



Threat Assessment at Harvard University

**New England Association of Collegiate
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Threat Assessment at Harvard

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Team Formation

- The University's Risk Management Council approved the formation of the Harvard University Behavioral Intervention Team in November 2012.
- Three issues drove the formalization of the threat assessment process at Harvard.
 - The movie theater mass murder in Aurora, Colorado in August 2012.
 - An external review of UHS's Mental Health Services recommending the formation of a team.
 - Best practices.



Team Roll Out

- To be effective, the Team required buy-in from senior University officials, awareness of and referrals from the community, and internal structure and protocols.
- The Team made presentations to the University's Administrative Council, the Joint Committee on Inspection, Council of Dean of Students, annual local emergency management team leaders meeting, and human resource deans and directors.
- The team is discussed at all Active Shooter Safety Guidelines presentations. Since 2013 the HUPD has conducted 93 presentations to students, faculty, and staff.



Team Roll Out

The initial conversations with University officials covered:

- Threat assessment at Harvard currently
- Roles of threat assessment teams
- Research on violence
- Research on threats
- The four steps in threat assessment
- Case management
- Team composition
- Team process
- What is success?



Role of Threat Assessment Teams

- The use of threat assessments should be viewed as **one** part of a risk prevention strategy. It should be noted that the creation of the team is not an automatic solution.
- The primary **purpose** of a threat assessment program is to prevent potentially dangerous situations on campus through the active engagement of a multidisciplinary team.
- It is just another tool to add to the existing structure in place within the University to assist in keeping the students, faculty, staff, and visitors safe while on campus.



Threat Assessment Steps

There are four steps in a threat assessment:

1. Identify threats
2. Evaluate the seriousness of the threats
3. Intervene to reduce the threat
4. Follow-up to monitor and reevaluate the effectiveness of the safety plan.



Case Management

Successful management of a threatening situation requires substantial time and effort. Management of these situations comprises three related functions:

1. Controlling/containing the situation and/or person in a way that will prevent the possibility of an attack.
2. Protecting and aiding the community, and especially people believed to be at specific risk.
3. Where possible and appropriate, providing support and guidance to help the employee or student deal successfully with his or her problems.



Team Composition

- The team is intended as a multidisciplinary resource to which University officials and others should turn for expertise and counsel when confronted with a situation that presents a risk to the safety of the campus or one of its members.
- BACT is an interdisciplinary team consisting of subject matter experts from law enforcement, mental health services, academic services, human resources, student affairs, employee assistance, and legal counsel.



Team Purpose

- BACT serves as a violence prevention resource for the University. The central question to be answered by any BACT assessment is whether an individual poses a threat to the safety of the community.
- BACT is not an administrative, treatment or disciplinary body; rather it is designed to provide expertise, information, **recommendations**, and referrals to those dealing with threatening or disruptive situations.
- It does not adjudicate, discipline or impose sanctions against any member of the University, nor does it provide or mandate treatment.



Team Mission

BACT is committed to employing a proactive, collaborative, coordinated, and fact-based process.

Working in concert with the school or department, BACT seeks to bring its expertise to the identification, assessment, consultation, intervention, and management of situations that pose, or may potentially pose, a threat to the safety and well-being of the campus community.



Community Outreach



Reporting Concerns

“It may be nothing, but...”

- Persons who become aware of potential situations that might pose a threat to the safety of the community or one of its members, including self-harm, are encouraged to consult with their school or department administrators who will follow-up with a member of BACT in a timely manner.
- If you have concerns about a person’s alarming or disruptive behavior that you believe could lead to a dangerous situation, even if you think it may be nothing, you are encouraged to share the information with your school or department administrator.



Identifying Concerning Behavior

- References to harming a person, a group of people, or the community through a violent or destructive event.
- An unusual focus on death.
- Articulated plans, vague or specific, to bring weapons to the workplace, classroom, or living spaces.
- Bullying behavior.
- Contextually inappropriate responses such as angry outbursts (especially uncharacteristic outbursts) or unusually or disproportionately intense negative reactions.



Identifying Concerning Behavior

- Agitated reactions to changes in policies and procedures.
- Preoccupation with weapons, violent events or persons who have engaged in violent acts.
- Statements indicating approval of the use of violence to resolve a problem.
- Threatening postings on posters, flyers, websites, or other media.



Identifying Concerning Behavior

Additional behaviors that should warrant concern about risk to the self and/or others may include but are not limited to:

- Significant, unusual, or sudden changes in behavior that suggests that an individual is in severe distress.
- Evidence of depression, hopelessness, or suicidal thoughts/plans.
- Extreme reaction to a loss, setback or traumatic event.



“Left of Bang”

“Being aware of your surroundings means that you notice what is normal for the area you are in and also look for people who are behaving in a way that is outside of that baseline. While what is normal will change from one area to the next, that is what you are looking for when you hear people say "see something, say something." You are looking for people who are behaving in a way that is not normal in that particular location.

But when you see something that doesn't make sense, don't let yourself rationalize away that feeling you have. You noticed the person for a reason, that is an instinct that you can always trust.”

- Patrick Van Horne, co-author of "Left of Bang”



Behavioral Assessment and Consultation Team

- BACT serves as a violence prevention resource for the University. The central question to be answered by any BACT assessment is whether an individual poses a threat to the safety of the community.
- When a student, faculty, or staff brings forward a concern to the BACT there are three questions to be answered initially:
 1. Why are you are concerned about this person?
 2. Have there been acts of violence, threats, or any specific behavior that you lead you to believe the person is a danger to others?
 3. Does the identified student, faculty, staff, or visitor present an imminent danger to the community?



Behavioral Assessment and Consultation Team

- Community members who become aware of potential situations that might pose a threat to the safety of the community or have concerns about a person's alarming or disruptive behavior are encouraged to share that information with BACT Team.
- Community members can share their concern directly with the BACT staff person, Steven G. Catalano at 617-495-9225 or via email at steven_catalano@hupd.harvard.edu.



Case Triage and Management



Triage

When a student, or a member of the faculty, or staff brings forward a concern to the BACT there are three questions to be answered initially:

1. Why are you are concerned about this person?
2. Have there been acts of violence, threats, or any specific behavior that lead you to believe the person is a danger to others?
3. Does the identified student, faculty, or staff present an imminent danger to the community?



Triage

- The screening usually involves a criminal record check, consultation with UHS Mental Health Services, and calling the school/department to determine the person's history to jointly determine if the person's behavior has raised concerns that he could pose a danger to the community.
- In addition to screening cases of troubling behavior on a regular basis the BACT staff person shares incident reports with UHS Mental Health Services about incidents involving students, faculty, and staff where there were mental health-related issues including either self-harm, threats of self-harm or disturbing or concerning behavior. On average 127 reports a year are sent.



Triage

After triage is completed there are three case status options:

1. Imminent Danger
2. Accepted
3. Not Accepted



Case Management

- For accepted cases, the BACT staff person and some or all of the members of the BACT team will confer with the reporting party or the appropriate person at the school or department, and others who have information about the person of concern, in order to conduct a further assessment of the potential threat and develop recommendations for case management.
- Examples of case management recommendations include counseling, support, confrontation, hospitalization, leave/suspension, termination, criminal proceedings.



Case Management

The following are the types of questions that the BACT considers, as appropriate:

- What is the behavior?
- Where is the behavior occurring?
- How does the behavior affect the community?
- Are there any past documented incidents/behaviors?
- What do we know of the student's academic performance or the employee's work performance?
- Is there any behavioral or other history that is relevant?
- Have there been indications of suicidal thoughts, plans, or attempts?
- Have there been indications of thoughts/plans of violence?
- Does the person have access to a weapon or are they trying to gain access?



Case Management

The BACT staff person will determine the following:

- If the individual has had a previous encounter with the Harvard University Police Department.
- If the individual has a criminal record.
- If the individual has a license to carry a firearm.
- If the individual is known to University Health Services Mental Health Services.



Triaged Cases

- Since 2013, the BACT staff person has screened 185 cases as a result of a report made to the Harvard University Police Department or as a direct result of a University official calling seeking assistance.



Triaged Cases

BACT Status	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	TOTAL	AVG	%
Triage	0	37	26	28	30	121	30	66%
Case	1	14	17	23	9	64	16	34%
TOTAL	1	51	43	51	39	185	46	100%
Activation	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	TOTAL	AVG	%
BACT	0	42	33	22	4	101	25	55%
University Official	1	9	10	29	35	84	21	45%
TOTAL	1	51	43	51	39	185	46	100%
Person of Concern	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	TOTAL	AVG	%
Affiliated	1	36	29	40	32	138	34	75%
Nonaffiliated	0	15	14	9	6	44	11	24%
Unknown	0	0	0	2	1	3	1	2%
TOTAL	1	51	43	51	39	185	46	100%



Contact Information

Steven G. Catalano

Special Advisor to the Chief of Police/Public
Information Officer

Harvard University Police Department

1033 Massachusetts Avenue, 6th floor

Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

617-495-9225

steven_catalano@hupd.harvard.edu