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DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE INDIVIDUALS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is a rare administrator who has not experienced a seemingly all-consuming black hole of time that typically accompanies dealing with a perpetually disruptive individual. Whether a faculty member, a fellow administrator, or a student, the disruption that one person causes can reverberate throughout the entire organization, affecting interpersonal dynamics, causing rumors and mistrust, and thwarting institutional productivity. In some cases, the person or persons charged with handling the situation might very well feel that the inordinate amount of time spent on the management of the disruptive individual is an emotional drain far outweighing the ultimate resolution of the case.

In response to an increasing awareness of negative, even dysfunctional and, in some cases dangerous, behaviors appearing on college and university campuses throughout the

country, this paper first, in Section 2, provides three different lenses for viewing disruptive individuals. Section 3 of this paper offers suggestions for managing disruptive individuals on our campuses. Section 3 also describes actual cases that highlight the extreme impact that two disruptive individuals each had on their campus community. In Section 4, the authors provide three case studies that will be used to stimulate discussion during the panel discussion of this topic.

2.0 THREE LENSES FOR VIEWING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

In attempting to identify forms of disruptive behavior in a manner which characterizes and differentiates types of disruptive persons, the following three lenses are presented so as to provide a paradigm through which individual characteristics may be viewed.

1. Lens 1 – A view of an archetype referred to by Generation Me (Twenge, 2006)
2. Lens 2 – A view that allows us to see an individual characterized by a ‘victim mentality’ (Kansas Safe Schools Resource Center, Andrew Gardiner on “Recognizing ‘victim mentality’ ...” The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence).
3. Lens 3 – A view of an individual that has been drawn and compiled from a number of articles examining the characteristics of extremely narcissistic behavior.

2.1 Lens 1 – Generation Me

Through lens one, we see individuals who are likely to exhibit traits often connected to those born in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. Often referred to as *Generation Me*, this personality type is often more self-serving than empathetic. Much of the information for this lens comes from an article on a 2006 book by Jean M. Twenge.

Through the lens of Generation Me, we see individuals who communicate with a **directness** that revolves around their own emotional needs, to speak freely, rather than the emotional needs of those to whom they may be addressing their thoughts. By way of illustration, consider a scene from the television teen soap opera, *The O.C.* A father chides his son, “Watch your mouth. I was trying to be polite. You might want to give it a try.” The son’s response is simply, “No thanks. I’d rather be honest.” In this case, the teenager places a far greater value on being open, almost guileless, than on sparing his targets feelings. This level of candor has found a ready outlet on the many new social networking venues such as *Facebook* and *MySpace*. In these virtual worlds, every social and sexual burp in one’s life is easily shared, even proclaimed, to anonymous masses. As these venues gain popularity and become more commonplace, the line between how one communicates electronically and how one communicates verbally may become more blurred. The result can be that the acceptable norms for interpersonal communication in the virtual world begin to creep into one’s “real” life.

Generation Me is also known for having an inflated sense of one’s own self-importance. Their baby-boomer parents were a generation which enshrined the concept of **self-esteem** into education and child-raising. Schools began to build “specific programs to increase children’s self-esteem, most of which actually built self-importance and narcissism.” Some educators, not wanting to disturb that feeling by actually correcting mistakes in class, leave this sense of infallibility unchecked. Inflated grades and *independent* spelling are two by-products of the self-esteem movement. When these feelings bump against the reality of quality control in college or on the job, *Generation Me* individuals are genuinely surprised — and who can blame them?

The cocoon of self-centeredness surrounding *Generation Me* individuals can leave young people with the feeling that they deserve everything – immediately! This is reflected as a sense of **entitlement**. For example, interns expect positions of great responsibility. Undergraduates believe that they will command unrealistic salaries upon graduation. And young professionals believe the steps to the corner office are few to traverse. An example of this is cited by an individual who had a conversation with a Vice President of a Public Relations firm who expressed her surprise at the lofty short-term ambitions of some of her staff. *It's tough to manage expectations of employees who have never encountered the quaint concept of 'paying your dues.'* What is more, this personality type is often raised to believe that any dream is achievable and consider the highest level of success as an entitlement that is owed to them. In our public relations example, the entitlement mentality can be seen firsthand in applicants who truly want a fulfilling career in public relations....but can't write.

However, *Generation Me* may not realize this limitation because no one ever drew the problem to their attention. Without having the experience of having had their faults pointed out to them, they have never made much effort to overcome the problem. Indeed *Generation Me* doesn't respond well to criticism. This is due to a number of causes. For many *Generation Me* students, what might be called constructive criticism has likely not been part of their upbringing. In addition, if a problem at school arises, it may even have been blamed on the teacher. Similarly, at work, the problem is always an external force, something outside of their control and for which they have no responsibility. One of the authors recalls numerous student disciplinary cases where the student respondent is accompanied by parents who insist that out of 15,000 students, the dean of students had a particular vengeance against

their son or daughter – and they are absolutely sure that their child “would never lie to me!” That is, until they are forced to face the pictures that the student has posted on Facebook! The result is that *Generation Me* students believe they are always right – no matter what the issue. They also have a remarkably **thin-skin** when it comes to criticism. It is therefore not surprising that when the reality of toil sets in, they feel undeservedly under siege. So, when the boss rips into them about a half-effort on the job, they are devastated. In the past, most people have complimented them on their efforts — no matter how shoddy or lackluster those efforts might actually be. (You would think watching Donald Trump and Simon Cowell on *reality* TV would have prepared them!)

Here is where the It’s-All-About-Me-I-Can-Do-Anything syndrome encounters a dichotomy. For all of the self-confidence, there is also a **cynicism** that most things are beyond their control. So, why bother. Why bother to work hard at finding a job; it just comes down to being in the right place at the right time. Why bother to work hard for a promotion; after all, it’s who you know, not what you know. Why bother to vote; a single ballot will influence nothing. The result of this cynicism combined with the entitlement mentality can be a potent mix of frustration and self-imposed blinders leading to a pressure-cooker of emotions.

The above factors can also lead to a feeling that it is tough-to-make-a-living. Some of their feelings about the difficulty involved in making-a-living may be justified. Today’s graduates face economic obstacles in getting started that are substantially different from those of earlier eras. Whopping student debts, whopping house prices and whopping child care fees have created hurdles the boomers generally didn’t face. For example, for many boomers, the first house cost two-and-half times their annual salary. How many entry-level practitioners can pull that off today? Similarly, for many boomers, the price tag on their first car was 40 per

cent of their salary. Again, this is not so easily done today. Each generation has a tendency to set its own historical measuring sticks up against today's reality.

Having repeatedly heard the refrains of "You can be whatever you want to be... Never give up on your dream....Nothing is impossible..." *Generation Me* has a world of opportunities at their fingertips with hundreds if not thousands of career paths available to them. However, many *Generation Me* may never know what exactly their career path should be. Many *Generation Me* individuals agonize over finding the right profession. Ironically, it is an agony that prevents many of them from finding any profession. This is often exacerbated by there always being another academic credential that can be gotten and another extended stay at home that can be had.

Many members of *Generation Me* receive the technical skills needed to help prepare them for the workplace. However, in reviewing many of the attributes of *Generation Me*, one wonders what prepares them emotionally for the workplace? The cult of self-esteem, entitlement, and thin skin combined with the prevalence of film & TV characters (and the actors themselves!) in exciting jobs, sets *Generation Me* up for a fall. Job descriptions and salary expectations often can't match the inspired expectations that have been cultivated and constructive criticism can sometimes be seen as a personal attack.

To the extent that the above characteristics are valid observations about *Generation Me* students, the above characteristics can lead to students engaging in disruptive behavior especially when the norms of *Generation Me* students conflict with the norms of Baby Boomer faculty and administrators.

2.2 Lens 2 – Bullies and Victims

The second lens looks at the intertwined behaviors of those individuals known as *Bullies* and those individuals known as *Victims*. These individuals and their characteristics and interactions are discussed in an online posting by the Kansas Safe Schools Resource Center, in an article by Andrew Gardiner on “Recognising ‘victim mentality’: A lesson from Kosovo,” and other sources.

According to an online article by the [Kansas Safe Schools Resource Center](#), bullying incidents tend to involve three different groups of students: Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders. While the young people within each of these groups share many similarities, each group can be further divided into subgroups of students with different personalities, motivations, and behaviors.

- Bullies are described in various online articles as being of four types, the aggressive bully, the passive bully, the bully-victim, and the pure bully.
- Victims are described as being of three types, the passive victim, the provocative victim, and the bully-victim.
- Bystanders include everyone — other than the bully and victim — who is present during a bullying incident.

2.2.1 Four Types of Bullies Defined:

The **Aggressive bullies** are the most common type of bully. Young people who fall into this category tend to be physically strong, impulsive, hot-tempered, belligerent, fearless, coercive, confident, and lacking in empathy for their victims. They have an aggressive personality and are motivated by power and the desire to dominate others. They are also likely to make negative attributions, often seeing slights or hostility in those around them where neither actually exists.

Passive bullies, unlike the ultra-confident aggressive bullies, tend to be insecure. They are also much less popular than the aggressive bullies and often have low-self esteem, few likable qualities, and unhappy home lives. Passive bullies also appear to have difficulties concentrating and focusing their attention at school. They also engage in violent outbursts or temper tantrums that lead to problems with their peers. Rather than initiating a bullying interaction, passive bullies tend to hang back until one is already under way – usually at the instigation of an aggressive bully. Once a bullying incident begins, passive bullies become enthusiastic participants. In fact, passive bullies are very quick to align themselves with and display intense loyalty to the more powerful aggressive bullies. Some researchers refer to this group as anxious bullies.

Bully-victims represent a small percentage of bullies who have been seriously bullied themselves. Bully-victims are often physically weaker than those who bully them but are almost always physically stronger than their own victims. They also possess some of the same characteristics as provocative victims (described below). Bully-victims are easily aroused and sometimes provoke others who are clearly weaker than they are. Bully-victims are generally unpopular with their peers, and they are more likely than other types of bullies to be both anxious and depressed.

Pure bullies are healthy individuals, who enjoy school and use bullying to obtain dominance," says Wolke, who labels these children "cool operators." Pure bullies have not been victimized themselves, and they are rarely absent from school — presumably because they enjoy victimizing their peers.

2.2.2 Three Types of Victims Defined:

Passive victims do not directly provoke bullies and represent the largest group of victimized children. They are socially withdrawn, often seem anxious, depressed, and fearful, and have very poor self-concepts. When compared with their non-victimized peers, passive victims have fewer if any friends, are lonely and sad, and are more nervous about new situations. This cluster of symptoms makes them attractive targets for bullies who are unusually competent in detecting vulnerability. In the early grades, initial responses to bullying among passive victims include crying, withdrawal, and futile anger. In later grades, they tend to respond by trying to avoid and escape from bullying situations (e.g., being absent from school, running away from home).

Perpetual victims are those victims who are bullied all of their lives. While "perpetual" refers to the duration of bullying rather than a subgroup of victim, it is interesting to consider the possibility that some children may develop a **victim mentality** whereby the victim role becomes a permanent part of their psyches (Elliott, 1993). An alternative view of individuals with perpetual victim mentalities is provided by Andrew Gardiner in an article on "Recognising 'victim mentality': A lesson from Kosovo." In this article Gardiner's contention is that victim mentality is a product of social and economic factors and a reaction to conflict. Those who assume a victim mentality are relieved of the necessity to confront the unsatisfactory reality that their feelings of deprivation and powerlessness are a result of background economic and social conditions. Instead, this pathological condition permits an interpretation of events which casts blame and absolves one of any personal responsibility. Firstly and primarily, an other is posited as that which is to blame. In order for the accusation of blame to be considered credible, it is next necessary to mythologise the character of this

other. There is, finally, a need for a self-understanding which is coherent with the mythologised primary positing. This is, however, already articulated within the logic of victim mentality. It forces upon its host a self-understanding of itself as the victim of this blameful other.

Provocative victims represent a small group of children who often behave in ways that arouse negative responses from those around them, such as anger, irritation, and exasperation. These victims exhibit some or all of the characteristics of passive victims. They possess a cluster of characteristics that are likely to disrupt a classroom and lead to social rejection by peers, including irritability, restlessness, off-task behavior, and hostility. They are hot tempered and attempt to fight back when victimized though usually not very effectively. In addition, they try to bully students weaker than themselves. Provocative victims are often disliked by adults, including teachers. Although they are a distinct subgroup, provocative victims often display characteristics of other groups of children as well — including pure bullies (i.e., they have elevated levels of dominant, aggressive, and antisocial behavior and low levels of tolerance for frustration) and passive victims (i.e., they are socially anxious, feel disliked by others, and have low self-esteem).

2.3 Lens 3 – Narcissistic Behavior

There are a number of articles about extremely narcissistic behavior and the effects that this behavior can have on individuals and organizations. An individual can be described as exhibiting extremely narcissistic or malignant narcissistic behavior if he/she is totally absorbed in how he/she looks, sounds, and seems. As a result, extremely narcissistic individuals engage in activities solely for their effect, while studying his/her reflection, to perfect how he/she looks, sounds, and seems.

According to an online article “What Makes Narcissists Tick, Understanding Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD – malignant narcissism)” – for a malignant narcissist to think he/she is grand, he/she must make everyone else seem insignificant by comparison. This is why extremely narcissistic individuals, also known as malignant narcissists, act as though it would kill them to compliment others, to thank others for anything, to tell others they love them, to listen to others, to say they're sorry for something, or to give others credit for being right about anything.

Treating others like they are nothing is just one of many ways the narcissist acts out his/her fantasy that they are so grand that others are dirt under their feet. Because delusions of grandeur are hard to maintain and are constantly challenged by reality the narcissist will actively work to make reality conform to his/her delusion.

For example, do you have a fine reputation? Look out, that threatens the narcissist's delusion that he is the greatest, so he'll have to fix that fine reputation of yours. Do you excel at something? Look out, that threatens the narcissist's delusion that he is the greatest, so he'll have to sabotage your work. Do you have an outstanding personal virtue? Look out, that threatens the narcissist's delusion that he is the greatest, so he'll have to drag your virtue through the mud, attributing it to himself while he portrays it in you as a vice.

According to an article about bully tactics in the workplace, the bullying phenomenon fits in well with the psychological theory of narcissism. Narcissists are particularly attracted to managerial roles. Narcissistic managers expect his or her subordinates to provide narcissistic supply, thus helping to support his or her deluded false sense of self. He or she likes to be surrounded with sycophants who can be relied upon to do this. The true self of a

narcissist is that of a flawed and inadequate person. The **false self** of a narcissist is a perfect superior person who can do no wrong. Narcissistic managers are often referred to as control freaks.

Given the above behavior patterns, some narcissists function as poison droppers in an organization by injecting, “dropping”, little words that sap an organization’s energy. This can be done by spreading rumor, innuendo, and other comments that can “poison” / undermine the ability of an organization to stay on task and function as a team.

3.0 MANAGING THE DISRUPTIVE INDIVIDUAL

It is an unfortunate fact of life that disruptive individuals will find their way into the campus setting. Anticipating the unanticipated is ultimately the most important defensive strategy available to any administrator. Hernandez and Fitz (2001) argue that to effectively manage disruptive individuals, a systems approach should be employed. In the absence of such an approach, the person’s behavior remains insidiously disconnected, thereby hiding the interwoven and synergistic nature of the dysfunction. In this way, the disruptive individual remains safe from exposure. There is no risk of the disruptive person being discovered – and the behavior confronted. Because of this, that person, a person who may very well be in need of help, may not rise to the attention of administrators allowing the individual’s disruption to persist undetected. Because this behavior persists undetected, it continues to create chaos for those departments frequented by him or her and, among those who come in contact with the disruptive individual, there is not an awareness of the seriousness of the problem. Hence, most cases of disruptive behavior are seen by faculty, staff, students, and administrators as more of a time consuming irritation than a threat to the campus community or to the life of the irritating person. Unfortunately, there are many well-known cases of college students who

ultimately committed grave acts of self-injurious behavior or even turned against fellow students.

3.1 Actual Cases of Disruptive Students

Among the most notable cases during the past few years of a student's disruptive behavior turning deadly are Ms. Elizabeth Shin, the MIT student who set herself on fire, and Cho Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech student who shot and killed 32 people and wounded 25 others in a rampage that has been called the "Virginia Tech massacre.

In Elizabeth Shin's case, she had interactions with numerous campus administrators including her academic advisor, the associate chief of the MIT Health Center, the associate dean of students, and her housemaster in her residence hall (January 30, 2002). In spite of these interactions with various campus units Elizabeth Shin set herself on fire in her dormitory room at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In the Cho Seung-Hui case he also had interactions with numerous individuals on and off of the Virginia Tech campus including a Virginia special justice, who declared him mentally ill and "an imminent danger" to himself, the General District Court in the commonwealth of Virginia that issued a temporary detention order that said he "presents an imminent danger to himself as a result of mental illness, university police after a student complained about him calling her and contacting her in person, the university's Office of Judicial Affairs, which handled the complaint, the university police again when a female student complained about instant messages Cho sent her, the police a third time when they received a call from a student concerned that Cho might be suicidal, and a teacher who considered Cho's poetry so intimidating -- and his behavior so menacing -- that she had Cho removed from her class in the fall of 2005.

As a result of the Shin, Cho, and other incidents, there is an evolving national conversation about a more demanding, needier, and more troubled student body. Colleges are grappling to minister to what administrators describe as an undergraduate population that requires both more coddling and more actual mental health care than ever before. They are struggling with liability issues arising from personal injury and student deaths. And, they are working to redefine their relationship with parents and their role in the nonacademic lives of students who are adults by many yardsticks, and yet not quite.

3.2 Key Issues Involved in Handling Disruptive Behaviors

Those who have dealt with multiple instances of disruptive behavior know that each situation has its own unique set of attributes that requires a distinctive set of treatment actions by the college or university in order to resolve or at least diffuse the disruptive situation. However, while acknowledging the need to treat the unique attributes of each situation, it is also necessary that every college and university identify the institutional culture that it aspires to achieve, the steps it is willing to take to achieve the desired culture, and the consequences for those who violate the desired culture. In establishing the cultural goal – which may be as simple as demanding that all members of the college or university community must behave in a civil manner – the institution needs to explicitly address the following issues:

1. The balancing of privacy rights and security needs, including communications to institutions to which the student may transfer
2. The need to have clear definitions of unacceptable/disruptive behaviors
3. An understanding of how unacceptable/disruptive behaviors interfere with the rights of others
4. The existence of clear policies and procedures for handling disruptive behavior

5. The need for institutional structures for promoting inter-departmental information sharing about disruptive individuals
6. The need for clear guidelines for when to involve counselors and/or organizations external to the college or university
7. A process for tracking and aggregating individual instances of disruptive behavior, which singly may be annoying but non-threatening, that together form a pattern that could eventually become harmful to the disruptive individual and/or to the institution
8. A clear process for informing the college or university community about:
 - The desired cultural norms and the policies and procedures in place to achieve them
 - The consequences for violating the cultural norms
 - The occurrence of disruptive behavior that is life-threatening and/or deadly.

3.2.1 Balancing of Privacy rights and Security needs

It is of the utmost importance that if one has reasonable reason to foresee dangerous actions, there is an obligatory need to respond with due diligence that includes alerting others to potential danger that the person may cause him or herself or others. Not only is the sharing of information in such cases a matter of personal and professional ethics, it is also grounded in statutory and legal terms. The federal statute most widely governing the protection of student records, the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) {34CFR99} has, in our experience, a record of being misunderstood. It is not unusual for college personnel to view FERPA in absolute terms and believe it be a singular mandate for maintaining confidential student records under all, or nearly all circumstances. They falsely hold to practices that disallow sharing any information about a student to faculty and staff, to other institutions, or

even to parents. Even when the student's behavior has caused concern among some administrators, information may be withheld from those with a need to know because of this erroneous interpretation of the law. Such an understanding falls short of a full appreciation for the breadth of disclosures that are, in fact, expressly permitted under FERPA.

The fact is that the regulatory language of FERPA has always clearly provided for the release of information under a variety of situations that would warrant a need to know or reason to release what might, at first blush, be seen as "private" information. Furthermore, as time has passed, and awareness and advocacy for campus crime victims generated more public concerns, new amendments have been passed that have created even more provisions for administrators to use when faced with circumstances that require them to release information in the name of safety. Consider, for example, an amendment added in 1998 which clearly stated that "nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit an institution of postsecondary education from disclosing the final results of any disciplinary proceeding conducted by such institution against a student who is an alleged perpetrator of any crime of violence..."

The right to disclose information when warranted is also clearly established through legal precedent. Despite a degree of tension between laws protecting privacy and those protecting free speech, when it comes to forewarning others about impending dangers, legal precedent has clearly favored the need-to-know side of the equation (Lake, 2005).

3.2.2 Clear definitions of unacceptable/disruptive behaviors

In general, society expects its members to behave in a civil manner which could be defined as exercising/showing simple politeness or courtesy. However, a 2006 article in the American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education by Catherine Paik and Kimberly Broedel-

Zaugg found that the views of pharmacy students of what constituted civil and uncivil behavior changed from their first, third, and fourth years. Based on their research, the authors concluded that this may indicate that students' beliefs, actions, and preferences change as they progress through the curriculum. For example, younger students felt cheating was the most uncivil classroom behavior while older students most disliked cell phone/beeper use. While one should hesitate to develop too many conclusions based on this one study, the study does illustrate the point that what is acceptable behavior for one person may not be acceptable to another and that perceptions of what is and is not acceptable can change for a given individual over time.

Even more than this changing notion of which behaviors are acceptable and which are not, the courts have established the need for colleges to provide fair notice of what was expected of them. The most famous of these decisions was issued in, *Dixon v. Alabama*, in the wake of four African American students being expelled from college after non-violently sitting at a “whites only” lunch counter in a courthouse in Alabama. The students’ dismissal was based on a rather ill-defined concept of what constituted behavior fitting of a student. There was no clear behavioral code, much less any attempt to provide the students with clearly defined provisions of permissible and impermissible behavior. The evolution of campus codes has since resulted in clear definitions and terms that provide clear notice to students of the students’ rights and responsibilities.

It is necessary that colleges and universities explicitly define what is and is not considered to be acceptable behavior at an institutional level through their policies and procedures as well as through official statements. Similarly, it is incumbent on faculty to include in their syllabi an explicit statement of what is considered to be desirable and

unacceptable behavior in the classroom. For example, faculty may include in the syllabus that class participation counts for YY% of a student's grade and that sleeping in class will result in XX points being deducted from the class participation grade. An upfront conversation with the class, will further establish the expectations for the semester by engaging the students in the goals of the class and encouraging them to talk to each other about what is expected. As so many faculty know, even one disruptive student can change the overall experience of the semester. Yet, that single student may never be confronted by the likely majority of classmates who are also frustrated with the disruption to their class time. If, however, the conversation happens at the beginning of the semester, before the student becomes disruptive, the power of the social norms that his peers express may be enough to curtail any inclination the student may have otherwise had.

3.2.3 Clear policies and procedures for handling disruptive behavior

As noted earlier, each type of disruptive behavior requires a different set of treatment actions by the college or university. However, regardless of the category, students who engage in disruptive behaviors may need to be dealt with behaviorally through disciplinary action, depending on the severity of their behavior.

Ensuring that policies are in place for dealing with these individuals is a critical first step. Whether through the faculty handbook or the student code of conduct, colleges must have formal, written policies to follow in such situations. Reasonable, sound, and well-researched policies provide guidance and minimize the opportunity for arbitrary or capricious behaviors. It is just as important that the college community receive regular notices alerting them to the existence of these policies, and letting them know where they can be located. All too often lawyers and administrators invest untold hours in discussing and documenting the

institution's policies, only to have their efforts posted on a remote website, under layers of more exciting and attractive pages filled with pictures of student life.

Rebellious and escalating disruptions need to be addressed behaviorally through disciplinary action and, if criminal action is involved, through police intervention, as well. Doing so establishes a documented record of the disruptive behavior, and also sends a clear message to the respondent. Furthermore, by establishing a seamless system between the campus disciplinary office and the campus police office, the institution creates a further safety net for the disruptive student and for the campus, at large. Gone are the days when all infractions could be handled exclusively through a residence director or a dean. The rise of serious acts of violence and the proliferation of drugs on campus have resulted in more fully-certified police departments on campus than ever before. The Clery Act and its corresponding regulations for campus safety (34 CFR 668.46) have mandated that institutions keep accurate records of all campus crime and that those records are publicized.

Given that safety continues to be given as one of the main attributes parents seek in a college for their child, it is obligatory that campus administrators act in accordance with the spirit of the law by providing public records that allow for parents and students to be as informed as possible. Therefore, clear systems need to be in place for ensuring that campus police officers and campus disciplinary officers communicate regularly with each other, have a clear protocol for when matters get referred to one office or the other, and operate in collaboration with each other. Doing so helps to minimize the chances that a student with chronic disruptive patterns is handled in isolation by each department, thereby preventing any one person from seeing a complete picture.

3.2.4 Promoting inter-departmental communications about disruptive individual

A case management approach can be useful when dealing with an individual. While it may seem an enormous investment of human resources and time, having everyone together in one room (face-to-face and not via email!) can make communication across departmental lines much more fluid and complete. Bringing together all the parties who are involved with the disruptive individual, and those who may potentially be involved with the individual, can be an effective management tool. It assures communication across-organizational lines thereby permitting each area to share specifics of the case of which their colleagues in other departments may not be aware. Parties that may be invited to the meeting include the dean of students, the chief of police, counseling staff, and a representative from academic affairs. Of course, each situation varies and may require a grouping of individuals based on the facts of the situation at hand. The idea is to allow for a process in which all parties dealing with the individual are able to formulate a single, comprehensive plan to guide institutional efforts. In doing so, it is probable that ongoing meetings will need to follow so as to monitor any new developments and alert the system to any escalation of behaviors.

Parker Palmer (1998) has emphasized the need to know oneself and to rely on that knowledge when interacting with students. While there are many guidelines for what should and should not be done when working with a disruptive individual, there is often no one “right” answer. It may, in some cases, come down to simply knowing yourself. Using that knowledge and the naturalness that accompanies a strong sense of self, can be more useful in making a true connection with a student – or with any individual – than any preconceived list of action steps.

In any case, once it is recognized that a situation requires intervention, the appropriate office(s) should act – not postpone some form of proactive intervention.

3.2.5 Clear guidelines for involving counselors and/or external organizations

Disruptive behavior precipitated by emotional distress may require consultation with counseling staff. However, one should not expect that an individual in crisis will necessarily voluntarily present his/herself for counseling. In fact, it is more likely than not that the individual will not be someone who has self-initiated ongoing counseling treatment. Therefore, the institution should have clear guidelines for whether mandatory counseling should be among the institutional repertoire for dealing with disruptive individuals. While the effectiveness and appropriateness of mandated counseling sessions is not without controversy, particularly within the counseling profession (Consolvo & Dannells, 2000; Freeman, 2001), the use of mandatory counseling initiatives seems to be growing among colleges and universities. While mandatory counseling has a long history in the court system, higher education has been less open to the consideration of such practices. Nonetheless, mandated brief intervention counseling programs are beginning to show promise (Larimar, Cronic, Lee, & Kilmer, 2004/2005). Evidence has emerged to indicate that adjudicated students sanctioned to brief intervention counseling had positive results comparable to the students who entered counseling voluntarily (Barnett et al., 2004). Likewise, students who have attempted suicide and were mandated to attend counseling have also been shown to be less likely to have repeated attempts than their counterparts who did not attend counseling. While there are differing views on the effectiveness of mandated counseling, it seems that studies supporting the effectiveness of mandated counseling are beginning to emerge. Suicidal students have been shown to be less likely to repeat an attempt to take their own life after being mandated to

counseling. There are also studies that show heavy drinkers are more likely to reduce their drinking after being assigned compulsory counseling sessions.

3.2.6 Tracking and aggregating individual instances of disruptive behavior

One of the challenges facing everyone who deals with disruptive individuals is that sometimes one's interaction with the disruptive individual is akin to the story about a group of blind people trying to describe an elephant. What each person perceives is very much influenced by what part of the animal they are touching. In the case of disruptive individuals, sometimes what might appear to be merely annoying, if viewed in isolation, might portend a more disturbing situation if seen as one of a number of instances of disruptive behavior.

For example, in the case of Cho Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech shooter cited earlier, when his prior actions were viewed after the shootings it became clear that he was an individual with serious personal issues that taken together could be seen as warning flags of potentially harmful behavior. All too often the likelihood that multiple departments across a campus will know about and share information about a disruptive individual occurs more by serendipity than by planned intent. Many of us who have dealt with disruptive individuals can remember instances when a person's name will come up in casual conversation as being disruptive only to have others with whom we are speaking note that they are also having issues with the same person.

While it is often true that hindsight tends to be 20-20, and that what is obvious after an event occurs may not be visible before the event, establishing a mechanism that enables key offices within a college or university to identify, track, and look for patterns of behavior that may be more than simply annoying can help alert one to the possibility that an individual's

behavior may eventually lead to the situations faced by Virginia Tech with Cho Seung-Hui and MIT with Elizabeth Shin.

Many of the issues connected with sharing information are contained in section 3.2.4 of this paper. To promote an awareness of the behavior of disruptive individuals between the meetings proposed in section 3.2.4, campuses may want to consider linking the dean of students, the chief of police, counseling staff, and a representative from academic affairs together in an email alert system that identifies them of the name of a person and the date when they engage in disruptive behavior. While each campus will need to define when a disruptive event should be reported, having the email alert system would enable the appropriate individuals to begin to track and analyze incidents of disruptive behavior without having to constantly schedule meetings. To be affective, faculty, staff, administrators, and students should be informed of where to post a concern that would be circulated to the email alert system.

3.2.7 Communicating with the college or university community

Clearly when someone is assaulted, injured, or killed by another person on campus the news needs to be communicated to the campus community in a quick and effective manner. Many of the issues connected with communicating with the campus community about the aforementioned as well as other forms of disruptive acts are discussed in sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.3 of this paper.

However, to help minimize potential disruptive situations, colleges and universities also need to communicate with their communities prior to the occurrence of actions that must be reported under the Clery Act. Among the types of information, which should be communicated to the campus community, are:

- The desired cultural norms and the policies and procedures in place to achieve them
- The consequences for violating the cultural norms
- The occurrence of disruptive behavior that is life-threatening and/or deadly.

Providing the campus community with a clear statement of what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behavior can help reduce disruptive situations involving those individuals who want to do the right thing if they know what it is. While some of these communications should exist in an institution's policies and procedures, as discussed in section 3.2.3 of this paper, it is also important to provide the campus community with a sense of the type of behavioral environment that the institution aspires to promote. For those who choose to be disruptive, having clear statements of what is and is not acceptable and what are the consequences of unacceptable behavior can provide the college and university with some leverage to deal with the disruptive individual. As also noted in section 3.2.3, about the institution's policies and procedures, it is also important that the college community receive regular notices behavioral environment that the institution aspires to promote.

In addition, providing workshops and training sessions for faculty, staff, and administrators in how to handle disruptive individuals can help them take actions to avoid and/or diffuse disruptive situations. And, in those instances where disruptive situations cannot be avoided or diffused, training and other forms of communication can help faculty, staff, and administrators know what additional steps they should take in dealing with or reporting the disruptive behavior.

4.0 CASE STUDIES

Additive Situation

A student appears at the Student Health Center complaining about stomach ailments. Upon examination, the health services staff can find no cause for the complaints. Staff nurses refer the student to the local hospital where she is examined and released. The student appears a week later, with the same complaint. This time, during the evaluation, she states that she was sexually assaulted the night before. Campus police are called to the Health Center where they interview the student. A counselor is also called to meet with the student. After an extensive investigation over the course of three weeks, and after numerous changes in her story, the student acknowledges that she fabricated the events previously reported. Throughout the last few weeks, the student has missed numerous classes and has continued to appear at the Health Center for numerous vaguely described ailments. Staff members have learned that the student is alienated from her parents and does not confide in either parent. Now the controller's office has reported that the student's checks have bounced and that she has outstanding bills for housing and meal plans.

Roommate's Parent Asking for Answers

A high-level administrator has been contacted by a parent of the student's roommate. He has asked that the administrator call him back and inform him of the steps that the University is taking to address the problem that has been described to him by his daughter. The daughter has been watching her roommate lose weight to the point that her clothes are hanging off of her, her hair is falling out, and she appears pale and weak. The roommate has refused medical

treatment and says there is nothing wrong with her. Her behavior has caught the attention of most of the residents who live in her complex. They are worried about her and some are spending inordinate amount of time trying to take care of her, talk to her, or even bringing her to dining services for a meal. The behavior has created a community disruption and students who should be focusing on their school and co-curricular activities are focusing on trying to help the student who has attracted so much attention. What should the administrator do in this circumstance?

A department head who was an unsuccessful candidate for a promotion, has had trouble adjusting to his new supervisor. The supervisor has come from another institution in another state. She has clear ideas on how she wants to run her new area of responsibility. She is also interested in changing many practices that she feels does not optimize the student experience. The department head disagrees with many of these changes. While on the surface, he is careful to not provoke his boss publicly, he has been creating false rumors about her. He has commented to other faculty and staff that his boss has a mental disorder and tells numerous people that his new boss is bipolar. His boss is beginning to hear the rumors as they make their way back to her. As more and more of the faculty and staff become drawn in to the kitchenette conversations, a sense of tension begins to penetrate what was once a relaxed working environment. When the new supervisor confronts the department head about the rumors, he denies having any role in the matter. When the supervisor asks if the department head is comfortable in his role, he maintains that there is no problem, dismissing her concerns as his merely wanting to point out things with which he disagrees. Nonetheless, the problem

continues with carefully crafted comments that undermine her new authority and ongoing reports to her (by colleagues who do not want their names brought in to the situation) that the department head continues to tell others she is mentally unstable.

The faculty member confides in another professor that she has been receiving sexually explicit emails from a co-worker in another department. She asks that the information be kept confidential, but the professor decided to let you, the dean of the department, know what is happening. Of course, she asks that you not say anything.

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