

## The University of Texas at Austin Behavior Concerns Advice Line

CCAPS Newsletter  
October 2008

Jane M. Bost, Ph.D.

Associate Director

UT Counseling and Mental Health Center

For several years, counseling centers across the nation have been reporting significantly increased numbers of students demanding counseling services, accompanied by increased severity of mental health issues. These trends have been brought to the general public's awareness through a number of campus tragedies, most notably the Virginia Tech shooting in Spring, 2007. As a consequence, heightened priority is being given to address issues of campus safety and security.

As a result of these trends and events, in August 2007, The University of Texas at Austin established the [Behavioral Concerns Advice Line \(BCAL\)](#) as a way to **actively prevent** campus violence. BCAL, located in the Dean of Students Office, is a centralized *single point of contact* for the entire university community and a clearinghouse for university resources. Any member of the university community is welcome to call the BCAL line (24/7/365) to voice concerns about the behavior of any other community member as well as non-university community members who are on campus. So often in large institutions of higher education, information is "silo-ed" so that the right hand doesn't know what the left is doing. BCAL serves as a central university information hub, increasing the chances that problematic situations can be more quickly and effectively addressed.



Call the  
**Behavior Concerns  
Advice Line**  
A Service for Faculty, Students and Staff  
of The University of Texas at Austin  
**512-232-5050**  
[www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal](http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal)

There are many advantages of this hub being located in the Dean of Students where there are fewer restrictions around communication with faculty, staff and parents. The Dean of Students Office is not bound by HIPPA or state mental health laws and/or mental health ethical codes. In addition, the Dean of Students Office is able to initiate *active intervention* for health and safety reasons under FERPA. For instance, when deemed appropriate, the Dean of Students Office can initiate contact with a person for whom significant concern about safety to self and/or others has been expressed. This ability to act proactively allows BCAL to be a crucial part of campus violence prevention. It is for these reasons that The University of Texas Police Chief has stated that "the only way to prevent violence is through something like BCAL". It is also important to note that BCAL is a partnership with the Dean of Students, Counseling and Mental Health Center, University of Texas Police Department (UTPD) and the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)—not in lieu of these services.

So, how does BCAL work? A highly publicized phone line is answered 24/7/365 by BCAL staff. During 8 a.m.-5 p.m., an administrative support staff answers the line. A brief phone script is utilized with the caller, then the call is directed to fulltime Dean of Students professionals. The professional consults with the caller and triages the call. Concerns about faculty and staff are forwarded to the Employee Assistance Program. Concerns about a visitor/contractor/or person with unknown affiliation to UT are forwarded to UTPD. Student concerns are handled by Dean of Students staff. Between 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m., a professional BCAL staff answers the calls and assesses if anyone is in imminent danger. The callers are

 [What is this?](#)

forwarded to UTPD if there is any imminent threat to self or others. If no imminent danger is assessed, the BCAL staff provides consultation for the caller, including necessary referral information. In addition, the information is forwarded by the BCAL staff to the Dean of Students (student concern) or the Employee Assistance Program (employee concern) for follow-up the next business day. In all cases, brief documentation by the BCAL staff person is made of the call. Callers are informed that they may choose to remain anonymous but the information is not confidential.

Depending on the level of threat and the complexity of the case, BCAL staff may contact other faculty and/or staff as appropriate. At first there was concern that our school song, "The Eyes of Texas are Upon You" would mirror a concern that "Big Brother" was watching/monitoring. Instead, the experience has been that people feel that BCAL is meant to be supportive. Another anticipated concern was that there would be "crank calls" and/ or callers trying to purposely falsify information about others. To date, no calls have fit this category.

The following is a brief summary of the calls that have been received between August 29, 2007- August 31, 2008:

- Total number of calls: 242
- Most calls were received in the last week of August and the first 2 weeks of September, tapering off throughout the year and rising again in April.
- Primary reasons for calls: concerns about students=56%; calls for information/brochures=18%; wrong number=15%; concerns regarding faculty/staff or contract worker=10%; concerns/complaints (about the BCAL line itself)=1%
- Approximately 15-20 calls occurred outside the 8 a.m.-5 p.m. hours
- Concerns about student behaviors: erratic behavior=53%; stalking/assault=15%; mental health concerns=24%; alcohol/drugs=6%; other=2%
- Concerns about faculty/staff/contract worker behaviors: aggressive behavior=40%; environmental concern (i.e.,disruption of workplace)=20%; not doing job=20%; depression=20%
- Of the callers who chose to disclose their identity, 22 were students, 13 were parents or other family members and 123 were faculty or staff.

Although this program has been operational for a relatively brief time, there are several indicators that it is contributing to campus safety. First, significant numbers of callers are utilizing this service. Anecdotally, it is also clear that BCAL staff were able to constructively act on caller information in ways that provided assistance to concerned callers as well as to the identified persons of concern. In several cases, it is clear that because of these actions, violence to self or others was diminished and/or prevented. In addition, BCAL has strengthened collaboration among campus partners, both through the BCAL development process and through the consequent interface and collaboration in regards to callers concerns. As a result of this success, universities have looked to the BCAL program to start similar initiatives. Information will continue to be collected on the impact of this program and shared with other universities as we all continue the search to find better ways to prevent campus violence.

For more information about this program, please contact:

LaToya Hill, Ph.D.  
Assistant Dean of Students  
Student Emergency Services  
Office of the Dean of Students  
The University of Texas at Austin  
[Email](#)  
512.471.5017

[Newsletter Home](#)