Tailoring Gatekeeper Training to Meet Audience Needs: New Methods and Lessons Learned

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“It Takes a University to Create a Living Safety Net:” Innovative Strategies for Suicide Prevention in University Settings

- Nova Southeastern University Campus Context
  - The nation’s 7th largest, not-for-profit, independent university, with more than 28,000 students
    - Main campus + 3 satellite campuses: Fort Lauderdale, FL
      - ~10,000 students
    - 7 FL Student Educational Centers (Distance sites)
      - Jacksonville, Miami, Orlando, Palm Beach, Tampa, Fort Myers, Miramar
      - ~8,000 students
  - Online programs
    - ~10,000 students
Suicide Prevention Efforts (Main Campus)

* In 2007, the university allocated sufficient funding to create the Suicide and Violence Prevention (SVP) Office

* To date, have provided 150+ suicide and violence prevention trainings to various groups across campus
What about the distance sites & online programs?

- The SAMHSA GLS Grant has provided the resources necessary to expand the initiatives from NSU’s main campus to the 7 distance sites across Florida and online students

  - How?
    - Via engaging web-based suicide prevention trainings which includes a combination of written text and audio, interlaced with dramatic video vignettes and narration
The Process...

- Enlisted a creative consultant
- Song written and produced- “Beauty that Remains”
- Developed characters for vignettes
- Filmed actors playing students/staff in vignettes
- Developed outline of script for narration
- Filmed narration
- View sample of web-based training
Using Gaming Technology - Penn State Altoona

- Integrated care model
- 4,000 undergraduates
- Rural
- 2/3 live on or around the campus
The Need

- 80% of students who commit suicide go unnoticed, leaving themselves and others at risk.
- Less than 10% seek help at their counseling center.
- #1 action taken by universities to overcome the increasing number of at-risk students is gate-keeper training.
- Conducting face-to-face training for faculty/staff and students is both expensive and difficult to administer, especially for part-time faculty.

** The 2007 National Survey by the American College Counseling Association
At-Risk Gatekeeper Training

- 30-minute, online
- Includes simulated conversation with at-risk student avatar
- Utilized to train all freshmen
- Materials for on-campus promotion
- Specific referral info
- Technical support by Kognito

Other At-Risk Programs by Kognito (demos at www.kognito.com/atrisk)

Training for University Faculty (75+ institutions)

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Learning Objectives

1. **Recognize** the common signs of psychological distress including suicide ideation, depression, and anxiety

2. **Manage a conversation** with an at-risk student and how to effectively motivate them to seek help & refer them to the counseling center

3. Avoid common pitfalls such as attempting to diagnose the problem or giving unwarranted advice during the conversation

4. Know what to do if the friend refuses to seek help or you feel uncomfortable to engage in the conversation

5. Learn about own college specific counseling center and referral process
Users assume the role of a student named Jesse, who has four friends. He’s worried that one of his friends is struggling, and it’s the learner’s job to figure out who.
Learner first observe student’s behavior over a semester in several social events such as a Thanksgiving dinner at the Dining Hall.
Users engage in conversations with the student avatars.

Practice and learn to use open-ended questions, reflective listening and other motivational interviewing techniques to effectively:

1. **Broach the topic** of psychological distress

2. **Motivate the student** to seek help

3. **Avoid common pitfalls** such as attempting to diagnose or giving unwarranted advice
Step 3: Talk to Students

The learner controls the conversation by choosing what topic to brings up and what specific things to say. Learners receive instant feedback through the student’s verbal responses and body language …
... as well as encouragement and constructive criticism on their decisions from a virtual coach. Critical errors lead to immediate corrective feedback as well as the opportunity to undo and correct their decision.
Once the learner successfully refers the student avatar to counseling, the training is complete and the learner is given a few helpful links to more information such as what to do if the friend refuses to go to the counseling center.
National Study- 944 students/ 35 colleges

67% of experimental group rated the course as **Very Good** or **Excellent**. An additional 29% rated the course as **Good** (n=403).

84% of experimental group would **recommend** the training to a friend (n=403)
Learning Experience

79% of experimental group reported that engaging in **simulated conversation** with at-risk students was helpful in preparing them for similar conversations in real life (n=403)

Fig.10: The simulated conversations helped me be better prepared for similar conversations in real life
Adoption of Training School-Wide:

72% of students agree that all students at their school should take this course (n=403).

Download study summary report at www.kognito.com/atrisk/research.html
Faculty/Staff Product: In Prof. Hampton’s class, there are six students he’s concerned about.
Of the FIVE total students:

- **Three are “at risk.”**
  - Users must approach them & refer them to the Counseling Center.

- **Two are not “at risk.”**
  - They can be approached. (optional for completing the simulation)
  - During conversation, users should realize their problems are not psychological.
  - Users can refer them or implement other solutions (e.g., setting boundaries and expectations for future behavior).
Approximately 87% are more confident to identify, refer and approach; 90% are more likely to refer.

80% are more aware of the need to reach out to students

98% found the conversations to be realistic; 98% were satisfied with the overall simulation

95% would recommend AT-RISK to colleagues
Challenges

* Faculty/staff participation
  * Administrative- top down approach
  * Frequent messages and invitations
  * Combining the invitation for participation with current issues/events
  * Addressing myths
  * Funding

* Student buy-in
  * First year student mandate
  * Clubs, Athletes and Greek participation
Implementing a Small Group Interactive Audience-specific Gatekeeper Training Program to Respond to Suicide Risk On-Campus: Successes & Lessons Learned

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SUNY Stony Brook
University at Albany Profile

* University Center within 64-campus SUNY System
* Urban Setting
* Research University
* NCAA Division I
* Students:
  * Undergraduates - 12,457
  * Graduate Students - 4,977
* Faculty: 967
* Employees: 4,197
* Degree Programs:
  * Undergraduate - 61
  * Masters - 89
  * Doctorate - 39
The STEPS Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Program Model

- Sustaining Student Success
- Preventing Suicide Risk Behaviors & Promoting Healthy Behaviors
- Engaging Students, Faculty, Staff, & Families in Education About Suicide Prevention
- Training Potential Campus Responders & Strengthening a Campus Comprehensive Care Network
- Screening and Early Intervention for Students at Risk for Suicide and Related Risk Factors

“Partnerships Working to Prevent Student Suicide… One Step at a Time”
Spectrum of Intervention Response:

Suicide Prevention

Universal Prevention
- Stigma Reduction Media Campaign
- Peer Services (Peer Education and Hotline Services)
- Educational Brochures

Early Intervention
- “Save-A-Life” Gatekeeper Training Program for Faculty, Staff, and Students
- PRISM (Proximate Risk Index and Screening Measure) Screenings
- Consultations with faculty, staff, students, and parents

Specialized Interventions
- CARE Net (Consultation and Resource Evaluation) Program
- Treatment and Referral
- Response to Urgent or Emergent Situations
The Save-A-Life Program: Key Concepts

Ask the Question

Make a Call

Save a Life!
Ask the Question.

When talking with a distressed student who demonstrates one or more risk factors…

- Ask the person about suicidal thoughts, feelings, plans, actions and self-injury
Ask the Question.

- Practice “ask-the-question”
  - Role play with scenarios tailored to the audience
  - Model a variety of appropriate responses
  - Discuss the emotional reactions raised
Immediate professional evaluation is needed for a student who has…

• Threatened suicide or has communicated the intent to commit suicide in the foreseeable future

• Engaged in behavior that a reasonable person would interpret as a suicide gesture or attempt, **regardless** of the seriousness or stated intent

• Demonstrated behavior that a reasonable person would interpret as efforts to plan, rehearse, or obtain the means to commit suicide
Express your concerns about what you are seeing or hearing directly to the student.

For example, “I’m very concerned about your recent email and am worried that you may actually harm yourself.”
Make a Call.

* Build a bridge to someone with experience in these matters.

For example, “I’d like to help you meet with someone right now who has more experience than I do in this area. Let me make a call on your behalf.”
Make a Call.

When you call, be prepared to…

* State your concern
* Be specific about what you heard, saw, or read
* Remember, “safety trumps privacy”
* Stay with the student (if physically present and safe to do so)
More often than not, distressed students display several risk factors but…

- Have **not** already harmed themselves
- Are **not** threatening to kill themselves
- Are **not** looking for ways to kill themselves
Frequent Concerns

- “Will this hurt my relationship with a student?”
- “How do I do this when a student is here for a sore throat or broken arm?”
- “What if I don’t think the student is seriously suicidal?”
Program Evaluation

- Program delivered to:
  - Faculty
  - Professional Staff
  - Student leaders

- Pre-post evaluation used to assess changes in knowledge & confidence in asking the “suicide question”
Knowledge

Pre: 76%
Post: 89%

$ t(69) = -6.945, p < .001 $
Interactive Group Activity

* Break into small groups and discuss how these 3 approaches might be applicable to your campus
* Pros/Cons of each approach
* Challenges of implementation
* Possible evaluation components
* Feedback on samples viewed
Thank You!

Questions?