



University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire

Post-Venture Response and Realities

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UWEC Context

- ▶ 4-year Liberal Arts Undergraduate University
 - ▶ Enroll approx. 10,000 students (500 graduate)
 - ▶ Predominantly European American, 1st Generation, Rural, Lower SES
- ▶ Five years prior to GLS funds ~4 suicides
 - ▶ 2yrs prior, suicide of student who was child of well-known employee
- ▶ Late Jan/Early Feb of year 1 of grant award
 - ▶ Very well known & respected student died by suicide



UWEC Postvention Response

➤ Email from Dean of Students

- Parents requested cause of death be shared
- *Strong emotionally laden language*

➤ Classroom Visits (*1st time ever*)

- Representative from DoS and CS
- Loosely structured script:
 - Condolences, Range of Emotions,
 - Info & Encouragement to use CS, left cards
 - Wait in hallway for 10-15min for immediate needs



UWEC Postvention Response

► Debriefing Support Sessions

- Within 1-3 days of email announcement
- Student Groups, Close Peers invited
- Content:
 - Grief process, Acceptability of Diverse Reactions/Emotions
 - Open discussion: memories, reactions, questions
 - Encouraged accessing support resources, info provided
 - *(no university structured follow-up)*

► University Wide “Day of Remembrance”

- Already established practice (1st Wed in May)
- For all Blugolds lost during past year regardless



Sequelai of Events

- ▶ At memorial for student (off campus):
 - ▶ Many stories were shared
 - ▶ Reveal of bird that was her inspiration....
 - ▶ All over social media, STEM group made memorial t-shirts
 - ▶ Student paper / Community paper stories
 - ▶ From parents: “long battle with depression, sought help, didn’t work for her, can work for others”
 - ▶ Community response → dragon boat race in honor
- ▶ Triggers Cluster/Contagion of Suicide Deaths (6, 2 unconfirmed)
 - ▶ Culture among students = “everyone dies by suicide here”



What Happened?

- ▶ “Triggering Email?”
 - ▶ Clear differences in tone, length, response
 - ▶ All emails following student A were more concise
 - ▶ Some disclosed cause, others did not → RUMORS
- ▶ “Triggering Postvention Response?”
 - ▶ First time for classroom visits – set precedent
 - ▶ First time for debriefing sessions – no protocol
- ▶ Emotional Health of Responders
 - ▶ Huge toll on morale, energy, clinical tolerance
 - ▶ DoS “haggard” & engaged in self-blame for initial email



Steps Taking Now

- **Initiated Involvement & Improved Communication**
 - Crisis Action Team Meetings
 - Coordination with Community Crisis Response Partners
- **In-Progress Postvention Protocol & Kits**
 - Standardized text for student death announcements
 - Standardized protocol for classroom visits/orgs/teams
 - Standardized protocol for debriefing process
 - Set time frame for initial meeting
 - Consider follow-up debriefing ~2weeks post-announcement



Remaining Questions & Concerns

➤ Remaining Questions & Concerns

- Social Media & Monitoring Responses/Information Shared
- Student Publications (media reporting guidelines)
- Student & Faculty initiated memorials
- Balancing of Disclosure (parental discretion)

➤ Debriefing and Helping Staff

- No clear support provided

