

12-2017

## Behavioral Intervention Teams: An Exploration of Team Member Perceptions at Oklahoma Regional Universities

Sheila J. Self  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd>



Part of the [Applied Behavior Analysis Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#)

---

### Citation

Self, S. J. (2017). Behavioral Intervention Teams: An Exploration of Team Member Perceptions at Oklahoma Regional Universities. *Graduate Theses and Dissertations* Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/2564>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact [scholar@uark.edu](mailto:scholar@uark.edu), [uarepos@uark.edu](mailto:uarepos@uark.edu).

Behavioral Intervention Teams: An Exploration of Team Member Perceptions at Oklahoma  
Regional Universities

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Higher Education

by

Sheila J. Self  
Northeastern State University  
Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, 1998  
Northeastern State University  
Master of Science in Counseling Psychology, 2000

December 2017  
University of Arkansas

This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

---

Dr. James O. Hammons, Ph.D.  
Dissertation Director

---

Dr. Ketevan Mamiseishvili, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Dr. Ronald Freeman, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

## **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to examine Behavioral Intervention Teams from the perspective of twelve team members at four regional universities in Oklahoma. This study strengthened the knowledge base regarding team-member perceptions of Behavioral Intervention Team effectiveness, functioning, resources, needs, state factors, and campus impacts, and added qualitative data to the existing body of literature. Behavioral Intervention Teams were designed to be a tool for preventing campus violence and addressing behaviors of concern through information gathering, analysis, and intervention. While it may never be known how many acts of violence, suicides, or other student issues have been prevented or ameliorated by these teams, this research allowed for a better understanding of team functioning, team member experiences, and of the value of having these teams on college campuses. This research may be used to by teams, administrators, and other decision makers to assist in maximizing student success, safety, and retention.

©2017 by Sheila J. Self  
All Rights Reserved

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to thank my mother. Mom, thanks for all the things you didn't have to do for me and for all the times I didn't say thank you but should have. To you, I am eternally grateful. And dad, I think you would be proud of all I've become. I still miss you.

I would also like to thank my husband Todd. Who knew this would take eight (or so) years!! Thank you for the countless things you took care of and handled without complaint. Thank you for never second-guessing this journey, and for your endless belief that I could see this thing through. Without you, I never would have made it.

My heartfelt appreciation also goes out to my mother and father in law. My children are happier and brighter because of their time with you, and I appreciate the confidence you had in me and the support you gave me all along the way. What precious gifts – thank you.

I would be remiss not to thank my dissertation committee as well. Dr. Hammons, you are what I will remember most about my doctoral studies at the University of Arkansas. Thank you for your wisdom and for nudging me when I needed it. Dr. Kate, thank you for modeling what a woman in higher education should aspire to become, and thank you Dr. Freeman, for giving me the gift of parallel process. I see them everywhere now! Thank you for opening my eyes.

And finally, to my girls, Ally G. and Zoë E. You have been my motivation to invest in myself, to use my talents, and to find purpose in my work, so that one day, you will have permission to do the same. Be brave, little ones! I believe in you.

## **Dedication**

I wish to dedicate this work to “my BIT” at Northeastern State University. Thank you all for your tireless commitment to our own brand of chaos and uncertainty. Although they’re unseen, I know you wear capes!

## Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE .....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Overview.....	1
Context of the Problem .....	1
The Oklahoma Budget Crisis.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Significance of the Study .....	7
Definition of Terms.....	8
Organization of the Study .....	9
Summary .....	10
CHAPTER TWO .....	11
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	11
Overview.....	11
Responding to Campus Violence.....	11
Literature Search Strategies, Exclusions, and Gaps.....	12
Literature search strategies .....	12
Literature exclusions.....	13

Gaps in the literature.....	13
Summary.....	14
Organization of the Remaining Sections .....	14
Theoretical Framework.....	14
Overview.....	14
Schlossberg’s Transition Theory .....	14
Summary.....	17
College Student Mental Health.....	18
Overview.....	18
Difficulties Meeting the Demand.....	19
Increased Severity of Mental Health Issues.....	20
Risk and Prediction.....	21
Summary.....	22
Threat Assessment .....	22
Overview.....	22
Threat Assessment and the Modern BIT .....	23
Threat Assessment Pre-Virginia Tech. ....	23
Shifts in Thinking about Threat Assessment. ....	23
Threat Assessment Principles .....	24
Summary.....	25



Modern BITs.....	26
Overview.....	26
The Evolution from TAT to BIT .....	27
Threat Assessment within the BIT.....	28
The Purpose of a BIT .....	29
BIT Guiding Principles.....	30
Campus violence to self and others is largely preventable.....	30
Early identification and proactive intervention are key to BIT success. ....	31
BITs should engage in and be knowledgeable about how to conduct a threat assessment. .....	32
BITs have the potential to save lives, money, time, and reputations.....	33
Summary.....	34
Summary of the Literature Review.....	34
CHAPTER THREE .....	35
METHODOLOGY .....	35
Overview.....	35
Selection of the Research Design .....	35
Selecting Participants.....	36
Selection of Research Sites.....	36
Identification and Selection of Participants .....	37

Gaining Permission.....	38
Securing IRB Approval.....	38
Securing Permission from Participants.....	38
Selecting Data Types .....	39
Data Recording and Interview Protocol.....	39
Development of Interview Protocol.....	39
Pilot Testing of the Interview Protocol.....	45
Data Collection .....	45
Preliminary Phone Interview .....	45
Document Analysis.....	46
Interviews.....	46
Recording of Analytic Memos.....	47
Trustworthiness.....	47
Credibility .....	47
Transferability.....	48
Dependability .....	48
Confirmability.....	49
Researcher’s World View (Personal Statement).....	49
Data Analysis .....	51
Summary .....	51

CHAPTER FOUR.....	53
PRESENTATION OF DATA.....	53
Overview.....	53
Participant Demographics.....	53
Role on the Team.....	55
Reasons for Team Creation.....	56
Responses to Interview Questions .....	58
Question 1: What would you say are the primary goals of your team?.....	58
Probe: What activities does your team engage in to meet these goals?.....	60
Question 2: What interventions are utilized by the team? .....	62
Probe: To what degree do you perceive these interventions to be effective?.....	64
Probe: What resources are available to assist in providing needed interventions?.....	66
Probe: What resources are needed? .....	68
Probe: For what populations do you provide interventions (faculty, staff, students)? .....	71
Probe: Please describe your teams’ use of interventions such as suspensions, withdrawals, and/or student conduct referrals.....	72
Question 3: From your perspective, describe the extent to which your team impacts campus safety? .....	74
Probe: Can you provide an example of a case that illustrates your answer? .....	75
Question 4: What marketing strategies are utilized by the team?.....	77

Probe: To what degree do you perceive these efforts to be effective? .....	79
Probe: What resources are available to assist in providing marketing of the team?.....	81
Probe: What resources are needed? .....	82
Question 5: What funding resources are allocated for team use?.....	84
Probe: To what degree do you perceive these resources to be sufficient to meet team goals? .....	85
Probe: What does your team do with its funding? .....	87
Probe: What needs, if any, do you have in this area? .....	87
Question 6: From your perspective, describe your team’s impact on those served. Include students, faculty, staff, and campus as a whole. ....	88
Probe: Can you provide an example of a case that illustrates the team’s impact? .....	90
Question 7: From your perspective, what internal team characteristics or dynamics, if any, strengthen your team? .....	91
Probe: What internal team characteristics or dynamics, if any, limit your team? .....	93
Probe: Can you provide an example to illustrate your answer?.....	95
Question 8: What BIT-related training have you had? .....	96
Probe: Please describe any team training your BIT has engaged in. ....	97
Probe: What training needs does your team have? .....	98
Probe: What resources are available to train the team or individual team members? .....	99
Probe: What resources are needed to train the team or individual team members? .....	99

Question 9: From your perspective, what, if any, impact does being at a regional institution in Oklahoma have on team functioning? .....	100
Probe: If state budget shortfalls have impacted your team, please describe that impact. ....	106
Question 10: If you have a branch campus, describe BIT practices there. ....	110
Probe: What resources are needed to improve branch campus BIT activities? .....	111
Question 11: What trends do you foresee for the future of your team? .....	113
Probe: What trends do you foresee for teams in Oklahoma? .....	113
Probe: What trends do you foresee for teams nationally? .....	114
Question 12: Can you think of any other information about your team that you would like to share? .....	116
Probe: Do you believe these teams are needed? Why or why not? .....	118
Summary .....	119
CHAPTER FIVE .....	120
INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	120
Overview .....	120
Research Design .....	120
Findings .....	121
What are the primary goals of Oklahoma’s regional BIT teams? .....	121
What do team members perceive as the reasons their teams were created? .....	122

What activities are teams engaging in to meet their goals? .....	123
What interventions are teams using? .....	124
Do teams have the authority to suspend, withdraw, or refer students to student conduct? .....	124
What are the marketing practices of teams? .....	125
What training do team members have or need? .....	126
How, and to what extent, are teams funded? .....	128
What do team members perceive is their impact on students, faculty, staff, and the campus overall?.....	128
To what extent do teams believe they are contributing to campus safety?.....	129
How do team members perceive team dynamics? .....	130
How do teams address branch campus needs? .....	132
What impact do team members perceive the Oklahoma budget shortfall, or other state factor(s), has had on their team? .....	133
What are the available and needed resources?.....	134
How do team members perceive their team’s effectiveness? .....	137
How do team members perceive the future of their teams, other Oklahoma teams, and national teams?.....	137
Conclusions.....	138
The Invisible Hat.....	139
State Impacts.....	139

National Trends.....	140
Student Retention.....	140
Team Dynamics .....	142
The Oklahoma Standard .....	142
Limitations .....	143
Recommendations for Improved Practice.....	144
Leverage the Core and Integrate Threat Assessment Activities .....	144
Connect with Branch Campuses .....	145
Fund the BIT .....	145
Stay in Your Lane .....	145
Overcome Language Barriers .....	145
Review Written Policies .....	146
Recommendations for Future Research .....	146
Closing Summary .....	147
References.....	149
APPENDICES .....	154
APPENDIX A.....	155
2016 Mid-Year Oklahoma Budget Cuts and Surplus Returns.....	156
APPENDIX B.....	157
Oklahoma Regional Universities .....	158

APPENDIX C .....	159
LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS AND SSAOs.....	160
APPENDIX D.....	161
IRB Approval.....	162
APPENDIX E .....	163
Consent to Participate in a Research Study .....	164
APPENDIX F .....	167
Interview Protocol Form.....	168



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Overview**

Administrators and policy makers, prompted to begin mandating prevention and response efforts, have implemented Behavioral Intervention Teams to address disruptive behaviors such as threats to self or others, stalking, social isolation, or inappropriate emotional displays (Van Brunt, 2012). Many institutions of higher learning are grappling with how to intervene on behalf of students with increased mental health and behavioral concerns while also navigating funding shortfalls. While the majority of individuals with mental health issues never become violent, Wilson (2015) reported, "...mass shootings in 2007 and 2008 by mentally ill students at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University, respectively, prompted many colleges to cast a wider net to identify troubled students" (p. A39).

This chapter provides context surrounding the problem of campus violence and behaviors of concern, includes a statement of the problem, and defines the purpose of the study. It also contains the research questions, information pertaining to the significance of the study, key terms, and concludes with a description of how the study is organized.

#### **Context of the Problem**

Behavioral Intervention Teams were created in response to violent campus events and increases in student mental health and behavioral concerns. According to the literature, the mission of these teams is to identify and respond to behaviors categorized as disruptive, dangerous, disturbing, distressed, dysregulated, or due to a medical disability (Delworth, 2009; Eells, Rockland-Miller, 2011; Golston, 2015; Sokolow, Lewis, Wolf, Van Brunt, & Byrnes, 2009), and Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) is a term used to describe a group of

purposefully selected staff, administrators, and faculty whose role is to help the campus community identify and respond to students or other individuals who may be exhibiting behaviors of concern. The team assembles pieces of information about the individual that have been collected from a variety of sources then pieces the information together into a useful conceptualization of the case. This allows the team to determine what type of intervention, such as counseling or academic support, is needed. These teams are responsible for connecting the student to appropriate resources equipped to address the problematic behaviors. Teams also follow-up and monitor progress as needed. It is common to find deans of students, campus police, counseling directors, and directors of judicial affairs on these teams. However, team make-up varies somewhat from campus to campus. The name assigned to teams also varies from campus to campus, but some of the more common names include Threat Assessment Team (TAT); Campus Assessment, Response, and Evaluation Team (CARE); or Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) (Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2011). For the purpose of this study, Behavioral Intervention Team, or BIT, will be used.

### **The Oklahoma Budget Crisis**

Oklahoma is challenged with a dangerous combination of staggering mental health needs and state revenue failures. In fact, Oklahoma is not only experiencing substantial cuts to higher education funding, but the state is also suffering from some of the highest mental illness rates in the country. According to the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS), Oklahoma rates third in the nation for adult mental illness. This equates to between 700,000 and 950,000 adult Oklahomans in need of mental health services, many of whom are attending college (ODMHSAS: Statistics and data, 2016).

Furthermore, the state of Oklahoma has experienced major challenges and shortages

when it comes to higher education funding. This funding shortage is due, in part, to state revenue tied to oil. According to McNutt (2016) Oklahoma has furnished around 94.7 million oil dollars per year to higher education in the state. But, in 2016, oil prices dropped significantly, and produced only 68.4 million dollars, resulting in a series of budgetary cuts to state supported institutions. When added to cuts that had already been implemented, the total budget reduction was \$106 million (McNutt, 2016).

Declining state funding to Oklahoma's institutions of higher education is nothing new. In 1998, 75 percent of Oklahoma's state system budget was funded by state appropriations. But, state appropriations were only half of higher education's total budget by 2007, and today, state appropriations make up only 35 percent of the budget (Stricklin, 2016). In fact, McNutt (2016a) reported a \$241 million decline in state support since 2008 for Oklahoma's 25 public colleges and universities. This amount closely approached 20 percent of spending in 2015 (McNutt, 2016a; Query, 2016). Low oil production revenue, in part, led to an announcement by Oklahoma officials in February of 2016 that there was a \$1.3 billion shortfall in the state resulting in mid-year budget cuts. However, Oklahoma over-estimated the amount that would need to be cut from the budget mid-year, and ended up with over \$100 million in surplus that was returned to state agencies (Blatt, 2016). Appendix A shows the announced budget cuts and surplus returns (Query, 2016; Johnson, 2016; Green, 2016; and McNutt, 2016). Oklahoma's institutions of higher education began fiscal year 2017 with an \$810 million budget. This is down \$67 million from 2016, which was down \$112 million from 2015 (McNutt, 2016a).

Still, even with these returns, the residual cuts were more than some institutions could absorb without severe consequences to those they serve (Query, 2016). During the 2016 Oklahoma legislative session, College presidents and the Oklahoma Regents for Higher

Education worked to eliminate further cuts. However, higher education was reduced by 15.9 percent, despite their efforts (McNutt, 2016a). Dr. Don Betz, The University of Central Oklahoma's President, was quoted by McNutt (2016a) as saying, "There is a continuing lack of appreciation for the role that public education plays among some people in our state" (p.3). As a result, BIT teams in Oklahoma are faced with the reality of having limited institutional budgets with which to address significant mental health needs, and both of these factors are forcing teams to do more with less.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The aim of this study was to strengthen the knowledge base regarding team-member perceptions of Behavioral Intervention Team effectiveness, functioning, resources, and impacts at regional public institutions in Oklahoma. In part, this study was inspired by J. Childress' (2013) qualitative dissertation on BITs in which she examined a private liberal arts college in California. She recommended examining multiple sites with enough commonalities to be able to compare and contrast findings and determine best practices. Childress also suggested that public institutions should be included in order to compare findings with those of the private institution in her study (Childress, 2013).

Although several existing studies of BITs provide a substantial amount of quantitative data (Cao, 2011; Golston, 2015, Mardis, Sullivan, & Gamm, 2013; Van Brunt, et al., 2012), more qualitative data is needed. In Golston's (2015) quantitative study about the formation and structure of BITs, the author acknowledged that a primary limitation to the study was the lack of qualitative data and added that more data was needed about team training, team funding, and characteristics of functional teams.

Further support for this study came from Brian Van Brunt, the Senior Vice President for

Professional Program Development for the National Center for Higher Education Risk Management Group (NCHERM). He served as president of the American College Counseling Association (ACCA) and has written a number of books, articles, and whitepapers related to the subject of campus violence prevention (Van Brunt, 2016a). When I asked Dr. Van Brunt (B. Van Brunt, personal communication, August 10, 2016) what aspects of BITs needed examination, he suggested researching BIT marketing practices, the role of case managers, and whether teams should focus solely on student behaviors of concern or on faculty/staff behaviors of concern as well. This study addressed all of these topics through the lens of Oklahoma teams. Furthermore, the study aimed to add to the current literature about BIT team resources and attempted to increase the knowledge related to BIT functioning, funding, and staff training. In addition, it described participant's perceptions about factors that, in their view, were either contributing to or preventing team success. Finally, the study illustrated how team members perceive their work and their team's impact on individual students and campus safety overall.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe Behavioral Intervention Teams from the perspective of twelve team members at four regional universities in Oklahoma. Particular emphasis was placed on examining how team members perceived and described the team, team functioning, available resources, needed resources, the perceived impact of team efforts, and the impact of being at a regional institution in Oklahoma. As pointed out earlier, Behavioral Intervention Teams were designed as a tool for stopping the "pathway to violence" before tragedy occurs (Randazzo & Plummer, 2009; Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2011). While it may never be known how many acts of violence, suicides, or other student issues are prevented or ameliorated by these teams, this research allowed for a better understanding of team functioning

in order for university leaders to better support and sustain the campus teams working to make a difference in campus safety and in the lives of students in Oklahoma.

### **Research Questions**

In order to achieve the purposes of this study, one central question was investigated by exploring several associated sub-questions. The central question was: How are BITs functioning at regional institutions in Oklahoma? In order to answer this central question, several sub-questions were explored, including:

1. What are the primary goals of Behavioral Intervention Teams?
2. What do team members perceive as the reason or reasons for team creation?
3. What activities are teams engaging in to meet their goals? And:
  - a. What interventions are teams using?
  - b. Do teams have the authority to suspend, withdraw, or refer students to student conduct?
  - c. What are the marketing practices of teams?
  - d. What training do team members have or need?
4. How, and to what extent, are teams funded?
5. What do team members perceive is their impact on students, faculty, staff, and the campus overall?
6. To what extent do teams believe they are contributing to campus safety?
7. How do team members perceive team dynamics?
8. How do teams address branch campus needs?
9. What impact do team members perceive the Oklahoma budget shortfall, or other state factors, have had on their team?

10. What are the available and needed resources?
11. How do team members perceive team effectiveness?
12. How do team members perceive the future of their teams, other Oklahoma teams, and national teams?

### **Significance of the Study**

BITs are a relatively new and evolving phenomenon in higher education, nevertheless, 97% of schools surveyed in a national study had a BIT on their campus (Van Brunt, 2016). This statistic suggested a national buy-in to the idea that these teams can effectively prevent and respond to immerging concerns on campus. However, a great deal of the information available about BITs was the result of quantitative surveys of members of the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association (Golston, 2015; Mardis et al., 2013; Van Brunt et al., 2012; Van Brunt, 2016). These studies have proven to be rich and valuable data sources and offered a broad picture of national trends. However, in a time of declining institutional budgets, not all institutions can afford to participate in NaBITA. This may be especially true in Oklahoma, potentially leaving them out of the data pool. Furthermore, as with all types of research, surveys have a number of possible limitations such as low response rate or incomplete responses due to survey length (Creswell, 2008). Golston (2015) acknowledged that many of the open-form questions in her study were not answered and said, “this type of question should be used in semi-structured interviews with participants” (p. 91).

In response to this need for additional qualitative data, this study provided thorough descriptions of BIT member perceptions, experiences, and resources, and described the perceived impact of BITs on the campus community overall. This study may assist administrators, practitioners, and policy makers charged with making decisions about their campus teams. Key

individuals, when armed with a better understanding of team member experiences, will then be better able to contribute to the success of team efforts and to make decisions that can maximize student success and retention.

### **Definition of Terms**

To ensure understanding, several terms related to intervention teams used in this study have been defined.

1. *Oklahoma Regional Universities*, according to the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education website, include six universities in the state of Oklahoma that are under the governance of The Regional University System of Oklahoma (RUSO), two institutions governed by The University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, and two institutions governed by the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges Board of Regents. The state's Regional Universities include: Cameron University, East Central University, Langston University (a historically black college or university), Northeastern State University, Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, and the University of Central Oklahoma (see *Appendix B*).
2. *Behaviors of Concern* are behaviors that may disrupt or endanger the safety or the well-being of one or more individuals or to the campus as a whole. These behaviors may make others feel uneasy and include, but are not limited to, behaviors such as: extreme emotional reactions out of proportion to the activating event, references to harming self or others, signs of depression, feelings of hopelessness, isolation from others, obsessive statements or behaviors, substance abuse, and/or relationship problems (Randazzo and Plummer, 2009; Van Brunt, 2012).



3. *Behavioral Intervention Teams* are defined as a diverse group of specially selected team members from within the university community whose role is to identify behaviors of concern and intervene using strategies and action plans developed to address the student and their troubling behaviors (Van Brunt, 2012). For the purposes of this study, threat assessment is included as one of many functions of the team.
4. *Case Managers* for BITs “flexibly and creatively connect the identified student with services, ensure they keep up with scheduled appointments and . . . coordinate communication among the student, faculty and staff . . . in an effort to keep the student moving towards academic success” (Van Brunt, 2012, p. 67).
5. *Intervention* is the term used to describe strategies used by the BIT to alter a student’s current concerning behaviors. Intervention resources may include, but are not limited to: counseling services, medical services, tutoring, psychological assessments, or emergency funds.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview on which all other chapters are built. Following this introduction into the scope of the problem and research questions, Chapter 2 reviews the current literature related to the topic and includes information pertinent to campus violence, literature review strategies, and the theoretical framework of the study. It also includes a narrative on the current state of college student mental health, provides insight into the use of threat assessment, and describes the modern BIT. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology to be used in the study including the interview protocol and corresponding research questions. Chapter 4 presents the data collected from the interviews and other informative descriptions. Finally, Chapter 5 provides the results of the study, conclusions,

limitations, and recommendations for future practice and inquiry.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided the context and statement of the problem and purpose statement. It contained the research questions and significance of the study, defined key terms and, in conclusion, outlined the organization of the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **Overview**

Chapter 2 reviews the existing body of literature pertaining to the study of Behavioral Intervention Teams. The chapter is broken down into three sections. Section one begins with a discussion of campus violence, and provides a review of the literature search strategies. It also discusses intentional literature exclusions, and gaps in the literature. Section two considers a theoretical framework through which to view Behavioral Intervention Team activities and is followed by a third section focused on the review of materials related to college mental health, threat assessments, and modern BITs.

#### **Responding to Campus Violence**

On April 16, 2007, 23-year-old student, Seung Hui Cho, shot and killed 32 people and wounded 17 others in a random-type attack on the campus of Virginia Tech before ending his own life. According to Randazzo and Plummer (2009):

In the weeks and months following the shootings, several extensive reviews and after-action analyses were conducted by Virginia Tech and others to better understand the attack and to try to prevent similar attacks at any institutions of higher education (IHEs). Just as the Columbine High School attack in 1999 served to galvanize efforts toward understanding and preventing K-12 shootings, so, too, has the 2007 attack at Virginia Tech served to galvanize campus safety efforts and to focus the nation's attention on the issue of preventing campus shootings. (p. 3)

In another well-known case, a Northern Illinois University student killed 5 and wounded 16 others before he ultimately committed suicide too. In both cases, the shooters had been treated for mental health issues, and the nation started asking questions about what signs had been missed and what could have been done to prevent these tragedies. As a result, Threat Assessment Teams, and the more broadly focused Behavioral Intervention Teams, became

commonplace across the nation. According to Sokolow and Lewis (2009), “behavioral intervention functions existed on college campuses before Virginia Tech, but their nature, composition and function are changing dramatically as campuses adjust to new complexities of student mental illness and increasing violence” (p. 3). Campus shootings have forced universities to intervene before, during, and after such tragedies and to plan for *when*, not if, they will occur.

As previously stated, this team approach was not a new idea in higher education. In fact, an earlier behavioral intervention approach was published by Ursula Delworth in 1989. Delworth provided a model for the assessment and intervention of student problems known as the AISP model (Assessment-Intervention of Student Problems). This model was later updated by Hollingsworth, Dunkle, and Douce in 2009 to accommodate the ever-changing landscape of higher education. The AISP model continues to be relevant and serves as an early reference point reinforcing the importance of having a structured, team approach to intervening with challenging student behaviors (Delworth, 1989, Delworth, 2009).

### **Literature Search Strategies, Exclusions, and Gaps**

This section describes the methods used to obtain existing literature pertaining to BITs. Additionally, it provides a description of the purposefully excluded materials and gaps in the literature.

#### **Literature search strategies**

A number of literature search strategies were utilized to obtain relevant literature for the review. I found materials by searching the University of Arkansas Libraries, published books, and publications listed on the National Association of Behavioral Intervention Team (NaBITA) website. The search included materials from the University of Arkansas Libraries’ Ebsco

Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar, and ProQuest databases. Also, I utilized the descriptors *Behavioral Intervention Teams*, *Threat Assessment Teams*, *students of concern*, *Campus CARE teams*, *threat assessment*, *campus violence*, and *campus violence prevention* to locate relevant materials.

### **Literature exclusions**

Some items were intentionally excluded from the search process and literature review. For example, in order to focus on the literature related to higher education, I excluded literature focused on K-12 and workplace violence prevention. And, although a significant body of literature can be found related to threat assessment by law enforcement and into the tactical aspects of active-shooter preparation, I excluded this literature as well. This allowed me to maintain a focus on responses to campus shootings, which are largely the impetus for the formation and evolution of the modern BIT. Finally, I did not review literature related to other violent crimes on campus such as sexual violence, robbery, burglary, or hazing. However, I acknowledge that BITs do respond to perpetrators and/or victims of these (and other) crimes as part of team activities.

### **Gaps in the literature**

I found numerous gaps in the literature pertaining to BITs. For example, my search produced few efforts to address in detail how teams address non-threat related issues such as homelessness, excessive absenteeism, academic failures, or social isolation. Authors, did, however, point to a need for data from public institutions, and from multiple sites so that findings could be compared geographically and based on institutional type (Childress, 2013; Greenstein, 2014). Other researchers pointed out that more qualitative data is needed and suggested future research focus on team training, team training needs, and on the interventions teams provide

(Mardis et al., 2013; Golston, 2015). I also found a gap in the literature pertaining to how and to what extent teams are funded.

## **Summary**

This introduction provided insight into the reasons BIT teams exist and into the role they play in responding to both violent and non-violent situations on college campuses. It included definitions of key terms and a description of the variety of sources and descriptors utilized to obtain literature related to BITs. Additionally, a description of excluded literature materials was provided. Finally, this introduction presented gaps in the literature that were utilized as a platform for the development of this study.

## **Organization of the Remaining Sections**

The purpose of the remainder of this review is to describe the literature as it relates to BITs and to provide a theoretical framework through which to view the study. The remainder of this chapter describes the theoretical framework and includes a literature review focused on college student mental health, threat assessment, and modern BITs.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Overview**

The theoretical framework used to conceptualize Behavioral Intervention Teams was Schlossberg's Transition Theory. Much like the mission of BITs, transition theory was developed to enable an understanding of individuals going through a time of transition and to help them connect to the assistance they need to get through the transition (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

### **Schlossberg's Transition Theory**

Schlossberg's transition theory served as the theoretical framework for this study and

provided a number of parallels to BIT functions. The theory was based in psychology and was later applied to counseling, which allowed for a useful theory-to-practice framework.

What Schlossberg considered a “transition” forms the basis of the first parallel between transition theory and BITs. For example, transition theory states that any event or non-event perceived by the individual as a significant event, change, or loss that alters the individual’s assumptions, roles, and/or view of self can be a transition (Evans et al., 2010). Therefore, students facing a transition may, as a consequence, display behaviors of concern. In terms of BITs, a transitional event could manifest as a break-up, a mental health diagnosis, the death of a loved one, retriggered past trauma, academic or social failures, or a combination of factors. These behaviors could be identified and brought to the BIT for intervention. For example, if a student who has been struggling with depression fails to gain admission to graduate school, they may interpret this non-event as “proof” of their feelings of worthlessness and begin to tell others that they are considering suicide. This case might then be referred to the BIT. The transition in this scenario was the non-event of failing to gain admission to graduate school and was complicated by the student’s depression. The behavior of concern resulting in possible referral to the BIT was the statement made to others about the suicidal ideation.

A second parallel between transition theory and BITs was found in the theory’s consideration of the context of the situation and the impact of the event on the individual. Schlossberg viewed transition as being influenced by three sets of variables. These included the individual’s perception of the transition, characteristics of the environment or situation, and characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition. A BIT considers these factors as well. According to transition theory, the support systems a student has in place effects the transition. BITs attempt to provide appropriate sources of support in order to positively impact

the outcome of the transition (Evans et al., 2010).

Additionally, utilizing this theoretical framework allowed for a parallel examination of processes that happen over time. As was the case with the pathway to violence or escalating behaviors of concern considered by BITs, transition theory acknowledged that dealing with a transition was a process that unfolded over a period of time. In transition theory, an individual's preoccupation with the transition was expected and was considered a stage an individual goes through while, hopefully, moving toward integration of the transition. Schlossberg's theory recognized, however, that transitions could lead to either personal growth or decline (Evans et al., 2010). This mirrors BIT in that BITs look for excessive preoccupations and signs of decline such as a preoccupation with getting revenge, obsessive behaviors such as stalking, or other behaviors that indicate to the team that the individual is not appropriately coping with the transition (Van Brunt, 2012).

Finally, transition theory presented a parallel with BIT in that an individual's resources related to the situation, to self, to support resources, and to strategies for coping would impact the outcome. These were labeled "the 4 S's" in transition theory (Evans et al., 2010). The 4 S's in transition theory influenced an individual's ability to successfully navigate the transition.

The first S, "situation", considered the context of the situation. This included the factors which precipitated the transition, the timing of the event, the individual's perceived level of control over the transition, other stressors occurring during the transition, and the individual's perception of who is responsible for the transition. BITs also consider the context of a situation as they determine a plan of action.

The second S, "self", incorporated personal, demographic, and psychological characteristics and resources. This included characteristics of the individual such as mental



health diagnosis, gender, race, major, classification, etc. BITs, in parallel, concern themselves with gathering this type of information from a variety of sources (Sokolow & Lewis 2009; Sokolow, Schuster, Lewis, Swinton, & Van Brunt, 2014, Van Brunt, 2012)

The third S, “support”, recognized the importance of social, familial, intimate, and community resources in helping an individual through a transition. This is modeled in BIT efforts to connect students to resources, to involve family when necessary, and to identify both positive and negative influences on the individual. Transition theory stated that while transitions offered opportunities for growth and development, a positive outcome was not assumed. BITs understand this too and try to maximize chances for a positive outcome by connecting students with needed support resources (Sokolow et al., 2014; Van Brunt, 2012; Sokolow & Lewis, 2009).

The final S, “strategies”, are actions taken by the individual to modify, control, or manage the stress and/or the transition (Evans et al., 2010). According to Transition Theory, a student was able to work through the transition when these efforts are positive and pro-social. However, when the strategy involves harm to self or others, it is appropriate for a BIT to intervene, such as in a case of a break-up where an individual considers a harmful revenge strategy.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory provided a framework for conceptualizing BITs. Transition Theory was focused on the individual, the transition, the context of the situation, and the timing surrounding the transition. These factors, along with the four S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies, formed the theoretical lens through which BIT activities were viewed.

## College Student Mental Health

### Overview

As mentioned previously, college student mental health concerns were cast into the spotlight following the tragedies at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University. And, mental health concerns were found to be the most commonly addressed issues by BITs (Golston, 2015; Mardis et al., 2013). In September of 2015 *The Chronicle of Higher Education* released a special issue that addressed the current mental health needs of today's college students. According to Wilson (2015), 58% of campuses have seen a rise in anxiety disorders, 89% have seen a rise in depression, 33% of students acknowledged a level of depression in the last year that made it difficult for them to function, and 8% of students in the past 12 months seriously considered suicide (Wilson, 2015). Furthermore, the National Alliance of Mental Illness reported that one in four young adults (college-aged) had a diagnosable mental health illness, and suicide was reported as being the second leading cause of death for this age group after automobile accidents (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012).

These issues are not limited to undergraduate students. While graduate students may often be viewed as highly functional and resourceful, institutional cultures may create environments of anxiety and isolation. According to Vimal Patel (2015), nearly 37% of master's students and 47% of Ph.D. students scored as depressed. Additionally, sixty-four percent of graduate students in the arts and humanities scored as depressed. Factors contributing to their depression included poor relationships with advisors, social isolation, financial problems, and a lack of career prospects (Patel, 2015).

For the most part, however, violence is not committed by the mentally ill, and certainly, most individuals with mental health concerns will never become violent (Deisinger & Randazzo,

2014; Langman, 2013; Van Brunt, 2012). However, within the population of individuals with mental illness, the highest risk for violence is found among those with acute psychosis and/or substance abuse issues (Deisinger & Randazzo, 2014).

### **Difficulties Meeting the Demand**

Colleges and universities are struggling to meet the mental health demands of students and their families. Wilson (2015) described families as often expecting campuses to provide “immediate, sophisticated, and sustained mental-health care... many want colleges to keep an eye on their kids, just as they did” (p. A39). Furthermore, students want to be able to access, on campus, all the help they need, when they need it. Unfortunately, many colleges are not equipped to provide this level of care. Baker (2015) reported that most universities have a limited number of counselors, and most have nurse practitioners instead of psychiatrists on campus to prescribe and monitor a growing number of students taking mental health medications.

Research suggested that college counseling centers may be struggling to keep up with demand. The Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors’ (2014) survey reported that one-third of college counseling centers had waiting lists and most limited the number of sessions (Reetz, Krylowicz, & Mistler, 2013-2014).

The 2012 National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) surveyed college students who were currently enrolled or were enrolled within the last five years (n=765). Of those who stopped attending before graduation, 64% reported that they were no longer attending college due to mental health issues. The primary diagnoses revealed by the survey included depression, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Fifty percent of the students who quit attending did not access their campus mental health services, but 70% of those who did utilize

services, rated the services as good or excellent. The top reason students gave for rating campus mental health services as poor was that they had a limited number of sessions and not enough counseling staff to support the need. Of the students surveyed 73% had experienced a mental health crisis (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012).

Furthermore, community colleges also had notable difficulties meeting student needs. Often, community colleges had the scarcest resources, but their students reported higher levels of abusive relationships and both suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. These students often faced issues such as homelessness, family problems, and/or were first generation students from lower socio-economic and diverse backgrounds. They may have worked a number of hours while attending classes, and tended to be older with children of their own (Epstein, 2015).

### **Increased Severity of Mental Health Issues**

Research indicated that the severity of mental health concerns on college campuses was on the rise. One college counseling center administrator (Watkins, Hunt, & Eisenberg, 2012) reported, “We have Tourette’s syndrome. We never used to see that on campus. Asperger’s is growing. People are on medication – people who would never have come to college a decade or two ago, are here” (p. 324). Another administrator reported that to meet changing student needs their college counseling center (CCC) changed their focus to crisis intervention and the treatment of serious mental health issues like suicidal ideation and harm to others in order to meet the need.

CCCs encountered a host of mental health concerns. The Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors’ (AUCCCD) Annual Survey (2014) reported the top problems experienced by college student clientele. They included: anxiety (47.4%), depression (39.7%), relationship issues (33.7%), suicidal ideation (18.2%), self-injury (12.1%), and alcohol abuse (8.5%). In addition, the survey indicated that 25.2% of students seeking services were on

medication to treat a mental health condition (Reetz et al., 2013-2014). As Gilbert (1992) stated,

A more diverse cross-section of our society...is now attending college than at any time in the history of American higher education... More students with severe pathology are now walking through the counseling center door and requesting services... For many counseling centers this trend has coincided with a period of retrenchment in resources and decisions... to limit the length of treatment available to students on campus. Responding in a clinically sound and ethically appropriate matter to this juxtaposition of increased severity and steady-state or decreased resources is indeed a challenge for the profession.” (p. 695)

Price, Mrdjenovich, Thomas, and Dake, (2009) emphasized the high rates of college binge drinking and suicide attempts by college students, and pointed out that serious mental health conditions often emerged in young adults in their late teens and twenties. In fact, according to Baker (2015) “College officials are faced with students in crisis every single day” (p. A42).

### **Risk and Prediction**

The number of referrals for threat or risk assessment on campus seemed to be rising as well. Unfortunately, many counselors, though comfortable with assessments for suicidal ideation, reported being less comfortable (and less trained) to deal with assessing behaviors of concern categorized as extreme or severe (Warren & Bartlett, 2015). One administrator reported,

I think . . . one of the most significant challenges regarding student mental health is this notion of risk. There is almost nobody who can predict the future and yet when it comes to mental health, counseling centers are being increasingly put on the spot to predict what a student is going to do. (p. 332)

Warren and Bartlett (2015) surveyed community college (mental health) counselors (n=70) and asked how often they responded to, and how confident they were in responding to student’s whose disturbing or disrupting behaviors were categorized as mild/moderate, elevated, or extreme/severe. Sixty-four percent of participants believed they could use additional training to help them work with behaviors categorized as mild/moderate, 73% agreed they could use

additional training to help them work with behaviors categorized as elevated, and 84% agreed they would benefit from training to work with behaviors categorized as extreme/severe.

## **Summary**

In conclusion, the mental health demands and increased severity of mental health conditions on today's college campuses can seem staggering. BITs must learn to identify and intervene when mental health issues threaten the campus community. This portion of the literature review discussed the state of college student mental health and highlighted the challenge and training deficits regarding risk and prediction. Furthermore, it highlighted the difficulties in meeting the current demand for services in a time of decreased financial resources, increased administrative expectations, and increased need.

## **Threat Assessment**

### **Overview**

The literature on threat assessment, risk, and violence is plentiful and includes a great deal pertaining to off-campus applications such as preventing workplace violence, terrorism, or violence toward public figures. However, there is also a growing body of literature focused on the challenge of predicting and mitigating campus violence. This portion of the literature review will highlight some of the history of threat assessment and review related studies as they apply to higher education. As Behavioral Intervention Teams and campus mental health providers continue to provide this service on campus, it is important to understand what threat assessment means on a college campus and to review some of the options for objective threat assessment in higher education settings. The following section will review threat assessment and the modern BIT and will provide an overview of threat assessment principles.

## **Threat Assessment and the Modern BIT**

### **Threat Assessment Pre-Virginia Tech.**

Pre-Virginia Tech threat assessment literature provided a foundation for modern BITs. The article by Borum, Fein, Vossekuil, and Berglund (1999) described threat assessment as an emerging and evolving field having roots in the U.S. Secret Service threat assessment framework designed to protect presidents and other public officials. As is the case with BITs, this article reinforced how closely law enforcement worked with mental health experts. In fact, mental health experts often assisted law enforcement with tasks such as determining a client's level of risk to others, evaluating for hospitalization intake and discharge, and with attempting to predict the likelihood and type of violence that may occur. Modern BITs reflect this practice in their recommendation of having a law enforcement and mental health designee serve as core BIT members (Van Brunt, 2012; Van Brunt, Reese, & Lewis, 2015).

### **Shifts in Thinking about Threat Assessment.**

In the 1970s through the 1990s mental health professionals and experts on violence viewed an individual's propensity for violence through the lens of profiling, but in time this thinking began to shift. During this time period, it was believed that dispositional qualities residing in the individual could aid in prediction and that these qualities were not likely to change over time and were either present in an individual or not present (Borum, Fein, Vossekuil, & Berglund, 1999).

However, as the work of threat assessment evolved, mental health professionals and law enforcement officials, started to view the potential for violence as being dependent on a number of contextual factors. Individuals were more often viewed as dynamic and changing with variance in their probability for violence (Borum et al., 1999). This shift in thinking endured and

can be found in modern threat assessment and BIT practices.

Another shift reflected by Borum et al. (1999), was a shift away from reactive responses to committed acts of violence toward proactive prevention efforts. This was due in part to changes in stalking laws, practices pertaining to restraining orders, and in response to incidents of school and workplace violence. This early work by Borum et al. (1999), reflected the reality that individuals who were given information regarding potentially violent events were expected, with increased frequency, to gather information about the risk and attempt to resolve it before it occurred. This new paradigm required new ways of thinking and a new set of skills. As efforts shifted away from profiling, so too were first responders shifting away from waiting for a direct verbal or written threat as a threshold for action. Instead, there was a movement toward looking at the pathways leading to violent acts. The paradigm shift changed from looking at individuals who “made” threats to looking for those who “posed” a threat to others, and new principles for assessing threat were defined (Borum et al., 1999). This shift in language mirrored the tasks associated with modern BITs in that BITs gather information about potential threats and attempt to intervene as early as possible. (Sokolow & Lewis, 2009; Sokolow et al., 2014).

### **Threat Assessment Principles**

The first principle of threat assessment stressed that acts of violence were thought out, planned, and not impulsive or spontaneous (Borum et al., 1999). In fact, it was reported that sometimes the planning of targeted violence dominated the lives of those planning the attack, and that this planning may have provided both a sense of purpose and a means to an end of their emotional pain.

The second principle of threat assessment emphasized that violence was the result of an interplay between past stressful events, the current situation, the attacker, and the target.



Therefore, they recommended gathering information from a variety of sources so as to begin to understand these contextual components of the case. Borum et al. (1999) recommended a minimum of five sources of information, which is roughly associated with the number of members on a BIT team. Most BIT teams have, on average, eight members who are there to contribute their piece of knowledge to the puzzle (Golston, 2015).

The third principle of threat assessment asserted that a successful threat assessment examined attack-related behaviors such as planning behaviors, leakage (telling others about the intentions), inappropriate interests or fixations, acquiring the means to commit the act, and visiting the target or scene of the intended act (Borum et al., 1999). Again, this is mirrored in the modern BIT approach. Modern BITs look for leakage, costuming, and legacy tokens, which are concepts adopted from federal and other law enforcement terminology. Leakage is considered to be any type of information received by a third party regarding the intent of another individual to do harm. A legacy token is an attempt to leave a lasting message behind for others such as a manifesto, a video, or other form of message. Finally, costuming refers to the clothing or accessories collected and worn during the planning and/or implementation phases of violence such as all black or camouflage (Van Brunt, 2016).

## **Summary**

This section provided a comparison between early threat assessment and modern BIT practices. It discussed threat assessment pre-Virginia Tech and reviewed shifts in how professionals thought about threat assessment. Finally, the threat assessment principles that emerged from the earlier work were shared in relation to modern BIT functions.

## Modern BITs

### Overview

The existing body of BIT research is small but growing. Several dissertations on the topic were found including Greenstein's (2014) study about how faculty and staff perceived their experiences utilizing their campus' BIT. Greenstein examined how faculty and staff perceived the following: the process for reporting behaviors of concern, the team's response to the referral, the observed behavioral changes post-BIT team intervention, and the perceived impact the team had on campus safety. In order to replicate the process and gather additional national data, Golston's (2015) dissertation adapted the 2012 NaBITA national on-line survey of its members (Van Brunt, Sokolow, Lewis, & Schuster, 2012). This survey data provided a wide range of information across the range of BIT functions and structures at all types of institutions. Data such as team membership, institutional demographics, case management practices, marketing strategies, and more were obtained. Graney's (2011) dissertation examined teams that were practicing threat assessment at Flagship universities in New England. This mixed-methods study provided descriptive and exploratory information related to six teams. Childress' (2013) qualitative study examined one private liberal arts college on the west coast and focused on how the people, policies, and practices came together to support students with mental health or behavioral concerns.

Exploratory and descriptive BIT studies provided insight into the day-to-day functioning of BITs. Greenstein's (2013) study demonstrated the shift towards utilizing case managers and a case management model and examined factors such as the GPA and risk levels of students referred to the team. This study also examined the record-keeping systems used and described typical cases addressed by the team. Another study described the steps taken to create their

campus' BIT logo (Dooley & Poindexter, 2013). Finally, Mardis et al. (2013), asked higher education administrators about their teams and team effectiveness. The overall findings were analyzed for similarities and differences, and, while the sample size was small and not randomized, it yielded data comparable to the other NaBITA national surveys.

The NaBITA national surveys of their members provided a broad foundation of knowledge related to BITs. Snapshots of the 2012, 2014, and 2016 NaBITA National Survey data were found on the NaBITA website and provided a wide range of information. Data included information pertaining to team membership, record-keeping practices, institution type and size, and practices related to satellite campuses, case management, and referral methods. The study also included data regarding mental health and counseling resources, team name, logos, and perceptions about team challenges, weaknesses, and strengths.

The following sections describe modern BITs and their relationship with Threat Assessment Teams (TAT). It provides reasons for incorporating threat assessment within the BIT framework and offers information regarding objective threat measurement tools. Next, the purpose of a BIT is explained, and the section ends with a discussion of current BIT guiding principles.

### **The Evolution from TAT to BIT**

Threat Assessment Team and Behavioral Intervention Team functioning seem to be merging. Following the mass shooting at Virginia Tech, Randazzo and Plummer (2009) published their post-event guide for implementing campus Threat Assessment Teams. At the heart of this work was a focus on preventing future acts of violence on a large scale. However, the authors' emphasis on implementing ongoing case management services for a variety of concerning behaviors suggested that the net was widening in terms of the types of cases seen as

in need of team intervention. In their publication, Randazzo and Plummer discussed a threat assessment team that was a separate entity from their CARE (BIT) team. In this case their CARE (BIT) team addressed non-violent student situations while the TAT addressed potentially violent situations acknowledging a need for both functions. Furthermore, Cornell (2010) warned against having a myopic focus, and suggested that universities would be wise to do more than just plan for an attack. While he acknowledged that colleges should have a comprehensive campus safety plan, he encouraged institutions to continue to identify threats of all sorts, evaluate their legitimacy, intervene, and monitor or follow-up as needed. While his focus, too, remained largely on the assessment of threat, the lens was beginning to widen as teams started to acknowledge a need to address a larger range of behavioral concerns. Not surprisingly, today's BIT appears to be more of a TAT/CARE hybrid.

### **Threat Assessment within the BIT.**

In fact, the modern BIT literature obtained for this study suggested that BITs and Threat Assessment Teams should be integrated when possible (Sokolow, Schuster, Lewis, Swinton, & Van Brunt, 2014). Even though, as mentioned previously, post Virginia Tech work by Randazzo and Plummer focused on assessing for the threat of violence, their work also acknowledged an awareness that a variety of situations needed to be addressed and monitored – regardless of their potential for violence. The reasoning behind this trend toward integration was later made clear by Sokolow et al. (2014). They stated:

If your campus is using a two-team model, you have erected silos where one of our key challenges is to tear them down. With two teams, the TAT will only be called in when a threshold of severity is reached. Yet, it will have been the BIT (or whatever you call it) that has the data on the baseline of the individual who is at-risk. The BIT will have been dealing with that individual up and until the crisis, when there is a handoff to the TAT. Now, precious time will be consumed in bringing the TAT up to speed on what the BIT already knows about this individual. And, risk will be assessed not by those who know the individual best, and have been dealing with him/her all along, but by a whole new

team without the same depth on history, character, background and the other key aspects that could make all the difference. To us, that makes no sense, and eviscerates the unique threat assessment advantage of intimate knowledge that college and universities have as compared to other entities that assess threat. (p. 85)

Further illustrating this point, Nelson-Moss (2015) conducted a study examining the training and team membership of eight individual Threat Assessment Team members at seven state public universities in the southeastern region of the United States. In her discussion regarding the outcomes of the semi-structured interviews she noted that there was confusion among the participants in that they seemed inclined to include information about their BIT team in order to answer her questions about Threat Assessment Teams. The researcher reported having to remind the participants that the study was only interested in the Threat Assessment Team activities. This observation suggests at least some degree of overlap between TAT and BIT functions and that it may be difficult to draw clear distinctions between the two. Currently, modern BITs conduct threat assessments as needed and view this function as a critical, but relatively small part of what they do. A modern BIT's primary function is to support a wide range of student issues and provide them with needed resources (Sokolow & Lewis, 2009; Golston, 2015; Van Brunt, 2012; Sokolow et al., 2014).

### **The Purpose of a BIT**

According to Sokolow, Schuster, Lewis, Swinton, and Van Brunt (2014) a BIT's purpose is to address behaviors found to be disruptive or concerning in a caring, developmentally appropriate way, as early as possible. The NaBITA group created a "D" scale to assist teams in identifying, and in training others how to identify, the behaviors of concern that should be addressed. The "D" Scale included behaviors categorized as distressed, disturbed, dysregulated, or due to a medical disability (Sokolow, Lewis, Wolf, Van Brunt, & Byrnes, 2009; Eells, Rockland-Miller, 2011, Delworth, 2009). A student in distress could be described as

emotionally troubled or stressed. A student categorized as disturbing could be described as destructive, aggressive, threatening, or experiencing substance abuse issues. Dysregulation was categorized by behaviors such as suicidal thoughts, self-harming behaviors, risk-taking behaviors, hostility, or an inability to regulate thoughts, feelings and/or interpersonal interactions. Medical disability could include psychotic behaviors, an inability to provide self-care, or a loss of contact with reality (Sokolow et al., 2009; Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2011).

The three primary functions of BITs included, gathering information, systematically analyzing the information, and providing interventions and follow-up as needed (Sokolow et al., 2014). In order to accomplish this, modern teams educate the campus about how and what to report and serve as a resource for those individuals who come in contact with the individual displaying the behaviors of concern. Teams should be the central point of information regarding the concerns and should assess the referrals and intervene as necessary. As discussed, threat assessment is part of BIT functioning, and the team should regularly assess and be knowledgeable of available resources. Modern BITs operate by means of formalized communication, operational protocols, and intervention protocols, and they should coordinate appropriate follow-up (Sokolow et al., 2014).

### **BIT Guiding Principles**

As BITs have evolved, their own guiding principles have been created and include the following:

#### **Campus violence to self and others is largely preventable.**

Examinations of campus acts of violence suggested that campus shooters do not emerge overnight, and the idea that someone just “snaps” is widely unsupported (Randazzo & Plummer, 2009; Van Brunt, 2012; Sokolow et al., 2014). There were typically signs of distress prior to

past acts of violence, and many times opportunities to intervene presented themselves before the act of violence occurred. According to Van Brunt (2012), past violent episodes involved a diligent amount of planning and were acted out only when the student reached a perceived end to other viable options for rectifying their situation or when there was a significant breakdown in mental functioning.

**Early identification and proactive intervention are key to BIT success.**

The intervention team literature recommended that teams attempt to create a culture where reporting and referrals are common and encouraged so as to take advantage of the earliest opportunities to offer resources to individuals who may be struggling. Most of the time an individual will progress on an escalating continuum before engaging in a violent act, and will often give clues or “leak” their intentions to members of the very communities they are targeting. The key is to detect, as early as possible, the behavioral and/or verbal cues indicative of concern. This allows the team time to proactively engage with the individual, provide appropriate interventions, and prevent further behavioral escalation (Randazzo & Plummer, 2009; Van Brunt, 2016, Sokolow et al., 2014, Sokolow & Lewis, 2009).

Minimal research focused on approaches to working with students was found. This literature included Gregg’s (2013) study about communication between counseling centers and BITs when working with a suicidal student. It presented a case study as a way to think through legal and ethical issues that may arise and provided questions to think through when approaching this type of case. Daniel and Logsdon’s (2013) article discussed working with non-traditional students (over the age of 25) at a public college in western New York. The article pointed out how non-traditional students often balanced multiple responsibilities. The study presented four case-studies and offered strategies and techniques used to address the needs of non-traditional

students. The authors suggested that these students may need a variety of services to help them manage their wider range of stressors. To accommodate the needs of this population they encouraged institutions to consider offering services such as academic tutoring and counseling at non-traditional times.

**BITs should engage in and be knowledgeable about how to conduct a threat assessment.**

Current threat assessment tools are available for use by campus teams. Borum et al. (1999) reported that objective measures for violence prediction worked as well or better than the clinical judgments of mental health providers. However, ultimate decision making will often still be a clinical call. Researchers have yet to study whether or not these decisions are strengthened by the BIT team approach.

Several threat assessment tools are currently used by BITs today and have their roots in earlier threat assessment work. For example, John Byrnes, founder of the Center for Aggression Management, wrote a book in 1993 that was later revised in 2002 and outlined a cognitive aggression continuum to be applied to the prevention of violence in schools, healthcare and social services settings, the retail food service industry, and in regards to terrorism. Years later, in 2009, Byrnes assisted in commemorating the establishment of the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association (NaBITA) by co-authoring a whitepaper about campus threat assessment (Sokolow, Lewis, Wolf, Van Brunt, Byrnes, 2009). This whitepaper introduced a threat assessment tool which incorporated Byrnes' cognitive aggression continuum, and it was named the NaBITA Threat Assessment Tool. Other tools that may be used by teams include the Violence Risk Assessment of the Written Word (VRAW<sup>2</sup>), the Structured Interview for Violence Risk Assessment (SIVRA-35), the Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk-21 (WAVR-21), and



the History, Clinical, Risk Version 3 (HCR-20). Minimal research was found regarding the efficacy of these tools for use by Behavioral Intervention Teams, with the exception of a study by Van Brunt (2013). Van Brunt conducted a comparative analysis of the WAVR-21, the SIVRA-35, the NaBITA Threat Assessment Tool, and the HCR-20. His application of the instruments to a collection of case studies found similar results or outcomes between instruments. All showed promise for BIT use as tools for assessing level of risk but differed in price, required evaluator qualifications, and time taken to administer.

**BITs have the potential to save lives, money, time, and reputations.**

Institutions face a host of challenging and often conflicting priorities and circumstances. They face growing pressure to provide more services, programs, and to address more severe student issues. At the same time, pressure exists for institutions to demonstrate their value through evaluation and assessment while doing so with severely restricted funds (Volpe Belin, 2005; Ferrero, 2014). Part of the solution to this challenge can come from the collaborative efforts of these multi-disciplinary teams. By distributing resources, sharing ideas, facilitating good communication, and supporting one another, institutions can save lives, save money, and save time, thereby building and sustaining a solid reputation for providing a safe, caring environment (Sokolow et al., 2014).

Moreover, to maximize and improve BITs, research suggested assessing teams. Studies were located that addressed BIT quality and effectiveness. A mixed-methods study by Reese (2013) found that, although counseling center referrals and crime referrals to university police had not gone up, the campus community members felt that the BIT was needed, even though they knew very little about the team or how it functioned. Mardis, Sullivan, and Gamm (2013) reached out to members of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA)

through means of a survey including open-ended questions. While the survey's response rate was low (18%) it did examine data such as similarities and differences between teams at different types of institutions and collected data regarding types of teams, team functions, mission, composition, and training. The research reported that participants gave high ratings to the effectiveness of their campus teams and suggested that administrators believed the teams are meeting the campus needs. Finally, Readden (2016) provided a model for quality improvement and assessment by implementing a peer review model at a medium-sized private university in the North East. Readden provided a systematic review utilizing a structured audit format (forms included) designed to improve intervention skills and documentation practices.

### **Summary**

This section provided an overview of the literature related to modern BITs. It described the evolution of teams from TAT to BIT, and included a discussion of how current teams incorporate threat assessment into BIT functions. The purposes of a BIT were provided along with BIT guiding principles and a list of optional threat assessment tools available for use by BITs.

### **Summary of the Literature Review**

This Chapter provided a review of the existing body of literature pertaining to a study of Behavioral Intervention Teams. The Chapter was divided into three sections. Section one introduced the topic and key terms and provided a description of the literature review strategies, exclusions, and gaps in the current literature. The second section offered a theoretical framework from which to view the study, and the third section delivered a review of the current literature related to mental health, threat assessment, and modern BITs as they relate to higher education.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Overview**

As previously emphasized, the purpose of this study was to describe Behavioral Intervention Teams from the perspective of twelve team members serving at four regional universities in Oklahoma. Particular emphasis was placed on examining how team members described the following: team activities, available resources, needed resources, the impacts of team efforts, and factors related to serving at a regional institution in Oklahoma.

This chapter discusses the methodology used in the study and includes an explanation of how the research sites and participants were selected. It also describes the methods used to gain the necessary research permissions and explains the data types selected, data-recording and interview protocols, and the data collection procedures used in the study. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the researcher's world-view, a description of the data analysis procedures, and a chapter summary.

#### **Selection of the Research Design**

The methodology selected for this study was a collective case study qualitative design. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2011), collective case study research "usually involves performing several instrumental case studies in order to enhance our ability to theorize about some larger collection of cases." (p. 37). This design combines information gathered from individual cases in order to better understand a problem and allows for an in-depth description of a complex phenomenon. Collective case studies were defined by Gerring (2007) as an intensive way of researching a small number of entities in order to better understand the larger context of such entities.

Creswell (2009) recommended a five-phase plan when designing qualitative methodology. These phases included: selecting participants, gaining permission to conduct the study, selecting appropriate data types, developing data recording and interview protocols, and administering data collection. These phases and how they were accomplished are described below.

### **Selecting Participants**

Creswell's first phase was selecting participants. In this study, selecting participants consisted of two steps: selecting the sites and selecting the team members at each site. A description of how this was achieved is provided below.

#### **Selection of Research Sites**

The first step was to select research sites. For this study, a type of purposeful sampling known as homogeneous sampling was used. Homogeneous sampling is defined by Creswell (2009) as the selection of certain sites or individuals "based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics" (p. 216). In this case study, I chose the population of regional institutions in Oklahoma, and, as is typical of qualitative research, I studied only a few institutions from within that population (Yin, 2016).

Four institutions were selected from the ten regional universities in Oklahoma (see *Appendix B* for list of institutions, governing bodies, and enrollment data). A national survey conducted by Mardis, Sullivan, and Gamm (2013) of Behavioral Intervention Teams indicated three years as the median length of BIT team existence, therefore, this study selected institutions who had functioning teams for at least that amount of time. As previously stated, regional institutions were purposefully selected as the focal point of the study. This was due in part to literature suggesting that, in order to compare BIT functions, future research should focus on

multiple case studies across similar, non-private institutions (Childress, 2013).

Next, I identified institutions that represented four different regions of the state and contacted their Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) via email. From these contacts, I determined who the point of contact would be from each institution's team and determined that all four teams were interested in participating in the study. Because all four teams met the three-year criteria and were interested in participating in the research, I decided to research all four institutions.

### **Identification and Selection of Participants**

The second step was to select three individuals from each of the research sites to participate in the study. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling. According to Creswell, "in purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (p. 214). In this study three team members from each campus BIT team were identified to participate in the interviews for a total of twelve participants. Each team member selected had to have served on their BIT for a minimum of three years and/or be a member of what Van Brunt (2012) referred to as "the core group" (p. 54). The basic core group included representatives from student affairs, mental health services, and law enforcement.

The SSAO served as gatekeeper and identified the primary contact person at each research site. The gatekeeper and/or primary contact person identified and provided access to possible participants from their campus BIT. Once identified, those individuals were contacted by email, provided with information about the study, and were invited to participate. All team members invited agreed to participate in the study.

## **Gaining Permission**

Gaining permission to conduct the study consisted of two steps. These included: securing IRB approval and obtaining permission from the SSAO and research participants.

### **Securing IRB Approval**

Prior to beginning the research, permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB approval included developing a thorough description of the study, creating all informed consent forms, describing the interview protocol, outlining risks and benefits, and detailing efforts taken to protect the confidentiality of the participating institutions and individuals.

The University of Arkansas' Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before beginning the study. In accordance with this process, the IRB protocol form and other required materials were completed and submitted for review. The approval forms and individual consent forms obtained prior to beginning the interviews are included in *Appendix D* and *Appendix E*.

### **Securing Permission from Participants**

Creswell's (2008) second phase involved obtaining the necessary research permissions. Once three participants from a selected institution agreed to participate in the study, an emailed letter (see *Appendix C*) was delivered to the VPSA at each participating institution and to the three individuals at each site who were participating in the study. The letter described the following:

- The purpose of the study
- The amount of time needed at the site and with the participants
- How data would be utilized

- The interview protocol
- The documents to be requested/reviewed. This included materials such as website content, written policies and procedures, and/or assessment tools
- The potential benefits of the study to the organization and to the individual, and
- A description of the provisions that would be made to protect the confidentiality of the research sites and the team representatives.

### **Selecting Data Types**

The third of Creswell's (2008) phases was selecting data types. This study incorporated multiple sources of data including interviews, document analysis, and personal memos. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and included semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Document analysis included a review of the website, policies, and instruments or assessment tools utilized by the team. Finally, the researcher utilized the practice of bracketing and kept memos of thoughts and observations throughout the data collection phase. According to Yin (2016) "capturing your own feelings and reflections on your research work . . . may later reveal insights into your research lens and, in particular, any unwanted biases" (p. 183), and it can reveal insights into personal and research related tendencies over the course of the study. This was important because, according to Yin (2016), "the final reporting of your work should include coverage of your *reflective self*" (p. 183).

### **Data Recording and Interview Protocol**

Creswell's fourth step in designing qualitative methodology is developing data recording and interview protocols. For this study pilot testing and interview protocols were utilized.

### **Development of Interview Protocol**

Hancock and Algozzine (2011) provided a framework and guidance for the development

of the interview protocol used in this study. These authors recommended that, after identifying relevant participants, researchers should develop an open-ended interview protocol, attend to the interview setting, and remain diligent to ethical and legal issues.

In accordance with Hancock and Algozzine's (2011) suggestion, an open-ended interview protocol was developed and a protocol form was created (see *Appendix F*). The header of the protocol form contained the name of the BIT representative, the name of the institution, and the date, time, and location of the interview. It also included the title of the representative, his or her role on the BIT, and the number of years in that role. Additionally, the header included a statement of purpose, a reminder to make sure to complete the consent form, and a statement regarding beginning the interview and recording. Consideration for the interview setting was achieved by asking each participant to select a location which allowed for both privacy and minimal chance for distraction.

Furthermore, thought was given to the ethical and legal considerations proposed by Hancock and Algozzine (2011). Participants were given the choice of ending their participation at any time or skipping questions they are not comfortable answering. Steps were also taken to protect the confidentiality of participants. For example, each individual was identified with a pseudonym. Participants representing Student Affairs were given the abbreviation "SA", Mental Health representatives were given the abbreviation "MH", and Law Enforcement representatives were given the abbreviation "LE." These abbreviations were preceded by an institutional pseudonym of either Alpha, Beta, Gamma, or Delta. So, for example, the Student Affairs representative from Alpha University was labeled "Alpha SA" and so forth.

Additionally, the study utilized a semi-structured format that allowed participants to elaborate and speak openly but which also allowed the researcher to follow up with questions to



probe deeper into areas of interest. The interviews followed Hancock and Algozzine's (2011) recommendations that, "specific wording and sequence of questions are predetermined, all participants are asked basic questions in the same order, and all questions require open-ended responses" (p. 48). By utilizing this type of interview, comparability of responses was strengthened, completeness of data for each person was enhanced, effects of interviewer biases were minimized, and analysis and organization were facilitated" (p, 48). Items asking questions within questions were avoided (ex. How do you perceive your team and your team leader?), as were yes/no questions and leading questions (Creswell, 2008; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011).

Finally, participants were sent interview questions in advance of the meeting. In agreement with Yin (2012), data collection was concluded when it seemed likely that little new information would be gained from additional inquiry. Interview questions were broken down by topic with the first question serving as what Creswell (2008) labels the "grand tour" question. Sub-questions and follow-up questions were asked with probes inserted as needed. The interview protocol contained the following questions:

Grand Tour Question:

1. What would you say are the primary **goals** of your team?

Probes:

- a. What **activities** does your team engage in to meet these goals? (Probe)
- b. What do you believe prompted the creation of your team? (Probe)

Sub-Questions:

2. What **interventions** are utilized by the team?

Probes:

- a. To what degree do you perceive these interventions to be effective?

- b. What resources are available to assist in providing needed interventions?
  - c. What resources are needed?
  - d. For what populations do you provide interventions? (Faculty, staff, students)
  - e. Please describe your teams' use of interventions such as suspensions, withdraws, and/or student conduct referrals.
3. From your perspective, describe the extent to which your team impacts **campus safety**.
  - a. Can you provide an example of a case that illustrates your answer?
4. What **marketing** strategies are utilized by the team?
  - a. To what degree do you perceive these efforts to be effective?
  - b. What resources are available to assist in providing marketing of the team?
  - c. What resources are needed?
5. What **funding** resources are allocated for team use?
  - a. To what degree do you perceive these resources to be sufficient to meet team goals?
  - b. What does your team do with its funding?
  - c. What needs, if any, do you have in this area?
6. From your perspective, describe your team's **impact** on those served. Include students, faculty, staff, and campus as a whole.
  - a. Can you provide an example of a case that illustrates the team's impact?
7. From your perspective, what internal **team characteristics** or dynamics, if any, strengthen your team?
  - a. Can you provide an example to illustrate your answer?
  - b. What internal team characteristics or dynamics, if any, limit your team?

- c. Can you provide an example to illustrate your answer?
- 8. What BIT-related **training** have you had?
  - a. Please describe any team training your BIT has engaged in.
  - b. What training needs does your team have?
  - c. What resources are available to train the team?
  - d. What resources are available to train individual team members?
  - e. What resources are needed to train the team or individual team members?
- 9. From your perspective, what, if any, impact does being at a regional institution in **Oklahoma** have on team functioning?
  - a. If state budget shortfalls have impacted your team, please describe that impact.
- 10. If you have a **branch campus**, describe BIT practices there.
  - a. What resources are needed to improve branch campus BIT activities?
- 11. What trends do you foresee for the **future** of your team?
  - a. What trends do you foresee for teams in Oklahoma?
  - b. What trends do you foresee for teams nationally?
- 12. Can you think of any other information about your team or BIT functioning that you would like to share?

Following the interview, several closing comments were incorporated into the interview protocol form. They included thanking the representative, reviewing the details pertaining to confidentiality, asking if they had any questions, and discussing how I would use the data and share the results.

As demonstrated in the table below, the interview questions were developed to correspond to the research questions.

Table 1

*Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Question*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Question(s)
What are the goals of BIT teams at Oklahoma regional institutions?	1, 1c
Why do team members believe their team was created?	1b
What activities do teams perform?	1a, 2, 2a
What interventions do teams use?	2, 2d,
Do teams have the authority to take actions such as to suspend, withdraw, or refer students to conduct?	2e
Do team members perceive teams to be contributing to campus safety?	3, 3a
What are the marketing practices of BITs?	4
What funding is available?	5,5a,5b
What is the perceived impact of team efforts on faculty, staff, students, the campus overall?	6, 6a
What team characteristics contribute to or limit or strengthen the team?	7, 7a, 7b, 7c
What training has been done or is needed?	8, 8a
How do these institutions incorporate BIT functions at branch campuses?	9, 9a
Has the Oklahoma budget shortfall, or other Oklahoma specific factor, impacted teams?	10
What do teams foresee for the future of their BIT and for BITs overall?	11, 11a, 11b
Team effectiveness	2a, 4a
What resources are available or needed by teams?	2b, 2c, 4b, 4c, 5c, 8b, 8c, 8d, 8e,10a

## **Pilot Testing of the Interview Protocol**

Creswell (2008) stated that a pilot test was an opportunity to make sure participants can both answer the questions and understand them. A pilot test was conducted prior to beginning this study which allowed the researcher to make changes and adjustments as needed after receiving feedback from the participants. First, the interview questions were reviewed by the dissertation chair. After this review, the protocol was field-tested with two members of the BIT at Northeastern State University who were then invited to make suggestions about the questions following their interview.

## **Data Collection**

The final phase in Creswell's (2008) plan was data collection. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2011), "case study research is richly descriptive because it is grounded in deep and varied sources of information" (p. 16). As such, this study incorporated multiple sources of data. These sources included preliminary phone interviews, document analysis, semi-structured one-on-one interviews, and analytic memos.

## **Preliminary Phone Interview**

Before any one-on-one interviews were conducted at the research sites, information was gathered from participants through a preliminary phone interview. This allowed demographic information to be collected along with perceptions regarding why the team was created. In addition, this preliminary interview provided insight into details such as record-keeping methods, professional memberships, and the use of mandated psychological assessments. The following information was gathered by phone prior to the site visit:

- Participant's job title
- Role on the team

- Whether the participant was a founding member and/or chair of the team.
- Length of time on the team
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Level of education
- Years in higher education
- Years at the institution
- Titles of other members on the campus team
- Participant's BIT-related professional organization involvement
- Whether the team mandates psychological assessments
- What type of data-base or record-keeping system, if any, was used, and
- The time, date, and place to conduct the one-on-one interview

Following the phone interviews, the one-on-one interview questions were emailed to participants.

### **Document Analysis**

BIT websites were reviewed before beginning the one-on-one interviews. This allowed a foundation of understanding to be established before meeting with participants. Additional documents were obtained during the campus visits which both complimented the evidence obtained from interviews and supported the findings (Yin, 2016).

### **Interviews**

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted, audiotaped, and transcribed. And to provide ample time and convenience for the participants, each interview was scheduled for two hours and was conducted on the participant's campus at a location of their choice. In

order to be fully present and to observe the surroundings, minimal notes were taken during the interview process, and a back-up digital recorder was always on hand. I found that recording not only minimized the need for note-taking but also maximized my ability to focus on the BIT representative being interviewed.

### **Recording of Analytic Memos**

Immediately following the interviews, I noted any initial reactions, observations, thoughts, or questions that arose during the visit in a journal. In fact, these memos of thoughts and observations were kept throughout the data collection and analysis phases. According to Yin (2016), most qualitative researchers would consider this process to be imperative. For this study, analytic memos were a way of keeping track of the ideas that surfaced during the course of the data collection and analysis. The memos helped track emerging themes, categories, and issues to be covered in the final discussion of the findings.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness requires credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and these guidelines, established by Lincoln and Guba (1985), have allowed researchers to legitimize their research. Therefore, this study modeled credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in a number of ways as outlined in the following sections.

#### **Credibility**

Efforts were taken to make sure the results of this study were authentic and credible. The researcher utilized triangulation, member checks, and rich data to improve the credibility of the study. Analytic memos were also utilized to help outline how ideas emerged during data analysis.

Other techniques were utilized, including pre-interview conversations (to build rapport),

semi-structured interviews, member checks with participants, document review, and interviews with multiple members of each team. In addition, I sought to highlight and practice rival thinking in terms of seeking out and sharing multiple perspectives (even when they contradicted each other) in order to challenge original assumptions on the topic as the data unfolded. The principle of the triangulation of data, according to Yin (2016), “pertains to the goal of seeking at least three ways of verifying or corroborating a procedure, piece of data, or finding” (p. 87). Therefore, I sought to triangulate data sources and perspectives when possible.

### **Transferability**

The data collected in this study may not be transferrable or generalizable to other Behavioral Intervention Teams, however, the study captured rich and thick descriptions of a moment in time at three institutions within the regional system of Oklahoma. Teams evolve over time and vary from campus to campus, yet, despite these limitations, findings from these purposefully selected institutions should furnish new insights or working hypotheses about BITs and may, to some extent, provided possible insights into other institutions within the Oklahoma regional system (Yin, 2016).

### **Dependability**

A collection of research materials pertaining to this study were organized and maintained in order to improve the dependability of the study and to allow other researchers the opportunity to review and analyze the soundness of steps taken and decisions made throughout the process. Tufford and Newman (2010) suggested that I preserve and organize the details of the research process. In keeping with this, I preserved raw data such as audio recordings, handwritten notes from interviews and site observations, data analysis, transcriptions, research drafts, and data synthesis materials. Memos composed of researcher thoughts, insights, and questions were also



maintained thus allowing me to more fully engage with and be aware of biases towards the data (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

### **Confirmability**

In order to establish the accuracy of the data collected and reported, the researcher utilized two techniques: bracketing through the use of analytic memos, and triangulation of data including interviews, analytic memos, and document review.

According to Tufford and Newman (2010), “bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process” (p. 80). This practice of writing down presuppositions, emerging hypothesis, the perceived impact of researcher characteristics on the participants, and other biases, thoughts, or emotions, allowed for an examination of the researcher’s relationship with the process and with the data (Tufford & Newman, 2010). This also allowed contradictory data, or information that differed from the researcher’s preconceived ideas to be heard and explored. While there is some debate about when to start the process of bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2010), in this study bracketing began with the data collection stage and continued throughout the data analysis and discussion phase.

### **Researcher’s World View (Personal Statement)**

My own personal and professional experiences left their mark on this study and should, therefore, be mentioned. First, I have a background in mental health counseling and crisis response, and I have been a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) for almost 15 years. I also previously served as the Director of Counseling Services at Northeastern State University in Oklahoma where I currently serve as the Student Affairs Assistant Vice President. And finally, I am a core member, co-chair, and founding member of my institution’s BIT.

For me, three events shaped my path toward crisis response, early intervention, and prevention. First, I have lived my life in Oklahoma, and the Oklahoma City Bombing on April 19, 1995 happened during my freshman year of college. I, along with the rest of the nation lived through the unimaginable horror and helplessness of what John D. Byrnes (2002) called “the most heinous, horrendous domestic terrorist act in American history” (p. ix) with the “single greatest body count ever achieved in a terrorist attack on American soil by an American citizen” (p. ix). I have visited that site numerous times during stages of wreckage through memorial, and I was influenced by this event during a time when I was trying to determine what I would do with my adult professional life.

Then, in December of 1999, a middle school student in Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma pulled out his father’s 9mm pistol and opened fire on a group of students at his middle school. He emptied 15 rounds before surrendering himself to authorities. He was 13 years old. Five were injured, but thankfully, no one was killed. Two years later I was tasked with providing counseling in that small rural school system, and I experienced once again the long-term effects of targeted violence on the communities in which they occur.

In 2007, the shootings at Virginia Tech happened while I was serving as the only full-time mental health counselor at Northeastern State University. This moment in history served as a critical crossroad of my involvement with violence prevention. Following this tragedy, I became the co-founder and co-chair of the Behavioral Intervention Team on our campus. I, along with some of my campus partners, had the distinct pleasure of attending a training with Marisa Randazzo, and we put those lessons to work at our institution.

All of these incidents had an impact on me in both my early career and early adulthood, and they have continued to play a role throughout my development. It is these experiences, with

the students I have worked with, with the law enforcement officers I have counted on, and with a team of people I have trusted in times of crisis, that have led to my desire to focus on this topic for dissertation. Over time, I have attended trainings, learned from experience, and have absorbed a mass of anecdotal information along the way which has no doubt colored and influenced this study. In fact, while working on this project, Oklahoma faced a 75 million dollar cut to mental health services, and Stephen Paddock opened fire on a crowd of concert goers in Las Vegas. Again, because of mass violence and my involvement with mental health services, I felt drawn into something larger than myself during another critical period of my life, and it is my hope that in some small way my work can help others find answers.

### **Data Analysis**

Yin's (2016) 5-phase data analysis cycle was utilized to analyze the data obtained in this study. The data analysis steps included: compiling or collecting the data, disassembling the data (coding, analytic memos), reassembling and arranging the data into themes, interpreting the results (including rival explanations), and drawing conclusions using an inductive approach. The data included transcripts from interviews, observation notes, documents, and website data.

Following Yin (2016) and Creswell's (2008) suggestions, data were grouped into a meaningful order using spreadsheets. This allowed the data to be read, reread, and coded in order to detect themes emerging from the data. Such detailed reading allowed the data to be grouped into content domains in order to compare and contrast the data with each other and with the literature. From this rich and complex description, findings were interpreted and described.

### **Summary**

In summary, this chapter provided a description of the study's methodology. It included a description of the research design, the process used to select participants, and the process used

to select data types. Furthermore, the steps for gaining necessary research permissions were outlined. Data recording and interview protocols were discussed as were the steps for administering data collection. Finally, the methods used for data analysis were considered, and the researcher's world view was provided.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF DATA

#### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to describe Behavioral Intervention Teams from the perspective of twelve team members from four regional universities in Oklahoma. The study utilized a semi-structured interview format that allowed participants to elaborate and speak openly, but which also allowed the researcher to follow up with questions to probe deeper into areas of interest. Each participant fell into the category of “core” team member as described by Van Brunt (2012), and each team had been in place for a minimum of three years.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the data in order to describe in detail the experiences of team members. Particular emphasis was given to examining how team members perceived and described the team, team functioning, available resources, needed resources, and the perceived impact of team efforts and impact of being at an Oklahoma regional institution. The chapter will begin with a brief overview and will include participant demographics, the perceived role of team members, and reasons why the teams were created. Next, the chapter provides detailed responses to the twelve interview questions. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief chapter summary.

#### **Participant Demographics**

Four of the ten regional universities as recognized by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education participated in this study. Each institution was provided with a pseudonym (Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta), and each participant was given a pseudonym associated with both their institution and their role on the team. Accordingly, student affairs representatives were given the abbreviation “SA,” mental health representatives were given the abbreviation “MH,”

and university police were given the abbreviation “PD.” So, for example, the university police representative from Alpha University was referred to as “Alpha PD,” and so forth.

Table 2 provides demographic information related to participant ethnicity, gender, level of education, status as a founding member, status as team chair, years at the institution, NaBITA professional membership status, record-keeping system(s) used, and length of time on the team (specific job titles have been excluded to protect anonymity). Table 2 also provides information pertaining to whether or not the team mandates psychological assessments and to the makeup of team membership beyond the “core.”

Table 2

*Participant Demographic Information*

	Alpha			Beta		
	SA	MH	PD	SA	MH	PD
Ethnicity	Other Non-specified	White	Hispanic	White	African American	White
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Education	Doctorate	Master’s	Master’s	Master’s	Master’s	Associate’s
Founding member	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Chair	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Years at institution	13	23	2	12	4	17
Years on team	10	10	2	Unsure	1	7
NaBITA member	No	No	No	No	No	No
Record-keeping system	Paper Records/email			Paper Records		
Membership in addition to “core”	Representatives from: Housing & VPSA			Representatives from: Disability Services (Vacant), Student Conduct (Vacant), VPSA		

Table 2 (Cont.)

	Gamma			Delta		
	SA	MH	PD	SA	MH	PD
Ethnicity	White	White	White	Native American	White	Native American/Irish
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male
Education	Master's	Master's	Master's	Master's	Master's	Associate's
Founding member	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Chair	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Years at institution	12	3	17	26	7	18
Years on team	10	3	10	8	3	1
NaBITA member	Institutional Membership			Yes	No	No
Record-keeping system	Maxient			Maxient		
Mandated psychological assessments	Yes			Yes		
Membership in addition to "core"	Representatives from: Academic Affairs, Faculty, Legal Counsel, Communications and Marketing, Housing, Athletics, & Scribe			Representatives from: Housing, President's Office, Communication & Marketing, Student Conduct (Vacant), Academic Advising, Athletics		

### Role on the Team

Participants provided brief descriptions of their role on the team. Alpha SA functioned as the Student Conduct officer; Alpha MH reported that she was there to give input and do her part as the mental health expert, follow up with students, and, maximize resources; and Alpha PD said her role was to ensure campus safety, to assist with mental health custody, and to implement Emergency Orders of Detentions.

Beta SA said her role was to assist with preliminary research into a student and/or case and to assist with wellness checks; Beta MH reported that her role was to function as the mental health consultant; and Beta PD said his role was to assist the team when called upon. Also, Beta PD was an outlier in this study because, although he was a member of the campus' TAT, he was not actually a BIT member, and only worked with the team when called upon and through the overlap between BIT and TAT functioning.

Gamma SA said his job as chair was to facilitate the meetings and move them along. He watched for pieces of the puzzle and made sure everyone shared their knowledge and expertise as it related to a case. Gamma MH reported that her role was to serve as a mental health consultant, and Gamma PD said his role was to lead law enforcement efforts.

Finally, Delta SA said her role was to serve as chair; Delta MH said her role was to identify red flags, emphasize a care and concern approach rather than a punitive approach, and to reduce over-reactions by providing guidance related to mental health issues. Delta PD said his role was to gather information from other law enforcement agencies, reduce dangerousness, and address violations of law.

### **Reasons for Team Creation**

All participants were invited to share the reasons they believed their team was created. Alpha SA reported that their BIT was created after the Virginia Tech shootings and added, “. . . because, you know, that education was so expensive for this country and the world. We didn't want to waste it.” Alpha PD said the team was already established when she was hired but believed the team was necessary because crisis response involved cross-campus resources, otherwise, students in need would fall through the cracks. Alpha MH added that the team began as an informal group, but over the years it had become more formalized and included more



intentionally selected members.

Beta MH believed that the team was created to be a centralized place for faculty, staff, and students to report unique situations or concerns. Beta SA believed the team was created to ensure campus safety, and Beta PD stated that the Governor's Task force recommended that the team be created. Following this recommendation, the institution's governing body created a TAT. However, due to the need for a sub-committee to address some of the lower level cases that were being referred to the team, BIT was created shortly thereafter.

All three Gamma participants reported that their team existed before the Virginia Tech shootings as a support team that collected information from multiple sources (connected the dots) in order to support struggling students. However, the team incorporated threat assessment elements after the mass shooting.

Delta MH reported that the team was created to address lower level issues before they escalated, to assess at-risk behaviors, to provide resources, and to be aware of the trends on campus. She added that the team responded to crises when necessary but worked to catch things early in order to prevent them. Delta PD believed the team was created to identify problems and collaborate with one another in order to help people get the resources they needed. Delta SA stated that the team was created to facilitate early identification of students at risk and to assess both the students and the emerging situations. She added that, around 2016, the team was small and not made up of individuals who were actually dealing with the issues "on the ground." She added:

And, so, partly, stylistically that's not who I am, and [it] didn't make any sense to me not to have the people who were dealing with the things on the ground [and for them] not to be the primary people on the team. We also had a pretty significant shift in our upper administration. We lost three VPs in a year. Everyone had new jobs. People were taking on very different roles, and so it was an opportunity, I think, for us to form a pretty cohesive base of people. So, I really looked at it as an opportunity to bring together

people to work commonly for the institution in an area that meant a lot to all of us.

### **Responses to Interview Questions**

This section presents the data obtained from the study's open-ended interview questions. Its purpose is to share the participants' perspectives and insights related to teams, to highlight themes that emerged from the interviews, and to present the range of answers given. In addition, direct quotations are used to illustrate insights, and to provide vivid descriptions of participants' perceptions. Finally, a brief explanation is given to describe the purpose of each question and probe.

#### **Question 1: What would you say are the primary goals of your team?**

This question was asked in order to establish team member perceptions of why they engaged in this work.

Just like BIT work is dependent on putting together the pieces of information to form a more complete picture, the responses given to this question fit together into one overarching strategy that defined the goals of the BITs in this study. Collectively, the goals of these teams included gathering together to collaborate on reported cases in order to protect the safety and security of faculty, staff, students, and visitors by being the central hub of information and awareness regarding behaviors of concern. This allowed teams to *quickly* assess, respond to, and assist the student with appropriate referrals and interventions in order to achieve a positive outcome. Ultimately, teams wanted to make sure another violent incident like the one at Virginia Tech never occurred again.

Collaboration and information gathering were two fundamental goals expressed by team members. Gamma PD, Alpha MH, and Alpha PD, all perceived collaboration (by team members and between the team and the campus community) to be a primary goal, and Gamma SA,

Gamma PD, and Alpha MH reported that another key goal of their team was to be a central hub for information and awareness so that nothing fell through the cracks. Instead, they wanted to gather as much information as possible so that the puzzle pieces could be put together. Gamma SA said,

In the past, it was so sporadic. There were pockets of information in Academic Affairs, in the Library. So, what we really wanted to do was to be the central receiving point. That's what we've always said. If in doubt – report it. Let us figure out what to do with it. So, we wanted to become a campus with a culture of sharing, and sharing those pieces of information when something just didn't feel quite right.

Assessment and intervention were also critical goals. For example, Gamma SA said one of the objectives of BIT was to formally assess a situation using the NaBITA threat scale, and Delta MH emphasized the response, or intervention, as a primary goal. Similarly, Gamma MH focused on outreach to individuals of concern, and both Gamma SA and Alpha PD listed making appropriate referrals as a team goal. Additionally, Beta SA and Alpha MH agreed that assisting and serving students who experienced challenges or barriers to their academic success was critical, and Gamma PD and Alpha SA both emphasized the goal of obtaining a successful outcome. Furthermore, Gamma SA thought it was also important to close the loop and report back to the referral source as appropriate and to, ultimately, close the case. Finally, Delta MH stated their goal was, “Basically, to become aware of individuals’ situations early on so that things don’t escalate and become a crisis. If it is a crisis, to assess and determine, where do we go from here?”

The themes of retention and campus safety emerged as primary goals for many team members. For instance, Gamma PD, Gamma MH, Alpha MH, Beta MH, Delta PD, and Delta SA all referred to retention when asked about team goals, and Delta SA summarized both goals by saying:

We really want to be student-specific and try to help students to be successful. Our goal is not to keep people out; it is to help figure out how to keep them in. And, probably just as equal, is to manage threats to campus.

Gamma MH, Beta PD, and Alpha PD emphasized the goal of ensuring safety and security and managing threats. Delta PD emphasized the goal of, “. . . protecting the health and well-being of the students here. The students as individuals, and the university as a whole.”

***Probe: What activities does your team engage in to meet these goals?***

This probe allowed team members to talk about their work and the ways in which they were actively engaged in reaching team goals.

Alpha University took a more informal approach. Alpha SA reported that their team met only when there was an issue and sometimes reached out informally over email first in order to find out what was known about a case or an individual. Alpha PD confirmed that the team met when there was an issue and said case consultation might sometimes be done remotely by email or phone call. Furthermore, Alpha MH reported that they did not need to meet regularly, but that when it was time to meet they would do so that day. Finally, Alpha MH mentioned that the team also engaged in closure meetings to debrief and wrap things up.

Beta engaged in some methods that were similar, and some which were different, from the other teams. Similarly, Beta SA reported that she attended regular meetings (monthly) where the team staffed cases and looked at factors such as: whether or not the identified student lived on or off campus, what the student was involved in on campus, their academic progress, attendance, and social media presence. Then informally, the team assessed whether or not they believed the student was a risk to themselves or others. Next, the team followed-up with wellness checks as needed. However, unlike other teams, Beta referred cases of threat to self or others to the Threat Assessment Team who would then assess the situation, determine

appropriate interventions, and would often refer the follow-up and implementation of interventions back to the BIT. While there was overlap in membership, the TAT and the BIT were significantly different groups. Beta SA added that anyone could call emergency BIT meetings as needed. Finally, Beta PD reported that teams met and gathered information from multiple sources such as Student Affairs, University Housing, and Academic Affairs, and all three team participants confirmed that the team met at least once per month.

Gamma University seemed to be consistently involved in a wide scope of activities, yet team members felt like there was room for improvement. For example, Gamma SA reported that they were “hit or miss” in regards to webinars (training), however, all the Gamma team members interviewed had attended the NaBITA conference and the team had also brought in a nationally recognized BIT expert (Brian Van Brunt) to spend some time training both the team and upper administration. Gamma occasionally traveled to a training, engaged in marketing activities, and were considering a team name change to better reflect their focus on care and concern. Other Gamma activities included outreach to their students, sharing BIT information at New Faculty Orientation, and BIT website development and maintenance. Gamma SA also said the team engaged in looking up criminal records on-line. Additionally, Gamma PD probed further into the weekly meeting where they reported staffing new and ongoing cases and checking back into the recently closed ones. Gamma PD added that by September of the previous academic year, the meetings lasted 2 hours. Furthermore, Gamma PD said that they had 13 new cases the first week of school and then it was “crazy the whole semester.” The team talked through each case at their meetings in order to determine what could be done to assist the struggling individual, what the risk level was according to the NaBITA Threat Assessment Tool, and what were the options for addressing the situation. Gamma PD went on to say that the team used the NaBITA

tool weekly to determine the threat levels of the students they were staffing. If the team didn't agree on the threat level, they would score high in order to error on the side of safety. In addition, Gamma PD reported that the team used psychological assessments, temporary suspensions, and/or housing suspensions, but that the team really looked at the potential impact on the individual as well as the community before making any decisions. He said that often the situations were complicated and not suited for a one size fits all approach. Gamma PD reported that the team sometimes reached out to other institutions to gather information as it related to a case. Finally, Gamma MH reiterated that team members had attended NaBITA, that they met every week, and that team members conducted training with the campus community (for example, with University Advising staff) in order to share resources, market themselves, and partner on events.

While most of the institutions focused on reacting to reports that they received, many of Delta University's activities were intentionally proactive. In fact, Delta SA reported that the team met regularly, and at every meeting they would conduct a campus landscape survey in order to address hot topics, trends, or time of year issues (such as homesickness, midterms, or early opening issues), and the team would then identify prevention and/or programming efforts that could help address the issues they believed would be popping up. Delta MH said they met weekly and Delta SA added that in the summer they met every other week. In addition, Delta PD said they would figure out resources to assist students and would try to address as many of the student needs as possible by taking a multi-faceted, wrap around, approach.

**Question 2: What interventions are utilized by the team?**

This question allowed team members to describe the skills, expertise, and resources the team depended on when addressing behaviors of concern. While the specifics of interventions

varied somewhat from institution to institution, there was a great deal of consistency in the interventions used by the teams. All of the teams described using some version of all of the following interventions:

- Counseling/Assessment (Counseling and conduct were the two most frequently discussed interventions used by the teams.)
- Student Conduct
- Law Enforcement interventions (such as: arrest, wellness checks, and assistance with hospitalization for mental health reasons)

Alpha PD shared that sometimes their officers will “stage” outside of a classroom or other location and said, “We try to be visible to those who need to see us and tucked away from those who we might set off.”

- Outreach (Contacting the person of concern)

Beta MH provided the following example of their team’s outreach efforts:

One of our softball students was going through a lot, and one of the coaches was like, ‘I don’t know what to do,’ so we [Beta MH and student] sat in the coach’s office and just talked. Sometimes they [students] don’t want to go to the office, and I can really go anywhere, and I will go where I need to go.

- Referrals to campus and community resources (Examples included such referral sources as: Domestic Violence Resources, medical referrals, alcohol and other drug resources, food pantry, and campus emergency funds)
- Wellness Checks
- Suspensions
- Interim Measures (Examples included temporary suspension, academic adjustments, no-contact orders, and/or housing reassignment)
- Medical withdrawal and/or leave of absences

- Parental notification

All of these were consistent with interventions discussed in *The Book on BIT* (2014).

In addition, all teams with the exception of Beta University mandated psychological assessments. Mandated psychological assessments were considered a BIT best practice in the literature (Sokolow et al., 2014; Sokolow & Lewis, 2009; Van Brunt, 2012).

***Probe: To what degree do you perceive these interventions to be effective?***

This probe allowed participants to share their perspectives about the effectiveness of the team's work. Many participants articulated that this concept was difficult to measure, but participants from three of the four teams used retention as a way to gage their team's effectiveness. Unanimously, participants perceived team efforts to be effective.

Alpha University perceived their interventions were making a difference. In fact, Alpha SA reported that they were 100% effective. Alpha MH said that their effectiveness was hard to measure, but effective. And, Alpha PD said, "I think we're pretty darn effective . . . kids will come by and say, 'hey, I'm doing better' . . . so, I really feel that good things happen."

Beta University felt their efforts were effective, but acknowledged there was room for improvement. As with other institutions in the study, the participants at Beta struggled to articulate their effectiveness. For example, Beta PD admitted, "I don't know how to put a percentage on it." Still, he guessed that the team was 70% effective. Beta SA also reported that it was hard to say, and perceived that the key to effectiveness was to get to struggling students early enough that their interventions could help them stay enrolled. Beta MH reported that while the team was doing the best that they could, often campus early alert systems did not alert the team early enough. Beta MH said:

There could always be more done. There can always be something else to help the students. We're doing the best we can with what we have, so that's why I really like the



BIT team, because I think it's the step before they are in big trouble. I wish it could be more effective for retention, but I don't know if it's helping as much as it could be because I feel like students are just like, 'well, I'll leave', or 'I'll leave this class.' So, I think we need earlier intervention and better ways. Like an early alert system, which [we have as] part of admission. . . . I know that we've had a specific person who was doing it, but she resigned and went to a different position, and I don't know if they filled that role. Instructors are supposed to take attendance and put alerts into the system, but we get close to the end of a semester and have someone in [BIT], and they'll find out that person hasn't been in class for weeks, but no one ever put anything into the system, so I think it's not used like it should be by the instructors. So, we don't know, and it only takes five minutes, so I don't know where the disconnect is.

Gamma University participants also perceived a high level of effectiveness, and similarly emphasized the need for better early alert systems. Additionally, Gamma SA hoped that data obtained through Maxient would help quantify the team's effectiveness by detailing the number of students the team had worked with, the level of threat, and the resolution or outcomes of the cases. Gamma SA perceived that team effectiveness was high, even though the team dealt with complicated situations. Gamma SA added that the team was prompt in their responses to referrals, and added that they did not get a lot of "repeat offenders." In addition, he said the team was able to retain the majority of the cases referred. Gamma PD thought the team was effective but admitted this was hard to quantify and added that sometimes they lost students, but engaged together as a team to supply the resources necessary to help students, faculty, and staff, even if they weren't staying at the institution. Gamma PD said:

But in terms of keeping our university and community safe, I think we are effective. Much, much, more so than we were a decade ago when we were just a bunch of ships bobbing around the bay. Now we are all together working much more closely on the relationships with the people on the team.

Just like Beta, Gamma MH reported that the team needs earlier referrals and said:

On the referral side, I think we are missing students who could use some of the services. And, I don't make a lot of waves about that because we're full. . . . But, if we can intervene earlier that would be helpful.

She added:

We get those [early alert referrals] late, consistently. . . . The unfortunate thing is that you can't fix some things if you aren't well-trained to do that . . . and, I think about behavioral health – they [other faculty and staff] are just not seeing that [behavioral/mental health issues] . . .there are people hanging on to students a little too long, and then at [BIT] we hear about an explosion. Almost always, when we peel the layers back, the referral wasn't the first thing that happened. It was ten steps ago [that a referral should have happened] – why not then?!

Finally, Delta University perceived a high level of effectiveness, and emphasized continuity of care (on-going care and case follow-up) to be important aspects of team effectiveness. Delta SA “felt really good” about the effectiveness of the team in terms of retention numbers and grades and said:

For Fall we really felt good. We went back and looked at: Did they retain into next semester? Did they make their grades? And, we've had good results. I felt like we were able to intervene early enough to get some results. I felt like we were able to intervene early enough to get some people back on track, and those who didn't need to stay at the institution, we took out as well, who needed to go. But, I, we, felt like we were really successful. . . . I can think of three people that actually graduated... and we felt really good about that. I mean, that's what we wanted to happen. It wasn't a permanent issue for them but at that time. At that moment, they really needed the intervention, and we were able to produce it, and they graduated.

Delta PD considered the team to be “very” effective and said:

I have seen cases come up that, on the initial view, it looks like a lost cause, and then you see them walk across the stage. From the onset, you go in and look at the background and history and what all is going on in their lives and then you set them down and go through [the intervention] and they walk across the stage in December. It's a very fulfilling thing.

***Probe: What resources are available to assist in providing needed interventions?***

This probe allowed for a deeper understanding of what team members have to work with in order to be successful in their response to behaviors of concern. There was great consistency among participants in regards to the resources they had available to them, and these resources fell into three categories: team resources, campus resources, and community resources.

Additionally, all teams considered the team members themselves to be resources for educational

outreach and for implementing interventions such as counseling or student conduct processes.

Alpha University shared a number of community, campus, and team resources that they had available to them. For example, they utilized community resources such as a crisis unit for mental health emergencies, the local hospital, community food pantry, reduced cost community health services, and they benefited from good relationships with community law enforcement, and church resources. They had campus and team resources available to them as well, and took advantage of campus emergency funds, and University Housing for emergency housing needs. Alpha University participants perceived that it was also a benefit that they had a seasoned team staff, and the team considered each other to be a resource.

Beta University shared similar campus, community, and team resources. Like Alpha, they viewed the expertise of their staff as a resource, and they had community resources available to them such as other law enforcement agencies and positive relationships with community mental health resources. They also reported utilizing campus resources such as disability services, tutoring services, and the university foundation (which provided emergency meal plans and/or funding for housing).

Gamma reported that their team was a resource because members were well-established on campus. Because people on campus knew certain team members personally, they would therefore, work with them and reach out to them as needed. Gamma also described utilizing community resources such as churches, domestic violence services, law enforcement resources, and resources for mental health emergencies. Also, Gamma described taking advantage of campus resources such as a food pantry and campus emergency funds. Finally, Gamma added that they also had national resources available to them through NaBITA such as the NaBITA threat assessment tool, conferences, and website resources.

Delta University had access to similar resources to the other institutions, but added tribal resources and team authority to the list as well. Delta participants reported having access to tribal medical and mental health services as well as tribal resources to assist with bills, and housing. They also utilized local law enforcement, emergency mental health services, the health department, the local hospital, church resources such as Celebrate Recovery, and community domestic violence resources. Campus resources utilized by the team included university Housing (emergency housing) and disability services. Finally, a critical team resource discussed by Delta was the team authority given to them by upper administration which allowed them to make decisions and act on those decisions. Delta also added that, like Gamma University, they took advantage of national resources through NaBITA, including the threat assessment tool and other website resources.

***Probe: What resources are needed?***

This probe allowed for a deeper understanding of what team members perceived they were lacking in order to be successful in their response to behaviors of concern.

Table 3 outlines the resources participants reported as needed to improve team functioning:

Table 3

*Intervention Resources Needed*

Intervention	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta
Additional Staff	X	X	X	X
Improved Community Mental Health Resources	X	X	X	X
More Counselors/Mental Health Resources	X	X	X	X
Homelessness Resources	X	X	X	X
Case Manager		X	X	X
Faculty Support/Improved Reporting		X	X	X
Training	X	X		X
Time	X		X	

Table 3 (Cont.)

Intervention	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta
Medical/Treatment Resources		X		X
Software for the team	X			
Transportation to resources		X		
Equipment	X			

Community mental health resources were both an available and utilized resource for all institutions in the study, however, participants from all four universities found these resources to be lacking or challenging in some way. Delta SA reported:

We do have a relationship with mental health, but frankly, they are busy referring people to us. We can't always get what we need moving that direction. . . . If we make the decision to transport, and then we get to our hospital, then our hospital decides whether or not they go on . . . or send them back to us. We have had a couple of cases like that with our hospital where they have not decided to go ahead and transport because there weren't beds [for inpatient care].

Gamma PD added that suicidal statements by students often result in transporting a student to the hospital for an evaluation, but they are often being released shortly thereafter to go back to campus. Gamma PD said:

Well, yeah, we have community mental health, which is basically a very challenging place to take people. . . . In fact, [Gamma MH] has gone down with one of my Captains and has had a meeting with them to say, you know, we are bringing people to you who at 4 PM are saying they are going to kill themselves with this knife, in their room, tonight, and they're dropped off at your door, and then we get a call back at 8 PM saying, 'They're good, come get 'em.' What did you do? Did you fix 'em? No! . . . Well, we go pick them up and drop them right back off into our community, and nothing's really changed.

Gamma PD reported that community mental health services personnel are used to (and many times only had the capacity for) treating worst-case scenarios. He believed there may be a mindset among community mental health service providers that colleges have ample resources, so students should just stay there.

Delta SA agreed that community mental health resources are lacking and said:

They've become more limited. Even fifteen years ago, I used to have a lot more support for mental health. I mean, I felt like, if I needed them we were able to access them, and it's just that their resources are so limited that everyone is just seeing the worst.

Beta SA said that transportation for mental health hospitalization was a need as well, and Alpha SA reported needing equipment (cameras and cages in the police cars) as well as additional staff to assist with these processes:

I require two officers on the transport [of a mental health emergency for hospitalization], and one to stay here. So, say I had one today, I'd have to call two people out, and we might have two that are reserve officers or something, so it gets a little bit tricky trying to pull the people. So, a cage in the next vehicle will close that down by one. But, if it's opposite gender I still like to have somebody there with them as a witness because we don't have cameras in the car, so cameras and cages. Those are always great.

Beta, Gamma, and Delta reported that they needed a case manager. Gamma MH emphasized that this needs to be a *clinical* case manager, who Gamma SA added would be housed under the counseling center and would support the team's efforts to manage BIT cases and interventions.

Beta SA and Beta MH both shared a need for a case manager as well. Beta SA reported hearing about a university that had an entire case management center but said she would have been thrilled to just have one person. Beta MH added that there were a lot of one-person offices at Beta University, and a case manager could help support the team by helping students with issues such as homelessness, food, and financial issues and serve as a liaison between students and faculty/staff. She added that they could also facilitate initial outreach conversations initiated by the BIT, and ultimately, a case manager could help students address the basic needs that must be met before any other intervention could be effective. Beta MH said:

Yeah, they can come to counseling and we can talk about their depression, but if you're hungry, or worried about how you are going to pay your rent, or if you're going to be kicked out of your home, you're not really worried about class. So, I really think social work is a key element to what we need. They offered a training online with some NASPA people, and they were talking about this [case management], and it was the

saddest thing because it was like, nope we don't have that, nope, we don't have this. But, just having that extra person . . . for help [would be great].

Likewise, Gamma participants reported needing more staff too, and they reported that their staff were currently spread thin. For example, Gamma PD reported that counselors' schedules were overwhelmed, and Gamma MH felt that their BIT was under-resourced and wearing multiple hats. She added that although NaBITA provided great materials, the team didn't use them as they should – mostly due to the lack of time. Additionally, Gamma MH felt that the team was still not making enough headway with faculty in terms of getting them to identify and report concerns. She said, "That's one thing about higher ed. that is still taking some time to understand."

Beta SA shared the belief that more staff would be helpful. She reported that one-person departments had an especially difficult time with self-care because team members were always trying to take care of everyone else, and Beta PD added that they also needed to be able to pay better in order to avoid high turnover. Alpha MH added:

You don't even have time to get more help, because it takes time to write a [position proposal]. But, our VP . . . allowed us to have those contract practitioners [counselors], which allowed me to be a director a little bit. Instead of a point guard, I'm more like a player/coach. And then, I started taking all of the people who came in. I'd try to see them that day, or the next day for a mini-assessment and plug them in with a contractor. That way I felt like they weren't going to drop through the cracks as much. And, they were like 'wow, you can see me today?' Yeah, but only for fifteen minutes. And usually, they were pretty darn bad, even to walk through the door. Even if they don't act like it.

Finally, participants from three teams perceived a need for additional training and time to get things done, and two teams expressed a need for additional medical/treatment resources. Also, Alpha expressed an interest in case tracking software such as Maxient.

***Probe: For what populations do you provide interventions (faculty, staff, students)?***

Best practice suggests that teams should not only address student issues, but should

address faculty and staff concerns as well (Sokolow et al., 2009). This probe explores whether or not teams were addressing all three potential areas of concern.

Three of the four institutions addressed the concerning behaviors of faculty, staff, and students. Alpha, Gamma, and Delta University addressed faculty, staff, and student situations, and Beta provided interventions to students only. Alpha reported that for faculty/staff issues the team would pull in Human Resources, and Gamma SA added that responding to faculty/staff concerns took a “different spin” in that the employee and faculty handbooks guided the process. In regards to terminations, Gamma said they might be called in to address a termination and they would consider how the terminated employee might respond. The team assessed the threat and offered opinions, recommendations, and mitigation strategies. For example, the team might advise HR to have an officer there during the termination, or suggest that a “bland” reference letter be provided to help deescalate the person being terminated. Gamma PD said training was needed for the extra members pulled in to discuss faculty and staff cases, but Gamma University used the NaBITA tool for faculty and staff cases as well as student cases and found it to be helpful. However, the team admitted that one of the challenges was not having on-campus resources for faculty and staff like they have for students, so often the interventions or outcomes didn’t feel as solid. Gamma PD added that faculty sometimes operated in silos, which created problems if, for example, the chair didn’t recognize a problem right away or know what to do with it. Unfortunately, often by the time an issue made it to the team it had become a significant problem.

***Probe: Please describe your teams’ use of interventions such as suspensions, withdrawals, and/or student conduct referrals.***

This question allowed for a deeper understanding of each team’s approach to and use of



suspensions, withdrawals, and student conduct referrals.

Alpha University reported that suspensions go through student conduct, and the team as a whole was not heavily involved in that part of that process. Beta University reported that the team met collectively to decide on a housing suspension, and then housing would implement the decision. The team also used temporary suspensions, but student conduct would determine all other suspensions. Beta MH admitted the following:

I don't really know about our suspension process. Is it a three-strike policy, or what? Because I'm not really higher ed., and that's one thing. I'm like the only person who's not higher ed. Like, I know things, but I don't know how things relate to each other, so I'm trying to put together the pieces. I'm learning too.

Beta MH was not the only one feeling a disconnect from these processes. Delta PD added:

I haven't had a lot of dealing with the product of that [suspensions, withdrawals, conduct]. I haven't had the opportunity to be privy to a bunch of the outcomes. I will say that when we do get to that part [conduct/suspensions] it's because all the other avenues have been exhausted.

Furthermore, Alpha SA described their use of suspensions with the following example:

Like last Friday, we had two students on top of the residence hall they are working on, Snap-Chatting between their dangling legs over the side, 'getting ready to do some pretty stupid shit.' Well, my phone blows up, [Alpha PD's] phone blows up. So, he did that Thursday night, and he wasn't going to school here on Friday.

Finally, Gamma reported using temporary suspensions, no contact orders, and other interim measures like academic adjustments, and said that the team sends conduct cases to conduct and mental health cases to counseling. They are mindful to follow the student code of conduct and then the team follows-up as needed. Gamma MH said:

And again, which may be a misstep of the team, should we be advising Student Conduct on those cases? 'This is what we recommend: Temporary Suspension.' But, usually it's the other way. I've completed the investigation [Student Conduct], and we're going to do a . . . suspension, or I've decided to trespass this person [campus ban] . . . so, there's not us [BIT] giving that direction, which from my perspective is just fine. I don't know that role. I don't know the legalities of it or the words to describe the process.

**Question 3: From your perspective, describe the extent to which your team impacts campus safety?**

Many Behavioral Intervention Teams were created following the Virginia Tech mass shooting tragedy as an effort to prevent targeted violence and assess behaviors of concern (Sokolow et al., 2014). This question helped determine the degree to which team members perceived their team to be preventing harm to self and to others as well as to what degree they believed they were mitigating threats to the campus community.

Although participants perceived that their BIT work contributed positively to campus safety, most participants, however, found the concept difficult to measure. Additionally, there was also a trend among participants to see BIT efforts as being “behind the scenes” and not well understood or visible to individuals who are not on the team. Alpha SA said, “If I do this right nobody knows what we’re doing . . . and, it’s hard to say – if you don’t have it, what would it [the impact on campus] look like?” Beta University agreed that their efforts, too, had a huge impact on campus safety, especially in combination with TAT efforts.

Gamma University believed their team was positively contributing to campus safety. Gamma PD gave credit to the knowledge and experience of team members and to the resources available to the team. He said this knowledge and experience made them nimble and able to respond quickly. Gamma MH added that relationships among team members were helpful because team members all had their feet in different spaces on campus. She believed this coverage assisted the team in thinking about who else may need to be brought in when an incident occurred. In regards to campus safety, Gamma SA said:

Ya know, and I think for many people that have been around higher ed. for a long time, I mean, those stories about Columbine and Virginia Tech are still in the back of your head . . . and when those pop up on the news, it’s like – that could happen. And, I think about stuff like that. We get lots of people on the radar, but what about the guy who never gets

on the radar? And, we talk about that sometimes. But, I think the community in general likes knowing that we're there.

In similar fashion, Delta SA also believed that their team was contributing to campus safety, but admitted that they needed to get the referral first, as prevention could only happen "if we know about it."

***Probe: Can you provide an example of a case that illustrates your answer?***

This question allowed for rich descriptive examples of how regional teams in Oklahoma were contributing to campus safety. The examples provided by participants included cases where the student was able to be retained, as well as cases when students needed to be separated from campus in order to maintain campus safety.

When possible, the team contributed to campus safety by helping students stay in school. For example, Gamma University addressed a homicidal male who was on the autism spectrum. Although the student had weapons in his car, which University Police confiscated, a thorough assessment led the team to determine that the campus was the safest place for him because his targets were not nearby. They chose, in this situation, to allow the student to remain enrolled and worked with him to change the trajectory of events and deescalate the situation. In another case, Gamma PD reported:

We actually had a couple of students who both had suicidal ideation, and they were [part of] each other's, what's the term, their safety valve [safety plan]. And, while we were dealing with one, the other one is like – 'I'm right here with you', but was actually having more problems than the other one. So, I think through the team, we figured that out. . . . And, housing requires that if you are going to stay here, you are going to have the RA, professional staff, or a friend [provide support], and the dots weren't connecting. Well, we connected the dots a little bit. We [the team] can connect the dots quicker, and the team helped facilitate the conversation about that, so that the outcome we achieved happened a lot quicker [and kept them both safe].

Beta University also discussed a student the team was able to assist. Beta SA said,

We had a resident on campus who had first alleged a Title IX violation. After speaking

with the student and their roommate, it was determined that the individual actually was having a mental break and hearing voices. So, . . . we were able to get the person to an inpatient facility with the family's assistance.

On the other hand, teams often believed they could best contribute to campus safety through the use of suspensions. For example, Alpha SA said:

We had a young man, who we had already had a [BIT] meeting on. Happened to be Saudi. Happened to have a lot of medical issues, um, real medical issues. Three faculty that I know of went . . . to visit him in the hospital. So, very well met, very well-liked, and he ends up outside a business downtown in a hoodie threatening women. First of all, sexually objectifying them, and then going off on a rant of what he's going to do to them. . . . [city] PD got called, and anytime it's one of ours, they let us know . . . so, the impact on that was we got together and said, we're not the kind of institution he needs. We've done counseling, we've done change of room, we've done community service, we've done everything. And, so we ended up taking him [inpatient] because we couldn't get him level enough to feel like we could let him go on his own, and he got deported because he wasn't a student any more, and that was harsh . . . but, ya know, when he broke, he broke. And so, while they were deporting him, they lost him in the airport . . . and he ended up . . . with some friends, and the way we know that is he hired somebody to come up here and get his car and bring it to [him], so we followed them. It's like, this is interesting, I mean, it was just a weird one. But, because we already had a [BIT] on him, it was kind of a, 'we're done'. We don't have any more toys. We've got nothing else to help him with, and he obviously needs help we don't provide .

Alpha MH shared that in times like this, the teams made *her* feel safer as well by being nearby during a psychological assessment, hospitalization, or termination. Alpha PD said that officers will "stage" where they are needed (like outside a counseling assessment) in order to be seen by those who need to see them, and to be out of sight but nearby when they don't need to be seen.

Sometimes though, teams dealt with individuals who were not affiliated with the university. In those instances, teams had to work within their scope of their control. For instance, the Delta University team had addressed campus safety concerns brought on by a campus visitor who escalated racial tensions. Delta SA said:

So, we had a case in the Fall where we had, [a visitor] came to campus, and I had been alerted from several schools about what they were doing, and as a result of that [visit] it

kind of created a lot of escalated race-related issues on our campus. Not that they weren't there [before], but it kind of charged up everything, and . . . the team was able to address individual students that were impacted by that. . . . It stayed on our agenda for about three or four weeks, [and] we were putting other interventions in place. Listening rooms, options to talk to a counselor. [We] reached out to student organizations and were able to pull students who were at risk during that time into it before they escalated into something else.

Regardless of whether the outcome was suspension, continued enrollment, or incident follow-up, receiving timely information mattered, and this was highlighted by Delta PD who reported:

One particular case, we met with a student, and in dealing with him he was a subject of [BIT]. We had met with him because of failing grades and things of that nature. He had a drug habit. We sat him down and talked to him, told him we can help you with this, went through a whole list of things. I felt confident that we reached him. Then that night one of my officers arrested him for drug use. . . . We were of the opinion [as a team] to go in a certain direction, and I literally got a phone call from [city police]. . . . He escalated a great deal unbeknownst to us, and we had to suspend him for violence. [That information] turned us completely around in the opposite direction. We went from looking at all the avenues we could help [him] with to suspending him and banning him from campus because of the violent behaviors he exhibited off campus. We immediately determined he was a threat to our population if his behavior was left unchecked.

#### **Question 4: What marketing strategies are utilized by the team?**

Best practices suggested that BITs should market themselves by engaging in educational workshops, media campaigns, and other marketing strategies in order to encourage reporting and increase awareness in regards to the team's existence (Sokolow et al., 2014). However, at least one participant from every team in the study perceived marketing to be an underdeveloped area of team functioning. Alpha University reported that word of mouth, reputation, and consistency in their approach was their best marketing tool. Alpha team members utilized opportunities for face-time with faculty and/or staff, such as New Employee Orientation, to talk about the team. Alpha MH believed more awareness of the team would be beneficial and believed that if they were marketing, referrals would certainly increase. Alpha MH added,

I mean, that's a good idea [marketing], but I think we're kinda underground. . . . It would be interesting to see how many people knew what the team was. . . . What they do is contact a wing of it . . . and then [we] as a team go, 'oh, this is a [BIT]'. But the more awareness I think would be beneficial, I really do. You really shouldn't be secret, and it's not like this is secret, it's just kind of like, we do our job, click-in.

All team members from Alpha University believed the VPSA would pitch in should they need support or funding for marketing efforts and/or departments associated with the team would contribute.

Beta also reported limited marketing efforts. They had a webpage dedicated to the team, and in the past they had initiated an anonymous reporting poster campaign. The posters were hung all over campus with an email address that could be used for reporting concerns. However, with staff turnover, the remaining members no longer knew where those emails were going, yet the posters remained on display. They were in the process of finding out how to find and re-route those emails. Beta MH added though, that there is a natural tendency for faculty and staff to reach out to Student Affairs when there is an issue or when they don't know what to do, and this method seemed to be what was primarily driving the referral process.

Gamma University also had a web presence, participated in New Student Orientation, and had used business cards at one time for marketing the team. They were currently working on a folder covered with helpful BIT information that the team hoped to pass out at Fall Convocation. They hoped faculty and staff would carry the folder with them and would have it on hand to pull out as needed when they had a concern.

Delta admitted that their only marketing activity was talking to groups whenever possible and talking to student leaders about what to do when someone is in trouble and how to know what trouble looks like.

***Probe: To what degree do you perceive these efforts to be effective?***

This probe allowed for a greater understanding of team member's perceptions of the effectiveness of their team marketing efforts.

Alpha SA felt no additional marketing efforts were needed because students were taught how to report concerns at orientation and in other trainings such as bystander training. As long as they told someone, the team believed they would be able to get that information and respond. Team members perceived that their personal connections on campus facilitated reporting, and Alpha SA gave out her cell phone number to every student at orientation and emphasized to them the importance of reaching out to her. She said that when she talked to students she would say, "name your needs . . . my telepathic powers are good, but unless you tell me what's wrong, I can't help you. And, you're the reason I go to work every day, so call me, that's why we're here." When asked how effective she perceived marketing efforts to be, Alpha PD said, "The marketing? We don't have any, so . . . not that I'm aware of." Alpha MH also said she was unaware of any marketing strategies used beyond speaking engagements such as New Faculty Orientation, but believed additional marketing would be beneficial.

Although they did have a website, Beta University believed their marketing efforts were not as effective as they could be. Beta SA described "small school challenges" such as limited staff as being a barrier to marketing efforts and added, "It just makes you wonder what you could do if you had a whole center whose focus was outreach." Beta PD admitted he had never thought about team marketing before, but he knew the team had a website. Beta MH said one of her top priorities was to figure out where the campus poster emails were going and perceived this to be a big marketing concern for the team.

Gamma SA reported "pretty low effectiveness," but said that word of mouth was their

biggest success because the team was perceived well by those who had used it. However, there was nothing “in hand” for the people to easily access the team, and he wanted to change that. Another of Gamma’s challenges was that their university branding standards made it difficult to think creatively about how to make the team stand out. The university as a whole really worked hard to ensure that everything marketed by the university had a consistent look, so it was challenging to design an attention-grabbing piece. Gamma MH added three additional challenges to marketing the team. One was that everybody wants a piece of everybody else which created an information overload for the campus community. Secondly, she said that, though social media is a great tool, the team was unsure about how to maximize social media for team use. And finally, the team was conflicted in regards to the viability of email which was perceived as a “hit or miss” tool. On one hand, they heard that no one checks email, but on the other hand, email had worked effectively when counseling used it to advertise a program. Because of such discrepancies, the team wasn’t sure if email was a worthwhile option for marketing the team.

Another major challenge, faculty buy-in, was brought up by two Gamma participants. These team members did not know how to get faculty to buy into taking an active role in identifying and referring behaviors of concern. Gamma MH said that staff were hired to serve and retain, but faculty were hired to teach. So, how to get faculty to buy in and see safety as their job proved difficult.

Similar to other teams, Delta also admitted that her team was not where she wanted it to be in terms of marketing. Delta SA said:

We are not anywhere close to where I want to be with that. That was the whole Student Conduct [Coordinator’s] Spring plan, and when she left in February, it fell off the work-plan. And, we are just now getting to rehire, but the big thing is that we have on our website an incident reporting button off of the student page, the faculty page, and the



staff page, and the staff page where you can submit a report. And, based on what you pick, it comes to the [BIT] through Maxient. So, it is under-developed. My big push is to speak to the faculty in two weeks about how it is that they can report, and the kind of things we are interested in hearing. That still seems to be hard for our faculty to wrap their head around. They don't want to use the incident reporting [tool]. They just want to tell me, but they don't want to go in, so I'm trying to work at that.

***Probe: What resources are available to assist in providing marketing of the team?***

This probe allowed for an increased understanding of existing resources that could help the teams market themselves.

Alpha SA reported that personal connections were an available resource and were key, especially when a campus was small like theirs. Additionally, Alpha PD and Alpha MH said the VPSA was a great resource for support when the team had a need.

Beta MH said they had student workers who could assist with graphic design and web managers who could assist with their website development. Beta SA added that Public relations would create materials, and Beta PD admitted that he did not know what resources were available.

Gamma SA reported that paying for a marketing promotion is less of a worry than finding the time to make it. Gamma PD said that the team itself was a resource for marketing, and Gamma MH said that NaBITA was a resource for marketing strategies.

Delta PD and Delta MH admitted that they did not know what resources were available, but Delta SA said the team had access to technology such as social media, website development, and graphic design. In addition, she said, while they didn't have a lot of funding for printing cards, flyers, or other materials, they could use social media to "blast" how to use the reporting portal through Maxient. She added that they could tie in the messaging to key time-of-year issues.

***Probe: What resources are needed?***

In contrast to the previous probe, this probe allowed team members to verbalize their needs and challenges as they related to marketing the team. The needs of all participating universities fell into the six categories of: funding, time, technology, staff, buy in from faculty and students, and increased awareness about what should be reported.

Alpha University said they needed funding, and perceived the team's lack of a formalized identity as a barrier. Alpha MH said, "If we were going to expand, or do marketing, we would need more resources [funding] for that . . . but we're unofficial. We're not like a department. We're not like a budget, just like an idea."

Beta SA reported needing more time, and Beta MH added, "when I got here, literally on the first day, I had clients in my office, and it has been back to back." In addition, participants reported that they needed a central place where people could submit anonymous reports online. Beta MH said they needed for people to know there was a team because:

I get calls from faculty who say, I don't know if I should say anything, but. . . . So, I think it would help if more people knew. That way we can help the student, because a lot of times we get, 'so and so said this', and it's like, why didn't you ever tell anybody?

Gamma SA reported needing more time, and needing a clinically trained Case Manager. He went on to say that the case manager would be staffed under the counseling center and would get their workload from BIT. He believed this would assist the team because BIT was not anyone's primary job, and balancing a lot of other things had become a challenge that prevented them from getting to marketing efforts. Gamma SA said,

I think that one of the fun things about [BIT] is that it's not anyone's primary job, so you're balancing twelve other things, and then it's like, oh crap, it's Monday morning. I have to put on this [BIT] hat and run over and lead a meeting. So, I think that's very real.

Gamma SA also believed that often faculty, and especially adjunct faculty, were hard to connect with and train. In addition, although the team visited departments whenever they are invited to do so, getting the door open to them had been a challenge. Gamma SA added that there seemed to be a gatekeeper, and they hadn't gotten the access they needed. However, Gamma SA reported that success with responding to faculty concerns led to repeat calls, and often the team assisted in reaching out to a student when faculty did not want to have difficult, but necessary, conversations. On the other hand, he noticed that the high number of adjuncts and faculty turn-over presented a challenge to this relationship building. Gamma SA said:

This is a point of contention, I think, across the country. I've got the team that's willing to go to the pony show, but departments have to invite us in, and we can tell faculty members and staff members you have to go to safety training, or you have to go to Title IX, but no one is ready to say, you have to have a [BIT] refresher every year. Faculty are busy, and it's just hard to get in the door.

Gamma SA also reported that they needed more education and marketing aimed at students so that students will report to the team when they hear something is going on with their peers.

Gamma SA said:

But, our big thing, I don't think we've done a good job of informing other students that we're here, so we don't get very many reports that are student on student. My gut tells me there are probably some things that students would report if they were familiar with our website or our reporting form, so that's an area I think we are missing.

Gamma PD added that though they were working on improving their marketing, the team often got "bogged down," and marketing moved lower on the priority list. Gamma MH added that there was also a perceived downside to marketing in that more marketing would mean more referrals, and they feared that the team did not have the resources to handle a big influx of cases. Gamma PD agreed that an area of weakness on the part of BIT marketing was that students didn't know about the team. Finally, he also perceived a mentality among some faculty that BIT work was not their responsibility. He said:

You're the one with the student that has the crisis, or you're the one sharing a cubicle with some guy, and he's leaving threatening notes on your computer. You're going, 'that's someone else's problem'. No! We all have the responsibility. Period. Whether it be faculty or staff. But, again, we are all here. We all have an agenda, and asking for people to step out of their agenda can be challenging.

Gamma PD added that their team needs to make sure they've got a current web page and some brochures to hand out. They also needed to take advantage of opportunities to give presentations, leverage social media, and access additional funding. But, he added, "in this environment to say we need to bring in another five or ten grand, I'm sure that our VPSA would say, 'Not this year. Do with what you've got. Be creative.'"

Finally, Delta also reported needing funds to support marketing, and Delta MH said that they were trying to address the fact that faculty and staff did not know about Maxient. Delta SA added, "I think that working the portal [Maxient] has not been hitting as many people as we want to hit, so we really have a lot of work to do there."

**Question 5: What funding resources are allocated for team use?**

This question addressed whether or not teams had received dedicated financial resources to address team needs and development. All teams in this study reported that there was no dedicated BIT budget for use by their teams. Teams requested funds as needed from the VPSA and/or President, and teams relied on the area budgets of team members, primarily Student Affairs, to support expenses related to such things as memberships to professional organizations, training, and/or marketing.

Alpha University did not have any BIT specific funding but credited the VPSA with providing a great sense of support should they ever need anything. Alpha SA said there was no budget, but when she asked for something, the VPSA made it happen. Alpha PD mirrored this perception and said there was no BIT funding, but that the VPSA provided for 100% of her

needs. Alpha PD added that she didn't ask for much, and only for things she really needed. Alpha MH laughed after hearing the question and said, "I don't think we have any money."

When asked about funding Beta University participants agreed that there were no dedicated resources. Beta SA said the team had, "Zero Dollars I would guess", and Beta PD agreed there was no funding that he was aware of. Beta MH said simply, "I don't think there is any."

In addition, Gamma MH added that she's pretty sure the BIT has no budget but said the chair asked the president for funds when needed. She added that the team had gone to NaBITA, but admitted she had no idea who paid for it. Gamma PD put it this way:

Outside of salaries, everything is discretionary. And, I have to do the same thing. I have an expense that came up this morning, which requires a huge chunk of my operating for the year, but if we need it, we'll figure it out. That's what we do. Maxient was one of those things we figured out. If we decided to put them [marketing materials] all over the place, that money would come from someplace, then maybe we wouldn't do something else. It becomes, what's the most important thing?

Delta said they had no specific BIT budget, but their professional membership to NaBITA was paid for out of the Dean of Student's account. Any webinars would also be paid for out of the same account. Delta MH admitted not knowing if there was a budget, and Delta PD said, "A little bit of funding never hurts", and added that training would be a primary priority if they were ever able to obtain funding.

***Probe: To what degree do you perceive these resources to be sufficient to meet team goals?***

This probe allowed for a deeper understanding of team member perceptions regarding the financial support they receive as a team and as team members.

Alpha University did not have dedicated BIT funds, however participants seemed at least content with their current situation. Alpha SA felt that their system of asking for funds from the

VPSA as needed was sufficient because, “whatever I determine we need, I have never been told anything but, yes.” Alpha PD agreed and reported that this system was 100% effective and sufficient. Alpha MH stated, however that more funding would be needed if the team wanted to expand or do more marketing.

Beta University perceived their lack of a budget to be more of a liability. Beta SA reported that the current funding structure was 40% effective, and said, “I think while we are doing the best we can, you always wonder what else could be done.” Beta PD said that with some funding they could attend conferences or trainings. Beta MH didn’t know if there was any dedicated funding but said:

I know for me, with budget cuts, funds are really limited. Personnel, we are lucky that people who quit have been rehired. We feared that we all would have to pick up their jobs. I wouldn’t say we have an abundance of funds, but I think it’s about being creative and not complaining. What resources do we have? I think funds are low, and that’s just an understood.

Delta University for the most part felt that they are doing fairly well with the current strategy of funding their needs from other areas. However, both Delta SA and Delta PD admitted that there was room for improvement. Delta SA said:

I would say that where we are now, we are fine. Where I want to be, we are not close to where I want to be just yet. I just have to weigh it with other needs we have and what are those competing needs as an institution.

Delta PD said that right now they were “pretty good,” but also reported that they needed more training and funding would enable them to obtain it. And, while Delta MH admitted to not knowing whether or not the funding was sufficient, she believed that the university would allocate what the team needed if it would help the institution avoid a crisis.

Gamma University participants were divided. Gamma SA believed the funding strategy was sufficient, but said a given budget would be better because then they would be able to plan.

Gamma PD believed that if they needed something they would figure out how to pay for it, but, Gamma MH said no, the funding was not sufficient and added that knowing there would be funds to attend a conference was important. She said:

I don't think they are sufficient, and there's something about taking your team to a conference every year that forces knowledge, information, and relationship. Those of us who have gone to that training together, in the down time you work, sort of. You're still socializing but that's, I would say that's where the power happens for this kind of a team. Because on the Monday's when we meet, there's no time for relationship building. We've got a long agenda. We've got to get through it. There's probably annoyance at people's interpersonal styles more than there is relationship building. I mean, we all get along, but there's something about being there and having some conversations, asking some informal questions. . . . There's just tremendous power there, and I know that it's money, but I think the investment is so much more than just that conference. And so, but no, the resources aren't enough. . . . Investment in this matters for the big picture.

***Probe: What does your team do with its funding?***

Across the board, participants said they did not receive BIT-specific funding. Therefore, they did not have an answer to this probe. However, alternative sources of funding allowed for the purchase of Maxient (Gamma and Delta), conferences and training (Gamma and Delta), and marketing materials (Gamma).

***Probe: What needs, if any, do you have in this area?***

If funding was limited or unavailable, this question allowed team members to express their team-related budget priorities.

Teams shared a number of funding needs. For example, all teams expressed a need for training and travel, however, institutionally imposed restrictions and travel "freezes", implemented due to budget shortfalls, were also a limiting factor.

Beta PD said:

I think that a little bit of funding would help us with sending people to conferences and to get maybe a little training, especially for new people who are just coming on and really have no idea of any of the history, you know. A new counselor coming on, unless they've heard of it [BIT], it's like, what's this all about? Well, and of course, all the

campus shootings [are] why a lot of this has happened, and we've had our one or two here.

Furthermore, all institutions in the study also discussed a need for additional staff.

Gamma reported a need for a Case Manager, Beta needed additional officers and more Student Affairs staff, Delta specifically mentioned needing more counselors, and Alpha mentioned needing funding for staff to fill in when another officer is traveling. Beta and Alpha universities mentioned having equipment needs, and Gamma said a hotline might be helpful. Gamma SA also shared that Maxient needed to pay off for the team by helping them tell their story. They hoped this data, could be used as a tool for advocating for additional funding.

**Question 6: From your perspective, describe your team's impact on those served. Include students, faculty, staff, and campus as a whole.**

This question served to galvanize the research question in regards to team member perceptions about how their BIT impacted their campus and those served by the team.

All teams reported both a positive and significant impact on those served. Alpha MH added that even when the outcome may seem negative for the individuals they are working with (such as in the case of university suspension), the team still offered options and provided some level of hope to the individual. Alpha PD focused on the fact that they hadn't suffered any loss of life, and believed that without the team that might not be the case. Alpha SA focused more on the impact the team had on the other team members and reported a collegiality or a "fox hole mentality" that grew out of being together in the life-saving or life-changing business. Alpha SA described BIT team work as a catalyst for building the type of cohesiveness that gets you through the crisis.

Beta university highlighted the impact of team efforts on faculty and staff, but also pointed out that often the impact went largely unknown to others outside the team. Beta SA felt



unsure about how much others acknowledged or saw the team's impact because part of the goal was to address issues confidentially. She reported that the team did not necessarily want others to know how much their students were struggling with issues. Both Beta PD and Beta MH perceived that one of the impacts was that the team provided an outlet for faculty and staff to report concerns and to know that there are people who were going to take care of the issue. Beta MH added that the impact of the team was that others recognized that the university held individuals accountable for their behaviors, and the students knew that there were consequences for poor choices.

Moreover, Gamma reported three ways they impacted campus: by serving as a resource, by facilitating student retention, and by facilitating campus safety. The team used "wrapping" as a term which meant they provided students with a variety of resources, services, and options aimed at meeting the range of needs they might have. Additionally, the team served as a resource for faculty and staff by acting as a central point for referrals. By doing so, faculty and staff knew they didn't have to handle the problem themselves.

In addition, all three Gamma participants discussed retention as an impact of the team.

Gamma PD described this impact by saying:

Look at a kid who is a student today versus a student who was a student ten years ago before this team was started. How was that student being handled? Would that student ten years ago have been able to finish school? I would tell you that today that number is higher. I can't give you a number, but I can just tell you that we'll throw whatever we have at them trying to manage enrollment by saving students, and that's what schools do. . . . If your grades have dropped because you've fallen into depression, or using alcohol/drugs and depression, whatever it may be, they are probably going to try to find an intervention that's going to save you as a student. . . . I think you have a greater likelihood of coming through a crisis, a personal crisis, and that can be anywhere from a mental health issue; you're a victim of rape; whatever it would be. We're going to help you in ways that we didn't a decade ago. Really in ways we didn't five years ago, four years ago. I think we're getting better as we move forward. Ultimately, the campus is safer, but individually, the impacts are that the students, faculty, and staff, can be saved.

Furthermore, Gamma reported that they positively impacted campus safety. This could be accomplished by asking an individual to leave (suspension), or by mitigating threats. Gamma MH provided this insight into how their team mitigated threats by thinking through the following:

What's going on in this person's life? Are there places that can be mitigated that reduce this threat for us? What would be a good exit strategy that reduces the threat to us? When an employee's being asked to leave, what kind of things can you mitigate? How can I, you know, the most bland of reference letters might turn someone down a notch. Yes, we're asking you not to be here anymore, but I want to give you this reference letter so that you can seek other employment. I mean, there's a lot of mitigating.

In addition, Gamma PD said the team impacted campus safety by preventing the "ripple effect" of issues caused by, for example, a roommate walking in on a student who had committed suicide. Gamma PD felt that by addressing the suicidal student as a team, the ripple impact was eliminated. When asked about impact, Gamma MH said, "We've been really blessed by not having any incidents, and maybe that's a sideways indication. Because, we've had a lot of things that could have been."

Delta University also believed that their team had an impact on faculty and staff and expressed a belief that the campus community was relieved to know that someone is looking into a situation they report. Delta SA added that students seemed to end up appreciating the outreach of the team and appreciated knowing that someone cared, even if they were angry at first that they had been reported.

***Probe: Can you provide an example of a case that illustrates the team's impact?***

This question allowed for rich descriptive examples of how team members perceived their impact on campus. The examples provided insight into how teams both proactively responded before an incident occurred and reactively provided follow-up services after an incident had occurred.

Delta PD discussed an incident involving pro-active prevention and said:

We had a student from over west that had a long criminal record. He was going to an off-site campus location. He had a lot of external factors, family problems, access to drugs, and a lot of issues. They made arrangements for him, he rented a house from the University, got out of that environment, and seemed to do a lot better over here. We had some rocky points, but he excelled. He walked across the stage last December. I initially never would have thought that was going to happen, but it was a success story.

On the other hand, teams often needed a more reactive approach. One example from Beta MH provided some context for the kinds of things they looked for in regards to follow-up. Beta MH talked about a student who passed away on campus. The team responded by working with the individuals who were left trying to make sense of it. Beta MH said,

We figured out what we could do to support the family . . . and to check with the disability services coordinator [who had worked with the student]. And, [the chair] was there with her [disability services coordinator] when the family arrived, and they can't get the screams out of their head [from] when the family arrived. And, the police who performed CPR felt horrible that he wasn't able to revive him.

The team made sure they reached out to and supported the individuals impacted by the death.

**Question 7: From your perspective, what internal team characteristics or dynamics, if any, strengthen your team?**

This question was asked in order to provide insight into the inner-workings of the team. There was a great deal of overlap in team responses to this question. Table 4 lists the qualities that team members perceived strengthened their teams.

Table 4

*Characteristics Perceived to Strengthen the Team*

Characteristic	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta
Student-serving: ethic of care & concern	X	X	X	X
Expertise of members	X	X	X	X
Cross divisional/diverse membership	X		X	X
Ability to disagree, openness	X	X	X	
Longevity of at least 1 team member	X		X	X

Table 4 (Cont.)

Characteristic	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta
Trust		X	X	X
Members understand their role			X	X
Members listen to each other	X		X	
Camaraderie/strong relationships	X	X		
Ability to transition in new members	X		X	
Commitment to the team/shared mission			X	X
Big picture thinkers on the team				X
Members have “boots on the ground” perspective				X
Authority to make decisions				X
Strong leadership				X
Members work well together			X	
Members are honest, even when it’s hard			X	
Humor	X			
Approachability (for students)	X			

Overall, team members perceived their teams to have a lot of strengths, and a great deal of commitment to these teams and to each other was expressed. For example, Gamma PD said:

And it’s not just a meeting I go to. And it’s like, we’ll get together whenever we need to – No! I’ll be back in the same room next Monday, 9:00, and we can pick back up where we left off, and see what’s changed good or bad. . . . Every week that we get together I see a willingness to engage. We are now to the point that we’ve got the right people, and we didn’t when we were just focusing on students – we weren’t there. . . . I think we’re pretty well balanced, and I think we do a pretty decent job. And, I say we, because I think conduct and the counseling center carry the load.

The selection of team members also seemed to be critical to team success. For instance, Delta PD credited their team’s success on the diversity of the team and said, “Everyone’s ability to take in different viewpoints and come to a mutually agreeable conclusion, that is very rare, but we don’t have a problem with that.” Delta SA believed a “boots on the ground” team was critical and said:

Our chief wasn’t on the team, because we wanted an officer who was working a duty shift. It would be great for the chief to come, but for us, we needed someone who was actually driving the car, talking to the students, listening to the scanner to be that person for us.

And finally, Delta MH commented on the diversity of the group as well and said:

Just the diversity of the group and coming in with different ideas and interpretations, opinions, some things that someone might catch that others didn't. They see it in a different light maybe. Just even different knowledge bases [proved to be important].

***Probe: What internal team characteristics or dynamics, if any, limit your team?***

This probe provided a contrasting perspective regarding the inner-workings of the team.

Unlike perceived characteristics that strengthened the team, there was very little overlap in what participants perceived as characteristics that limited team functioning. Table 5 lists the limiting characteristics.

Table 5

*Characteristics Perceived to Limit the Team*

Characteristic	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta
Cross-divisional/diverse membership may create uneasiness and/or role confusion			X	X
Feeling disconnected or murky about the team's relationship with the TAT		X	X	
Handling things as individuals and not as a team	X			
Different lenses: Team members may not always see the same level of importance			X	
Power struggles regarding who's in charge			X	
Unclear expectations about what team members should be doing (purpose on the team)			X	
Not including necessary members, or including unnecessary members			X	
Frustrations over lack of knowledge about due process and the time it takes			X	

Table 5 (Cont.)

Characteristic	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta
Lack of authority to make decisions and act			X	
Teams can get too big				X
Confusion and uncertainty about how to balance confidentiality with consultation/ sharing expertise (Counseling)				X
Not considering the potential threat of individuals who are not faculty, staff, or student				X
A lack of confidence in regards to decision-making.				X

While all of the participants in the study had positive things to say about their teams, many who had been on their team for some time could look back and describe things that they had learned over the years. They described ways that they had addressed limiting characteristics and shared how they made their teams better. For example, Gamma SA addressed the need for team members to know and stay within their role and scope of control. In order to accomplish this, they avoided stepping into the role of other experts on the team. Gamma called this “staying in your lane.” In one particular example, the team as a whole needed to “stay in their lane.” Gamma SA said:

We had a big situation last spring where a student athlete . . . was admitted, was a transfer student, and had sexual assault charges at his former institution and didn’t fill out on his application the prior felony. He skipped the felony review board process because people just kind of worked the system . . . he lived in housing in a co-ed building, so it kind of became our problem . . . some decisions were made above us . . . some of us that were adamant that . . . we need to write a letter saying we don’t agree with the process, and I thought, I think that’s out of our pay grade. . . . We worked the part that we could. Did he need to be removed from housing? We worked on that as a team . . . he had to go back through the felony review process, and he was admitted, but we did remove him from our on-campus housing. So, again, we focused on the piece that was ours to focus on. . . . We had to stay in our lane as a team.

Delta SA also highlighted this need to “stay in your lane” and said:

We talked about that. And, part of that, as the facilitator for the meeting is that I ask very pointedly, okay, now let’s look at this from an academic support perspective, and not look at anyone else but that person, and that was on purpose to train us to be the expert of what you are the expert of. But, don’t try to be the expert of what you’re not. That really kind of came out of the previous group, we had a member on the team who was also a psychologist, but that was not their role on the team. And so, it was constantly usurping the role of the counselor, but they would make claims about someone’s mental health, and I’m like, you can’t be that guy, you’re not the counselor, or you’re not the treating person.

According to participants, the makeup of team membership matters, and certain members may create a chilling effect on the team. Delta SA described it this way:

I think that having a representative from the president’s office artificially limits that team. I think there’s an initial [worry] that they are reporting back on what I say, or my professionalism, and that’s not the case at all. But, I think initially, with the team, there was some chilling effect with that because that had not been a part of any of those meetings. But stylistically, our president kind of wants to know what is going on. And, because he has an open- door policy, a lot of people who show up on the list are people who have randomly shown up in his office. So, the person is on there [on the BIT] for that. Not because of wanting to know the nitty-gritty of the team, but because you hear a lot when your door is propped open every day, and you invite everyone to come in. I think that was an issue.

***Probe: Can you provide an example to illustrate your answer?***

This probe allowed for rich descriptive examples into perspectives regarding the inner-workings of the team. The following examples explained what characteristics team members perceived as strengthening or limiting to team functioning.

Delta SA provided an example of a team strength and credited the “big picture people” on her team. She said:

So often you’ll deal with the individual student issue and then the issue turns into, what does this look like for the greater campus? Do we need to think about this in terms of, is there going to be publicity? Is there going to be an issue with other students, or social media? They immediately kind of go to the bigger picture, which is helpful in managing potential crises.

On the other hand, Delta SA described the lack of confidence or unwillingness to make a decision as a limiting characteristic the team needed to work through. She said:

The team was initially a little tentative to make decisions about action. Um, I guess that's a characteristic. It's hard for me to tell if that's because it was new for them to be acting this way as a group, or, because some of them were new to being involved in this. So, toward the end of the year it was much more group decision-based. Early on there was still some deferment. 'Well, we don't know what to do, so let's go to someone who will make the decision.'

At Beta University, staff turnover was perceived as a limiting team characteristic that they team would have to overcome. Beta MH shared this example:

Yes, a big chunk of our team is going to be new. Our student disability services coordinator, and student activities coordinator, along with the Director of Student Development will be new. So, it will be interesting. One of the new people will be the boss of another new person, so it's just going to be interesting. And we have an opening for another multi-faceted position. It's part time in enrollment management working on retention, and another half working with us, and I saw that case management is a part of that piece, but the job description is long, so we'll see how much actually ends up being case-management. But, at least someone was thinking about that component.

And finally, not looking beyond the individuals directly impacted by a situation was perceived as a limiting characteristic. Gamma SA provided this example:

We had a situation where a woman was inappropriately video-taped, and those videos got out, and so we were kind of focused on the woman and the person who took the video. Well, her dad was pretty upset, and was her dad going to come to campus looking for the boy? And, we wouldn't have thought of that. . . . Cause we get into working with our students and forget about dad who's out there too.

### **Question 8: What BIT-related training have you had?**

Question eight explored the degree to which individual team members had training specific to Behavioral Intervention Teams.

Alpha University reported no recent BIT training, but Alpha MH said that a training she attended years ago prompted the creation of their team. No participants from Alpha University members reported BIT specific training since that time. Likewise, no Beta University



participants reported having any BIT-specific training. However, Delta participants had completed some online training. Gamma University participants had attended the NaBITA conference and had invited Brian Van Brunt to come to campus for a day-long training. Gamma participants had also engaged in other state training, webinars, and had utilized the NaBITA list-serve as a way to stay current on best practices. When asked about the NaBITA conference, Gamma PD said attending was important to him because, “It was reaffirming to say, yeah... they have the same problems I have. And, it doesn’t lessen the actual load, but emotionally it does because you feel like you’re not alone in the world.”

***Probe: Please describe any team training your BIT has engaged in.***

According to Van Brunt (2012) on-going team training is a required team activity. This probe explored the degree to which teams were engaging in this practice.

Alpha University said they did not engage in team training. Alpha SA said, “. . . we don’t train each other, or make extra work, and we don’t make extra meetings. Everybody had a full-time job before we had a [BIT] . . . and so we don’t do simulation games.” Beta University also had not trained as a team, but Gamma said they had used the NaBITA video of a BIT meeting for a professional development training with Student Affairs. Gamma’s team from time to time presented a new topic or idea (often something NaBITA put out) at a BIT meeting that the team would then talk about. However, this was a really small fraction of the time they spent together because most of their time was spent addressing cases. Gamma SA said:

It’s just a function of time. We always say we should spend one week a month doing table-tops, but we just never have time to do that. Ugh! Because we meet every Monday during the school year. And, it’s usually a two-hour meeting, so we block two hours.

Delta reported that their team discussed the NaBITA Threat Assessment tool before implementing it, and they also discussed relevant articles from time to time. For example, at a

recent meeting the team discussed the concept of disruptive versus dangerous students.

***Probe: What training needs does your team have?***

This probe explored team member perceptions about what training is needed and what barriers are keeping teams from engaging in training.

Alpha University said that the biggest barrier to training was their location in the state. Traveling was difficult because they struggled to find BIT and mental health trainings that were relatively close, and/or worth the cost of traveling to.

Beta said simply that their team needed “a lot” in terms of training, and she would like team members either to be able to attend a conference or have experts come to their campus. Beta also expressed a desire for their team to receive more training related to mental health trends.

Gamma said that they needed to utilize the available resources such as the NaBITA training calendar, and wished that the state regents would share best practices with all of the regional institutions in the state. Finally, Gamma SA said the team needed to be more intentional and plan for maybe a three-year cycle to get everyone on the team to the NaBITA conference. Gamma SA added that it would be helpful to have a list of what assessments counseling can do, or what training police can give in order for team members to know what others are trained in. He believed this would allow the team to maximize those resources. Finally, Gamma said that they needed to conduct more table-top or case study exercises, or review the NaBITA newsletter each week, but the perception was that that sometimes they had no time to do so.

Delta perceived a need for alcohol and other drug related training to assist in their drug and alcohol related BIT cases. Overall, Delta participants perceived that for the most part, team members were participating in training related to their areas of expertise, but were not training as

a team or about topics specifically designed around their role on the team.

***Probe: What resources are available to train the team or individual team members?***

This probe allowed for a deeper understanding of some of the resources that were available for BIT training. Alpha perceived a high level of support from their VPSA, and felt that this was their primary resource for obtaining additional training. Beta perceived their VPSA as their primary resource as well. Delta counted on their president, web resources, and campus and community experts who were willing to come in (at no cost) as content experts when needed. Gamma MH shared that the entire travel budget for counseling services was \$800.00, and said that in lieu of financial resources the team depended on the following: team member expertise, bringing in content experts from the campus or community to consult in their areas of expertise (at no cost), and on NaBITA training resources. Gamma also reported a high level of upper administrative support, and it was the VPSA who provided the funds for the team members to attend NaBITA. Gamma PD said:

I'll tell you, what I think we have here is a good thing, because I see other places where it's not. I see places that are struggling. They've just gotten their team formed, or someone forced them to. What we have had is now two presidents . . . who really support the team. The development of the team, the training of the team. If we have a need, we are going to figure it out. Plain and simple.

***Probe: What resources are needed to train the team or individual team members?***

There was a great deal of similarity between teams in regards to training needs and barriers to training. This probe allowed for a deeper understanding of what may be limiting team training activities and/or opportunities. Alpha MH didn't know what the team might need, and Alpha SA perceived that the team had all that they needed. Alpha PD said their greatest need was information regarding what training is available and how to find it. Beta University needed more training specific to mental health issues as they related to BITs, and Delta said that their

team needed funding for travel and training. Both Delta and Gamma expressed a desire for a regional training to review things that have happened at regional institutions and obtain information on current best practices. Delta also expressed that their team needed training about confidentiality, releases of information, and the consultation role of mental health staff on the team. There seemed to be some confusion among team members about when, how, and what could be shared by counseling with the team. In addition, Delta University shared that more information was needed about police protocols and about how officers make their decisions about when to involve the team. Finally, the team needed assistance with writing and developing BIT policy and procedure.

**Question 9: From your perspective, what, if any, impact does being at a regional institution in Oklahoma have on team functioning?**

This study specifically addressed BITs at regional institutions in Oklahoma, and this question allowed participants to share their insights into how this factor impacted their teams.

Participant interviews revealed five overarching themes related to being at a regional institution in Oklahoma. Those themes were: state challenges, cultural issues, leadership, student issues, and feeling under-valued.

**State Challenges.**

The first theme that emerged related to being at a regional institution in Oklahoma was about how state challenges impacted the teams. State problems consisted of issues related to a campus' location within the state, prison release efforts, substance abuse issues, and lacking mental health resources.

Alpha PD reported that location within the state was a challenge because typically, if there was a training offered in the state, it was a significant distance away from where their

campus was located. This presented a challenge because of limited travel budgets, plus, having small departments meant that at times covering the campus while another staff member was out could be difficult to do.

Delta SA reported that prison release efforts and substance abuse issues were impacting the team. For example, when prison release efforts were implemented to make room for new inmates, these programs often attempted to send the released inmates to college. If they were admitted, Delta's BIT members assisted with the admissions process and followed-up with the students to provide resources as needed. She also said that drug court referred a lot of individuals to college as well, and the team faced challenges associated with trying to retain students who were still really fighting their addictions and their court cases and may not yet be ready for college. Plus, in Oklahoma, marijuana was often perceived to be viewed as normal and acceptable by students, and with surrounding states legalizing the drug, there were growing challenges for team members in regards to addressing the social and academic effects of substance abuse, enforcing drug policies, and with drug use prevention efforts.

The largest gap between what was needed and what resources were available seemed to be in the area of mental health. Gamma SA said that due to lacking mental health resources in the state Gamma University has been very vigilant about keeping counseling services available on campus even in the midst of major budget cuts. Although the university is constantly seeking new ways to save money Gamma reported that cutting or outsourcing counseling is not the path that they want to go down as a university. Gamma SA put it this way:

I think when you look at the overall funding of mental health services in the state, I just think the university's role was not meant to be the medical provider for mental health to the level that I think we've had to step up and fill in some of those holes because there's no other accessible resources. Especially when people don't have insurance or whatever. So, I think that universities over time have had to take on more of the care provider over time than they were ever designed to be. I think back when I was in college I thought the

counseling center, oh, we'll do stress tips, and relationship awareness, but it's not that anymore. It's 1 in 10 of our students have had suicidal thoughts. Medications, psychoses. So, I think because the state hasn't solved some of those issues itself, they land on our plates.

Alpha PD added that there had been some frustration for her team as well. For example, if a suicidal student needed a bed for inpatient mental health care, but there were none available in the state, this left her officers responsible for "sitting on the student until the next morning." Even so, Gamma MH reported that she depended on external resources to help keep up with the demand for services. She said one of the issues was that so many students were uninsured or depended on Medicaid, and without community resources they could not serve students. They quickly referred students out if there was an existing resource, but many students also lacked transportation to get to and from the resource. She reported seeing more and higher acuity in the students who were coming in for services, and felt that many times they were able to settle it down, but only if they made it in to counseling early enough. In addition, she said

We're only serving right at 4% of our student body. The statistic's one in four [who need mental health services]. Where are they? What's happening to them? Who isn't noticing? All of those pieces worry me around, statistically, there are more that need services. And then when you – to know, that that's directly tied to how well you think or perform in a classroom, so that means we're missing a lot that we could help stay here. And that bothers me. I think this year, our data [showed] about 60% said that the mental health intervention kept them here. I don't know what other department can say that.

But, the perception was that there were far more needing services than there were counselors to cover the need. Alpha MH said:

Counselors, we've been sucking for air. Pretty seriously. You see, you have five or six students on your calendar every day, and you do that for a few days, and you know what that is [burnout], and so you get feeling bogged down, you get physically exhausted. People are coming in, and you feel like they are falling through the cracks because you can't get them in, and the truth is, they *are* falling through the cracks because they are waiting two weeks to get in. So, that's stressful. You've got stress, emotional stress, and just, you know, just the feeling of being overwhelmed and being behind. . . . So, yeah, and then we get a BIT call? Where, okay, I've got to go, and that's what you've got to do, but that just makes things worse here. And, that's stressful, and counselor-types,

personalities like mine, I tend to worry about that, and I worry about these students.

### **Cultural Issues.**

A number of cultural issues emerged related to being in Oklahoma and/or at a regional institution in Oklahoma. For example, Beta SA said:

I think in Oklahoma we have pretty traditional views and sometimes our students don't fit into those boxes. Helping others understand what those views are and making sure we [for example] use the right pronoun or preferred name versus the legal name.

Furthermore, navigating cultural clashes between international students and domestic students who may have political or other beliefs that strain these relationships were reported as a challenge by Gamma SA. And, an institutional culture of trying to do more with less and overloading staff to offset budget cuts has played a role as well. This culture has put additional strains on team members who are trying to juggle their multiple responsibilities. Beta MH put it this way, "Campus culture has been a component for sure. [The perception is that] I don't feel supported in my role, or maybe my role has too many job duties. I can't do everything."

Alpha SA shared that being in Oklahoma made it tough to hire a diverse faculty, perhaps because of state factors such as economy, reputation, and location. But, on the other hand, Delta PD felt that it was a benefit that the staff understood the culture of the area. He said:

Most of us are from here and we understand the outside factors that happen with most of these people, what things can be going on in their life, so that's a big benefit. When you take someone from off [out of state], they don't understand the lifestyle here. [One staff member] is from New York, so I have to explain stuff to her sometimes and we don't always see eye to eye. She's catching on though. Most of our kids are from around here so we have a decent idea of the struggles they are going through, the things they face – situational, circumstantial type stuff. I think that's a benefit.

Alpha PD also found a positive impact of state culture in that there was a network of state-wide police chiefs she can call on as needed. Gamma PD agreed and felt they were always there to answer questions and offer support. He suggested we should do the same with BITs in

the state.

### **Leadership.**

When asked to discuss state factors, three leadership topics emerged. They included: a perceived investment by leadership in enrollment over retention, a desire for leadership to help fill the gap for rural areas with limited community resources, and a desire for BIT leadership to pull together to maximize state BIT teams.

First, teams perceived that regional institution leaders were prioritizing and investing in enrollment efforts over retention efforts. Gamma MH said:

Anecdotally, what I see is a push towards enrollment and not the same attention to retention. We talk about retention a lot, but I don't even sit on the retention committee. So, that disconnect . . . sometimes people will bring students that, from the surface, look fine, and they can't figure out why they are not performing well, and then you meet with them, and they're just this huge anxious ball of mess. But, it was this great student in the classroom, and nodded her head every time, you know. Turned her assignments in, but I don't know why she can't perform. Cause her heart rate's 180 every time she steps in that room. So, there's a disconnect I think.

The second topic that emerged was the belief that leaders across regional institutions could (and should) pull together to maximize resources. Gamma MH perceived that institutions in the state might be more effective if schools collectively, as a body of regional institutions, utilized each other and used the same instruments, created consultation opportunities, and engaged in peer to peer opportunities for networking and training.

Finally, Delta SA noted that a lack of community resources was common in rural areas, and a lot of Oklahoma's regional institutions are located in or around rural areas which are not close to a major city. In regards to this, Delta SA added:

And, I don't think that we, as a system, do anything in that regard. Like, if this is an issue for us all, how can we combine resources to say, have someone come in and work with us on policy, or work with a psychologist . . . [so] we all have the chance to see that person.



### **Student Issues.**

Gamma SA believed that these state issues impacted the cases BITs see because Oklahoma's regional students seemed to have increased stress, increased debt, and homelessness issues resembling the struggles of community college students (Epstein, 2015). He said:

It's the bigger – not a simple fix most of the time, here are those underlying issues that our students are coming to school with, at regional institutions especially. Our kids are working kids. They are working thirty hours a week, and family, and a baby, or whatever it is. And, that plays into stuff.

### **Feeling Under-Valued.**

Participants in this study expressed the perception that higher education overall was undervalued in the state, that the value of a degree was diminishing, and that they were undervalued as employees.

First, participants felt that higher education seemed to be undervalued by state leaders.

Beta MH said:

It just doesn't seem like our place in education is really valued. And, so I think it's kind of a fear that if they [state legislators] aren't valuing education at the base level, from elementary, pre-K, what does that say for higher ed.?

Furthermore, there was also the perception that the value of a degree was diminishing.

Beta MH added:

I also think, from my perspective, a lot of schools, like tech schools . . . are going to get a lot of our students because they can go for little or no cost and have a great career, and be successful, and just fine. I feel like the value of a four-year degree does not seem as valuable as it used to be.

Finally, participants seemed to perceive that many who were employed in Oklahoma Higher Education felt undervalued as employees. Gamma SA expressed that staff were wearing a lot of hats and had blended job descriptions that covered multiple roles, so BIT often felt more like something they will “get to”, rather than something they can regularly make a top priority.

Alpha MH said, “Because more and more there are more things that we are required to do. It’s like wearing more hats.” These additional job duties have resulted in staff turnover. Beta MH said:

One of the people who left, one of her deciding factors was that when the position over hers left, she was afraid she was going to have to pick up those job duties too. She was already over-loaded. So, I think the switch for her to another job where all she does is that job, is better for her physically, emotionally also.

Delta PD agreed that restructuring on his campus had also led to staff wearing lots of hats, and Delta MH said staff were not able to concentrate on just a few areas. Instead, they were being spread thin. Beta SA said, “We combined positions as well. Other positions didn’t get filled in order to save money. They didn’t repost some empty positions. They’re also looking at our insurance policy too.” She added, “I think with all the unknowns right now, or morale is low. I think in education in general, it’s low. Alpha PD offered an alternate perspective and said that she perceived that law enforcement at Alpha University was valued, but she was also conscious of the financial situation, and was therefore, careful what she asked for.

***Probe: If state budget shortfalls have impacted your team, please describe that impact.***

This probe allowed team members to share their experiences as related to the impact of budget shortfalls on themselves as team members, on the areas they represent on the team, and their teams as a whole. Participant’s perceptions about the impact of budget shortfalls fell into six categories: under-resourced areas, staff turnover, lost or “frozen” positions, travel and training restrictions, furlough days, and fear of future budget cuts.

#### **Under-resourced areas.**

All institutions participating in the study perceived some or all of the areas involved in the team to be under-resourced, and Alpha MH added, “Raises, that just doesn’t happen anymore.” Gamma PD reported being funded at one officer for every 950 students but said the

national average is one for every 850. Alpha MH shared in a document that counseling services was staffed at a ratio of 1:2680, but national recommendations were 1:1999. Gamma MH said that many staff were hired into positions where two jobs were combined into one and said:

As the [BIT], everybody is pretty stable, but all of us are in programs that are under-resourced. All of us are in, have been in, spaces where somebody left, so two things got crunched together into one position. So, . . . I think this about the [BIT]. That might be okay, in advising. What you'll miss is enrolling a student. That's not okay around behavioral health and threat assessment, 'cause what you'll miss is going to be egregious to the university. And we've been really, I say lucky, it's not so much lucky, [VPSA] has had some money for advising that he has done a couple of temporary positions for us here in counseling from that funding. That has been helpful on the counseling side. But again, I have four and a half clinicians, and two people who do outreach. The clinician's side, based on the national standards should be eleven. So, now we're better than we were three years ago, when there were just three of us here. A director and two therapists, so we're better than we were, but we're going to miss something. And that's just . . . we'll do the best that we can.

#### **Turnover.**

Turnover emerged as a budget related impact for Beta, Gamma, and Delta. Delta reported the recent turnover of three VPs, Gamma reported that team members had been impacted by two roles being combined in some areas, and Beta PD said:

. . . and let's be quite honest. It [budget cuts] affects faculty. It affects staff. If I've got staff who are trying to go . . . and are not happy to be here, then they're not thinking about their job here. They're thinking about 'what's my next career path.'

#### **Lost and frozen positions.**

Teams experienced both lost and frozen positions as a result of state budget shortfalls. Lost positions were defined as positions that were dissolved by the institution. Another cost-saving measure implemented by institutions were "hiring freezes." A hiring freeze meant that vacant positions were not dissolved, however, they could not be filled for a period of time, thus leaving them "frozen." Gamma PD lost one position the previous year, and expressed that he was not able to hire staff to the level he felt he needed. Gamma SA said:

We had a hiring freeze at the end of Spring semester, and you know, one of our counseling positions was frozen until July. That impacts us. Our assistant police chief retired. That impacts us until we can get that filled. So, some of those budget things you don't think are direct impactors – they do!

### **Training and travel restrictions.**

All institutions in the study had been impacted by travel restrictions imposed as a result of budget shortfalls. These restrictions were impacting training opportunities. Delta SA said:

It's needing approval from a zillion people. It has to be, you either have to be involved in that organization as an officer or have a reason that you need to attend. Like, if you are presenting, and it has to be compliance related. So, when we look at the big wheel of compliance, we try to look at which thing [training] are we trying to get to first?

Delta MH added that the funding limitations were impacting training opportunities, and she had paid for some of her own required continuing education units herself. Delta PD attended free trainings when possible, but said the travel still gets expensive. He added:

We cut back on student workers, and that trickles down. People who were able to sit here and answer phones and take care of business while someone is away. And, then when you take someone like [Delta MH and another staff-person], it's hard for them both to be gone at the same time [without someone to fill in].

Alpha MH reported:

I used to go to ACA [American Counseling Association conference] every other year. I haven't done that in a while. That was a way to refresh, and kind of take care of myself...but, I'm the type [of person] that if they tell me to slow down on that [travel], then I'm going to save money for everybody, and I'm going to stop.

### **Furlough days.**

Beta University was the only institution in the study who had experienced furlough days as a result of budget shortfalls and cuts. Furlough days were reported to be between 12 and 18 days per employee, per year. Beta SA shared the impact furlough days had taken on the team as well as on her and her family, and she said furlough days were especially hard on one-person areas. Beta MH said that the budget situation had caused people to look for other jobs and

added:

With furlough days looming over us, we're going to take them for the team. Yeah, it stinks, but it saved jobs. So, it's just one of those things. Now, there's talks of insurance changes. Things like that can be huge. So, I think people are being proactive and looking because they don't know what's going to happen.

Beta SA said furloughs were especially challenging to the BIT when the help you need was not allowed to report to work. She said:

We've had days when a couple of people have been out of the office, and you're not supposed to contact them. But, if they were the last person to have contact with the student. Do you consider what the policy is, or the well-being of the student? Which becomes more important?

### **Fear of future budget cuts.**

All participants were concerned about the impact of future budget cuts, and no one expressed a belief that the budget cuts were over. In regards to future cuts, Gamma PD said:

I mean, what do we do? What if that is so severe that we are now being furloughed one or two days a month? Rather than laying people off we take a five or ten percent cut? 'You can take one or two days off a month, unpaid.' Uh, how does that affect the team? It affects the team. Because now I've got less time to do the same work. It could be devastating.

Gamma SA added:

And I hate to keep harping on it, because I think we are very fortunate here, but if we don't send someone to NaBITA, or if we aren't able to bring him in [Brian Van Brunt], or if we are no longer able to afford Maxient, then we are going to suffer, and it's one of those things; that you can't go back. We've invested in this. I mean, I can't imagine what that would look like. Pulling back out the paper files? What do you do with that? I mean, what do you do with that?

Delta SA feared what future cuts may mean to the team and how cost savings measures could change the dynamics of team functioning. She said:

A lot of campuses, I can't believe. They don't even have real police, they have security, and I don't even know how they go to work in the morning – I just don't. I told our president that if we lose counselors and campus police, they are going to lose me too. And so, that means to me, that it's my job, and the job of others on the committee to talk regularly in the room about the value of these people to campus safety all the time, and to

our constituents, and to the regents, and to whomever will listen, is to say, ‘aren’t we glad to have these people on our campus?’ There’s such a blow-back right now for campus counselors because of, like after the election, with all the ‘snowflake’ talk. And all the, ‘we’re too busy pampering students when they feel bad.’ And, that got on us. And, I don’t know anyone who is dealing with snowflakes. I know people who are dealing with scary, real things, and trying to keep that message out there as necessary on a college campus is something we really have to work on.

Even with all of these challenges, participants remained hopeful, loyal to their institutions and their teams, and grateful to have the support and resources that they were afforded. Alpha MH shared this:

I love [BIT], I really like it. I feel like it’s really effective, and it works, and I would be hurt if we didn’t have it anymore because I think it’s something I think we do with minimal effort that I think really works. Because we do so many things that cost so much money, or is so much work. Like having a health expo, and I’m not really sure what it does. So, I think [BIT] is money well spent.

Alpha SA said that she felt hopeful due to presidential support. She reported that his approach to this budget crisis was to create and grow their way out of it instead of cutting people. She added that the president there believed all the ideas he needed were in the heads of the people around him. She said, “You know that campus safety and counseling, in my opinion, determine the health of your campus. And, when you have to cut – don’t start there.”

**Question 10: If you have a branch campus, describe BIT practices there.**

According to the 2016 NaBITA survey, thirty-three percent of BITs had no BIT representative or separate team on their satellite campuses, nine percent had a separate team, and eighteen percent had a representative assigned to the branch campus. This question allowed for an exploration of how regional teams are approaching BIT work.

Oklahoma teams primarily approached BIT work on branch campuses through referrals back to the main campus. All institutions in the study reported that if someone from the main campus team needed to go to the branch campus to respond to a situation, that they would do so,

and in some cases, had done so. None reported having a branch campus BIT, none reported having a representative assigned to the branch, but all reported that staff would travel to the branch campuses as needed.

Alpha institution, reported having a counselor on the branch campus who would call the main campus to consult on BIT related issues. Alpha PD reported that a BIT situation would come back to the main campus team, or their reserve officer would call the local police department for support and back-up as needed. Beta added that for the most part branch staff were handling things on their own. In addition, Gamma reported that the main campus staffed a part-time counselor at the branch who then helps refer cases back to the main campus team. Finally, Delta reported that they have tried to work out memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with area counselors to provide services as needed. However, they have not found counselors who are willing to do that, so they have had to send counselors from the main campus when needed.

***Probe: What resources are needed to improve branch campus BIT activities?***

This probe allowed participants to discuss needs in regards to their branch campus functioning and to describe their perceptions in regards to how they could improve branch campus BIT functioning.

Alpha found staff shortages and blended roles to be a challenge when trying to meet branch campus needs, yet they could not justify adding more staff there based on the limited branch campus incidents reported. Alpha PD stated:

We have another campus just about an hour from here. We have a reserve officer there. He's many hats. He's the maintenance guy. He's the grounds guy. He's not in uniform every day, but he has all the tools there. And so, usually when he has an issue he'll call the local police office there, and they will come assist. To my knowledge, we've never had anything. They don't have dorms; they don't have the amount of students.

Alpha MH added that while staff from the main campus are happy to go to the branch, it causes more strain on main campus resources. Another challenge was that branch campus staff may feel disconnected from the main campus. Alpha MH reported the following:

Again, if I go over there, I'm happy to do that, but it takes all day, and so, here we go again. And you know, they always talk about, I think it's improved, but I think in the past, I think they felt they weren't as much a part of the tree as they would like.

Furthermore, Beta reported needing counselors at their branch, and thought it might be useful to identify and invite BIT representatives from the branch to main campus BIT meetings or to at least have them call in. Beta MH said:

I think it would be nice to at least send an email out to the campuses about our BIT team. 'Do you have anyone you would like to conference in and talk about?' Maybe we can bounce some ideas around. 'What are the trends that you're seeing on your campus?' So, we can be more in check. . . . It would be kind of nice to reach out because some of the students may start their degree on one campus then come to ours to finish. So, it would be nice that if a name pops up, we have that knowledge of what happened with them over there. So, I think it would be worth at least shooting out an email.

Issues of disconnection from the main campus were echoed by statements made by Gamma SA who reported needing more marketing because branch campus staff were perceived to be more vulnerable to not knowing about available resources or about the BIT.

Delta reported needing more funding because they are currently outsourcing police functions or are using non-police at the branch. When asked what branch campus needs could be identified Delta SA illustrated this point by saying:

Funding. I would like to see full-time police officers there. Someone better suited that knows how we operate. One of ours. Up until about a year ago, we had a full-time police officer. . . . Due to budget cuts they went to a cheaper route and went with an armed security guard over there. We've had a lot of budget cuts, but we are stable right now. We are still operating at the level we did last year. We didn't get cut additionally. . . . There are always things we could do given the financial means, but we're making it.

Delta also reported needing more counselors, and that it might be helpful to have branch campus staff call into BIT 1x/month. Delta MH admitted needing more knowledge and understanding



regarding what branch campus staff are doing in regards to BIT related situations.

**Question 11: What trends do you foresee for the future of your team?**

This question allowed participants to think about trends, issues, and problems they anticipated down the road as they continued with BIT work at their regional institutions in Oklahoma.

When asked about their campus team, at least one participant from each of the four institutions expressed a belief that they were seeing more and more students entering college without the necessary resiliency and life skills to be successful students and adults. Participants expressed concern that disrespectful behavior toward faculty (especially in the form of email) was on the rise, and that they were responding more frequently to social media related issues. Therefore, an increased need for counseling was a consistent message both between and within teams.

Finally, one participant admitted to not knowing what trends were on the horizon for the team, however, overall, there was a strong belief by teams that reporting would continue to increase, in part because of marketing efforts by the BIT, but regardless of the reasons why, all teams expressed that they were getting busier. Beta MH was hopeful that their team would grow and develop in staff, skills, and competencies, over time.

***Probe: What trends do you foresee for teams in Oklahoma?***

When asked about trends for the future of Oklahoma teams, Alpha SA described Oklahoma as slow to change, but reported believing the state would do the right thing when it came to issues such as meeting the needs of transgender students. Another trend that emerged was that off-campus resources are being tapped more often for assistance with BIT cases related to Title IX, Clery, and mental health concerns. In fact, mental health issues were of high concern

for all institutions, and Beta MH reported reading a statistic that Oklahoma was tenth in the nation in terms of suicide and that the city where their branch campus was located had the highest suicide rate in the state. Gamma SA referred to Oklahoma as a “melting pot” of health issues, challenging family dynamics, mental health issues, and budget/financial issues, and said that all of these impacted the types of cases the team responded to.

Gamma PD expressed an interest in having a shared data-base between schools and believed this may be a trend for the future of Oklahoma teams. However, he had ethical concerns regarding what an institution could do and should do with that kind of information. Gamma PD also pointed out that, in Oklahoma, there seemed to be a huge gap between what was spent per student at one institution as compared to another. The perception presented was that bigger schools often had more resources “but are the kids at smaller universities worth any less?” The issue of resources also came up with Beta institution where there was a fear that the administration may not be seeing the impact of teams and might therefore consider cutting BIT positions. Beta MH said, “nobody wants to talk about it [the need for support services] until there’s a tragedy and then wonder what else could have been done.”

Another trend that was highlighted as an Oklahoma factor was in regards to gun law challenges and guns on campus. In fact, Delta institution not only reported an increase in weapons on campus but they feared declining reporting about guns as well. Delta SA stated:

Our students just don’t see it as a big deal if someone has a gun. Ten years ago, when I was on BIT, if someone had a gun, someone would run and tell. . . . People are just okay – they think you’re weird if you don’t have one, and I think that it’s going to become increasingly hard for us to know when we should be concerned about somebody having a weapon.

***Probe: What trends do you foresee for teams nationally?***

In terms of national trends, concern was expressed related to lacking health care options

for both students taking classes on campus and on-line. Delta SA said,

If the AHCA gets repealed or changed significantly where they are not able to get health care or mental health care, then they are going to look towards wherever they are paying fees, and then I'm going to have someone in Delaware [an online student] saying they need mental health care, then what are we going to do about that?

Teams also reported a perception that Title IX related reports were on the rise, and they anticipated that their teams may be impacted by future Dear Colleague letters. Gamma and Delta pointed out the more litigious nature of society today as a national trend, and Gamma SA emphasized the growing scrutiny higher education faces. However, participants anticipated more best practices coming out of national organizations, and hoped to acquire further training to help them meet the many challenges.

In conclusion, some trends emerged from the interviews in regards to the future of all three of the following categories: future of the participant's (campus) team, Oklahoma teams, and national teams. For example, every team anticipated a growing need for counseling and mental health services and articulated a perception that the severity of issues brought to teams at all three levels (campus, state, and nationally) would continue to increase. The Delta MH representative described this trend by saying:

I think that since I started there's been a huge increase. I think last year, in terms of counseling, we have seen more students than we have in the past twenty years. Definitely since I came the problems that are present are more severe. They are gradually more severe each year. We have more suicidality every year.

All four teams addressed growing alcohol and drug related issues and believed they would be responding to more 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment related issues such as race related free speech issues, hate speech, and to the "traveling preacher" who regularly visited campuses around the state. These issues were creating some new conversations within the teams studied. According to Gamma SA:

Right after the election/inauguration I felt like things were really at a bubbling point as far as race and diversity issues on campus, and how do you address those? . . . When we have a group of our black students kind of wanting to do a march last year, the police feel very threatened by that, and they were like, no, we need to clamp that down, and I was like, no we don't. They're either going to do it and tell us so that we can help and protect them . . . or, then they were just going to show up and do it on their own. They either were looking to us for help, and we can get their message out there in a safe, productive manner, or we can be, you know, an adversary.

Gamma SA reported that their team was becoming a “catch all” for responding to everything from a death in the family to 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment related situations such as the traveling preacher. Gamma SA believed that this is because the team is one of the few truly multi-disciplinary teams on campus who are known for responding to and taking care of a variety of situations. Because teams want to get referrals, Gamma SA went on to say they would never tell someone they “called the wrong office” because this is counter to their goal of being a central hub for receiving information. They instead, take everything in and figure out what to do. As such, all teams in the study described a widening of scope as they evolved as teams.

Descriptions also emerged that overlapped with both the Oklahoma and national category. For example, in both categories, team members described transgender issues as a growing area for teams. All four teams also reported that they anticipated receiving more formalized training, and participants from two teams expressed a desire for state teams to get together to connect, share resources, and complete training.

**Question 12: Can you think of any other information about your team that you would like to share?**

While at this point, most participants did not have any additional information to share about their teams, there were some perspectives offered by participants that seemed to hit home and bring it all together when it comes to the work they are doing. Participants across the board seemed to have found meaning and purpose in their work on the team. Delta SA summarized

team buy-in by saying:

They come, and they must think it's valuable or they wouldn't. You know, I knew that something was different when something happened that time in November, when I went out in the middle of the fray, and our whole team had come out. Without someone pushing the hot red button. When they got word, and they felt like they were necessary there in whatever role that they had. To me that is a very specific example of buy-in.

In another instance, Alpha SA highlighted, in light of state budget reductions, that institutions shouldn't fail to recognize the impact of University Police and Counseling Services to the vitality of a college campus when considering where to implement budget cuts. Gamma SA seemed to agree with this opinion and highlighted the burden of fears that team members carry with them as they strive to keep campuses vibrant and healthy. Gamma SA said:

I think we're all kind of just, unfortunate that we are just sometimes feel like something's going to happen. I know when OU had that thing at the end of the Spring semester when the guy shot at the fraternity house then went down the street and took his own life. Then OU gets criticized, why didn't they send out their alerts soon enough? You know, it could happen anywhere, and are we prepared, and are we, do we have the communications and the ability to make the decisions? We need to make the decisions. It almost leads you down a rabbit hole, you know, thinking about that OU situation, and again, I don't know all the details, but it sounds like the guy didn't receive a bid to the fraternity he wanted, and our campuses, every year have, we have 20-30 guys that don't get a bid to the house they want. We don't ever do anything with those, they don't show up on a list. 'These were the men and women who were cut from Greek life.' But, should we have them on a list? If you've ever done Recruitment, it's a pretty emotional situation. . . . How do we get them on the radar? Who got kicked off the football team? I don't know. I mean, yeah it could happen, but, so I mean, a kid who's got his heart set on medical school, then flunks out of biology, his whole life path is ruined. Those are the people who . . . ugh! That's not OK, but it's something we think about.

So, instead of focusing on the "what ifs," team members instead actively worked to address the situations they knew about. Delta PD said it this way:

It works. I don't know how else to say it. I know that's a simple answer but, you can see a change once these teams get involved. A change for the better. And in some cases, you can see the atmosphere improve with that person's absence. Some people just don't need to be here. That's a sad way to say it. You know it's not a great outcome for that person, but the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.

Gamma PD seemed to agree with the thought that teams "just work" and said, "We've been

talking for over an hour, and I've given more thought about this team today than I have in years, because it's just automatic. We just go, and we do, when we get a call." Delta Sa added, "I just love my team. I'm really proud of them. I'm proud of the work that they do, that they really care for students, and . . . that's just who they were – who they are." But perhaps most importantly, all of the passion participants felt for their BIT work was likely rooted in the reason teams were created in the first place, and this was pointed out succinctly by Gamma PD who believed:

We've come to the recognition that you can't have a Virginia Tech. And had Virginia Tech had a BIT team in place when Cho was walking around that campus, they would not have had that tragedy. Well, that's a good catalyst to get your team together.

***Probe: Do you believe these teams are needed? Why or why not?***

All participants believed that teams were needed, and the following comments highlight the impact these teams have had on the campus communities and on each other. Alpha PD said, "I think kids would slip through the system, fall through the cracks, and we'd lose those kids [if we didn't have this team]." Alpha SA said teams are needed more every day and added:

I think universities reflect the personalities of their president, and I think the level of care for students is reflected by the [BIT]. And, both of those things make me confident, and not comfortable, but at ease with whatever comes. I know that's not true everywhere.

Beta University also supported team efforts. Beta SA believed that sometimes a little guidance and someone who cares can prevent a tragedy, and Beta MH said:

Absolutely they are needed . . . because I think it's just as important as enrollment, just as important as filling the residence halls. Just as important as students being successful. I mean, they are here to get their education, and this is just one piece that is going to help them along in doing that.

Beta PD admitted that when the TAT first started he thought it was a waste of time, but said it has gotten better each year as it has evolved and grown to include BIT.

All participants from Gamma University perceived BITs to be needed, and Gamma PD

said:

I have to go back to the example of Virginia Tech. There is no guarantee that a team would have prevented that, but I know in my heart that it would have at least mitigated what happened. The bells would have rung earlier. The dots would have been connected earlier before he swung completely out of control that day. We have no idea what's walking around our campuses right now. . . . If we're not sitting there every Monday morning, and as needed, and be able to . . . be ready on the fly. If we're not here to do that, then I don't want to be here in the aftermath. And, our president doesn't want to be here in the aftermath. But, at least we're going to say, you know what, our team did our job.

Finally, Delta too supported team efforts and this was illustrated by Delta PD who said, "I've seen the direct impact we have on these kids. There are many success stories that wouldn't be success stories if it weren't for our involvement."

### **Summary**

This chapter described in detail the experiences and perceptions of team members. The chapter began with a brief overview and included participant demographics. Next, participant's role on the team and reasons they believed the team was created were shared. Finally, responses to the twelve interview questions and accompanying probes were provided in detail.

CHAPTER FIVE  
INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS

**Overview**

Chapter five discusses the study's design, summarizes the findings, and provides conclusions, limitations, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future research. The chapter begins with a review of the research design including a summary of the purpose of the research and research methods. Then, the findings for each research question are summarized, and interpretations and conclusions are explored by comparing and contrasting the data with the existing literature. Next, the study's limitations, recommendations for improved practice, and recommendations for future research are discussed. The chapter finishes with a closing summary.

**Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to describe Behavioral Intervention Teams from the perspective of twelve team members serving on BITs at four regional universities in Oklahoma. Particular emphasis was placed on examining how team members described team activities, available resources, needed resources, team impacts, and the impacts of being at a regional institution in the state of Oklahoma.

This study utilized a collective case study qualitative design. It incorporated multiple sources of data including interviews, document analysis, and personal memos. Additionally, all semi-structured one-on-one interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. As a complement to the interviews, document analysis was performed and included a review of BIT websites, policies, and assessment tools utilized by the team. Finally, the researcher utilized the practice of



bracketing and kept analytic memos of thoughts and observations throughout the data collection and analysis phase. Finally, Yin's (2016) 5-phase cycle for data analysis was used and included: compiling and collecting the data, disassembling and reassembling the data into themes, interpreting the results, and drawing conclusions using an inductive approach. Data analyzed included transcripts from interviews, analytic memos, and documents collected from teams.

Following Yin's (2016) and Creswell's (2008) suggestions, records were grouped into a meaningful order utilizing spreadsheets whereby they could be read, reread, and coded in order to detect themes emerging from the data. The data were then compared and contrasted with each other and with the literature. From this rich and complex description, findings were interpreted and described.

### **Findings**

This section provides a summary of the findings from each of the study's research questions. Overarching themes and trends are highlighted, and relevant examples are provided in order to compare and contrast the findings of this study with existing literature. The research questions include:

#### **What are the primary goals of Oklahoma's regional BIT teams?**

According to Sokolow et al. (2014), Behavioral Intervention Teams focused on the goals of providing "caring, preventive, early intervention with students whose behavior is disruptive or concerning" (p. 3) and Sokolow and Lewis (2009) suggested that threat assessment should complement the team's primary function of providing supportive resources to students.

Teams involved in this study all shared these goals with the exception of one team who had a separate Threat Assessment Team that did all threat assessment. In addition, the goals of collaboration, information gathering, assessment, planning and implementing interventions, and

assisting students through a range of issues were also important to team members. Retention emerged as a primary and critical goal for all teams as they worked to keep students enrolled whenever possible. However, keeping individuals and the overall campus community safe served as the primary goal, and this sometimes meant that certain individuals were removed from campus if necessary.

Oklahoma teams also emphasized the goal of moving quickly, and perceived that forming strong, open, trusting, and collaborative relationships seemed to be a key to success. In fact, participants reported that the relationships between team members, and their ability to collaborate effectively, enhanced team nimbleness. Moreover, the act of gathering together regularly seemed to be an important goal for most of the teams, as this activity was perceived to build trust, to increase confidence in each other and in their work, to provide a support system for team members, and to increase the competence of the team.

On the other hand, one team in the study had the goal of meeting only when necessary so as to maximize time and resources. The goal of functioning efficiently without creating more work, and utilizing methods of communication other than face to face meetings (such as phone or email) seemed to meet the needs of this team.

### **What do team members perceive as the reasons their teams were created?**

Although teams existed before Virginia Tech, the mass shooting in 2007 fueled the advancement and evolution of teams (Sokolow and Lewis, 2009). When asked why they believed their teams were created, only individuals who had worked at their institutions when Virginia Tech happened mentioned this tragedy (or any other campus tragedy) as a driving force behind team creation. Therefore, it may be important to educate new members about the impact of past tragedies on higher education and BITs across the nation and facilitate an understanding

of this critical piece of history into the process of bringing new members in.

Other participants perceived that teams were created to ensure campus safety, to respond to crises, to support students by collecting information from multiple sources, and to provide appropriate resources. One team credited its formation to the Governor's Task Force recommendation that teams should exist on every campus, but most were more of a grass-roots effort to better address concerning situations.

### **What activities are teams engaging in to meet their goals?**

Among other functions, teams must meet, and must determine how often they will meet. According to the NaBITA 2016 survey, 41% of the teams surveyed met weekly, 30% met twice per month, and 12% met as needed or quarterly. In this study, teams met weekly for the most part, but met less frequently over the summer. Alpha, however, met only as needed and reported that this intentional practice helped maximize the time of staff who already had full-time jobs before the BIT was created. At these meetings teams staffed cases, determined appropriate interventions, and followed up and/or reevaluated cases as needed. To a small extent, teams also utilized meeting times to discuss articles or engage in training.

Another activity listed as a best practice by Sokolow and Lewis (2009) was to use risk rubrics when classifying risk. Half of the teams in this study did so, and were using the NaBITA threat assessment tool. According to Sokolow and Lewis (2009), providing interventions, monitoring students of concern, and providing follow-up services as needed were viewed as best practices. All teams involved in this study participated in these activities. Additionally, NaBITA (2016) found that 45% of teams monitor faculty and staff situations along with student concerns, and Sokolow and Lewis (2009) agreed that addressing faculty and staff concerns, along with student concerns, was a BIT best practice. All but one of the teams in this study

addressed student, faculty, and staff concerns and believed this was a necessary function of their teams.

### **What interventions are teams using?**

Mental health and student conduct seemed to carry the weight of team interventions. In fact, literature suggests that mental health concerns are the most commonly addressed BIT issues (Golston, 2015; Mardis et al., 2013). Similarly, most of the cases addressed by teams in this study were associated with mental health concerns, followed by student conduct issues and life circumstances such as domestic violence, or homelessness. The literature provided a range of interventions that could be implemented in response to a behavior of concern. Some of the most common interventions included: monitoring the situation, providing outreach by a team member or other identified support person to engage and/or de-escalate the individual or situation, referring the individual to campus or community resources such as counseling, or a local food pantry, referring for voluntary or involuntary psychological assessment, connecting individuals with voluntary or involuntary hospitalization options, referring an individual to student conduct, notifying family, and/or initiating voluntary or involuntary suspension or separation from the institution (Nolan, Randazzo, & Deisinger, 2011; Ells & Rockland-Miller, 2011). In this study, the institutions studied were engaged in all of these interventions, and also similar to the literature, teams in this study viewed early intervention as a key to success (Sokolow & Lewis, 2009; Sokolow et al., 2014).

### **Do teams have the authority to suspend, withdraw, or refer students to student conduct?**

According to Van Brunt, Reese, and Lewis (2015), team leadership should carry the authority necessary to require psychological assessments, threat assessments, and student conduct actions. Otherwise, if the team, and/or team leader does not have the authority to make

decisions and act on those decisions, or for example, if the team has to ask permission from someone else to initiate those processes, then an unnecessary (and potentially deadly) time delay could result. Sokolow et al. (2009), agreed, and wrote that modern BITs must have the authority to invoke policies related to separating a student from the institution whether voluntarily or involuntarily. While all teams in this study utilized suspensions, student conduct processes, and withdrawals, the scope of authority and the authority of the chair varied from team to team.

Nevertheless, the concept of authority emerged as a critical element for teams. Without it, teams faced power struggles, and team leaders perceived a lack of empowerment over team functions and their ability to effectively intervene. Delta believed that one of their team strengths was the authority given to them by their upper administration which allowed for both decision making and action. On the other hand, another institution saw their chair's lack of authority as sometimes being a challenge to team effectiveness because other areas had leveraged for control or had made the decisions and then reported back to the team about what they had already done.

### **What are the marketing practices of teams?**

According to Sokolow & Lewis (2009), teams should train the campus community about what to report, when, why, and to whom in order to foster a culture of reporting. Although the NaBITA 2016 survey reported that 77% of teams utilized in-person training, 72% had dedicated BIT websites, and 45% utilized handouts and flyers to market their teams, teams in this study perceived team marketing to be an area of weakness even though they were engaged in at least one or more of these practices. Several participants shared that the work of the team was largely behind the scenes and not visible to others or at least not well understood. In addition, team members as a group seemed to be underselling their work, as they seemed to view it as nothing

special, or “just doing their job.”

At times, marketing was perceived by participants to be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it helped with information gathering and referrals, however, on the other hand, teams feared that they would not be able to handle the influx of cases they believed might result from additional marketing efforts. After all, teams were already feeling overwhelmed. Still, that didn't keep teams in this study from participating in some degree of marketing, as all teams shared a desire to create a culture of reporting, and said that they would rather know about a problem than not know about it.

One of the challenges shared by two teams in regards to marketing was trying to market online reporting tools such as Maxient. Teams who had this software were finding that faculty may not want to use the online tool. Instead, they found that what was convenient for the team (having faculty enter their report online) may not be convenient for the campus community and may also compete with other campus early alert systems. More often, personal connections, word of mouth, and the relationships between team members and individuals in the campus community still seemed to still be the strongest tool for generating referrals.

Finally, teams demonstrated a need for student-specific marketing strategies, and wondered how to maximize or leverage social media for team use. They saw a need for increasing the number of reports they were getting from students who were concerned about their peers and believed this to be an information rich population that they were missing out on.

The most significant barriers to improved marketing activities was a perceived lack of time to create the materials, and a lack of access to opportunities to speak to the faculty.

### **What training do team members have or need?**

According to Van Brunt (2012) on-going team training was a required team activity,

however, training was perceived to be lacking to some degree at all institutions in the study, and there were a number of barriers preventing proper training. Only Gamma members had had the opportunity to attend in-person BIT specific training (NaBITA) within the last few years. And, Gamma was the only institution who had been able to bring in a nationally recognized BIT expert (Brian Van Brunt) to their campus. While Delta had utilized some on line training related to BIT, no other institution in the study had attended any type of BIT training within the last five years.

There were a number of barriers preventing teams from obtaining the needed training. Funding was the most commonly cited resource needed to assist with team training, but another limitation, especially for small or one-person offices, included the challenge of how to cover for another staff person when they are out for training. Also, the location of a campus within the state (especially those in rural areas) posed a challenge. Even when training opportunities were within the state, the cost of travel and the distance from training opportunities still posed a challenge.

Furthermore, many of the teams found that they had competing training demands specifically related to compliance issues (such as Title IX) that took priority. At the end of the day, with such limited funding, teams had to choose what was most important to the exclusion of other training priorities. Other participants, though able to access specific trainings related to their field or profession such as counseling or law enforcement (for their required continuing education units), had not had access to or information about BIT specific training opportunities. In addition, teams felt they lacked the time needed for table-top or other team exercises necessary for ongoing team development.

In order to address these team needs and challenges, team members expressed a desire for

regional collaborative efforts, networking, and training opportunities specifically designed for the state's regional institutions in order to share resources, connect with counterparts in the state, and support each other's efforts.

### **How, and to what extent, are teams funded?**

Because so little information existed in the literature about how teams are funded, it seemed pertinent to explore this facet of BIT functioning. The NaBITA 2016 survey listed insufficient budget as one of the characteristics reported by participants that weakened the team, so I was interested to see to what degree teams in Oklahoma had financial support. What I found was that teams in this study had no dedicated BIT funding. They depended on other Student Affairs budgets, the Student Affairs Vice President's budgets, and "special request" support from the president for such things as travel or software, and typically this was a one-time request. To be expected, the absence of a dedicated budget created difficulties with obtaining training and with any type of planned strategy for addressing training, travel, marketing, or other needs.

### **What do team members perceive is their impact on students, faculty, staff, and the campus overall?**

*The Book on BIT* reported that BIT efforts can save money, time, reputations, and lives (Sokolow et al., 2014), and all participants in the study perceived their efforts as having a positive and significant impact on their campus communities. Three themes emerged related to team impact. They included: serving as a resource, facilitating student retention, and facilitating campus safety.

First, the teams believed they impacted students, faculty, staff, and the camps overall by serving as a resource. Team members perceived that faculty and staff liked having someone to report their concerns to, and they liked knowing that the situation would be handled should they



feel unable or unequipped to do so themselves.

The teams also impacted students, faculty, staff, and the campus overall by facilitating student retention. Participants perceived that students often came to appreciate the outreach and intervention efforts (even if they didn't appreciate the attention at first), and many students could be retained through the use of BIT interventions. However, when the outcome for a student was suspension from the institution, teams still tried to provide some level of hope and/or options to that student. Ultimately though, when removing one person meant that they could retain others by decreasing the negative impact made by that one student on the campus community, then team members agreed that this was the most appropriate decision to make.

Finally, team members believed their work impacted students, faculty, staff, and the campus overall through the team's contribution to campus safety. Though difficult to measure, team members perceived that their efforts had saved lives and had assisted the campus community through a variety of crisis situations and through the grief of times when lives had been lost. They also worked to mitigate the "ripple effects" of a situation or of another person's actions on others at the institution and offered support and outreach to those who had been impacted.

### **To what extent do teams believe they are contributing to campus safety?**

As noted by Sokolow et al. (2014), campus violence, especially targeted violence, can often be prevented. Overall, the teams in this study perceived that they were contributing to campus safety and preventing acts of violence. Through a vigilant approach to BIT work, teams were not only having a direct impact on safety through the cases they address but were also impacting the "ripple effects" and/or "copycat events" that may result as well. While the goal of the team may be to keep students enrolled, it is also to keep them alive, and all teams in the study

had been heavily involved with addressing potentially lethal situations such as suicidal ideation and/or attempt. In fact, mental health issues and mental health emergencies were the number one issue that teams addressed. This aligns with research suggesting that the severity of mental health issues is on the rise (Watkins et al., 2012). In addition to mental health concerns, participants discussed their team's involvement in other events that hold the potential of impacting safety such as: 1<sup>st</sup> amendment demonstrations by students and by campus visitors, situations involving drugs or alcohol, follow-up related to deaths of members of the campus community, facilitating terminations, addressing sexuality and/or transgender issues, and addressing a growing number of Title IX cases. Many of these types of cases carry the potential for violence, or harm to self or others, and teams are actively working to mitigate these threats whenever possible. Gamma SA put it this way:

Ya know, and I think for many people that have been around higher ed for a long time, I mean, those stories about Columbine and Virginia Tech are still in the back of your head... and when those pop up on the news, it's like – that could happen. And, I think about stuff like that.

Team members seemed to take their responsibility towards maintaining campus safety seriously, and they were willing to go the extra mile to actively engage in outreach and response efforts. This is not to say that all campus' efforts were perfect, however, participants were willing to learn more in order to do their job better, and wanted to be able to maximize their limited resources in order to do the most good.

### **How do team members perceive team dynamics?**

There were a number of team dynamics that were perceived to strengthen or limit team functioning. The NaBITA (2016) survey listed the following characteristics as strengthening for the team: having a diverse team, training team members, good communication and collaboration, member expertise, and clear processes and support. In comparison, the most frequently reported

qualities viewed as strengthening for the teams in this study included: being student-serving (having a working philosophy of care and concern), having strong member expertise, having diverse team membership, maintaining good communication (ability to disagree, openness), maintaining longevity of at least one team member, and trust.

On the other hand, the qualities viewed as limiting by the NaBITA (2016) survey included: lack of training, insufficient budgets, challenges with consistently and objectively rating risk, canceling too many meetings, a lack of organization, a lack of attendance to meetings, and lacking support from high level administration. The most frequently reported qualities participants in this study found to be limiting to their teams included: challenges with diverse membership, not understanding their role/purpose on the team, and feeling disconnected or murky about the team's relationship with the campus' Threat Assessment Team. Additionally, strong leadership and "boots on the ground" team membership were also important. Teams felt that the chair needed authority to allow them to make decisions and act on those decisions. However, chair authority needed to be balanced with boots on the ground team membership. On the other hand, having too many upper level administrators who were out of touch with the day to day activities of students was seen as a limiting factor for teams.

Interestingly, the diversity of the team was reported to be both a strength and limiting factor to the teams in this study. Clearly, the team membership of a BIT is critical to its success. However, there is no one size fits all formula for team selection, and the teams in this study had learned through trial and error and had adapted and evolved over time. According to The Higher Education Mental Health Alliance (HEMHA) (2012):

Since an important function of campus teams is to improve coordination and communication across various campus departments, it makes sense for teams to be multi-disciplinary. Ideally, teams blend those with proximity to information about what is going on around the campus (i.e., a finger on the campus pulse), those who have

expertise in assessing and managing troubled or troubling students, and those who have the authority to recommend or take action (p. 9).

Additionally, the literature recommended that the team operate with three concentric circles in mind. The inner is made up of the “core members” from Student Affairs, Law Enforcement, and Counseling. The middle circle includes other campus partners who may be invited only as needed. And finally, the outer circle includes those who, based on a given situation, are able to provide information or take part in outreach efforts (Van Brunt, 2012; Van Brunt et al., 2015). All institutions in the study followed this model except for one. This institution did not involve law enforcement on the BIT, however, there was a good deal of overlap between their BIT and their TAT. Still, there seemed to be missed opportunities to “leverage the core” and get ahead of incidents because the BIT did not always know such things as a student’s criminal record or past encounters with campus police. Furthermore, when campus police were called in during a crisis, they didn’t always know all of the backstory of what the BIT had been doing with a student, resulting in an information delay. However, the participants on this team did not vocalize a desire to change the way their BIT/TAT functioned, and in fact, the law enforcement representative expressed that he did not see a reason why he needed to be on the BIT. Whether this was because the teams were functioning together effectively, or because the participants lacked awareness into how they could benefit from Law Enforcement being on the BIT was unclear and beyond the scope of this study.

### **How do teams address branch campus needs?**

According to the NaBITA survey (2016), 18% of teams reported having a BIT representative assigned from their branch campus, 9% of campuses reported having a dedicated BIT on their branch campuses, and 33% reporting having neither a team nor a representative from their branch campus on their BIT. The later was the case for all institutions in this study.

There seemed to be gap between BIT functioning at the main campus as compared to the branch. While most participants reported that branch campus concerns would get referred back to the main campus, in general, the referrals were few, and teams admitted that there was a lack of awareness about BIT functions by branch faculty, staff, and students. However, one team had addressed branch campus needs by staffing a counselor at the branch, and many participants reported that they would go to the branch as needed to address concerns. Some of the barriers to effective BIT functioning at the branches included: a lack of funding, staff shortages (including counselors and police officers), difficulties with traveling back and forth, a need to identify BIT representatives on their branch campuses, and a general sense of disconnection between the branch and main campus. In fact, some participants admitted they had never really thought about BIT functions on their branch campuses before participating in this study.

**What impact do team members perceive the Oklahoma budget shortfall, or other state factor(s), has had on their team?**

All teams in the study perceived significant team impacts brought on by the Oklahoma budget shortfall and other state factors. Participants reported five overarching themes related to being at regional institutions in the state. These included: state challenges, cultural issues, leadership issues, student issues, and feeling under-valued as employees.

State challenges included factors related to an institution's location within the state, state prison release efforts, significant substance abuse issues, and a lacking state-funded mental health system.

Oklahoma cultural issues included factors such as clashes in belief systems between different types of students and between more traditional versus more modern viewpoints, difficulties hiring a diverse faculty, and campus cultures where people did not feel supported in their role or

where too many jobs had been merged into one. On the other hand, for some, being a part of the culture of an area provided opportunities for networking and allowed for a perceived greater understanding of what the students were going through.

Leadership issues were perceived to be a state factor as well. Three trends emerged related to leadership and included: a perceived investment by institutional leadership in enrollment and recruitment over retention, a need for institutional governing bodies to help rural areas who have limited community resources fill those gaps, and a desire for state BIT leaders to maximize resources by pulling together as teams across the state to network, collaborate, and train.

Additionally, student issues were viewed as a state factor as well. Much like community college students, students at Oklahoma regional universities are experiencing a wide range of barriers to their academic success such as: suicidal ideation/attempts (and mental health issues overall), domestic/dating violence, homelessness, 1<sup>st</sup> generation student issues, low socio-economics, challenges related to working full time while going to college, and/or challenges related to having children of their own for whom they are trying to provide (Epstein, 2015).

Finally, participants in the study perceived that higher education was undervalued in the state and their value as individual employees was also perceived to be low. All institutions in the study reported having under-resourced areas due, at least in part, to state budget shortages. They had also been faced with all or a combination of some of the following: lost or frozen positions, travel/training restrictions, furlough days, staff turnover, and fears about future cuts.

### **What are the available and needed resources?**

Over the course of this study, three levels of resources emerged and included team resources, campus resources, and community resources. Community resources included any resources external to the campus including local, state, and national resources. Within these

three levels, some resources were perceived to be available while other resources were needed or lacking.

Some of the most frequently mentioned team resources available included: a willingness by team members to engage in educational outreach efforts and intervention implementation, support for other team members, team member knowledge and expertise, team member connections and relationships with others on campus, and the authority of team members to make decisions and take action as a team.

Additionally, teams discussed a number of available campus resources such as: emergency funds, emergency university housing, disability services, VPSA/Presidential support, campus content experts, and available resources to help with marketing efforts such as access to technology, student workers, web managers, and public relations staff.

Finally, teams shared that they were able to access community resources such as crisis units for mental health emergencies, hospitals, food resources, reduced-cost health services, community law enforcement agencies, church resources, community mental health services, domestic violence resources, tribal resources, social media, and national organizations such as NaBITA for information and materials.

On the other hand, some of the most frequently mentioned needs and lacking resources included: needing more staff (such as counselors, police officers, and case managers), needing more time, needing more training, needing more faculty support and reporting, and needing more funding (to increase pay, reduce turnover, and support training and marketing). Also, additional marketing was needed to formalize the teams' identity, increase knowledge about the team; increase reporting by faculty, staff and students; and to increase awareness about what kinds of things should be reported to the team.

The shift toward using case managers and a case management model was discussed by Greenstein (2013). Likewise, teams in this study expressed a need for clinically trained case managers to assist with outreach, follow-up, and record-keeping efforts. However, none believed they were likely to get the additional staff support that they needed.

Furthermore, participants expressed needing additional training in the following areas: mental health, drugs and alcohol, police protocols, BIT-specific training, and the role of counseling (confidentiality, and releases of information) within the BIT framework. In addition, participants believed they needed to train more often as a team and engage in more table-top or case study exercises. They also needed information about what BIT training opportunities were out there and how to find them.

In addition, team members indicated that they needed campus resources such as: software (for the team to assist with anonymous reporting and data collection), equipment such as police cages and cameras, a network of state teams, and they needed data to help them tell their story in order for them to advocate for additional resources. Also, teams reported that they needed improved branch campus BIT functions such as having a branch campus representative serve on the BIT. Likewise, they perceived that there was a shortage of branch campus staff, branch campus marketing efforts, connections with the branch, and a lack of knowledge about what branch campuses are doing in regards to individuals of concern.

Furthermore, participants perceived needing additional community resources including: improved community mental health resources; homelessness resources; medical and treatment resources; and transportation to and from services for students (including to/from appointments and inpatient hospitalization stays). Participants also needed accessible training and access to conferences, presentations, and speakers. And finally, there was a perceived lack of community



resources in rural areas. Teams indicated having few options for treatment or referrals for faculty or staff who might be struggling, and faculty and staff did not have access to campus resources like students did. Students, on the other hand, were perceived to be depending more and more on campus resources for treatment. Often times it was perceived to be difficult for students, faculty, or staff, to travel to the off-campus resources that were available as they may be some distance away.

### **How do team members perceive their team's effectiveness?**

According to Mardis, Sullivan, and Gamm's (2013) quantitative study, participants gave high ratings to the effectiveness of teams. Though participants found team effectiveness difficult to measure, this study's qualitative data supported these findings as all participants perceived team efforts to be effective and in some cases, highly effective.

Again, participants felt like their work was effective and was making a difference in the lives of those they served. Even so, team members described having to wear a variety of hats and/or serve in blended roles with BIT work often being something they felt like they would "get to" rather than something they could make a top priority. While they perceived their work to be effective, participants acknowledged that there was room for improvement and that more could always be done.

### **How do team members perceive the future of their teams, other Oklahoma teams, and national teams?**

Some trends emerged in regards to campus teams, Oklahoma teams, and national teams. When asked about their campus teams, participants reported that students seemed to be needing more resiliency and life skills to be successful students. Participants also reported increasing numbers of disrespectful behaviors toward faculty (especially in emails), increased social media

concerns, increasing need for counselors, and a belief that the number of cases referred to the team would continue to increase. Teams described getting busier year after year, and they hoped for additional training to assist them in keeping up with the demand. In addition, all teams foresaw a growing need for counseling and mental health services both on and off campus, and believed that the severity of issues being brought to teams would continue to increase. All teams addressed growing alcohol and drug related issues and saw themselves as becoming a “catch all” for responding to campus incidents ranging from concerns over the death of a student’s family member to concerns about 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment demonstrations on campus.

Additionally, while threat assessment was described in the literature as an important part of BIT work, it was also important that BITs support a wide-range of student issues (Sokolow & Lewis, 2009; Van Brunt, 2012; Sokolow et al., 2014). All teams in this study described a widening of this scope of activities, in part, because these teams perceived themselves to be one of the only truly multidisciplinary teams on their campuses known for taking care of a variety of situations.

In terms of Oklahoma teams, participants reported that Oklahoma would be slow to change and slow to adjust to issues such as accommodating transgender students, but that ultimately, institutions would do the right thing. They perceived more frequent collaboration with off-campus resources when working an increasing number of cases related to Title IX, the Clery Act, and mental health issues.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the teams in this study demonstrated a deep commitment to BIT work and to the students, faculty, and staff that they serve but were struggling with their own identities and with factors beyond their control. Following a review of the data, the following eight

conclusions were drawn:

### **The Invisible Hat**

All teams in this study were under-resourced to varying degrees. In fact, team funding was almost non-existent. This may be due, in part, because of the unseen, behind the scenes, or “invisible” nature of this work. All teams felt that team members were wearing multiple hats and described BIT work as being “another duty as assigned.” Many times, the other “hats,” or roles/responsibilities of team members were easier to label and were more established and well-known on campus. In fact, most participants believed that others outside the team were largely unaware of the serious and time-consuming nature of the work that was taking place, making this particular hat an invisible and therefore particularly vulnerable one. Understandably, as a result, most teams were struggling to obtain their share of what was already a limited pool of funding. Not surprisingly, without dedicated funding, teams couldn’t plan strategically and struggled with team development activities such as training, marketing, and in some cases technology and/or equipment. However, all teams in the study said they were getting busier over time and that the scope of issues addressed by the teams was widening. The challenge for teams was how to quantify and tell their story in order to continue to provide a quality level of service within a framework of shrinking resources and growing referrals.

### **State Impacts**

Regional teams in Oklahoma shared a number of state challenges, including: cultural issues, leadership issues, student issues, and feeling under-valued as employees. In addition, Oklahoma factors played a part in team functioning, and the state was viewed as a perfect storm of intersecting physical and mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues, challenging family

dynamics, and financial issues. This was perceived to be impacting the severity of cases Oklahoma teams were seeing.

Other state factors such as the state's economy and the state's funding or lack of funding related to education and mental health, along with the possibility of changing marijuana laws were all viewed as impacting teams as well. In fact, team members expressed fears of future budget cuts and fears that administration may not prioritize teams or team members when trying to divide up limited financial resources. Teams also feared that cuts to community resources could cause students to need more on campus services, which would quickly overwhelm the institutions studied. Finally, teams in this study were concerned about possible changes to gun laws. They worried that because laws have changed and evolved in surrounding states to allow for more guns on campus, that they too may soon be facing this issue. And, as attitudes about guns on campus have become more accepting, there was concern about what this will mean for campus teams in terms of both reporting and in terms of the number of gun related incidents.

### **National Trends**

Moreover, participants described a number of national trends that were impacting Oklahoma teams. Some of these included race-related and other 1<sup>st</sup> amendment demonstrations on campus and transgender issues. Teams also expressed a fear that changes in national health care laws could negatively impact available services. Participants were on the lookout for future Dear Colleague letters, and believed that society was becoming more litigious which increased scrutiny on higher education. This was believed, in turn, to potentially put more stress on campus teams to protect themselves from litigation.

### **Student Retention**

Retention emerged time and again as a team goal, a measure of effectiveness, and a

necessary outcome for teams to prove their value to administration. However, teams were struggling to gather the data needed to effectively report their successes – especially teams who lacked a computer-based system such as Maxient. In part, I believe retention was such a critical element to the participants because it was so important to the leadership of Oklahoma institutions and to the continued success of Oklahoma institutions struggling through the budget crisis. This focus on retention appeared to be a way for teams to “speak the language” of administrative priorities. Teams seemed to want to be acknowledged for their contribution to this goal but did not believe their contribution was fully understood. It became clear to me that individuals whose background is tied to a profession other than higher education (for example, counseling or law enforcement) had some trouble speaking the same language as those who are “native” to higher education. There seems to be a disconnect here, especially for counseling, in that higher education administrators, faculty, and other staff may not know how to leverage or maximize counseling or its benefits to the bottom line, and counselors transitioning into higher education have not yet learned how to “speak” higher education in order get at the decision-making table and advocate for their needs and for the needs of students. For example, Beta MH said:

I don't really know about our suspension process, is it a three-strike policy, or what? Because I'm not really higher ed., and that's one thing, I'm like the only person who's not higher ed. . . . Like I know things, but I don't know how things relate to each other, so I'm trying to put together the pieces. I'm learning too.

Gamma MH added:

I struggle sometimes in some of those systems. Like our [student strategies class] . . . they wrote their own book, [but] there's nothing in there about managing their [student's] mental health. I find that odd. I have tried to offer up resilience curriculum, I have the materials, and can teach the instructors how to do it. And nobody bit. I am just . . . so, I think there's a disconnect. But I don't know why, and I can't seem to figure that out. . . . [I've sent out emails to faculty saying] here are some things we are doing this year that might help settle your students down. And, probably eight responded. . . . We are saying we can support you. Not everybody bites like that, and I don't know why. I wish they would.

Finally, Alpha MH reported that they had a 10-month counselor on the branch who calls Alpha MH at the main campus as needed to consult. But, Alpha MH does not know who that counselor reports to. Again, there seems to be a disconnect between the higher education organizational structure, or language, and the professions they employ. Retention, however, seemed to be one concept they all shared, and participants were trying to figure out how to get their retention message heard.

### **Team Dynamics**

A surprising (and unintentional) finding was the impact team members had on one another. While this research was geared to look at the impact team efforts had on others outside the team, the impact of the team on its own members was substantial. Team members felt supported, protected, and validated by the other members of the team. The teams demonstrated a strong sense of cohesion and trust, and described their success as a result of having others with them to think through problems, create solutions, disagree constructively, and to stand together when things were difficult. Team members in the study, many from one-person offices, were leaning on each other, working closely together on a range of projects, and were finding strength and support in coming together as a team. Teams were evolving and were in the process of becoming what looked like their own functional areas – a department made up of other departments, complete with goals, processes, tailored roles, and a shared sense of purpose and mission. However, they were still often times working behind the scenes, and had not yet become well known or well understood by the campus as a whole.

### **The Oklahoma Standard**

Finally, teams clearly believed in the importance of this work and perceived that their efforts were effective. All participants viewed teams as necessary and believed their teams were

positively impacting students, faculty, staff, and campus safety overall. In fact, they believed that without their efforts lives would have been lost. After speaking with the participants, I was reminded of the Oklahoma City Bombing, which happened on April 19, 1995. The community's response to this tragedy set a tone among witnesses that became known as the "Oklahoma Standard." The Oklahoma National Memorial website said this about the Oklahoma Standard:

But rather than bow to fear as the attackers intended, the community banded together. Cars became ambulances. Strangers became neighbors. People donated the shoes off their feet. Visiting rescue workers and journalists called this spirit of generosity the Oklahoma Standard. (p. 1)

This study demonstrated that the spirit of the Oklahoma Standard is alive and well in Oklahoma's BITs. Participants were committed, generous, loyal, and steadfast. Faced with little resources but significant student, faculty, and staff issues, they continued to face the challenges and do whatever it took to make a difference, and sometimes, to save lives. For example, Alpha SA said this:

I think I may have told you that I got a call that somebody had cut their wrists in the bathtub, in the apartments by the Wesley center. Well, there are apartments all around the Wesley center. And, they said they think the door was unlocked, but they were out of town and couldn't get there. And, they hung up, before anyone could say what apartment, whatever. So, within about five minutes, there were four . . . PD officers, and five campus safety officers, and every counselor, and me were just going door to door, and we found her. . . . And it's kind of, all hands on deck whenever anything happens.

Because of their efforts, this student was able to be saved, and similar efforts were being made at all institutions in the study.

### **Limitations**

A few of the study's limitations should be mentioned. First, only four of the ten regional institutions in the state were involved in the study, and findings cannot be generalized to other institutions. Furthermore, one of the participants in the study, Beta PD, was not a member of their campus' BIT. While this presented some interesting comparative information, it strayed

from the goal of having true “core” members serve as participants. And finally, my own biases should be mentioned. I serve as BIT co-chair at the institution where I work, have a background in mental health, and currently serve as the Student Affairs Assistant Vice President. These factors likely influenced the study beyond my own awareness, so several credibility, dependability, and confirmability strategies were utilized in an attempt to mitigate biases both recognized and unrecognized.

### **Recommendations for Improved Practice**

A number of recommendations for improved practice emerged from this study. They include the following:

#### **Leverage the Core and Integrate Threat Assessment Activities**

Make sure you are leveraging “the core” by having Student Affairs, Law Enforcement, and Counseling on the team. That participants in Oklahoma might be doing otherwise was the most surprising finding to me. For example, one team was referring high level cases to the TAT who was then referring interventions back to the BIT. And, while law enforcement was on the TAT, they were not on the BIT, which created missed opportunities for information sharing and early prevention/intervention.

Also, threat assessment should be integrated into BIT work when possible (Sokolow et al., 2014; Van Brunt et al., 2015). In fact, not to do so creates confusion (Nelson-Moss, 2015). As such, BIT members should be exposed to formal threat assessment tools, which should be used often and consistently. Counselors too, though often well-trained in assessing suicidality, may need additional information, tools, and training related to assessing threat to others and the potential for targeted violence on campus.

It is also worth mentioning that there was often confusion by non-counselors about what



can and can't be shared by the mental health representative on the team. Ethical dilemmas and processes related to the use of signed information releases need to be worked out and understood by all team members. Decide how and when you will use releases and informed consent documents, and discuss with the team and with your clients how you will handle information obtained during mandated assessments. To assist with this, counselors may need additional training associated with their roles and responsibilities on the BIT.

### **Connect with Branch Campuses**

Furthermore, branch campus needs should be addressed. Main campus teams should consider options for building bridges of communication in order to address student, faculty, and staff concerns wherever they may be.

### **Fund the BIT**

Funding emerged as a critical need for all of the teams in this study. Unfortunately, teams were often perceived as being out of sight and out of mind. Instead, time should be spent discussing and identifying team needs (such as training and marketing) and ways to support those needs.

### **Stay in Your Lane**

The concept of "staying in your lane" emerged as a critical and necessary team dynamic. Efforts should be taken to educate members about their role as a team and as team members and to remind team members that they should not try to represent an area that is not theirs to represent.

### **Overcome Language Barriers**

Furthermore, because there seemed to be a language barrier between higher education professionals and other professionals such as counselors and law enforcement, BIT staff and

their administrators should begin to work on developing a shared language. It may be helpful to pull BIT staff into strategic planning conversations in order to leverage opportunities for retention and student success. For example, team members and team leaders should build partnerships with early alert champions on campus in order to help strengthen the knowledge base and infrastructure around what should be reported and to whom. Team members may need assistance to get at the table for these conversations. Team members in turn may need to prepare administration for the double-edged sword of what more referrals will mean for areas such as counseling and student conduct. Also, reporting and early alert systems on campus may be (or may seem to be) in competition, so organizations should talk through how to align and maximize these tools.

### **Review Written Policies**

And finally, if teams are designed to intervene early and stop the pathway to violence before violence actually occurs, then policies and procedures may need to be adapted. For instance, many conduct policies may categorize direct threats, violent acts, or abuse as violations, however, language related to the behaviors of conspiring or planning to commit an act of violence may also need to be included. In other words, policy verbiage may need to be expanded in order to create more options for addressing and/or adjudicating these behaviors of concern early, before violence occurs.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

During the course of this study, several questions and topics emerged that were beyond the scope of this project but were in need of further research. They included the following:

First, research is needed to clearly articulate when and how individuals should be taken off the caseload. Participants reported that an important step in BIT work was determining when

and how to consider a case closed. However, participants' approaches to this task were loosely defined and informal. A more objective approach to inform best practices may be beneficial.

In addition, and probably the question that is most critical to higher education today is: what is the impact of BIT work on retention? More quantitative data is needed to understand the extent to which teams are contributing to student success.

Finally, another gap that emerged was related to branch campus BIT activities. Research to facilitate a better understanding of branch campus best practices is needed.

### **Closing Summary**

As I write this, Oklahoma is in the midst of determining whether or not our state's mental health system will lose millions of dollars in state funding. Should this happen, it would devastate Oklahoma's mental health system and would extinguish all outpatient services for 189,000 Oklahomans. This cut would eliminate drug courts, and only inpatient services for the most acutely ill and substance dependent would remain (Talley, 2017). BIT teams in this study were already struggling to meet the needs of students, and as Delta SA said, students who lose services will begin seeking them from the institutions to which they are paying fees. What will institutions do? The ripple effect of this budget possibility would mean that faculty, staff, and students may not have access to needed treatment for problems such as substance abuse issues, depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder. What will happen to these individuals as they attempt to function on a college campus? What will happen to enrollment numbers? What will the impact be on higher education in the state if the projected 10,000 state, private, and non-profit mental health employees are laid off? What will happen to higher education programs designed to prepare future counselors, social workers, and case managers? What will happen when lives are lost because people in need cannot access care? And, how will all of this impact

teams? In anticipation of the possible cuts, Joy Sloan, CEO of Green Country Behavioral Health, said this at a KWTW-News 9 press conference on October 18, 2017, “Brain health effects every other system that we have. It effects education, it effects law enforcement, it effects the courts, it effects our economy. There will be total devastation if our legislature fails to act.” (Brilbeck, 2017)

I heard one time, years ago, that “all systems replicate the problems that they treat.” I don’t know who said it, and I haven’t been able to locate the quote since hearing it, but when I heard it, it stuck. In the case of BITs in Oklahoma, the struggles of finding money where there isn’t any, choosing between competing priorities, managing with limited resources, and juggling multiple roles, mirrored, in many ways, the struggles of the students they were trying to help. In other words, BITs in Oklahoma seem to replicate (or mirror) the problems that they treat. Oklahoma regional students have limited resources, limited time, limited funds, and a host of “other duties as assigned” that they are trying to manage while earning a college degree. In many ways, the stressors and anxieties I felt when listening to team members talk about their BIT work echoed the stressors and anxieties of the students they are working to save.

Knowing all of this, I am truly grateful to the participants of this study for giving time they didn’t have in order to share their experiences with someone they didn’t know. I am humbled and honored to have been welcomed so graciously into their worlds. Each and every one of them should be proud of their work. They are truly making a difference in the lives of students, and I hope that this research will bring awareness and support to BITs throughout our state. I have come to believe these teams are vital to the success of our organizations, and hopefully, as we learn more, we, as a state, will begin to better invest in their infrastructure and in the systems they rely on.

## References

- Baker, K. (2015). Colleges are hard put to help student in crisis. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 61(1), A38 - A40.
- Blatt, D. (2016, June 21). After two revenue failures, Oklahoma will end the year with surplus. What? Retrieved from <http://okpolicy.org/two-revenue-failures-oklahoma-will-end-year-surplus/>
- Borum, R., Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., & Berglund J. (1999). Threat assessment: Defining an approach for evaluating risk of targeted violence. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 17, 323-337.
- Brilbeck, A. (2017). State could cut all outpatient mental health and substance abuse programs. Retrieved from <http://www.news9.com/story/36630437/state-could-cut-all-outpatient-mental-health-substance-abuse-programs>
- Byrnes, J.D. (2002). *Before conflict: Preventing aggressive behavior*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Cao, Y. (2011). *An epidemiological analysis of a university threat assessment team case load* (Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 1499525).
- Childress, J. (2013). *Behavioral intervention teams: A case study exploring how student affairs professionals support and serve students with mental health and behavioral issues* (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). California State University, Long Beach.
- Cornell, D. (2010, Jan./Feb.). Threat assessment in college settings. *Change*, 42(1), 8-15.
- Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Daniel, E., & Logsdon, K., (2013). Behavioral team case management of non-traditional aged college students (>25). *The Journal of Campus Behavioral Intervention*, 1, 60-68.
- Deisinger, G. & Randazzo, M. (2014). Targeted violence in schools: Understanding mental health and managing the risks. *The Police Chief*, 81, 42-46.
- Delworth, U. (1989). The AISP model: Assessment-intervention of student problems. In U. Delworth (Ed.), *Dealing with the behavioral and psychological problems of students: New directions for student services* (pp. 11-21). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Delworth, U. (Winter 2009). The AISP model: Assessment-intervention of student problems. *New Directions for Student Services*, 128. doi:10.1002/ss.338

- Dooley, D., & Poindexter, C. (2013). Branding of a BIT: From idea to image. *The Journal of Campus Behavioral Intervention*, 1, 56-59.
- Eells, G. T., & Rockland-Miller H. S. (2011). Assessing and responding to disturbed and disturbing students: Understanding the role of administrative teams in institutions of higher education. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 25(1), 8-23.
- Epstein, B. (2015). Providing psychological counseling in community colleges: Even greater challenges and fewer resources, *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 29(4), 289-295.
- Evans, N.J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F. M., Patton, L.D., & Renn, K.A. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ferriero, J. R. (2014). *Outreach practices of a small college counseling center: A comprehensive model to serve the college community*, College of Education, University of Massachusetts.
- Gerring, J. (2007). *Case study research: Principles and practices*. New York, NY: Cambridge.
- Gilbert, S. P. (1992, July/August). Ethical issues in the treatment of severe psychopathology in the university and college counseling centers. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 70, 695-699.
- Golston, A. C. (2015). *A descriptive study of the formation and structure of behavioral intervention teams at colleges and universities*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
- Graney, D. D. (2011). *Behavioral assessment teams using threat assessment at flagship universities in New England*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (3457223).
- Green, R. (2016, September 13). Surplus money returned to Oklahoma agencies. *The Oklahoman*. Retrieved from <http://newsok.com/article/5518016>
- Greenstein, K. (2014). *Faculty and staff perspectives of a behavior assessment team: A case study evaluation* (Electronic theses & dissertations). Retrieved from Jack N. Averitt College of Graduate Studies, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA.
- Gruttadaro, D., & Crudo, D. (2012). *College students speak: A survey report on mental health* (National Alliance on Mental Illness).
- Hancock, D. R., & Algozzine B. (2011). *Doing case study research: A practical guide for beginning researchers*. New York and London: Teachers College Press.
- Higher Education Mental Health Alliance (HEMHA). (2012). *Balancing safety and support on*

- campus: A guide for campus teams*. The Jed Foundation. Retrieved from: [http://hemha.org/campus\\_teams\\_guide.pdf](http://hemha.org/campus_teams_guide.pdf)
- Hollingsworth, K. R., Dunkle, J.H., & Douce, L. (2009). The high-risk (disturbed and disturbing) college student. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2009 (128), 37-54.
- Johnson, G. D. (2016, April 17). Glen D. Johnson: Invest in higher education to move Oklahoma forward. *Tulsa World*. Retrieved from [http://www.tulsaworld.com/opinion/readersforum/glen-d-johnson-invest-in-higher-education-to-move-oklahoma/article\\_1a096ca1-0d4a-5da1-85d5-6d98e53c7075.html](http://www.tulsaworld.com/opinion/readersforum/glen-d-johnson-invest-in-higher-education-to-move-oklahoma/article_1a096ca1-0d4a-5da1-85d5-6d98e53c7075.html)
- Langman, P. (2013). School shooters on college campuses. *The Journal of Campus Behavioral Intervention*, 1, 6-39.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Mardis, J. M., Sullivan, D. J., & Gamm, C. (2013). Behavioral intervention teams and threat-assessment teams in higher education: Results from an exploratory study. *Journal of The Association of Student Conduct Administrators*, 5, 1-30.
- McNutt, K. (2016, March 4). State regents OK cuts of \$26 million. *Tulsa World (Tulsa, OK)*. p. A6.
- McNutt, K. (2016a, May 29). Oklahoma budget cuts more than expected for higher education. Retrieved from <http://newsok.com/article/5501086>.
- Nelson-Moss, T. M. (2015). *Participatory action research: Threat assessment team training and team membership at universities* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest (3712749)
- Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Service: Statistics and data. (2016, April 19). Retrieved from [https://www.ok.gov/odmhsas/Additional\\_Information/Statistics\\_and\\_Data/](https://www.ok.gov/odmhsas/Additional_Information/Statistics_and_Data/)
- Oklahoma Standard (n.d.). Retrieved November 15, 2017 from: <https://www.oklahomacitynationalmemorial.org/oklahoma-standard>
- Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (n.d.) Retrieved April 19, 2017 from: <https://www.okhighered.org/state-system/>
- Patel, V. (2015, September, 4). Grad schools try to ease 'culture problem' of anxiety and isolation. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, LXII(1), A42-A44.
- Price, J., Mrdjenovich, A. J., Thompson, A., & Dake, J. A. (2009, September/October). College counselors' perceptions and practices regarding anticipatory guidance on firearms. *Journal of American College Health*, 58(2), 133-139.

- Querry, K. (2016, March 3). Oklahoma state agencies facing even deeper budget cuts to make up additional \$235 million. *KFOR-TV*. Retrieved from <http://www.kfor.com/2016/03/03/oklahoma-state-agencies-facing-even-deeper-budget-cuts-to-make-up-additional-235-million/>
- Readden, K. C. (2016). Behavioral intervention team peer review: A new model for quality improvement. *The Journal of Campus Behavioral Intervention*, 3, 34-42.
- Reetz, D. R., Krylowicz, B., & Mistler, B. (2013-2014, September - August). *The association for university and college counseling center directors annual survey* (AUCCCD).
- Randazzo, M. R., & Plummer, E. (2009). *Implementing behavioral threat assessment on campus: A Virginia Tech demonstration project*. Blackburg, VA: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
- Reese, A. C. (2013). A mixed methods evaluation of a regional university's behavioral intervention team. *The Journal of Campus Behavioral Intervention*, 1, 86-110.
- Sokolow, B., & Lewis, S. (2009). *2<sup>nd</sup> Generation behavioral intervention best practices*. Malvern, PA: The National center for Higher Education Risk Management.
- Sokolow, B. A., Lewis, S. W., Wolf, C. R., Van Brunt, B., & Byrnes, J. D. (2009). Threat assessment in the campus setting (NaBITA 2009 Whitepaper). Available from [www.nabita.org](http://www.nabita.org)
- Sokolow, B., Lewis, W., Schuster, S.; & Swinton, D. (2014). *The book on BIT*. B. Van Brunt (Ed.). 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Berwyn, Pa: National Association of Behavioral Intervention Teams (NaBITA).
- Stricklin, T. (2016, August 21). Oklahoma state regent: Cuts to higher education are being felt across Oklahoma. *The Oklahoman*. Retrieved from <http://newsok.com/article/5514672>
- Talley, Tim. (2017, October 18). Oklahoma to slash mental health, drug abuse programs. *US News and World Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/oklahoma/articles/2017-10-18/oklahoma-mental-health-agency-to-cut-75-million-from-budget>
- Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2010). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 11(1), 80-96.
- Van Brunt, B. (2012). *Ending campus violence: New approaches to prevention*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Van Brunt, B. (2013). A comparative analysis of threat and risk assessment measures. *The Journal of Campus Behavioral Intervention*, 1, 111-155.



- Van Brunt, B. (2016). NaBITA Member Survey. Retrieved from <https://nabita.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/NaBITA-Survey-2016.pdf>
- Van Brunt, B. (2016a). Brian Van Brunt, Ed.D. Retrieved from [www.brianvanbrunt.com/about](http://www.brianvanbrunt.com/about)
- Van Brunt, B.; Reese, A.; Lewis, W.S. (2015). *Who's on the team: Mission, membership, and motivation*. National Behavioral Intervention Team Association. Retrieved from <https://nabita.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/2015-NaBITA-Whitepaper.pdf>
- Van Brunt, B., Sokolow, B., Lewis, S., & Schuster, S. (2012). NaBITA Team Survey. Retrieved from <https://nabita.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/survey.pdf>
- Van Brunt, B., Sokolow, B., Lewis, W., Schuster, S., & Golston, A. (2014). NaBITA Team Survey. Retrieved from <https://nabita.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/2014-BIT-survey-summary.pdf>
- Volpe Bettin, K. (2005). *Counseling center survival: What directors need to know from vice-presidents of student affairs*, Department of Counseling and Psychological Services, Georgia State University.
- Watkins, D. C., Hunt, J. B., & Eisenberg, D. E. (2012, May). Increased demand for mental health services on college campuses: Perspectives from administrators. *Qualitative Social Work*, 11(3), 319-337.
- Warren, C. A., Bartlett, J. E., (2015). Community colleges and BITs: A study of North Carolina community colleges. *The Journal of Campus Behavioral Intervention*, 3, 42-47.
- Wilson, R. (2015, September 4). An epidemic of anguish. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, LXII(1), A38-40.
- Yin, R.K. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

2016 MID-YEAR OKLAHOMA BUDGET CUTS AND SURPLUS RETURNS

### 2016 Mid-Year Oklahoma Budget Cuts and Surplus Returns

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Budget Cuts</b>	<b>Return</b>
Public Schools	\$110 million	\$40 million
Health Care Authority	\$63.8 million	\$23 million
Department of Human Services	\$43.7 million	\$16 million
<b>Department of Mental Health</b>	\$22 million	\$8.4 million
Department of Corrections	\$27.5 million	\$10 million
<b>Higher Education</b>	\$112 million	\$20.7 million

APPENDIX B  
OKLAHOMA REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES

## Oklahoma Regional Universities

### *Oklahoma Regional Universities*

---

Name of Institution	Governing Body	Undergraduate Enrollment
Cameron University	University of Oklahoma Board of Regents (BOR)	4,740
East Central University	RUSO	4,447
Langston University (HBCU)	Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges	2,159
Northeastern State University	RUSO	7,044
Northwestern Oklahoma State University	RUSO	2,166
Oklahoma Panhandle State	Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges	1,232
Rogers State University	University of Oklahoma Board of Regents	4,064
Southeastern Oklahoma State University	RUSO	3,263
Southwestern Oklahoma State University	RUSO	4,358
University of Central Oklahoma	RUSO	15,067

---

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS AND SSAOs

<DATE>

Dear <NAME>,

My name is Sheila Self, MS, LPC, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Arkansas. For my dissertation, I am interested in studying the Behavioral Intervention Team at your institution and have been in contact with <NAME> who suggested that you may meet the eligibility criteria to be a participant in my study. The research is a qualitative study designed to describe Behavioral Intervention Teams from the perspective of team members. This will include how team members perceive and describe the team, team functioning, available resources, needed resources, and the perceived impact of team efforts.

Your participation in this study is important, as you function as one of the core members of your team (Law Enforcement, Student Affairs, or Mental Health). Your participation would consist of a phone consultation lasting no more than 30 minutes and a face to face interview lasting 2 hours. I will also ask that you provide for review documents such as policies and procedures, mission statement, logo, marketing materials, assessment tools utilized, and website address associated with your campus team.

Your participation will provide needed research on this topic and guidance for administrators charged with supporting BIT initiatives. Your involvement is completely voluntary, and your employment and/or relationship with your institution will not be impacted in any way, regardless of your decision to participate or not. Data will be coded in order to identify themes, and will be compared to best-practices in order to provide a foundation for discussion.

The University of Arkansas IRB has approved this study. While there is always a risk that your identity will be discovered, by using a pseudonym I aim to preserve the confidentiality of both you and your institution. This researcher will adhere to all applicable federal and state guidelines and the data will be shared with you for review prior to final submission.

Any questions may be directed to me at 919-207-9925 or email me at [selfsj@nsuok.edu](mailto:selfsj@nsuok.edu).

Respectfully,

Sheila Self, MS, LPC  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of Arkansas

Dr. James O. Hammons  
Chair, Dissertation Committee  
University of Arkansas



APPENDIX D  
IRB APPROVAL



# UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board

July 12, 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: Sheila Self  
James Hammons

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
IRB Coordinator

RE: PROJECT MODIFICATION

IRB Protocol #: 17-05-726

Protocol Title: *Behavioral Intervention Teams: An Exploration of Team Member Perceptions at Oklahoma Regional Universities*

Review Type:  EXEMPT  EXPEDITED  FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 07/10/2017 Expiration Date: 06/11/2018

---

Your request to modify the referenced protocol has been approved by the IRB. **This protocol is currently approved for 12 total participants.** If you wish to make any further modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

Please note that this approval does not extend the Approved Project Period. Should you wish to extend your project beyond the current expiration date, you must submit a request for continuation using the UAF IRB form "Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects." The request should be sent to the IRB Coordinator, 109 MLKG Building.

For protocols requiring FULL IRB review, please submit your request at least one month prior to the current expiration date. (High-risk protocols may require even more time for approval.) For protocols requiring an EXPEDITED or EXEMPT review, submit your request at least two weeks prior to the current expiration date. Failure to obtain approval for a continuation *on or prior to* the currently approved expiration date will result in termination of the protocol and you will be required to submit a new protocol to the IRB before continuing the project. Data collected past the protocol expiration date may need to be eliminated from the dataset should you wish to publish. Only data collected under a currently approved protocol can be certified by the IRB for any purpose.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

109 MLKG • 1 University of Arkansas • Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201 • (479) 575-2208 • Fax (479) 575-6527 • Email [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu)

The University of Arkansas is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution

APPENDIX E  
CONSENT FORM

Behavioral Intervention Teams: An Exploration of Team Member Perceptions at Oklahoma  
Regional Universities

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

Principal Researcher: Sheila Self, MS, LPC and doctoral candidate for the degree of Ed.D. in  
Higher Education Administration from the University of Arkansas

Faculty Advisor: Dr. James O. Hammons

**Invitation to Participate**

You are invited to participate in this research study about Behavioral Intervention Teams  
at Regional Universities in Oklahoma. You are asked to participate in this study because you are  
a member of your campus' Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT).

**What you should know about the Research Study**

*Who is the principal researcher?*

Sheila Self, MS, LPC is the co-founder of the BIT at Northeastern State University (NSU).  
Formerly the Director of Counseling Services, she currently serves as the Student Affairs  
Assistant Vice President at NSU.

*What is the purpose of this study?*

The purpose of this study is to describe Behavioral Intervention Teams from the perspective of  
team members. This will include how team members perceive and describe the team, team  
functioning, available resources, needed resources, and the perceived impact of team efforts.

*Who will participate?*

Three team members from four regional universities in Oklahoma (twelve total participants) will  
participate in the study.

*What will I be asked to do?*

Participation will include one phone consultation interview lasting no more than 30 minutes and one 2-hour face to face interview. Participants will be asked to provide any team policies, assessment instruments, logos, marketing materials, or other documents related to the team.

*What are the possible benefits of this study?*

Participation in this study will inform BIT members and administrators about how they can strengthen and support BIT teams on their campuses.

*What are the possible risks of this study?*

There are no anticipated risks associated with this study.

*How long will the study last?*

The phone consultation, document review, and interview phase of the study will be conducted during the Spring-Summer of 2017. You will be provided with the researcher's interpretations of your responses to confirm for accuracy no later than the Fall of 2017.

*Will I have to pay for anything?*

No. There is no cost associated with participating in the study.

*What if I decide I do not wish to participate in the study?*

You may choose not to participate in the study at any time. You may also decline to answer any questions or to provide the requested documentation.

*How will my confidentiality be protected?*

Pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants and to their institutions as a means to protect the anonymity of the participants in all data reporting. All information will be kept confidential in accordance with State and Federal law.

*Will I know the results of the study?*

You have the right to request the results of the study. To do so, you may contact the principal

researcher, Sheila Self, [selfsj@nsuok.edu](mailto:selfsj@nsuok.edu).

*Who do I contact should I have questions about the research study?*

You may contact the principal researcher at any time should you have questions regarding the study.

The University of Arkansas Research Compliance office is another resource for you should you have any questions about your rights as a participant. Any concerns about, or problems with the research may be directed to this office.

Iroshi Windwalker, CIP  
Instructional Review Board Coordinator  
Research Compliance  
University of Arkansas  
109 MLKG  
1424 W. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201  
479-575-2208  
[irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu)

I understand the research procedures and the conditions of my participation. My questions have been answered, and I agree to participate in this audio-recorded study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

A copy of this form will be provided to you.

APPENDIX F  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FORM

## Interview Protocol Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Role on BIT: \_\_\_\_\_ Years on BIT: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

- Introduce myself and the purpose of the study
- Informed consent signature
- Explain structure of the interview
- Is it okay to begin audio-recording the interview?
- Any questions?

### Interview Protocol Questions

#### Grand Tour Questions:

1. What would you say are the primary **goals** of your team?
  - a. What **activities** does your team engage in to meet these goals?
  - b. What do you believe prompted the creation of your team?

#### Sub-Questions:

2. What **interventions** are utilized by the team?
  - a. To what degree do you perceive these interventions to be effective?
  - b. What resources are available to assist in providing needed interventions?
  - c. What resources are needed?
  - d. For what populations do you provide interventions? (Faculty, staff, students)
  - e. Please describe your teams' use of interventions such as suspensions, withdraws,



and/or student conduct referrals.

3. From your perspective, describe the extent to which your team impacts **campus safety**?
  - a. Can you provide an example of a case that illustrates your answer?
4. What **marketing** strategies are utilized by the team?
5. To what degree do you perceive these efforts to be effective?
6. What resources are available to assist in providing marketing of the team?
7. What resources are needed?
5. What **funding** resources are allocated for team use?
  - a. To what degree do you perceive these resources to be sufficient to meet team goals?
  - b. What does your team do with its funding?
  - c. What needs, if any, do you have in this area?
6. From your perspective, describe your team's **impact** on those served. Include students, faculty, staff, and campus as a whole.
  - a. Can you provide an example of a case that illustrates the team's impact?
7. From your perspective, what internal **team characteristics** or dynamics, if any, strengthen your team?
  - a. What internal team characteristics or dynamics, if any, limit your team?
  - b. Can you provide an example to illustrate your answer?
8. What BIT-related **training** have you had?
  - a. Please describe any team training your BIT has engaged in.
  - b. What training needs does your team have?
  - c. What resources are available to train the team or individual team members?

- d. What resources are needed to train the team or individual team members?
9. From your perspective, what, if any, impact does being at a regional institution in **Oklahoma** have on team functioning?
- a. If state budget shortfalls have impacted your team, please describe that impact.
10. If you have a **branch campus**, describe BIT practices there.
- a. What resources are needed to improve branch campus BIT activities?
11. What trends do you foresee for the **future** of your team?
- a. What trends do you foresee for teams in Oklahoma?
  - b. What trends do you foresee for teams nationally?
12. Can you think of any other information about your team that you would like to share?

- Thank you!
- Review of confidentiality
- How I will use data and share results
- Do you have questions?
- End Recording