Collin County Community College District
APPLICATION FOR SABBATICAL LEAVE

Instructions
Please complete this application by responding to all items. Attach requested documentation (in the order requested) and secure the appropriate signatures prior to submitting the application to the chair of the Sabbatical Committee. Please submit the original and 10 copies.

Name Christine DeLaTorre
CWID 110456346

Title Professor of Management and Marketing
Division BIET

Have you ever been granted a sabbatical?  No  If yes:  Date:
Please provide a brief description of your previous sabbatical project:

Sabbatical Leave Period Being Requested

Dates:  Beginning Date August 10, 2010  Ending Date December 10, 2010

Length:  [X] One semester  [ ] Two semesters  [ ] Other

Applicant’s Agreement

ABSTRACT
Please give a summary description of the project and its significance in a language that can be readily understood by persons in areas of expertise other than your own. PLEASE DO NOT EXCEED SPACE PROVIDED BELOW.

The complex issues of promoting student mental health, individual privacy and public safety weigh heavily on the minds of federal legislators, college administrators, and institutional leaders. The proposed research project analyzes the federal privacy legislation, reports the changes reflected in higher education policy in response to the Virginia Tech tragedy, and identifies critical steps to improve the institutional communication to address emergency preparedness and campus safety.

Although the likelihood of a campus massacre remains low, if it does occur, the results can be disastrous. The Virginia Tech tragedy has raised issues and fostered discussion regarding campus safety, student privacy and critical information sharing within colleges and universities. Research shows that institutional leaders can take measures to create a ‘culture of preparedness’ to prevent and respond to potential threats to campus safety. These steps include creating campus policies that balance student privacy and public safety, improving organizational communication structures and developing innovative approaches, such as threat assessment teams, to reduce the likelihood of a campus tragedy.

The proposed research project benefits Collin College by providing recommendations on how to improve college systems. In addition, the research is discipline-related, enhances student learning by increasing the currency of program curriculum, and provides a professional enrichment opportunity to continue my dissertation research.

JAN 11 2010
Sabbatical Proposal for Professor Christine DeLaTorre

1. Research Plan

Description – The proposed research project reexamines federal privacy laws and changes on college campuses in response to the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). I have divided my research into three areas of focus. First, I will explore amendments and legislation that impact individual privacy including: The Americans with Disabilities Amendment Act of 2008 (ADA), The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Second, I will analyze how college and university policies prevent and respond to threats to campus safety. Last, I will research organizational communication theories used in emergency planning and risk management.

Research Questions
1. Do protective privacy statutes increase threats to public safety?
2. How do colleges and university address individuals with psychological disorders who may threaten public safety?
3. How do these policies attempt to distinguish between prevention and response?
4. How are faculty trained to identify potential threats?
5. How is critical information shared within institutions of higher education and among college staff, administration, faculty, mental health providers, and public safety officials?

Methodology – This study will provide a comprehensive analysis of federal privacy laws. It also compares several college and university campus safety policies. The analysis of the data will search for similarities of policies according to variables such as college enrollment size, location and institutional complexity. To collect data, I will review public policies and interview a sample of individuals including administrators, faculty, legal counsel, student service representatives, disciplinary agents and campus safety officers.

Significance – Although the likelihood of a campus massacre remains low, if it does occur, the results can be disastrous. The Virginia Tech tragedy has raised issues on campus safety, student privacy and critical information sharing within the institution. Research shows institutional leaders can take measures to create a ‘culture of preparedness’ to prevent and respond to potential threats to campus safety. This research project provides data on recent changes to federal privacy legislation, compares Collin College’s (Collin) campus safety policies and programs with other colleges and universities and analyzes the Collin’s formal emergency communication structure. These findings will benefit various stakeholders within the Collin College by:

- Assisting in improving college systems. This research is helpful in developing models and strategies to improve awareness and communication about student privacy, campus safety and behavior intervention. Findings will foster discussion among college administrators, staff and faculty about how to create a ‘culture of preparedness’ and how to address potential threats to campus safety while
preserving an environment of dignity and respect. Faculty members are in a unique position to notice potentially dangerous student behavior and to refer them to helpful institutional resources. To increase critical information sharing within the institution, it is important to create a communication bridge between Student Development and Academic Affairs. As a faculty member, I will share my perspective and research findings with Collin’s Strategies of Behavior Intervention (SOBI) team. In addition, I plan to present my research findings to the faculty by facilitating a professional development session during faculty development week.

- **Providing a professional enrichment opportunity.** I have completed the course requirements for a doctorate in Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Dallas. The proposed research project compliments my current research and allows me to devote the time necessary to complete the program’s graduation requirements. The title of my dissertation is “The Effect of University Policies on Faculty Perceptions of Student Safety: A Study of North Texas Colleges and Universities.” If granted a sabbatical, I would have the opportunity to devote myself to completing my research and reach my proposed graduation date in the spring of 2011.

- **Enhancing student learning by increasing currency of program curriculum.** The Business Management program curriculum includes topics such as organizational behavior, managerial decision-making and employment law, Principles of Management (BMGT 1327), Strategic Management (BMGT 2344), Leadership (BMGT 2309) and Human Resource Management (HRPO 2301) include student-learning outcomes covered in my research project. Focused, relevant research on this material improves student learning by increasing the currency of program curriculum.

II. Project Timetable

- August/September 2010 – Research the history and recent changes in federal privacy legislation. Compile data on Virginia Tech massacre. Determine research sample of colleges and universities to include in study.

- October 2010 – Research and analyze college and university campus safety policies, organizational communication structures and behavioral intervention models. Schedule interviews with key college and university stakeholders.

- November/December 2010 – Conduct interviews. Analyze research results. Prepare report and presentation of key findings for Collin administration, the faculty and Business Management program leadership. Update curriculum for Business Management courses.
III. Narrative and Bibliography

The incidences of mass violence occurring on college campuses, in the workplace and most recently, a U.S. military base has reignited debate on how to balance an individual's right to privacy while preserving public safety. In higher education, balancing student privacy, the public good and campus security is a complicated task. According to campus-safety experts, colleges and universities must create a 'culture of preparedness.' This culture includes setting up threat assessment teams, creating an information-sharing network, and reducing the state of uncertainty on campus about the privacy legislation (Hoover 2008; Fox and Savage 2009; McBain 2008).

According to The Report to the President of the United States on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy, "confusion and differing interpretations about state and federal privacy laws" impeded the institution's ability to share critical information to necessary stakeholders. Because of difficulty in understanding the laws and fears of personal or professional liability, educators often exercise extreme caution even when public safety is at risk. In February of 2009, revised FERPA regulations suggest a renewed trust in colleges related to student privacy. The most significant revision addresses the health-and-safety provision exception in FERPA. Colleges may now disclose information about someone if "there is an articulable and significant threat to the health and safety of a student or other individuals" (Lake 2009). The new regulations suggest a fundamental shift to empower college administrators to decide what constitutes an emergency, what information they can share and with whom. However, to increase campus safety, institutional leaders must inform employees about legislative changes, present a written protocol for reporting threats to campus safety and train employees on how to assess when behavioral intervention is necessary.

Many colleges and universities have created threat assessment teams (TATs) designed to document and report incidents of dangerous or threatening student behaviors. The U.S. Department of Education, the Secret Service, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation all agree that threat assessment teams are a sound method for identifying and responding to distressed students in educational settings (Keehan 2009). In general, the TAT's purpose is to receive reports of troubling student behavior and to evaluate whether a student poses a risk of harm. Members of the team often include student affairs administrators, representatives from the counseling center, faculty and law enforcement.

In 2007, Seung-Hui Cho, a Virginia Tech student, opened fire on campus killing thirty-two students and faculty members. University records show campus health officials interviewed him several times more than a year before his attack. While Cho was enrolled as a student, Virginia Tech had a threat assessment team called "Care Team." In the recent addendum to the Report of the Review Panel presented to the Governor of Virginia, the panel states the "university's Care Team failed to provide needed support and services to Cho in late 2005 and early 2006. The system failed for lack of resources, incorrect interpretation of privacy laws, and passivity" (Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech: Addendum to the Report of the Review Panel 2009). Cho displayed violent tendencies and disturbing behavior at various times during his college career. Although both faculty
and student affairs documented incidents of Cho's potentially violent behavior, there was no communication between the departments. Many have openly criticized Virginia Tech for their failure to "connect the dots" related to the dangers of Cho's mental condition. There have been many recommendations following Virginia Tech, including establishing more stringent gun legislation, creating a campus-wide emergency-notification system and hiring more police officers and mental health counselors. Since the campus tragedy, university officials at Virginia Tech have spent more than $10.4 million to impose proposed improvements to campus safety (Fischer 2008).

Although the budgetary costs associated with improved campus safety may be high, the extreme consequences from failure to address concerns of student privacy, campus safety, organizational communication, and emergency planning can be disastrous. While it may be impossible to predict violent behavior with undeniable certainty, there are critical steps that federal agents, college and university policymakers and institutional leaders can take to reduce that risk. These steps include revising federal privacy laws, creating campus policies that balance student privacy and public safety and developing innovative approaches, such as threat assessment teams, to reduce the likelihood of a campus tragedy.

Bibliography


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