BIT members to come to the meeting prepared with an

Table 1: Sample Access Database

Student's Name	ID Number	Year in School	Location	Date Entered	Category of Concern	"Left off"
Smith, John	1234567	Sophomore	115 Lovewell Hall	3/7/17	Mental health	Email sent 3/7/17; give until 3/14/17 to respond, then follow up with RA.
Hope, Mary	7654321	Freshman	134 Onondaga Hall	2/13/17	Financial	Student meeting with financial adviser 2/17/17.
Glee, Scott	2564788	Senior	Off campus	2/16/17	Substance	Needs to schedule AOD eval.; emailed 2/25/17.

A-list (students they absolutely need to discuss) and a B-list (students they can discuss if time permits). Go through everyone's A-list prior to entertaining B-list students.

Proper management of the BIT meetings is extremely important and worthwhile to establish. Without an appropriate strategy for reviewing cases, participants are less likely to engage or be engaged during the meeting. If participants feel that your BIT meeting is a time when one member comes to talk about their many interactions with students but no real objective is being met the group members may start to think that this meeting is unworthy of their time and participation.

Setting & Maintaining Expectations for Excellence

Managing a successful BIT requires more than having empathic responses to student concerns. The system that supports the work that your team does is crucial to the overall reputation of your team and referral rates. Often, the administrative and procedural aspects of a team, such as how you share the names of students of concern with team members or the expectations associated with team membership, are overlooked or not prioritized due to the plethora of other responsibilities of team members. As a result of this, members of your college or university may underutilize your BIT's services due to feelings that your team is disorganized, or they may circumvent your team's system and take matters into their own hands.

Creating a consistent and purposeful way of responding to care referrals is integral to the overall operation of your team. This requires your team to be on the same page regarding the goals and responsibilities of members, both individually and as a group. If there is one member of your team who does not consistently attend meetings or follow through with responses to students, the image and efficiency of your entire team suffers. At the beginning of each semester, the team leader should establish expectations and generate individual, as well as systemic, buy-in from participants. Meeting one-on-one with team members to discuss their commitment and involvement on the team may be helpful. Identifying an agreed-upon way of reaching out to team members if someone does not follow through may also help. If you have established a group norm to give members 48 hours to return an email or respond accordingly, it will not seem as pushy if a fellow team member sends a follow-up message after 48 hours of non-response. It is important to establish these norms prior to experiencing problems on your team. Establishing these norms after periods of inconsistency may be viewed as passive-aggressive if not initially discussed transparently with the entire group.

Cautions

As Clare Booth Luce once warned, "No good deed goes unpunished" (Shapiro & Epstein, 2006). As you begin to think about taking your BIT to the next level, there is a common cyclic phenomenon worth mentioning: as the efficiency of your BIT increases, so will your referrals. As your referrals increase, so will your workload. As your workload increases, so will your need for more staff. The first author learned this the hard way when fine-tuning the campus's referral system and increasing awareness of the BIT led to a 141 percent increase in referrals in one year. A word to the wise: before implementing system improvements, consider the effects that these improvements may have so your BIT, administration, and legal counsel can determine the level of increased effectiveness your institution is able to support. Here are a few additional considerations:

- As more students are referred to your BIT, liability increases. This change in liability risk has led some colleges to be rather specific about the type of information they would like reported to the BIT and to establish this threshold prior to opening all referral sources.
- An influx of referrals to your BIT often yields an increase in the number of referrals to other campus resources. These offices may or may not be equipped to handle an increase in demand for services. Speaking with these offices in advance and creating a method to track the number of referrals from the BIT to these offices may prove beneficial for long-term planning.
- If adding staff support is not high on the list of your college's priorities, there may be an increased need to set boundaries on the responsibilities associated with your BIT or case manager (e.g., on-call hours, coming to campus as needed, and cases you will and will not be able to handle). Establishing these expectations prior to an influx of referrals may help the BIT members and case manager frame their work with students and commit to necessary work-life balance.
- As you increase the visibility of your team, other parts of your job may get busier (e.g., responding to emails, serving as the point-person for handling crises, and presenting information to faculty and staff). Consider how you will handle the increased demand prior to feeling overwhelmed. Rather than offering multiple in-person presentations to different departments, for example, you could create a standard video about your services to include on your website. Can you hire and train student-workers who can speak effectively on behalf of your program? Should you set up an email "away response" at the end of every workday, so those who email after hours will have instant access to information about what to do if they are in distress or have a concern about a student?

- Creating documents that outline and support standardized transparent practices and procedures will become a necessity. Some examples of such documents that support best practices include a Discharge Support Planning Agreement (i.e., behavioral contract) and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the local hospital or law enforcement. There should be clear practices and procedures for students in different situations, such as when students are discharged from the hospital or when a student does not follow through with a behavioral contract. Develop supporting documents and policies before you need them. Consider asking colleagues at other institutions to share their versions of these documents that outline best practices with you.
- There may be a need to redefine roles between your office and other departments, specifically the Counseling Center. Approaching this discussion prior to the conflict that often accompanies overlap in responsibilities can help prevent or otherwise mitigate feelings of resentment related to territory long-term. Understand that distinguishing (and re-distinguishing) roles will be a normal and expected part of expanding your program.

It is important to understand the realistic support of your institution prior to implementing too many improvement strategies too quickly. Some administrators make changes that lead to the increased use of services and then ask for support given that there is a demonstrable need for resources. Others take a proactive approach to resource allocation to determine if additional support is to be made available. There are potential advantages and challenges to both strategies, but understanding your institution's commitment or non-commitment to your team's advancement is a critical step.

Locating Sources of Funding

It goes without saying that proactively identifying funding sources to support your BIT improves the chances of furthering the implementation of your system improvements. It may not be possible to make enhancements in the absence of financial support. At a time when many colleges and universities are faced with declining enrollment, and thus, declining tuition dollars, creativity in identifying sources of funding can be the difference between a stagnant system and one that moves forward productively. Here are a few suggestions about where to start:

- Schedule a meeting with someone from the Advancement Office and explain your program. Advancement's goal is to match alumni and donor interests with programs and services at the college to yield longstanding financial contributions. The easier you make it for those staff members

interacting with donors to promote your program and shared interests, the more likely you are to reap the financial rewards. When presenting to your Advancement Office, bring tchotchkes, students of concern who were assisted by your BIT and who can speak about the positive experience they had with your program, a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the main functions of your BIT, and the type of donor who might be interested in financially supporting the program. Highlight the many reasons why donors would want to financially support this program (i.e., it's a new program, they could attach their name to the program with the right amount of money, your team directly impacts student experiences, etc.), and where donor money could be spent (tip: donors typically want to spend their money on the more flashy aspects of your program, rather than on additional staff). Give a presentation that leaves your advancement team thinking, "I have the perfect person to speak with about supporting this work!" Afterwards, make yourself available for follow-up discussions.

- Find someone who can help you secure grants. On most college campuses, Institutional and Sponsored Research Offices focus on data-gathering for the institution and securing grant funding. There is often a person whose full-time job it is to identify grant opportunities and help faculty and staff members write grants that support their mission. Identify who this person is on your campus and set up a meeting to share about your BIT and what type of funding would be beneficial to your team.
- Take people up on their offers to help. The work you do with students is meaningful. We would be willing to bet that you have heard on more than one occasion, "If there is ever a way I can be of assistance, please don't hesitate to let me know." Instead of thanking that person for the compliment and ending your interaction, consider responding with, "I really appreciate that offer. One of the best ways you could continue to be of assistance is by supporting our program through some type of donation. Even making a small financial contribution to our program helps us help other students in need." Responding in this way invites individuals to contribute to your program and at a time when they are most likely to give back. Don't be afraid to ask for support. Those who give freely of their money typically do so after someone has identified a need that can easily be met with reasonable financial support.
- Share the cost of shared resources. Being in Student Support Services means that you interact with staff members from other support resources throughout the college on a regular basis. Your BIT and these offices

share a vested interest in connecting students with the help they need to be successful. Why not also share the cost of shared resources? When considering purchases such as your data management system, giveaways, advertisements, speakers, or apps like ConcernCenter (www.concerncenter.com) that allow students to search for resources on your campus by concern, ask for financial buy-in from these offices to support the overall cost. When purchasing ConcernCenter for her former institution, for instance, the first author solicited \$1,500 from each support-related office on campus and paid for the cost of the product in full.

It is highly unlikely that your BIT will have a self-sustaining budget that grows as the needs of your department advances. Although this is an unfortunate reality, we recommend that you identify ways in which your BIT can partner with other offices on campus doing similar work. This may be your best hope for supporting your team's growing needs.

Conclusion

Since the 2007 Virginia Tech events, professionals in student support services have learned a great deal about how to identify students in distress and which systems best accommodate the diverse needs of these students. Each campus' iteration of a BIT has unique components that often represent the campus climate, number of resources available, and organizational reporting structure. Common BIT qualities like those found on the CORE-Q10 Checklist (Van Brunt, Sokolow, Lewis, Schuster, & Swinton, 2014) are essential to creating the foundation upon which to build and improve your institution's BIT functioning. The suggestions and guidance provided in this article are intended to inspire critical thinking about your current BIT functionality and ways in which improvements can be made. Thinking about your BIT from a systemic point of view will help your team build and support a successful referral system that will serve the needs of the students who need you most.

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