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Student Conduct

A CASE FOR CASE MANAGEMENT

Campuses explore a variety of models for responding to campus mental health issues.

By **Brian Van Brunt**

Case management, at its very core, is about helping students to overcome the obstacles they encounter in their lives. This is central to the educational mission of most institutions of higher education, which seek to retain students and provide them with an environment conducive to academic success. Case management can serve as a keystone mechanism through which universities support and keep students safe.

In higher education, case management occurring outside of campus counseling centers can be traced back to 2000. In 2000, the University of Miami created a case management position that was split between the counseling center and student affairs. In 2006, the demand was such that the university created two full-

time positions, one reporting through the counseling center and one through the dean of student's office. The tragic shootings at Virginia Tech (April 16, 2007) and Northern Illinois University (February 14, 2008) reiterated the prevalence of campus mental health issues and the need for sophisticated threat assessment, behavioral intervention and university accountability. Many campuses answered this need with the establishment of case manager positions.

Case management has a rich history within the fields of social work and psychology dating back to the de-institutionalization movement of the 1970s. As those struggling with mental health disorders were relocated from state run asylums back into the mainstream community, it became apparent that many struggled to successfully reintegrate. Case management programs soon ar-

rived on the scene not only to facilitate access to mental health treatment, but also to assist these patients in managing finances, identifying and maintaining employment, and facilitating engagement in recreational and social activities.

Despite these roots, case management today isn't limited to those struggling with mental health challenges. With the creation of behavioral intervention teams

order that compromises the quality of life; students that need access to medication; students who would benefit from concurrent support from several on-campus services; those who need help engaging in the campus community; or students who have violated the student conduct code and are now on probation or need to fulfill sanctions. Case management is applicable to a wide range of student needs in the higher

shares his name with the campus BIT/TAT.

Each of these cases outlines a potential scenario in which a case manager could help by connecting the student to other departments and assisting them in setting and reaching their academic, social and career goals.

The graphic on page 28 illustrates the wide range of departments and services with which a case manager can help a student to connect during or after a time of crisis, intervention, prevention or postvention. In the graphic, imagine the case manager function as the blue arrows that facilitate communication between the student and the identified department or group.

Other departments the case manager may interact with include: study abroad, athletics, international student programs, Greek life, student employment/work study, office of disability services, campus safety and more.

Case management is a solution-focused approach to assisting students with a wide variety of needs. As such, case managers are concerned about what is and what can be done, rather than a focus on what was and what has held back the student in the past.

(BIT) and threat assessment teams, colleges and universities have come to recognize the benefit of dedicating staff members to work flexibly and creatively with at-risk students, to ensure proper access to care, to help them schedule and keep their appointments, access academic assistance (e.g., tutoring), and effectively navigate the student conduct and other university processes, amongst other functions.

Case management is a solution-focused approach to assisting students with a wide variety of needs. As such, case managers are concerned about what is and what can be done, rather than a focus on what was and what has held back the student in the past. Helping students to engage in effective problem solving by identifying solutions is the backbone of case management.

Case managers can help a wide range of students. Examples include: a first-year student struggling academically may need assistance identifying and utilizing existing services on campus (e.g., math tutoring or writing lab); clients of the counseling center who wrestle with a mental health dis-

education setting.

Imagine how a case manager could help in these common situations:

- Darla struggles with recurrent thoughts of suicide and depression. She has little family support and also has some learning disability concerns that keep her from performing well in the classroom. She recently came to the attention of your campus BIT/TAT upon her return to campus following an off-campus evaluation for a suicide attempt.
- Thomas recently committed his second serious alcohol violation and has come to the attention of the BIT/TAT. His substance use seems to be out of his control and despite his strong academic performance, he is putting his academics at risk with his problem drinking.
- Carter is having trouble adjusting to college life. He is socially isolated, has difficulty keeping track of his class assignments and says, "I want to study, but I just don't know how. This is so different from high school." By the third week of the semester, Carter is frustrated and considering dropping out. A professor

How Are Students Referred?

How are students assigned to case management? This depends on the location of the case manager (i.e., what department they work in), whether or not there is a centralized intake process or whether multiple departments can make a referral to the case manager. In a centralized process, the case manager often receives referrals from his or her supervisor or the BIT. A decision can be made from metrics such as an academic early alert program (poor GPA, significant attendance problems), classroom disruption, violation of the code of conduct, or participation in intensive outpatient treatment or inpatient hospitalization. Some schools may also refer students who are a retention risk for not coming back to school.

In some centralized intake systems, the BIT refers students to the case manager, in others, the case manager is the ini-

tial point of intake for students who then may be referred to the BIT and/or other relevant resources or departments. Many schools use an online reporting system to filter information directly to the case manager, which allows for the consistency of a single point of entry. The emphasis in these systems is for the community (faculty, staff and students) to report any concerning behavior. This may not always result in a referral to case management, but that will fall to the discretion of the case manager, the BIT, or whomever is the central referring resource.

In a de-centralized process, referrals to case management may come from various departments under student affairs, academic affairs, athletics, student conduct, housing and residential life, counseling or the BIT. An online reporting process may be used in a decentralized system where the information will first go to the

office most appropriate for follow-up and then be shared with the case manager as needed. The pathways of communication must be very intentionally created to avoid information silos. In some decentralized systems with online reporting mechanisms, the case manager is copied on communications but only follows up as needed or directed to by lead departments.

Administrative Model: Where is Case Management Located?

The Administrative Model of Case Management generally locates the case manager within Student Affairs, more specifically the Dean of Student's (DOS) Office, but there are increasing examples of administrative case management positions being located in offices of student conduct, academic ad-

vising, housing and disability services. The administrative model allows for a larger degree of oversight and information sharing between the various departments. Another benefit to this model is the support and buy-in that occurs from the top of the student affairs division. This centralized location allows for the case manager to be dispatched with greater efficacy to a larger set of circumstances. And because they are embedded within student affairs, the case managers is better able to connect students to a wide variety of resources within the department. A student affairs model helps connect students to a wide variety of resources within the university and in the outside community. The solution-focused nature of case management helps the student move beyond behavior problems and achieve connection and support to ensure behavioral change.

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management program, the types of cases that the office will take on must be clearly articulated. While there always should be some case-by-case flexibility, the failure to define the parameters of this office can make it something of a “dumping ground” for other departments within the university. If you have a situation where your resources are not limited, this concern is less pressing. Typically, though, the philosophy that the case manager can/will handle anything dilutes the ability of the case manager to effectively develop connections.

Case Management in Student Conduct

When located in the Student Conduct Office, the case manager can work to ensure that the student completes conduct sanctions and help seal the cracks a student may potentially fall through. One of the greatest legal liabilities an institution of

higher education can face is creating a set of expectations for a student and then failing to follow through on monitoring the student’s compliance. When case management is connected to a Student Conduct Office, it allows for greater accountability of the conduct process and a more educational and developmental process for the students.

Take this example: Roberta is a first year student who contacted campus police early in her first semester of college with thoughts of suicide. Campus police contacted emergency medical services, who transported her to the nearest emergency room. Unfortunately, the BIT team wasn’t brought into the process until after she was transported. The case manager attempted to contact the hospital, but could get no information as a result of privacy laws. Phone calls, emails, and letters were sent to Roberta asking her to contact the case

manager upon her return to campus, but there was no response. The case manager, housed in the conduct office, learned that Roberta already had a hearing scheduled for a drug violation that occurred in her first weekend on campus and notifies the hearing officer of the situation. As a result, the hearing officer is able to connect Roberta with the case manager who facilitates her meeting with needed treatment providers and ensures she completes her conduct sanctions.

Or consider this example: Ian is a third year student who has an extensive history with the Office of Student Conduct. Most of his incidents involve alcohol and his inability to regulate his emotions. He has been given a series of detailed sanctions. If the case manager is located in the conduct office, it is reasonable she/he can spend more time with this student on a one-on-one basis. This provides a

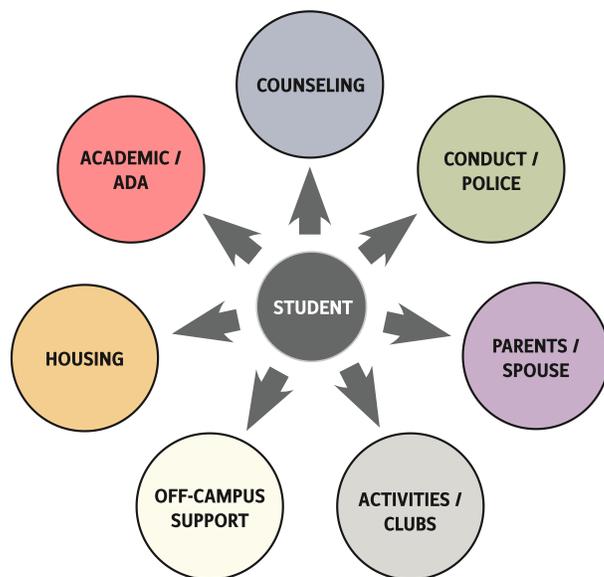
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How students are assigned to case management is dependent on what department the case manager works in, whether or not there is a centralized intake process, or if multiple departments can make a referral to the case manager.

mechanism to ensure the conduct sanctions are completed and also presents the opportunity to create a connection with the student. A case manager with a solid foundation in student development can use this connection to facilitate long-term behavioral changes in this student. Without the case manager, the conduct office might assign less effective sanctions that are easier to enforce, may not have the time to dedicate to this student, or the interactions with this student may be spread among many different hearing officers.

Case Management in Housing and Residential Life

Housing and residential life staff forms the scaffolding of any college or university community with on-campus living. Having case management connected to the housing office makes sense to better connect the case management staff with the pulse of the living-learning community. A case manager can exist as a type of mobile resident director who is tied not to a phys-

ical building, but instead to a group of at-risk students. This relieves pressure on existing housing and residential life staff who may be struggling to manage a student in the halls. It also creates an opportunity for a more consistent response and accountability given the interconnected, plugged in nature of a case manager located within housing and residential life.

Consider this case: Angela is a first year student whose floor mates report she is involved in significant high-risk behavior. The report of Angela's behavior comes to the attention of the university after she is involved in an off-campus accident during which she is struck by an automobile. In this scenario, the residential case manager can work one-on-one with the student to ensure she receives the appropriate mental health and medical follow-up while addressing the concerns about her high-risk behavior. This allows the residence life staff member responsible for the residential area to focus on supporting the community that has likely been disrupted

by her behavior. In these cases, it is critical that the communication between the residence director and the case manager be clear, regular and cooperative.

Case Management in Disability Services

In disability services, there are often students who have difficulty navigating the systems associated with both seeking and using accommodations. There are students who need, by nature of their circumstances, more support. A case manager in this scenario can routinely meet with the student to ensure that the student has the right mechanism in place.

Take this example: John is a student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) who also has a serious anxiety issue and documented learning differences. John has had accommodations since his first year in college but he rarely uses these accommodations because accessing them requires John to have a one-on-one conversation with his faculty members. It would also require him to arrange test taking with the Office of Disability Services. John finds this overwhelming and therefore does not access the accommodations granted. This, in turn, impacts his academic performance. A case manager can work with John to break down this process into small executable parts. He/she can meet regularly with John to help him develop the ability to do this on his own.

Case Management in Academic Advising

Universities are beginning to implement case management positions within offices of academic advising. These case managers have a foundational knowledge of academic advising, but would take on a caseload of students who need more attention. These positions have existed in universities in the form of high-risk academic advisors for many years, but shifting to a case management model more appropriately allows the professional staff member to holistically respond to the needs of the

student.

Examine this case: Alex is a junior in credits, but has been at the university for seven years. He has gone through a series of academic advisors, many of whom become frustrated with his inability to show up for scheduled meetings or to follow-through with plans made in advising sessions. His previous academic advisors had caseloads of more than 300 students and couldn't devote the time Alex needed. The case manager in academic advising should be able to set clear expectations for regular contact with Alex and have the ability to offer immediate follow-up and direct accountability to Alex.

Building Conduits for Information Flow

A student affairs-based case manager has the advantage of a built-in connection to the various departments within student

affairs. The result is a case manager who has more information and better working relationships within student affairs. This, in turn, provides better access to support services and treatment for the students on their caseload. This is especially helpful when working in crisis situations.

A central tenet of crisis management is establishing and maintaining information flow between various key constituents or departments. To establish these connections, a case manager must develop positive relationships with key staff members in these departments. This usually involves a combination of stopping by to talk informally, attending orientation or staff events and making use of formal mechanisms such as regular meetings and memoranda of understanding to articulate for each party how information will be shared. A case manager should realize that building and maintaining these relationships is an

on-going job task that requires nurturance and attention throughout the year.

As previously stated, many colleges and universities have implemented online reporting systems. This, coupled with intensive outreach about the importance of reporting concerning behaviors, makes it more likely that information will flow to the case manager from multiple sources.

Para-counseling Skills and Limits

Case managers should have some fundamental counseling skills when working with students. If the administrative case management position is filled by someone who is a licensed counselor, social worker or psychologist, it is critical that he/she understand his/her role is not clinical and not one protected by confidentiality and that he/she must make this clear to the students with whom he/she works. Some

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Strengths and Limitations of Administration Model

STRENGTHS	LIMITATIONS
Increases student accountability	Case manager may not have the portfolio of counseling skills that are necessary
Connect student to resources easily	Could feel like probation
More freedom in communication	Student frustrated with increased information sharing
Clear role within student affairs	Information sharing may compromise the student's willingness to share
Provides help without stigma of counseling	Doesn't help challenge the stigma of therapy and may reinforce the stigma
Ability to mandate compliance and to use conduct to reinforce boundaries and limits	Can become a dumping ground for anything that other offices don't want to address
Balance of counseling and student development skills gives a diverse base of interventions	May conflict/compete with counseling service's work with student

schools have this disclaimer as part of the intake paperwork that students sign. If this is something your campus does, it is important to explain the case management service as private, but not confidential, or to make sure the student understands information is only shared on a need-to-know basis.

Case managers should be excellent at the process of building rapport with students. In some cases, the case manager may need to enforce boundaries with the student. If the foundation of the case management relationship is one of trust and respect, this is easier to accomplish.

Motivational interviewing is also a skill that is useful in case management. Motivational interviewing is, according to Miller and Rollnick, a "collaborative conversation, goal oriented style of communication with particular attention paid to



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the language of change. It is designed to strengthen personal motivation for and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person's own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion.”

Case managers should also have an awareness of the signs and symptoms of suicide and general mental health crisis management. Case managers should be trained in basic threat assessment—suicidal as well as homicidal threats—to make an appropriate referral to counseling services, hospitals or other crisis providers. A comprehensive understanding of campus student conduct code and hearing procedures is important. Advocacy for a student while balancing advocacy for the entire campus community is essential. The primary skills of the advocate dovetail nicely with the skill set of a case manager,

especially in cases such as sexual assaults. These two positions should work together for the best resource coordination. Collaboration is essential.

Case managers should have an intimate knowledge of the on-campus and community resources so that they can make appropriate referrals when necessary. Administrative case managers are not therapists and, as such, should be aware of their professional and personal limitations. This is generally not as straightforward or clear as one may expect. Those who are trained as counselors have an advantage in this area as a component of their professional education is dedicated to boundary preservation. 

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