

UNIVERSITY SAFETY COUNCIL MEETING  
FEBRUARY 3, 2015

PRESENT: Alan, Brad, Bindu, David, Steve, Tandra, Donna, Emily, Jason, Barb, Charlie, Amy, Andrea, Mark, Martha, and Mary (Cindy, Gunther, Greg, and Jane arrived later after meeting with the Chancellor)

Since Greg and Cindy were delayed due to a meeting with the Chancellor to discuss safety issues, Alan opened meeting and reported on the student death this week and informed the group of other incidents over the weekend resulting in four evaluations on students with 3 being admitted to the hospital.

Alan stated that maybe the group should talk about big picture in light of media everywhere. The death that occurred this week was an off campus medical call in response to a distressed individual.

Barb stated that the media attention is troubling – i.e. UNC system not investigating App State. She expressed concern for our community and especially those on the front line, and asked what can we do for our community, i.e. a gathering?

Alan indicated that this could be a part of what Greg, Gunther and Cindy are talking about this morning in their meeting with the Chancellor -formalizing an event with talking points from Chancellor, JJ and Carson and then provide a time for the community to come together for discussion/concerns. Alan stated that JJ had suggested ringing the bells 9 times for the students who we have lost but there is hesitancy in recognizing suicide. The research shows you do not treat suicide differently but talking about losses in general may be our approach.

Martha indicated that Katie Knowles, a former sorority member is willing to come to campus. Alan indicated that her post is worth reading and that they have reached out to her. Alan also indicated that one possibility for her to participate in be on campus is with the suicide memorial in April. With the loss of Mary Catherine, the Greek community wants to help us.

Martha – Katie Knowles message is poignant. Her blog talks about mental illness and how things get better and we need to talk about it. She struggled with suicide – being in that place while in college but that things get better.

Alan stated that we are in crisis mode, particularly with the suicide contagion. This has happened at other campuses but not a lot out there about the right approach and we need to bring all to the table about how to communicate and respond and help our community grieve and process.

Amy asked that we include faculty and staff in this gathering because it hits residence hall staff and housekeeping, and is also very difficult for faculty.

Discussion followed about ways to show institutional support for Dean of Students Office and others on the front line. Andrea suggested a retreat or debriefing, or yoga.

Martha stated that this is proactive, having someone talking about these issues and providing these people some hope.

Alan informed that Elisabeth Cavallaro, our Suicide Prevention Coordinator, has been providing a lot of training on campus relative to Suicide Prevention. She is using an educational approach that meets students where they are. Responses have been very positive and indicating that she is reaching folks in that way and that the more messaging we have, the better. The educational component rather than memorials is effective.

Mary asked if the Council might be able to craft for the Chancellor more substance about what is available, what is happening – the actual work that is being done to inform faculty, staff and students, and letting everyone know that we have a Suicide Prevention training program.

Barb stated that the numbers are astonishing that have been through training – over 1,000? This is a good message in that these numbers show how we care.

Amy asked if we are tracking from messages to the link. David will check with webmaster since this is not a function of IT but for the webmaster.

Donna – worries me – folks are front line and everyone is over the maximum of what they can handle and continue to work for students in need – do what we need to do without additional counselors, etc.

Alan informed that Student Development has posted a ton of jobs in the last week including a Wellness and Prevention Services Director. This will be beneficial in the movement towards a proactive approach rather than a reactive approach. –

Steve asked if we have checked with our peer institutions about what are they doing. Our numbers may seem a little high but are other institutions keeping track of their numbers?

Tandrea stated that it is unhelpful that in the High Country Press they talked about the student death as a suicide. She also asked that in terms of looking at the losses we have had, have there been any issues identified, any patterns identified with the students we have lost. Any ways to address these vulnerabilities going forward?

Alan stated that this is definitely on JJ and Cindy's radar.

Other conversations occurred relative to training included:

- The Suicide Prevention training provides campus wide messaging and goes along with bystander intervention
- Idea of reaching out to high school students through faculty and graduate students – broadening the community since students don't all of a sudden come into distress.
- Bullying model is a great model to begin changing the tide in middle school and high school
- Resiliency training – mindfulness training – could be helpful
- Putting this discussion back into the curriculum, Freshman Seminar/First Year

Cindy – Chancellor called meeting of 9 of us to discuss dealing with where we are - Are we in a crisis? There was very good discussion and new communication will be out about reporting the cause of deaths since everyone is reporting differently.

Secondly, one of the biggest challenges is dealing with grief from students, faculty and staff. Emily, Carson and other students want us to talk about grief providing a session on Thursday night and a formalized message will be out soon.

Cindy – There are real life mental health issues on our campus and many have dealt with complex problems. It is a myth that our Counseling Center cannot see a student and we need to address this fact. We need more space, resources and more therapist but we are handling triage differently- we have an operational difference to track

all students that walk in, we have added more service hours at the Counseling Center and service hours by the Dean of Students Office, Housing and Residence Life.

Cindy - What can the campus do? One of those things is that we are out there and we are present. We need to be out of our offices and reassuring to folks and providing students with "adult wisdom." We are looking at how we would operationalize this process – maybe providing a table supported by our faculty staff, Safety Council members – where we could sign up to offer services – where we could sign up and take our lunch – offer support.

Cindy – The Counseling Center is trying to extend hours and we have reached out to Campus Ministries who are not therapist but do have special training that they can use to aid/support others.

Cindy – Our communication process is a work in progress. Questions from the media -What are you doing to make your campus safe and tying the issues to questioning if we are an unsafe campus. We want to communicate that there are avenues for expressing grief, and straighten out any misconceptions.

Jane – reporters don't always bother to check facts and they report on what has already been reported and errors are compounded.

Cindy -Hank and Megan are working on a Fact Sheet that will go to media including the number of on campus deaths and the number of off campus deaths – trying to clean up what poor reporting has caused.

Cindy – we are not far off from national standards –but our number of deaths has been compacted in a four month period.

Greg – We concluded the meeting this morning with the Chancellor expressing concern for all of you and she wants to make sure that you are alright and expresses her thanks to everyone and she appreciates this group.

Gunther – it is important to share that the Chancellor has decided that unless death on campus creates a safety issue, we will not be sending out a notice unless there is a suspicion that there is a long term effect.

David and Martha –both expressed that will have a communication through social media.

Cindy – Conversations indicated that kids and parents at other schools knew nothing about any of these issues but it is classic app way that we are out there in a public way that others aren't – does it help or hurt us? Everyone has social media – we reach out to that circle of concern – that tends to be more of the way that is handled

Mark – We have to look like we aren't having a change of approach due to media scrutiny or that it looks like we are getting defensive since that may not be well perceived.

Cindy – We have to do that thoughtfully and this will probably not be implemented until summer

Mary informed the late arrivals that the group had talked a lot about acknowledging support for the people on the front line and in the residence halls and there was no conclusion but agreement that some type of activity or event is needed

Tandrea –This is a hard position to be in and is there anything Faculty and Staff Senate can do?

Donna – People want to prevent tragedy and not feel like we are out of control.

Cindy – We have had 39 emergencies in 3 weeks from Counseling Center with Alan and Judy dealing with those emergencies as well.

Cindy - March highest month of suicide on this campus according to Counseling Center data.

Cindy – We are open to any suggestions and faculty and staff have been amazing and the care and concern and deep connection is profound.

We have to remember our new administrators and faculty – how are they sorting out this place we are in?

Barb – How can we acknowledge grief and appreciation, i.e. make a wall and allow written public expressions of appreciation? How does it feel with folks who are grieving?

Cindy – The linkage is strong and there are circles of connectivity that are grieving, but we have thousands who are happy and feeling good about where they are.

Bindu – We need to acknowledge that those students not at the same high level of crisis still need assistance.

Bindu - Alive and Thrive Suicide Training is a good training connecting you to important resources.

Cindy – Suggested that everyone read information on the Counseling Center web page which has a lot of good information. There is good on-line and person to person resources which all are related to care for the human spirit.

Cindy -The suggestion of putting in Student Development pieces in Freshman Seminar has been discussed but further conversation has been delayed until the new Provost is here.

The meeting adjourned followed by the LifeLine App demo.