



Risk Aware

Providing Safe and Secure College Campuses

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Introduction

With the growing number of criminal acts committed on college campuses in recent years, is it possible to keep the traditional university environment safe, open, and diverse? The answer to this question may reside in a combination of increased security, added technology, and a new proactive perspective.

The traditional, decentralized university campus may be one of the past due to safety measures and tools now necessary to reduce risk. Traditional tools include background checks, criminal checks, personality profiles, as well as security cameras and safety patrol personnel. However, with technology advancement today, many new tools that were previously only available and used in the corporate world are now available for the university setting. These tools include on-line monitoring and data-mining software systems as well as real-time, anonymous web-based incident reporting systems. In order to keep campuses safe, college administrators need to put these risk mitigation tools in place to monitor the general environment as well as prevent violent incidents from occurring.

Today's Campuses and Safety Measures

Considering events such as the Virginia Tech tragedy in April 2007, many colleges are not doing enough to be pro-active and reduce risks. These risks represent incidents including legal, financial, safety, and asset related issues ranging from athletic scandal, academic fraud, misconduct, and even murder.

Incidents that go un-noticed or escalate to a level of scandal or violence can damage the institution's reputation and good will that in turn decreases enrollment, financial support and donations from alumni and donors while costing millions in risk mitigation, lawsuits and legal fees. "According to the False Claims Act Legal Center of the Taxpayers Against Fraud Education Fund (www.taf.org), universities occupy 5 spots in their top 100 list of largest claims recorded by the U.S. government since 1986" (As quoted in Hughes and White 2006). In addition, "Scandal does have a significant negative impact on a school's ability to generate charitable giving among its constituents" (Shank and Hughes 2005).

With the severity and range of possible occurrences, it is important to realize that all individuals may pose a potential threat to the institution at which they work, teach, attend school, or even act as a sub-contractor or vendor. The main concern for colleges is the reality of the traditional, decentralized, open, and diverse student body, faculty, and general workforce in which it can be difficult to effectively monitor campus environments in an effort to maintain safety and prevent harm.

Although many colleges have increased safety measures such as adding security cameras, increasing the number of campus police, increasing security personnel and training, utilizing mass e-mail notification systems, as well as performing various staff background checks, these efforts are not enough since incidents continue to rise. According to the Department of Education, there were over 71,621 criminal offenses including 15 murders committed on college campuses in 2004 (U.S. Department of Education 2007). "Many argue that even this number severely understates the reality of crime on U.S. campuses. For example, according to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, in 2001 alone, alcohol-related injuries led to over 1,700 deaths, 97,000 rape or sexual assaults and over 696,000 assaults (Kingsbury, et. al. 2007 quoted in Hughes and White 2006)." Based on these statistics, university administrators need to increase risk mitigation practices in order to be pro-active as well as accountable.

Risk Mitigation Tools: Background Checks

To decrease risks, many institutions have turned to risk mitigation tools such as background checks which include Criminal Background Checks (CBC) on faculty, staff, and even incoming students. However, conducting these checks also comes with risks of civil lawsuits based on respondeat superior, negligent hiring or negligent retention, antidiscrimination statutes, as well as privacy laws. These issues have an increased risk when university hiring is decentralized and proper training is not in place.

Although CBCs have become common place in the corporate world, the academic world has been slower to follow suit; partially due to the resistance of faculty. The U.S. Society of Human Resource Management recently reported that over 80% of responding industry participants indicated that they now perform checks on all potential employees (SHRM 2004). By comparison, a recent survey of higher education Human Resource professionals, has found that just 42% perform CBCs on all types of employees (Hughes, White & Hertz 2007).

However controversial, Federal (and where applicable, state) privacy laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) also must be considered when considering the use of CBCs. Privacy issues arise with respect to how employers handle the data involved in both conducting and evaluating results from CBCs. For example, the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) requires employers to inform potential employees that a background check will be conducted (Connerley, et al 2001). Additionally, the law requires that employers properly safeguard personal data in their possession (20 U.S.C. 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99).

To increase the use of background checks, many state legislatures have preempted university policy-making measures by crafting legislation intended to address inadequacies in risk mitigation policies on campus. These legislators have enacted laws requiring previously unevaluated groups such as faculty and incoming students to undergo CBCs as a requirement for employment or enrollment. Utah (2007) is the latest to join an ever-growing list of states, including Arizona (2005), Kentucky (2006), North Dakota (2007) and North Carolina (2006) whose lawmakers have passed legislation to implement CBCs on new employees and some student groups within a variety of operational boundaries (McFarland, 2007). Finally, in response to the Virginia Tech tragedy, four states including Maine, Missouri, Virginia and Illinois took steps to ensure

that more mental health records be shared with the Federal National Instant Check system" (PR Newswire 2007 as quoted in Hughes and White 2006).

Risk Mitigation Tools: Web-based Reporting Systems

Although background checks represent one tool to help reduce risks, background checks alone are not the answer. "These practices need to be augmented with additional techniques in an effort to address the substantial safety gaps in existing university risk mitigation practices and policies. One technique that is gaining increasing attention on college campuses are web-based incident reporting systems. A web-based reporting system often acts as a type of insurance put in place to prevent a crisis from occurring as well as act as a standard operating procedure in case a crisis erupts. These systems also offer advantages such as:

- A Controlled Environment
- Enhanced Governance and Communication
- A Standardized Reporting Environment
- Accessibility from any internet device (not dependent upon the university server)
- Ease of Use
- Consistency in reports and process
- Anonymity
- Risk Reduction

In the past, these systems have been used in the corporate environment as a response to the whistleblower provisions of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act passed by the United States Congress in 2003. Research shows that these systems have already uncovered a tremendous amount of illegal activity, fraud, and scandal that in the past would have went undetected. According to the U.S. Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, 34% of all fraud reported in non-profits came from tips from employees, customers and vendors and anonymous sources such as a web based incident reporting system (ACFE, 2006 as quoted in Hughes and White 2006). This statistic is overwhelmingly positive considering fraud alone costs U.S. companies over \$600 million per year (Hughes and White 2006). With the success these systems have had in the corporate world, colleges and universities need to follow-suit and adopt similar systems.

RiskAware, Inc.

The majority of companies offering risk mitigation services such as web-based incident reporting systems, cater to the corporate environment. However, one company specializing in higher education and offering many risk mitigation tools is RiskAware, Inc. RiskAware specializes in providing risk mitigation services in order to reduce risks and the costs associated with scandals and incidents. The company offers three solution oriented products including RiskAware Basic, RiskAware Monitor, and RiskAware Complete.

RiskAware Basic provides the traditional background check and personality profiles that many colleges and universities have recently grown accustomed to using. The RiskAware Monitor product takes background checks to the next level using new reporting technology that measures and analyses feedback from the external community via online public media channels, blogs, message boards, chat groups, newsgroups, and forums regarding the organization's operational activities. The aggregated reports generated assist key decision makers with

previously unavailable or incomplete data in order to protect the university's brand, reputation, and goodwill.

The third and most comprehensive product the company offers is RiskAware Complete. This product offers a complete risk mitigation solution that uses real-time survey and reporting technology via an anonymous web-based incident reporting system. This service can also be data mined and analyzed in combination with the information collected from the Monitor product. In the end, the solution is an up-front warning system in place to provide real-time reporting and alerts regarding issues that pose a threat to the university.

Conclusion

Traditionally, risk management and mitigation on college campuses has been a reaction approach versus a pro-active effort. Due to the lack of knowledge and controversy surrounding risk mitigation tools and techniques, decision makers have often created policies without the necessary systems in place to perform proper threat assessments and lower risks. "Despite the fact that the use of risk mitigation techniques in higher education is still very controversial, many higher education association groups, such as the national Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACVDA), are encouraging their member schools to consider adopting these practices as a way to deal with the increased risk in their environments" (Gardiner 2005 as quoted in Shank and Hughes 2005).

As seen from evidence of recent scandals and tragedies, the traditional campus environment is one of the past. University administrators need to work with a company like RiskAware, Inc. to create a threat assessment team. This team can customize risk mitigation solutions including the use of background checks, continuous monitoring, and web-based incident reporting systems to meet the needs of colleges and universities, but most importantly to reduce risk, lower costs associated with scandals, and provide a safe campus environment. The problem of increased risks and violent incidents is growing every day. The solution is simple. Colleges and universities must take a pro-active, 360 degree, holistic approach to put tools in place to reduce risk in an effort to maintain the safe campus environment that was once assumed and deserved, but unfortunately, no longer exists.

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