STRENGTHENING THE ECOSYSTEM OF CARE AND RESILIENCE: A BASIC QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF THOSE WHO LEAD THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Julie A. Roe

May 2025

Copyright © 2025 by Julie Ann Roe

All rights reserved.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all the higher education professionals working in threat assessment and case management. Your quiet determination, subject-matter expertise, and tireless efforts truly empower the ecosystem of care and resilience for our campus communities. To those that volunteered for this study, it was my honor and privilege to learn about your lived experiences leading a threat assessment team. Your passion for this work and the people you serve is evident. Thank you for sharing with me.

To my children, you have been a source of motivation and inspiration for me, even before you were born. Life is a precious journey, never stop learning and growing. I hope you also dream big and know that I will always be your greatest supporter.

To my parents, thank you for always believing in me and for never letting me take life too seriously. Dad, I wish you were here to see me defend and graduate one final time. Your "preparation, presentation" philosophy is applicable yet again. Miss you.

To my family and friends, thank you for cheering me on even when my goals seemed crazy, and life was full of hurdles. Your kind words, silly stories, and support were essential. I appreciate you all.

And most notably, to Brian, my husband and best friend, I could not have accomplished any of this without your love and unwavering support... or your tasty meals. You had a front row seat for this entire ride and deserve the most credit. I cannot thank you enough for simply being you. I am grateful for your steadfast commitment to our goals, our family, and to me. You are a blessing from God. I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am immensely grateful to Dr. Dorian McCoy, my dissertation committee chair, advisor, and supporter. My doctoral journey took me longer than anticipated. Life came in many forms during my studies – a robust job, two children, caregiving for both parents, my own unexpected health issues, loss and grief, and, you know, a little ole' global pandemic. I am grateful for your patience and mentorship as I navigated all of that while pursuing my academic goals. You inspired me to never give up and take everything one step at a time. The journey was long, but I am a better person because of it and because of you. Your passion for qualitative research and commitment to your students is clear. Thank you for agreeing to be my chair and getting me across the finish line.

To my dissertation committee, Dr. Karen Boyd, Dr. Casey Barrio-Minton, Dr. Ashley Blamey, and Dr. Patrick Biddix, thank you for your time, expertise, and support throughout this entire process. You challenged my thinking and as a result, strengthened me and my dissertation. I am forever grateful.

To my work family – my leadership team, the HR Employee Relations team, the threat assessment team, and all my colleagues – you were supportive every step of the way, even if that meant me taking time away from the office. Your words of encouragement and diligence in my absence helped me to stay focused. I appreciate each of you and am honored to serve beside you.

To the greatest cohort of all time, Dr. Janice Branch Hall, Dr. Lauren Longino Jacobs, Dr. Jacob Kamer, Dr. Craig Pickett Jr., and Dr. Steve Syoen, we did this together as a family and ALL graduated! I was more nervous at orientation about meeting my cohort than going back to school. People can make or break a situation. It is safe to say you have made this one of the best experiences of my life. I am perpetually impressed by each of you.

ABSTRACT

Threat assessment teams (TATs) are multidisciplinary teams that mitigate risk and enhance campus safety to ultimately prevent crisis. Although campus safety concerns are not a new phenomenon, the physical and mental safety of faculty, staff, and students can affect how they work and learn. TAT leaders guide and support a critical component of care and resilience for campus communities. This basic qualitative study examines the experiences of TAT leaders, specifically to understand how they describe and operationalize success. Through document analysis and nine semi-structured interviews, the following themes were created: Establishing and Maintaining Norms, Acquiring and Leveraging Resources, Recognizing the Human Element, and Commitment to Protecting Campus. Bolman and Deal's organizational model framed the study. The four frames—structural, human resource, political, and symbolic—serve as the lenses through which teams navigate threats in innovative and effective ways. Findings reveal that TAT leaders used all four frames to balance process, people, and politics. By understanding the experiences of TAT leaders—specifically how they describe and operationalize success—this research can inform institutional policy and procedures and potentially motivate the people doing this work. The findings offer valuable insights that can assist leaders and other stakeholders as they strive to elevate threat assessment and case management at institutions of higher education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION 1

Statement of Problem 3

Purpose of Study 4

Basic Qualitative Research Study 4

Research Questions 6

Theoretical Framework 6

Significance of Study 7

Delimitations 8

Definition of Key Terms and Member Roles 9

Organization of Study 14

CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF LITERATURE 15

Guns on Campus 16

Mass Shootings in Schools 20

Other Types of Violence 23

Legislative Implications for Threat Assessment Teams 24

Federal Education Rights to Privacy Act of 1974 26

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1966 27

Other Legislation to Consider 28

Policies for Violence Prevention and Threat Assessment at IHEs 29

History of Threat Assessment and Threat Assessment Teams 30

Importance of Multidisciplinary Teams 33

Threat Assessment Models 34

Prevention 35
Intervention 36
Postvention 37
Challenges and Limitations of Threat Assessment Teams 37
Other Factors Impacting Threat Assessment Teams 38
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Threat Assessment Teams 39
Theoretical Framework 40
Structural Frame 41
Human Resource Frame 42
Political Frame 43
Symbolic Frame 44
Summary 46
CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY 47
Context 48
Participants 49
Data Collection 52
Interviews 55
Document Analysis 57
Data Analysis 57
Data Organization 57
Coding 58
Trustworthiness 60
Ethical Considerations 62

Insider/Outsider Status and Reflexivity 63
Summary 64
CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS 65
Document Analysis 65
Themes 68
Establishing and Maintaining Norms 68
Acquiring and Leveraging Resources 77
Recognizing the Human Element 82
Commitment to Protecting Campus 88
Summary 92
CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS 94
Summary of Study 95
Establishing and Maintaining Norms 96
Acquiring and Leveraging Resources 98
Recognizing the Human Element 101
Commitment to Protecting Campus 102
Four-Frame Model 104
Implications for Higher Education 107
Develop Accessible Guidance 108
Provide Consistent and Effective Engagement Opportunities 110
Cultivate Stronger Threat Assessment Networks and Partnerships 110
Implement Intentional Resilience Strategies 111
Highlight Commitment to Protect Campus through Stories and Data 112

Invest in a Coordinator or Threat Manager Position 113
Limitations 113
Recommendations for Future Research 114
Conclusions 115
REFERENCES 117
APPENDICES 132
Appendix A: Initial IRB Approval 133
Appendix B: Revision IRB Approval 134
Appendix C: Recruitment Emails 136
Appendix D: Participation Survey and Informed Consent 140
Appendix E: Member Checking 145
Appendix F: Interview Protocol 146
VITA 148

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Participant Demographics 51

Table 2 Participant Total Years of Service 51

Table 3 Participant and Institution Pseudonyms 67

Table 4 Document Analysis 67

Table 5 Themes 68

Table 6 *A Priori* Codes 59

Table 7 Interview Protocol and Framework 54

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A quiet fall day that started out like any other day quickly turned tragic as four students at the University of Idaho and three at the University of Virginia died in separate tragedies on a Sunday in November 2022 (Rodrigues & Goodman, 2022). Unfortunately, the rise in active shooter cases, including those in educational environments, and swift media response has continued to increase (Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022; Hume & Perreault, 2022). Although campus safety concerns are not a new phenomenon, the physical and mental safety of faculty, staff, and students can affect how they work and learn (Bolante & Dykeman, 2017). Colleges and universities must remain flexible yet steadfast by adapting to change while remaining faithful to their founding principles. Many critical issues challenge this notion, and campus safety is a prevalent issue facing institutions of higher education (IHEs; Allen & Lengfellner, 2016; Blumenstyk, 2015; Drysdale et al., 2010; Flannery et al., 2021; Hoisington, 2017; Paterson, 2020). Furthermore, campus violence is an extension of societal, or community violence; therefore, colleges are obligated to establish environments through primary prevention strategies that may shift culture to create more mature adults and ultimately affect campus safety (Birnbaum, 2013; Paterson, 2020; Roark, 1987). The relaxation of gun control, increase in active shooter cases, and continued prevalence of other types of campus violence (e.g., sexual assault, stalking) as well as insider threats warrant ongoing and proactive mitigation strategies (Birnbaum, 2013; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Paterson, 2020; Wilson & Karus, 1983). Multidisciplinary teams bring diversity of perspective and subject-matter experts together for collaborative and creative problem-solving (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Threat assessment teams (TATs) serve as an effective way for IHEs to create a culture of care

and fulfill institutional duty in times of distress to prevent crisis (Deisinger et al., 2008; Haynes, 2013; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Okada & Pollard, 2021).

Threat assessment fosters an institutional duty of care which can be conceptualized through foreseeability, proximity, and policy; in other words, identifying a person of concern, understanding their relationship to the IHE, and how to implement strategies in the bounds of policy and law (De Haven, 2009; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Whitting, 2005). Threat assessment models have expanded and have even been adapted for K–12 and postsecondary institutions (Cornell, 2010; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Some states have legislation that requires the implementation of a TAT whereas other states, although not required, have adopted some form of threat assessment as a safety measure (Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018). A wide range of violence prevention can be achieved through the work of TATs, such as threat assessment and case management (Cornell et al., 2021; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Paterson, 2020). Intervention strategies to mitigate risk are considered a best practice in caring for the campus community (Zdziarski et al., 2007). Further, Zdziarski et al. (2007) noted that "caring for the individual, providing support to those who can benefit from attention to their needs, and enhancing the human experience as educators and mentors underlie much of what we do in higher education" (p. 4). Behavioral intervention through TATs is often more cost effective than other measures, such as intricate building security or zero-tolerance policies (Cornell, 2010, 2020; Deisinger et al., 2008). However, with the rising number of active shooter incidents and growing mental health crises comes increasing pressure for TATs to successfully prevent tragedy (Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022). TAT leadership must guide a high-performing team in collaboration with campus partners during prevention, intervention, and for some, postvention which can yield a wealth of challenges and even criticism.

Leo Tolstoy (1970) began *Anna Karenina* by observing, “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (p. 1). Specialized teams have a similar purpose and standards for success, but the failures vary, even for TATs (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Although there are threat assessment protocols that may be common to all, such as the composition of the teams or steps to collect information and data, higher education is a unique field with a variety of stakeholders and room for error (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Katzenbach and Smith (1993) defined a high-performing team as “a small number of people with complementary skills, who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable” (p. 112). At IHEs individuals serving on TATs often do so as a subject-matter expert and collaborate with others as a small part of their everyday work and regular role in the institution (Bennett & Bates, 2015). Although case management and threat assessment may be infrequent compared to other priorities for IHEs, they are critical steps for overall campus health and safety (Bolante & Dykeman, 2017). Variance in case volume, frequency, and even severity may affect team member engagement and the ability to measure overall success, often defined as the absence of a tragic event (Junod, 2014; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Proxy measurements, such as surveys and general feedback, may provide additional insight regarding other ways engagement and success is defined (Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018).

Statement of Problem

Each tragedy that occurs at IHEs brings new challenges and criticisms with an ever-increasing call for continuous prevention efforts (Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022). Well-functioning multidisciplinary teams are an effective approach to reaching shared goals (Bohnenkamp et al., 2023; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TATs are multidisciplinary teams that

mitigate risk and enhance safety to prevent crisis (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TATs bring diversity of perspective and subject-matter experts together for collaborative and creative problem-solving (Deisinger et al., 2008; Jaeger et al., 1993; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). However, it is unclear how TAT leaders at IHEs describe and operationalize success in the absence of a tragic event (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Although there is a common protocol for routine threat assessment, successes are unclear.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of individuals who lead TATs in higher education, specifically to understand how they describe and operationalize success. Furthermore, I sought to learn how team leaders, not policy or standards, describe and operationalize success, and understand how that manifests in practice for them.

Basic Qualitative Research Study

The methodology for this study was basic qualitative research which is the most common form of qualitative research found in education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described qualitative research as a method to uncover and interpret meaning. The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in this inductive and richly descriptive process (Creswell, 2014). I collected data through interviews and document analysis to uncover participant experiences. I analyzed the experiences of individuals that lead TATs with initial outreach for participants from 15 Southeastern Conference (SEC) schools to better understand how TAT leaders describe and operationalize success. The unit of analysis for this study was TAT leaders.

I used a nonprobability sampling method in this study. Nonprobability sampling is the process of selecting participants from a nonrandom sample and preferred for qualitative research

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This sampling method allowed me to select participants from TATs to better understand how leaders describe and operationalize success from the perspective of those who lead (Creswell, 2014; Honigmann, 1982; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). A type of nonprobability sampling is criterion-based or purposeful sampling (Chein, 1981; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). I used the most common form of purposeful sampling known as snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I first sought participants from TATs in the SEC as TATs are a recognized group in the SEC. As I interviewed key participants who met the criteria for my study, I asked each to refer me to other participants. With each referral the number of participants (snowball) grew, and I accumulated information-rich cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

I engaged in two forms of data collection—semi-structured interviews and document analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I collected thick, rich data and analyzed it so that it "makes sense" (Firestone, 1987, p. 19) to the reader. The interviews and documents provided data to answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ponterotto, 2006). I engaged in data collection until the point of saturation. Saturation was achieved when data collection became redundant and no new information was forthcoming (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

A basic qualitative study was ideal to conduct in-depth interviews, review documents, and analyze the experiences of those who lead TATs. Each tragedy that occurs at IHEs brings new challenges and criticisms with an ever-increasing call for successful prevention efforts (Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022). This research is important to understand how TAT leaders describe and operationalize success (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

In Chapter 3, I discussed participants, data collection and analysis, as well as trustworthiness, ethical considerations, insider/outside issues, and my reflexivity.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do TAT leaders describe success?

RQ2: How to TAT leaders operationalize team success?

Theoretical Framework

Bolman and Deal's (2021) organizational frames model is the theoretical framework that guided this study. Theory has been defined in a variety of ways to help researchers evaluate interconnected observations and make meaning about the relationships between them, in other words, to help us to understand why something is the way it is (Anfara & Mertz, 2015; Argyris & Schon, 1974; Kerlinger, 1986; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Silver, 1983; Strauss, 1995; Thornton, 1993). Our epistemology, or theory of knowledge, is how we make sense of the world (Crotty, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Instead, knowledge and understanding were co-constructed by the participants and me through basic qualitative methods (Crotty, 1998; Flick, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, a constructivist epistemology was best for this research. To gain a deeper understanding throughout this basic qualitative study, I used Bolman and Deal's (2021) four-frame model to theoretically frame the study (Anfara & Mertz, 2015, p. 15; Crotty, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). Identifying this theoretical framework at the outset of this study helped me develop the interview questions, interpret, and analyze the findings (Anfara & Mertz, 2015; Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Roberts, 2010; Yin, 2014). The four-frame model served as the scaffolding for this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Roberts, 2010).

A theoretical framework is often influenced by the professional field, experiences, and personal beliefs of the researcher (Crotty, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to personal and professional influences, I chose this framework to help me make sense of and understand the data; and it allowed me to see that which I might otherwise miss (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Thornton, 1993). When applied to this study, the four frames revealed and concealed meaning (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). Further, the four-frame model can be applied to the complexities of higher education, the experiences of those in a leadership role on TATs, as well as the responses of TATs to a crisis. The framework helped me learn more about how team leaders describe and operationalize success (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Sypawka et al., 2010). The four frames (structural, human relations, political, symbolic) helped me to co-construct, interpret, and derive meaning from the data (Crotty, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I discuss the four frames in more detail in Chapter 2. TATs are responsible for prevention, intervention, and postvention strategies to mitigate risk in a higher education setting (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Reframing, using the four-frame model, requires individuals to think from a multi-frame perspective to develop alternative strategies, which in the world of threat assessment can be paramount (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

Significance of Study

This research is important because understanding the experiences of those directly involved with TATs will yield insight into the functionality, failures, and successes of these teams. A review of the literature in Chapter 2 describes the history and best practices for threat assessment in higher education (Deisinger et al., 2008; Fein et al., 2004; Meloy & Genzman, 2016; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). However, minimal research is available from the perspective of those doing the work, especially as it relates to how leaders describe and operationalize

success. Study participants, their respective teams, and other IHEs could benefit from a shared understanding of how TAT leaders describe and operationalize success.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries set by a researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Neutens & Rubinson, 2014). This study was delimited in several ways. First, all SEC institutions with a TAT, except for the University of Tennessee, Knoxville were invited to participate in this basic qualitative study regardless of whether a mass shooting or high-level incident had occurred on campus. The University of Oklahoma and University of Texas were slated to join the SEC July 1, 2024, increasing the membership to 16 schools. This study includes Oklahoma and Texas (see Definition of Key Terms). Additional participants from other IHEs were obtained through snowball sampling and discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Second, I conducted all interviews virtually using an online platform, Zoom. Third, interview participants were required to serve on a TAT at the time of the interview and must have served a minimum of 1 year (or 12 months). The service minimum was intended to increase the likelihood that a participant was familiar with the institution and/or team protocols and had been involved in casework. Fourth, participants from each TAT were required to serve in a chair, co-chair, or team leadership role. I invited team members to participate and provided the above criteria to prospective participants. The total number of interviews was based upon the number of eligible, willing participants and/or the point of saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Definition of Key Terms and Member Roles

In the section, I define key terms and roles that inform the study.

Academic affairs/provost role—"This team member acts as a liaison to/from the college or university's academic units and centers and is responsible for interpreting academic policies and priorities" (Deisinger et al., 2008, p. 38).

Active shooter—"An individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area" (Blair & Schweit, 2014, p. 44).

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)—Protects the privacy of student education records; FERPA applies to all institutions that receive federal funds under any program administered by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education & Office of Civil Rights, 2019).

Graduate and professional schools' role—According to Deisinger et al. (2008),

> If the college or university has a graduate and/or professional schools, it is particularly important to have a representative of the graduate/professional schools on the team in addition to the undergraduate dean of students. Some teams find that a greater proportion of graduate students—compared with undergraduate students—is reported to the team. A representative from the graduate/professional school may be able to inform the team about dynamics that are unique to, or more pronounced for, graduate students—such as pressure to achieve academic goals, reliance on the approval of one or two faculty members for advancement (rather than on passing grades in coursework) and added dynamics such as cultural influences for [international] graduate students. (pp. 40–41).

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)—Enacted to "improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the health care system through the establishment of national

standards and requirements for electronic health care transactions and to protect the privacy and security of individually identifiable health information" (U.S. Department of Education & Office of Civil Rights, 2019, p. 5).

Human resources role—According to Deisinger et al. (2008),

> This team member has access to employee information and records and provides this information to the team in cases where a faculty or staff member has raised some concern. He/she is responsible for interpreting personnel policies, contractual issues that may affect decision-making, and generally acts as a liaison to/from human resources. This individual keeps the team informed about important personnel developments, such as an anticipated termination of benefits or employment. (pp. 38–39).

Legal counsel role—According to Deisinger et al. (2008)

> Legal counsel can provide guidance and advice regarding the development and operation of the team to best ensure compliance with relevant laws and policies. The legal representative can also discuss privacy and confidentiality issues, facilitate obtaining court injunctions and temporary restraining orders, and assist in preparing legal documents to deal with potentially dangerous situations." (p. 40)

Media relations role— According to Deisinger et al. (2008),

> This individual is responsible for maintaining public information in major cases and relating it to the media when appropriate, and generally acts as a liaison to the media and the public. Even for internal cases, this member of the team can provide valuable advice regarding how information about policies and procedures should be shared with the college/university community, as well as how information should be disseminated to the campus community about the operation of the team. In addition, the media relations

representative may be able to inform the team about potential threats, such as those stemming from controversial research being conducted on campus. (p. 39).

Mental health consultant role—According to Deisinger et al. (2008),

This team member can provide helpful consultation regarding mental health issues and how they may impact upon a case. This person can come from the student counseling center, employee assistance program, or be an outside consultant. This person can also coordinate efforts with outside mental health agencies so that services are available to the individual who cannot be served adequately by campus services. No mental health professional that advises the team should be in a treating relationship with anyone who is a focus of threat assessment or management efforts. This would likely result in a significant conflict of interest. (p. 40).

Police/security role— According to Deisinger et al. (2008),

If the college or university has its own police or security force, a representative of that unit should be on the team. The police/security representative is responsible for conducting investigations and coordinating efforts with both internal and external law enforcement agencies. He/she coordinates emergency services and acts as a liaison for all law enforcement actions. An institution may also choose to involve representation from local law enforcement in addition to campus law enforcement or security services, or where there are no campus law enforcement or security services. In any case, the law enforcement or security department will be most effective when it maintains a strong focus on community policing and crime prevention. (p. 39).

Residence life role—According to Deisinger et al. (2008),

> Depending upon how much of the college or university's student population lives on campus in residential housing, it may be extremely helpful to have a residence life representative on the team. If a significant portion of the student body live on campus, then the representative will help the team with detecting new cases, since residence life personnel may be aware of students who may be engaging in suspicious or concerning behavior in the on-campus dormitories or apartments. This team member can also be extremely valuable once a case is already under investigation by the team because residence life personnel may be able to suggest which students know the person of concern and should be interviewed—and which should not. Similarly, the residence life representative may have the ability to monitor individuals who may pose a threat and are being managed by the team. (pp. 39–40).

Student affairs/dean of students role— According to Deisinger et al. (2008),

> This person is responsible for interpreting the student code of conduct and other student-related policies. This person also has access to student records and other information, provides this information to the team, and acts as a liaison with students' parents and families. Other responsibilities include maintaining an up-to-date list of members of the TAM team and serving as the liaison to administrative decision-makers. (p. 40).

Southeastern Conference—The SEC (2025), established in 1933 "has provided leadership on the vital issues facing intercollegiate competition." There are currently 16 member schools in the SEC: University of Alabama, University of Arkansas, Auburn University, University of Florida, University of Georgia, University of Kentucky, Louisiana State University, University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, University of Missouri,

University of Oklahoma, University of South Carolina, University of Tennessee, University of Texas, Texas A&M University, and Vanderbilt University. The University of Oklahoma and University of Texas were the most recent schools to join the SEC (2025) on July 1, 2024.

Specialty member role— According to Deisinger et al. (2008)

> In addition to the regular members who comprise the team, it may also be helpful, on a case-by-case basis, to include a specialty member(s). This may include someone who knows the student or employee in question, so that he/she can provide an inside perspective and assist with the team's assessment and management of the case. It may also include someone from a department on campus that can provide case-specific information. For example, a member of the Religious Life may be helpful for cases where religion may be important to the person; a member of the chemistry department may be helpful in cases where chemicals have been found in a student's dorm room; or a member from the student gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender organization may be helpful in cases where hazing of a gay student is involved. (p. 41).

Targeted violence—"An incident of violence where a known or knowable attacker selects a particular target prior to their violent attack" (Drysdale et al., 2010, p. 19).

Threat—A statement of intent to inflict harm, such as direct or indirect threats. Threat can be further broken down into transient (lack of true intent to harm) or substantive (evidence supports an intent to harm; Fast, 2008).

Threat assessment can be summarized as learning of a person who may pose a threat and gathering information about that person from multiple sources to assess risk and understand the threat. Threat management, also known as case management, follows threat assessment and includes developing and implementing an individualized plan to reduce any threat and mitigate

risk (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). The purpose of threat assessment, and ultimately TATs, is to identify threats and prevent violence, such as a mass shooting (Albrecht, 2010; Cornell & Allen, 2011; Deisinger et al., 2008; Dunkle et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Pollard et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Threat assessment & management team (TAM team)—"a multidisciplinary team that is responsible for the careful and contextual identification and evaluation of behaviors that raise concern and that may precede violent activity on campus" (Deisinger et al., 2008, p. 5) or a group of officials that convene to identify, evaluate, and address threats or potential threats to school security (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Violence—"The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation" (World Health Organization, 2002, p. 4).

Organization of Study

This dissertation examines the lived experiences of individuals who lead TATs in higher education, specifically to understand how they describe and operationalize success. In Chapter 2, I provide an in-depth review of the literature on threat assessment. Topics include school violence, legislative implications, a history of threat assessment, and contemporary threat assessment models. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methods used to conduct the study. I provide for the method employed for this basic qualitative research study. I discuss the research design, participants, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, insider/outsider status, and my reflexivity. In Chapter 4, I present the findings and in Chapter 5, I discuss and summarize the findings, provide implications for higher education, and offer recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The last 3 decades have seen an increase in active shooter incidents in educational settings, although the total number is relatively small (Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). However, the attention on school shootings is greater than that of other types of school violence and yields more challenges and criticisms (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Muschert, 2007). The campus environment varies by institution, but for many IHEs a "dense population, relatively low police presence, and open and welcoming nature" (Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2011, p. 338) make them ripe for a targeted, violent attack. Policies and practices centered on violence prevention remain issues (Birnbaum, 2013; Cornell, 2020; Cornell et al., 2021). Although random attacks are rare, many acts of violence in the classroom or workplace may be targeted due to one or more motives such as revenge, power, loyalty, terror, or profit (Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022; Fox & DeLateur, 2013; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

One problem for IHEs continues to be the ability to identify potential violence, threats, or those on a pathway to violence (Boynton, 2003; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TATs are a best practice in threat prevention and assessment (Cornell et al., 2021; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). One challenge for TATs is their reliance on faculty, staff, students, and the community at large to report concerning behavior (Cornell et al., 2021). Reports on previous gun violence incidents have shown that students speak up, but not always in time (Northern Illinois Review Panel, 2008; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). In addition, employees may report concerns about others, but in some cases, there may be fear associated with raising concerns to the administration or others (Sokolow et al., 2014). The work of gathering and responding to information in the form of threat assessment and case management can be daunting (Meloy &

Hoffmann, 2021). Those serving on TATs are often doing so as a small part of their full-time job, although some IHEs hire staff to conduct threat assessment and case management full-time (Cornell et al., 2021; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; Schiemann & Van Brunt, 2018; Sokolow et al., 2014). With so much autonomy to set guidelines for threat assessment in higher education, having an engaged team and effective protocol is paramount (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). In this chapter, I provide an in-depth review of the literature on threat assessment. Topics reviewed include guns on campus, school violence, gun legislation, a history of threat assessment, and contemporary threat assessment models.

Guns on Campus

The continuing debate on gun control surges with each act of violence in the U.S. (Birnbaum, 2013; Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022; Olzak, 2023). Incidents on college campuses can escalate fear and safety concerns of faculty, staff, students, parents, and even surrounding local communities (Birnbaum, 2013; Paterson, 2020). Institutional response to an actual event or a mere growing concern is critical to the success and well-being of IHEs (Cornell et al., 2021). Some argue more guns will enhance safety, whereas others implore less guns to be the safest solution (Birnbaum, 2013; Borum et al., 2010; Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022; Olzak, 2023). Data on the presence or absence of guns does not settle the argument between the two groups (Birnbaum, 2013; Education Commission of the States, 2022; Olzak, 2023). Guns on campus is not a new issue for IHEs (Education Commission of the States, 2022); they have always been on campus. However, the student body has changed since the initial establishment of colleges and universities which were designed to educate and develop young men of the colonial era (Thelin, 2011). As students changed so did the institutions. To

understand the evolution of guns on campus, or weapons in general, it is necessary to understand the history of higher education.

During the colonial era, the tutor or faculty, often assumed the role of disciplinarian. This caused tension among students and instructors (Thelin, 2011). Faculty were harassed and beaten by students at the University of Virginia during the Jeffersonian Era. Thomas Jefferson wanted to place greater responsibility in the hands of the students. A student rebellion began and fighting ensued. Students were expelled and eventually one professor was shot and killed (Wagoner, 1985). At that time, guns were present on campus, even when prohibited. This history illustrates what was expected by policy yet not enforced in practice and ultimately deemed acceptable until the 1820s. Even though guns were prohibited, students seemed to have guns and other weapons at their disposal. This may have been for a variety of reasons. Hunting was a pastime for many students. In addition, men aged 16 and over were generally expected to be prepared for militia duty at any moment. This implied that although guns were prohibited, students should have access to them (*Acts and Laws*, 1716).

There are historical milestones that mark turning points for guns on campus, the relationship of the college and student, and the perception of students as adults. The first is the 1804 Hamilton–Burr duel. The Hamilton–Burr duel is a milestone in history because it marked the beginning of the end of dueling. Dueling was an accepted practice prior to 1804, but there is limited literature about duels on college campuses, or anywhere, after this event (Thelin, 2011). This event is significant to the evolution of guns on college campuses by igniting the downfall of the duel (Sabin, 1864). Second, the rise and fall of the philosophy of *in loco parentis* or "in place of the parent" still affects IHEs today (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Colleges must balance the amount of regulation and protection they provide, while simultaneously being subject to

negligence and other liability (Blumenstyk, 2015; Henning, 2007; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; Olzak, 2023; Thomas, 1991). The right to carry a concealed weapon on campus and the interplay with violence prevention efforts, such as threat assessment, should be considered by TATs (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

Another turning point for IHEs was the 1944 GI Bill, which helped returning World War II veterans access postsecondary education (Thomas, 1991). This benefit changed the demographics of traditional students as did the Constitutional amendment to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 in 1971 (*Constitutional Amendment,* 1971). Colleges no longer serving in place of the parent and students being perceived as adults set the stage for a shift in violence prevention at IHEs and eventually a call for TATs and behavioral intervention (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). In the 1960s and 1970s, shootings at IHEs, including the University of Texas, Kent State University, and Jackson State, ignited fear and highlighted issues related to student rights and safety (Langman, 2015; Lewis & Hensley, 1998; McGee & Platt, 2015).

Since the 1980s, colleges and universities have witnessed an increase in shootings on campus, reaching an all-time high in 2021 (Blair & Schweit, 2014; Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI] et al., 2021). The 2007 Virginia Tech shooting was a catalyst for IHEs and organized emergency management with a call for greater prevention strategies (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). With shootings at other IHEs such as the 2008 Northern Illinois University and 2015 Umpqua Community College shootings, Virginia Tech marked a turning point for more antigun campaigns (Barker & Yoder, 2012; Keneally, 2019). These events resulted in a combined death toll of 15 people and were significant tragedies at IHEs, further increasing the call for solutions (Keneally, 2019). Guns allowed on public campuses has increased since 2011 and the gun culture in the United States typically has two perspectives, more guns equal more

safety, and fewer guns equal more safety (Birnbaum, 2013; Education Commission of the States, 2022; Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022; Somers & Valentine, 2020). There has been much debate over campus carry laws with many IHEs concerned about the controversial idea of guns in the classroom and campus safety (Olzak, 2023; Somers & Valentine, 2020). Contemporary responses to violent attacks on campus include the Clery Act (reporting of campus crime), the need for concealed weapons permits, and criminal profiling (Janosik & Plummer, 2005; Somers & Valentine, 2020; Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2011). Sanburn (2015) offered controversial, yet potentially effective ideas to prevent shootings, such as refraining from using the shooters' name(s) in media and communications, mandating mental health treatment for those who pose a risk, implementing security systems, passing legislation to prevent individuals from obtaining weapons, and holding gun manufacturers accountable. TATs should be knowledgeable of requirements or strategies related to violence prevention. Crime reporting and allowing weapons on campus as means to increase campus safety are supported by limited data; however, there is more support in the literature for threat prevention and assessment strategies (Cornell et al., 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2011).

The debate on gun control is far from over. However, it does illustrate the widespread desire for enhanced safety protocols at IHEs. In the diverse, complex, and legal environment of higher education, threat prevention and assessment and the policies that guide them are critical to the health, safety, and well-being of campus communities (Cornell et al., 2021; Heilbrun et al., 2009; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). In the next section I review a history of targeted-violence, specifically mass shootings in schools, which paved the way for prevention, intervention, and postvention efforts related to targeted violence in IHEs.

Mass Shootings in Schools

In this section, I provide a brief overview of mass shootings in schools. A school shooting by a student in 1853 served as an early example of violence in schools (Amada, 2007). However, more documented gun violence began in the 1900s. In 1955, a fraternity member confronted others with a rifle because of hazing at Swarthmore College (Amada, 2007). A decade later at the University of Texas at Austin a shooting occurred on campus and was the first mass shooting to receive national media attention. Charles Whitman, a student, randomly shot people from the campus clock tower resulting in 16 deaths and 31 people wounded (Colloff, 2006; Langman, 2015). Concurrently, political unrest was taking place on campuses as Vietnam Era protests and Civil Rights-related riots sparked debate around gun regulations and control (Amada, 2007; Colloff, 2006; Langman, 2015). The protests, riots, and fallout in 1970 at Kent State (OH) University and Jackson State (MS) University raised concerns about students' rights, campus safety, and the institution's duty of care (Broadhurst, 2010; Lewis & Hensley, 1998; McGee & Platt, 2015; Olzak, 2023). Approximately 2 decades later, school shootings not only continued but escalated. The United States experienced a surge of school shootings throughout the 1990s in places such as Moses Lake, WA; Bethel, AK; Pearl, MS; Paducah, KY; Jonesboro, AR; and Springfield, OR (Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018). The 1990s culminated in a shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, with 13 deaths (Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018). The increase in active shooter incidents in the 1990s, punctuated with the mass tragedy at Columbine, ignited security concerns and a call for threat assessment in K–12 schools (Curran et al., 2020; Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018). IHEs would begin to incorporate threat assessment and TATs a few years later.

Several school shootings furthered the need for increased violence prevention efforts and TATs. The 1999 Columbine High School shooting and attempted bombing forever changed violence prevention in schools. At the time it was the deadliest high school shooting in U.S. history with 15 fatalities and more than 20 wounded (Hume & Perreault, 2022). However, it was the 2007 Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech; Blacksburg, Virginia) shooting that heightened safety concerns in IHEs, serving as a catalyst for the establishment of IHE TATs (Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018). Virginia Tech is the deadliest mass school shooting in U.S. history to date with 32 fatalities and 17 wounded (Blair & Schweit, 2014;). Since the 2007 Virginia Tech tragedy, other incidents have further propelled the need for TATs. Sandy Hook Elementary School (Newtown, CT) marked another tragedy in 2012 with 26 fatalities (Sukhera & Schwartz, 2023). In 2018, an expelled student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (Parkland, FL) opened fire on campus resulting in 17 fatalities and 17 wounded, surpassing Columbine as the deadliest high school shooting (Hume & Perreault, 2022). The incidents in Newtown and Parkland further escalated the debate on gun control and safety (Hume & Perreault, 2022). Since Columbine, there have been numerous shootings in educational settings with 11 categorized as mass shootings based on four or more fatalities. The list below includes mass shooting in educational settings from 1999–2021.

Virginia Tech—April 16, 2007

Sandy Hook Elementary School—December 14, 2012

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School—February 14, 2018

Santa Fe High School—May 18, 2018

Umpqua Community College—October 1, 2015

Red Lake Senior High School—March 21, 2005

Oikos University—April 2, 2012

West Nickel Mines School—October 2, 2006

Northern Illinois University—Feb. 14, 2008

Santa Monica College—June 7, 2013

Marysville Pilchuck High School—October 24, 2014

Rigby Middle School—May 6, 2021

Oxford High School—November 30, 2021 (Keneally, 2019; Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022)

In 2014, the FBI conducted a study of active shooter incidents, a specific type of shooting situation that law enforcement and the public may encounter. The federal definition of an active shooter is "an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area" (Blair & Schweit, 2014, p. 5). The FBI study expanded the definition to include the possibility of multiple shooters and omits the term confined since not all incidents occur indoors (Blair & Schweit, 2014). The study of active shooter incidents in the United States between 2000–2013 examined 160 incidents. Incidents occurring in commerce and educational environments total 70%, with educational environments at 24.4% and commerce 45.6%. Of the 24.4%, IHEs account for only 7.5% or 12 of the 160 incidents studied at that time (Blair & Schweit, 2014). The FBI repeated this study in 2021 and examined active shooter incidents through 2021 (Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022). The most recent FBI study confirmed an upward trend for the period 2017–2021 with a 52.5% increase in active shooter incidents from 2020–2021 (Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022). The 2021 study shows that two of the 61 active shooter incidents occurred in an education environment (Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022). The influx of active shooter incidents, despite only having two in an educational

setting, has resulted in perceptions that schools have become an unsafe place, ripe for violence (Kohut, 2000; Midlarsky & Klain, 2005; Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022). However, empirical data shows, compared to home, commerce, and other environments, schools are among the safest places (Blair & Schweit, 2014; Muschert, 2007; Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022). Although that may provide some comfort, it does not eliminate challenges and criticisms for IHEs and TATs (Hume & Perreault, 2022; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021).

The rise of violent incidents on campus, in addition to other natural (e.g., hurricanes) and man-made (e.g., cyber-attacks) disasters, reinforces the need for emergency management systems (Kim et al., 2012). Kim et al. (2012) outlined a framework for effective emergency management and boasts that human element and technology factors aid in successful emergency management. In addition, the nationwide increase in active shooter cases in the U.S. highlights the need to increase education, training, and prevention efforts (Blair & Schweit, 2014; Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022). A study of the Virginia Tech communications during and after the crisis revealed areas for improvement in terms of crisis management and communication with victim families (Barker & Yoder, 2012). Although TATs may have been implemented due to active shooter incidents, current TATs provide vital support and intervention through case management and threat assessment for a wide variety of needs (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Randazzo & Cameron, 2012).

Other Types of Violence

The introduction of threat assessment at IHEs helps to mitigate workplace and community violence (Van Hasselt & Bourke, 2018). Although school shootings have received the most attention, there are various types of violence often creating fear and concern for students, parents, and employees (Bockler et al., 2013; Paludi, 2008; Pollard et al., 2012;

Turanovic & Siennick, 2022). Stalking, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, hazing, as well as drug and alcohol induced violence are examples of other types of violence on contemporary college campuses (Drysdale et al., 2010; Johnson & Gardner, 1999; Paterson, 2020). IHEs, although often thought of as a place to learn, are also a place of employment.

A multitude of factors can impact the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. Moreover, campuses by design are open environments with educational and social gathering spaces that increase the opportunity for violence in general (Heilbrun et al., 2009). Stress and violence in the workplace as well as the classroom can be mitigated through policy, procedure, TATs, and other support programs such as employee assistance programs or student support services (Flannery et al., 2021; Hunt et al., 2012). Behavioral intervention is more common on college campuses with employees hired to specifically provide services ranging from mental health care and support for threat assessment (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Schiemann & Van Brunt, 2018; Sokolow et al., 2014). However, TATs have members who serve in these roles in addition to their regular duties (Bolante & Dykeman, 2017). Decades of research on school violence incidents support threat assessment and behavioral intervention as a best practice model to mitigate risk in IHEs (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Pollack et al., 2008; Sokolow et al., 2014). Furthermore, TATs should operate with an understanding of the laws and policies that may impact the work of threat assessment and case management to mitigate risk. In the next section, I provide an overview of legislation and relevant laws.

Legislative Implications for Threat Assessment Teams

Allen et al. (2008) described threat assessment as a problem-solving approach rather than methods such as zero tolerance (i.e., suspension or expulsion). Regardless of approach, the institutional response to early warning signs of violence for students can be viewed as a

professional obligation and a legal duty (De Haven, 2009; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). Threat assessment in the workplace can also help identify employees who may be on a pathway to violence (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). Whether the person of concern is a student or employee, IHEs are challenged to find a fair and objective balance between individual rights and campus safety (Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2010; Marshall & Clark, 2023; Paterson, 2020). TATs strive to mitigate risk early by identifying troubled students and employees, and should consider legal risk and nondiscriminatory best practices when developing a plan (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Teams can evaluate a threat by collecting information to better understand the risk and ultimately implement actions for intervention and prevention (Harwood, 2011; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TATs at IHEs may be confronted with difficult cases where community members may have a mental illness, personal stress, active disciplinary action, or are experiencing suicidal ideation (Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2010; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TATs must operate in the bounds of reason and limited resources for students, faculty, and staff (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

In the early 1900s colleges often served *in loco parentis* or in the place of the parent when caring for students (Henning, 2007; Lake, 2013). Lake (2013) discussed the balance of standing in place of the parent and the law:

> [Colleges] stand *in loco parentis* concerning the physical and moral welfare and mental training of the pupils, and . . . to that end [may make] any rule or regulation for the government or betterment of their pupils that a parent could for the same purpose unless unlawful or contrary to public policy. (p. 23)

However, the legal climate in IHEs began to change with the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. It was during this time that IHEs could no longer act *in loco parentis* to students in terms of

discipline and other matters (Lake, 2013). The U.S. federal court decision in the 1961 *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* case obligated IHEs to provide due process for students and increased legal accountability (Lake, 2009). The end of *in loco parentis* caused courts to impose a duty of reasonable care upon college administrators, resulting in questions of foreseeability and duty to care being scrutinized to a greater degree (Blanchard, 2007). Courts began to hold IHEs more responsible for campus safety, this included statements of self-harm and harm to others (Pavela, 2009). Legal counsel typically serves in an advisory capacity to TATs to enhance understanding of legal implications when sharing sensitive information amongst the team and with campus partners (Deisinger et al., 2008).

Information sharing is critical to the mission and success of TATs but must be done with a spirit of care and compliance. "The Executive Summary" (2008) of the Mississippi State University's *New directions for Student Services* describes the duty of TATs as an act of caring examples that include sharing information with appropriate members of the campus community on a need-to-know basis or with a student's family. Faculty and staff acting in good faith and in compliance with law and policy, should tend to share more when it comes to campus safety ("Executive Summary," 2008). To further assist, confidentiality issues related to FERPA and HIPAA must be considered during case management and/or threat assessment (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Nolan & Moncure, 2012). Other legislation such as the Jeanne Cleary Act and disability laws are also a consideration.

Federal Education Rights to Privacy Act of 1974

FERPA "protects the privacy of a student's educational records [and prohibits disclosure with an exception for those who have a] legitimate need to know" (Deisinger et al., 2008, p. 90). In 2008, the U.S. Supreme Court approved FERPA amendments that included school safety

(Rinehart-Thompson, 2009). An expansion of the term *education records* under FERPA eventually included records of special education students and those impacted by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education & Office for Civil Rights, 2019). This expanded definition relieved some scrutiny as to how IHEs assessed the need to share information and empowered them to use their best judgement related to health and safety concerns (U.S. Department of Education & Office for Civil Rights, 2019). Therefore, to balance safety and privacy, information sharing with those that have a legitimate need to know include emergency situations as well as urgent concerns related to campus safety (Deisinger et al., 2008). TAT members such as legal counsel and mental health professionals may have a legitimate need to know information that best informs the development of prevention, intervention, or postvention plans. Therefore, there may be rare, but necessary instances where IHEs release information without the student's consent (Harwood, 2011; McDonald, 2008). FERPA protects student records but does not extend to communications and observations that team members may need to share (Deisinger et al., 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Last, FERPA does not pertain to law enforcement and IHEs may defer to their police/security member or respective law enforcement agency for guidance (Deisinger et al., 2008).

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1966

HIPAA was established in 1996 and addressed several healthcare issues; relevant to this study is the security and privacy of healthcare records also defined as protected health information (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). HIPAA protections cover health and mental health records (Deisinger et al., 2008; Lake, 2013). Counseling centers at IHEs may have health and mental health records protected by FERPA instead of HIPAA; legal counsel may advise each IHE accordingly (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Health

professionals adhere to high confidentiality standards, appropriately so, to create a safe space for service and resources (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Schuchman, 2007). However, that requirement does not prevent TATs from sharing information with healthcare professionals; at minimum, receipt of this information could enable the healthcare professional to acknowledge whether the information raises concern enough for a duty to warn others (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021).

Other Legislation to Consider

Behaviors, including but not limited to, stalking, domestic violence, dating violence, and sexual assault exist at IHEs (Hunt et al., 2012; Janosik & Plummer, 2005; Paterson, 2020). Safety can be a factor when evaluating which college or university to attend (Paterson, 2020). Reporting requirements provide an avenue to learn more, and legislation such as the Clery Act reveal campus crime statistics and security information that may prove helpful (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Congress enacted the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990 (Title II of Public Law 101-542), which amended the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) and required IHEs receiving financial assistance under the 1965 HEA to disclose crime statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). There have been several amendments (1992, 1998, 2000, 2008) with the 1998 amendment renamed the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act in memory of a student who was slain in her residence hall room in 1986. It is generally referred to as the Clery Act and is in section 485(f) of the HEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

In addition to the Clery Act, there is other legislation that may impact the work of TATs. The U.S. Office for Civil Rights continues to provide guidance under Title IX with a prevalent theme of reasonable care. Established in 1972, Title IX was an amendment to the 1965 HEA and

continues to guide IHEs in creating a safe learning and working environment free from gender violence (Bryant, 2021). Mandatory reporting and proactive outreach and support efforts are just a few provisions under Title IX. TATs may include, or partner with, the campus Title IX coordinator as needed to strategize about case management (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021).

Other relevant legislation includes the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), 2013 Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act, Dear Colleague Letters, and disability laws (Bryant, 2021). IHEs that receive federal funds may be subject to laws such as section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, parts of Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Fair Housing Act (Nolan & Moncure, 2012). Disability laws prohibit discrimination based on ability (Civil Rights Division, 2024). Disability laws include mental health impairments and may require an institution to provide reasonable accommodations to a student (Civil Rights Division, 2024; Dunkle et al., 2008). The laws are separate, but related, in their effort to clarify and enhance campus safety, support, compliance, and reporting. Threat assessment can reduce the likelihood that situations will escalate through prevention, intervention, and support (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TATs are responsible for knowing the laws and exemptions, whereas the legal counsel role on teams can provide guidance on these matters (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Protocols and practices should include a spirit of care as well as compliance to achieve best practices for a safer campus community (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

Policies for Violence Prevention and Threat Assessment at IHEs

Bennett and Bates (2015) identified six areas of emphasis for campus policy and procedures for violence prevention: (a) legislative authority, (b) use of multidisciplinary teams,

(c) procedures and a rubric, (d) reporting culture (threats and low-level concerns), (e) team training and resources, and (f) developing partnerships through policies and procedures. Legislation, teams, models, culture, and training are discussed in detail in other sections of this proposal. I now explore support for policies and procedures related to violence prevention.

Measures to ensure safety include emergency management practices, organizational culture, and the policies that drive them (Blair & Schweit, 2014). The problem many institutions encourage are balancing the safety, rights, and responsibilities of all parties (Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2010; Marshall & Clark, 2023). As a direct result of active shooter tragedies, only a few states have implemented laws to mandate TATs in K–12 and postsecondary school systems. These states include Virginia, Illinois, Connecticut, and Florida (Bennett & Bates, 2015; Office of Safe Schools, 2020). Unfortunately, each state experienced a tragedy before enacting requirements. However, even without a tragedy or subsequent laws, most IHEs have followed suit with policies and/or implementation of some form of a TAT to mitigate risk and enhance safety (Bolante & Dykeman, 2015; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

History of Threat Assessment and Threat Assessment Teams

Emergency management is necessary for when and if a disaster occurs (Cornell et al., 2021). The preparedness of colleges and universities is critical to campus safety and success (Cornell, 2010). The costs associated with being unprepared during and after a disaster could cripple an institution, marking the beginning of a long, daunting recovery (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Threat assessment may help avoid a disaster with early detection and intervention efforts (Cornell et al., 2021). Campus safety is a consistent issue facing IHEs (Allen & Lengfellner, 2016; Drysdale et al., 2010; Hoisington, 2017). The physical and mental safety of faculty, staff and students can affect how they work and learn (Bolante & Dykeman, 2017).

TATs are a way to address safety concerns early and often (Cornell, 2010; Deisinger et al., 2008).

Randazzo and Cameron (2012) considered threat assessment a time-tested tool, as well as a behavior-based and prevention-focused model. Threat assessment is a scientific discipline (Meloy & Genzman, 2016) that has historically been used for violence prevention in a variety of settings (Reddy et al., 2001). However, its presence has been growing in K–12 schools and IHEs for the last three decades with the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School serving as a catalyst (Curran et al., 2020; Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018). Threat assessment is needed to enhance campus safety, minimize threats early, and ultimately mitigate the consequences of a tragedy (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). The rise of active shooter incidents across the United States, specifically those at postsecondary institutions, in conjunction with the ongoing debate on gun control, pushes threat prevention and assessment higher on the priority list for IHEs (Blair & Schweit, 2014; Curran et al., 2020; Education Commission of the States, 2022; Stuart-Cassel et al., 2011). Other crimes and violent incidents are more common in a campus community than an active shooter or homicide case (Deisinger et al., 2008; Paterson, 2020). Randazzo and Cameron (2012) contended threat prevention and assessment strategies for students, faculty, and staff may mitigate risk and allow IHEs to intervene as necessary.

Although IHEs have seen an increase in campus TAT the last 15 years, the issue of school violence has existed much longer (Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018). Historical milestones laid a foundation for the establishment of TATs in IHEs. The United States government recognized the need to address school violence. In 1998, Attorney General Janet Reno and Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley issued a letter to U.S. schools for a “comprehensive violence prevention plan” (O’Toole, 1999, p. 5). Moreover, the Safe School Initiative (SSI) was

created by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education in 1999 and incorporated methods used by the secret service to manage threats and violence toward the president of the United States and others (Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018; Vossekuil et al., 2004). The SSI studied planning and other pre-attack behaviors and evaluated whether pre-attack behaviors could be identified to prevent future attacks (Pollack et al., 2008). As a result of the SSI, it was learned that many perpetrators had displayed warning signs or in some way informed others. This elevated education efforts for students and employees to report concerns. In addition, the federal model of threat assessment was developed based upon empirical findings of the SSI (Alathari, 2018). Threat assessment and prevention efforts focused on a person of concern's pathway to violence, in other words, a trajectory to engage in violent acts, such as a mass shooting (Deisinger et al., 2008). It is important to note that threat assessment is not violence risk assessment which is a process used by trained mental health professionals to evaluate the likelihood that a particular person may engage in general violence (Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018; Reddy et al., 2001). Threat assessment should also not be confused with profiling, or comparing an individual to a profile or composite, to predict violence (Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018; Reddy et al., 2001). Threat assessment is based on behavior and facts to bolster violence prevention (Fein et al., 2004; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Meloy et al., 2012; Vossekuil et al., 2004). The U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education partnered with K–12 schools to develop threat assessment programs and provide trainings based on the federal guide to threat assessment (Fein et al., 2004; Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018). According to a *Campus Safety Magazine* survey on the 10th anniversary of the Columbine shooting, nearly half of all surveyed school personnel indicated their schools had implemented a TAT or program to enhance safety (Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018). An increase in shootings at IHEs spurred the

implementation of TATs at IHEs, with the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting serving as a turning point (Barker & Yoder, 2012; Binder, 2015). Other incidents such as the 2015 Umpqua Community College shooting near Roseburg, Oregon, further established the need for TATs (Binder, 2015). The next section explores the importance of multidisciplinary teams.

Importance of Multidisciplinary Teams

Many subject-matter experts, researchers, and professional organizations have endorsed the use of multidisciplinary teams to manage threat assessment and prevention efforts (Cornell & Allen, 2011; Deisinger et al., 2008; Dunkle et al., 2008; Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2010; Hemphill & LaBanc, 2010; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Sokolow et al., 2009). Often, reports of violence at IHEs support the implementation of TATs in one form or another (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; O'Neill et al., 2008).

Multidisciplinary teams bring diversity of perspective and subject-matter experts together for collaborative and creative problem-solving (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). General roles for TATs are defined in Chapter 1. The size of the team often depends on the size and resources of the institution. TATs members should demonstrate a commitment to safety and well-being, confidentiality, fairness, policy and law, and follow-through; recognize the complexity and diversity of each case; and possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for crisis management (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Best practices implore the use of legal counsel throughout case management and threat assessment (Deisinger et al., 2008; Nolan & Moncure, 2012). Although all members of a TAT fulfill a critical role, the mental health professional is valuable for behavioral assessment (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Legal risk is reduced if a trained and qualified mental health professional such as a psychologist or social worker serves on the team (Finkel, 2016).

The literature emphasizes the expertise that each member brings to the team but often highlights the behavioral assessment contributions of mental health professionals (Pollard et al., 2015; Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). A TAT can provide a familiar resource to distressed faculty, staff, and students. In the next section I discuss threat assessment models.

Threat Assessment Models

Various threat assessment models have been created to mitigate risk and potentially identify persons of concern (Binder, 2015; Cornell, 2010; Deisinger et al., 2008; Dunkle et al., 2008; Keller et al., 2011; Sokolow et al., 2014). Many student-focused teams have a representative from human resources who can access employee records and advise on policy and employer responsibility in the event a faculty or staff member is involved in a case (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

Entities such as the U.S. Secret Service and other governmental agencies use behavioral intervention teams and strategies, as do many IHEs "to ensure that the campus community has a lower threshold of understanding for what kinds of things should be reported" (Bennett & Bates, 2015, p. 7). Dewey Cornell, a professor of education at the University of Virginia, developed early threat assessment strategies for K–12 institutions such as *Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence* (Cornell, 2010). Cornell later developed, in partnership with other researchers, a simple threat assessment model intended to reflect the landscape of the college campus and allow for more creative problem-solving and case management for IHEs (Cornell, 2010). Most models recommend some form of a case management system and multidisciplinary team for best practices in effective prevention, intervention, and postvention (Keller et al., 2011; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Sokolow et al., 2014).

In 2009 the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association (NABITA) was formed. NABITA is a behavioral intervention association that provides guidance to teams in postsecondary settings (Sokolow et al., 2014; Van Brunt et al., 2018). The NABITA model is a risk rubric used to triage initial mental health concerns and potential threats that can be applied broadly to IHEs (Sokolow et al., 2019; Van Brunt et al., 2018). A 2018 NABITA survey yielded 416 responses from community colleges, four-year institutions, and for-profit institutions. Results indicated 97% of respondents had some form of a student-focused team with multidisciplinary members from various campus offices (Schiemann & Van Brunt, 2018). Seventy-two percent of respondents confirmed using a rubric or protocol to consistently assess risk across cases and determine next steps (Schiemann & Van Brunt, 2018).

Models exist for behavioral intervention and TATs. IHEs typically adopt the model that best suits their college or university needs. Regardless of model, consistent attributes include a team of subject-matter experts, record keeping, communication, partnership, and creative problem-solving. Most models adhere to a formula of identifying a person of concern, gathering information, making an assessment/plan, and executing the plan (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). The role of the mental health expert may yield the greatest insight for a troubled student or employee (Cacialli, 2019). Next, I provide a review of prevention, intervention, and postvention strategies in the next section.

Prevention

Tragedies may be unavoidable, but prevention is important to promote knowledge about campus safety and what to do during an emergency. Prevention efforts strive to enhance education and outreach (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). However, they are not perfect; one pitfall is the failure of TATs to follow through in part, or at all, on case

management plans (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; Pollard et al., 2012). Once a person of concern has been identified, the team should collect more information and develop a plan (Deisinger et al., 2008). If no immediate threat is identified the person may be placed under case management. Case management can include numerous informal strategies to connect a person of concern with resources and supports (e.g., referral to the counseling center or an employee assistance program with intermittent follow up by a team member (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TATs should also work to build prevention efforts into the campus culture and clarify what behaviors and/or incidents should be reported and to whom (Deisinger et al., 2008). Creating an environment of care and support can be achieved through internal marketing and communication channels to faculty, staff, and students. TATs and their initiatives can serve as a campus resource. Last, assessment for prevention, as well as intervention and postvention, are a challenge as it is often the absence of a tragedy that indicates success (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; Van Brunt, 2012). Surveying the campus community can gauge knowledge and understanding about a culture of care, outreach, and available support.

Intervention

Intervention is a critical action step in case management. TATs have several options to connect a person of concern with campus and local resources for support or to uphold safety (Cornell et al., 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Examples may include connecting a student with the student counseling center, suspension, or expulsion. Faculty and staff of concern may require a mandatory employee assistance program referral, fitness for duty examination, or administrative leave with or without pay (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Threat assessment alone may not be enough for adequate intervention to protect the campus community

(Borum et al., 2010; Sokolow et al., 2014). Many teams will assess both the threat and engage with the person of concern for a more comprehensive approach (Sokolow et al., 2014). If a threat is identified, the TAT will determine a priority rating or level of concern and collect more information to develop a plan (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). This helps the team determine when/if an attack might occur and whether the individual has the means to carry out an attack (Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; O'Toole, 1999).

Postvention

Postvention efforts are rare since they follow a tragic incident and not all IHEs experience major threats, such as an active shooter (Cornell et al., 2021; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; Pollard et al., 2012). TAT members may coordinate healing efforts such as campus bereavement in the aftermath of a tragedy (Cornell et al., 2021; McCusker & Witherow, 2012; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). A study of Virginia Tech's communications during and after the crisis revealed areas for improvement in terms of crisis management and communication with victim families (Barker & Yoder, 2012). Much can be learned from postvention efforts to better inform early prevention and intervention. In the aftermath of tragedies, panel reviews and other efforts have attempted to identify similarities between incidents and opportunities for prevention measures (Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; Northern Illinois Review Panel, 2008; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007).

Challenges and Limitations of Threat Assessment Teams

There are several challenges facing TATs. First, is a lack of research on employee-focused teams as the literature contains information on student-focused teams in relation to violent crimes and prevention strategies, but does not address faculty and staff prevention measures in as much detail. TATs are also bound by law and must balance policy, practice, and a

duty of care for students (Meloy & Hoffman, 2021). Smaller IHEs may struggle to find professionals on staff with the expertise and experience necessary to successfully serve on TATs. Larger IHEs with more case volume must be wary of burnout and case fatigue for their team members. Ethical and trauma-related issues for individual team members or the team at-large may also be prevalent due to the difficult subject matter of each case (Cornell et al., 2021; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Studies have shown there is no one profile or set of characteristics for a person of concern or clear indicator of a pathway to violence; instead IHEs must look for behaviors, patterns, and other evidence to best assess threat potential (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). Last, and perhaps the biggest challenge, is identifying a person of concern (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TATs must rely on the campus community to speak up and speak out when they see or hear something of concern. In most cases, referrals to TATs are not typically cases where a threat exists (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; Sokolow et al., 2014). Trust of the informant(s), and the team itself, is paramount (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Therefore, teams must regularly review best practices for prevention, intervention, and postvention (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). A culture of care may inspire campus community members to contact the TAT, or related program, to discuss concerns and/or seek resources and supports. IHEs cannot react to what they do not know about. Education about when and who to contact about concerns is essential for the overall success of the TAT.

Other Factors Impacting Threat Assessment Teams

Perceptions of campus safety vary among students, faculty, and staff. Employees at three Australian Universities were asked to complete a safety culture survey. Despite a low response rate, the study concluded staff perceive safety as work-in-progress with room for improvement (Lyons, 2016). In comparison, a survey of students, faculty, and staff at Virginia Tech perceived

mental health to be the most significant factor in the April 2007 tragedy (Fallahi et al., 2009). Moreover, survey opinions on safety, parenting, violent media, and gun control also saw differences among genders (Fallahi et al., 2009; McIntyre et al., 2011).

Chekwa et al. (2013) conducted a smaller study that again reinforces the idea that students do not feel safe on campus and suggests they are not familiar with the legislation designed to protect them, such as the Clery Act, nor campus safety resources. The purpose of the Clery Act is to enforce the consistent reporting of crime on campus to enhance educational and safety awareness efforts (Janosik & Plummer, 2005). Although studies about crime reporting efforts, such as the Clery Act, are generally positive, there are concerns regarding the likelihood that students will read the data and change their behavior because of it (Janosik & Plummer, 2005). Last, campus culture may have the biggest impact. TATs may be leaders in fostering a culture of care through outreach and education efforts (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Threat Assessment Teams

IHEs are more diverse than ever with student enrollment bringing a variety of backgrounds and experiences to campus (Bakioglu et al., 2022; Silverman, 2008). The college campus is where students come to prepare for the world they are about to inherit and do so in a safe environment (Blumenstyk, 2015; Flannery et al., 2021). The work of TATs is best accomplished through diversity of perspective via multidisciplinary teams (Deisinger et al., 2008; Dunkle et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Specialty members could also be invited to case management discussions where appropriate to relay information as subject-matter experts and better assess a case. For example,

> a member of Religious Life may be helpful for cases where religion may be important for the person… [of concern or] …a member of the student, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and

> transgender communities may be helpful in cases where the hazing of a gay student is involved. (Deisinger et al., 2008, p. 41).

TATs may be a primary point of contact for students and employees in distress related to hate crimes. Wang et al. (2020) indicated from 2016–2019 that 958 hate crimes were reported on college campuses, 437 incidents of destruction, damage, and vandalism, and 385 incidents of intimidation, and 83 instances of simple assault. Racial, religious, and sexual orientation themes were frequently associated with the 958 hate crimes. Other controversial topics such as concealed campus carry has IHEs considering the implications for freedom of speech and the impact on Communities of Color (Somers & Valentine, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Threats come in many forms, including but not limited to, self-harm, gun violence, lone actor terrorism, cyberthreats, insider threats, and more (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). These incidents can quickly escalate to a crisis. How organizations, including TATs, respond to crisis can have a huge effect on both the organization and leaders as "crisis is an acid test for leadership" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 313). Innovative responses to crisis stem from using the four-frame model and applying the frames as appropriate; no frame fits every situation (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Roberts, 2010). The four frames—structural, human resource, political, and symbolic—can serve as the lenses through which TATs conduct threat assessment and case management to navigate threats in innovative and effective ways (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). There are advantages and disadvantages for each frame (Bolman & Deal, 2021). The following is an overview of each of the four frames and how they may apply to leading through crisis.

Structural Frame

Organizational structure and accountability are a priority for success in the structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2021). The structural lens is rooted in scientific management and sociology as influenced by Taylor (1911) and Weber (1947). Frederick W. Taylor founded the "scientific management" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 51) approach where tasks are divided into defined duties with clear expectations to enhance efficiencies. Sociologist, Max Weber, pioneered "monocratic bureaucracy" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 51) as an effective way to maximize efficiencies. Weber's original model described the following concepts, which inform the structural frame: fixed divisions of labor, hierarchies of offices, sets of rules governing performance, separation of personal from official property and rights, the use of technical qualifications (not family ties or friendship) for selecting and promoting personnel, employment as primary occupation, and long-term career (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Weber, 1947). Taylor's (1911) approach and Weber's (1947) model, serve as the inspiration for Bolman and Deal's (2021) six assumptions of the structural frame.

1. Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives and devise strategies to reach those goals.
2. Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and appropriate division of labor.
3. Suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh.
4. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures.

5. Effective structure fits an organization's current circumstances (including its strategy, technology, workforce, and environment).
6. When performance suffers from structural flaws, the preferred remedy is problem solving and restructuring. (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 50)

Considered social architects, leaders and/or teams who use the structural frame seek to establish and enforce structures and rules to meet clear goals (Bolman & Deal, 2021). TATs that are lead through the structural frame see the value of a clear protocol, defined roles, and a solid understanding of how such rules and roles operate in tandem during a threat or crisis. Rational thinking and problem solving grounded in policies and procedures are hallmarks of a TAT operating in the structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TATs that fail to use the structural frame may waste time, energy, and resources during critical responses (Bolman & Deal, 2021). However, sole reliance on this frame risks losing sight of human, political, and cultural variables necessary in response to a threat. Unlike the structural frames' reliance on rules, the human resource frame focuses on the people who comprise the organization.

Human Resource Frame

The human resource frame was influenced by several theorists including Abraham Maslow (1954), Douglas McGregor (1960), Chris Argyris (1957, 1964), and Frederick Herzberg (1966). Bolman and Deal's (2021) human resource frame was developed from the work of Mary Parker Follet (2009/1918) and Elton Mayo (1933, 1945). Follet and Mayo argued that the talent and loyalty of people are vital to an organization's sustainability and the idea of working simply for a paycheck is lackluster. Their work was critical for the organizational shift from processes and productivity to people and relationships; thus, the human resource lens views the people that

comprise an organization, or team, as an extended family (Bolman & Deal, 2021). The following are the core assumptions of the human resource frame that connects people and organizations:

1. Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse.
2. People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities.
3. When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer. Individuals are exploited or exploit the organization—or both become victims.
4. A good fit benefits both. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed. (Bolman & Deal, 2021, pp. 121–122)

One disadvantage of this frame is the potential for an unrealistic assumption that everyone in the organization has the same goal. TATs that lean too heavily into the needs and wants of the people may miss the difficult realities of conflict and scarcity (Bolman & Deal, 2021). TATs that use the human resource frame value the individual by balancing the needs of the individual and the organization, or IHE. In contrast, the political frame strives to secure resources necessary for success.

Political Frame

The political frame is based on Cyert and March (1963), who viewed organizations as coalitions made up of individuals who negotiate, or bargain, to find the resources necessary for success (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Leaders who use the political frame rely on networking and negotiating between interest groups for scarce resources. TATs who use this frame are aware of limited resources, hidden agendas, and the need to make tough decisions in a crisis (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). The following five propositions

that summarize the political view of organizations as roiling arenas that host ongoing contests arising from individual and group interests:

1. Organizations are coalitions of different individuals and interest groups.
2. Coalition members have enduring differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, resources, and perceptions of reality.
3. Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources—deciding who gets what.
4. Scarce resources and enduring differences put conflict at the center of the day-to-day dynamics and make power the most important asset.
5. Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for their respective interests. (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 191)

The political frame captures what other frames can miss which may prove vital during a crisis (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Having subject matter experts on a TAT will diversify perspectives and may enhance use of the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Disadvantages of this frame include the possibility of perpetuating conflict as well as losing sight of rational discourse and the common good (Bolman & Deal, 2021). TAT responses based on this frame can be negatively perceived; whereas, the symbolic frame can help teams enhance positivity and inspire a shared vision.

Symbolic Frame

The symbolic frame is derived from organization theory, sociology, political science, magic, and neurolinguistic programming (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Zott and Huy (2007) described a symbol as "something that stands for or suggests something else; it conveys socially constructed meanings beyond its intrinsic or obvious functional use" (p. 72). Symbols can help

people make meaning, hold onto hope, or believe in something greater (Bolman & Deal, 2021). The symbolic frame distills ideas from diverse sources into five suppositions:

1. What is most important is not what happens but what it means.
2. Activity and meaning are loosely coupled; events and actions have multiple interpretations as people experience situations differently.
3. Facing uncertainty and ambiguity, symbols arise to help people resolve confusion, find direction, and anchor hope and faith.
4. Events and processes are often more important for what they express or signal than for their intent or outcomes. Their emblematic form weaves a tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories to help people find purpose and passion.
5. Culture forms the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise to accomplish desired ends. (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 254)

TAT members who believe they are part of something greater than themselves may feel inspired, energized, and take pride in their work (Bolman & Deal, 2021). In times of crisis symbols can empower collaboration toward a common belief or shared goal and even console the people in an organization making it an effective tool for TATs (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Often considered artists, authentic leaders who use the symbolic frame can foster an energy and enthusiasm around a common goal, such as in a response to a threat (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

All four frames may serve as alternate approaches to case management and impact existing team protocols, engagement, and success. I explore how the four frames inform the work of TATs, specifically from the perspective of those leading a TAT. Leaders and teams who

adapt their leadership style and view situations from a multi-frame perspective tend to be more successful (Bolman & Deal, 2021; McArdle, 2013; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Monahan & Shah, 2011; Pierce, 2012).

Summary

Regardless of the causes or consequences of school violence, the institutional duty of continuous safety measures remains (Turanovic & Siennick, 2022). Throughout history campus safety has continued to evolve. Mass shootings, other types of violence, and behavioral concerns at IHEs have paved the way for the development and growth of TATs (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Furthermore, workplace and community violence prevention inform the work of TATs in higher education in several ways. Institutional obligations to safety, other types of violence, legislative implications, and the importance of multidisciplinary teams are all critical considerations for the work of these teams. Although only a few states mandate threat assessment, most have committed to doing the work to provide support and resources for their faculty, staff, and students in distress (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). These teams are important for prevention but may also play a role during intervention and post-disaster communications. Threat assessment will not eliminate disasters but may serve as a critical step toward overall campus safety (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). In the diverse, complex, and legal environment of higher education, threat assessment is essential to the health, safety, and well-being of every campus community. Students and college campuses have changed over the years, and the challenge of finding the balance between protection, regulation, and rights continues (Education Commission of the States, 2022; Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2010; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; Turanovic & Siennick, 2022). Understanding the lived experiences of those leading threat assessment will help uncover how they describe and operationalize success.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

I conducted a basic qualitative research study to examine the experiences of individuals who lead TATs in higher education, specifically to understand how they describe and operationalize success. Furthermore, I sought to learn how team leaders, not policy or standards, describe and operationalize success, and understand what that looks like in practice to them. To accomplish this goal, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do TAT leaders describe success?
2. How do TAT leaders operationalize team success?

In this chapter, I discuss the methods for this basic qualitative research study. Specifically, I discuss the research design, participants, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, insider/outsider status, and my reflexivity.

The methodology for this study was basic qualitative research which is the most common form of qualitative research found in education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described qualitative research as a method to uncover and interpret meaning. The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in this inductive and richly descriptive process (Creswell, 2014). I collected data through interviews and document analysis to uncover participant experiences. I analyzed the experiences of individuals that lead TATs starting with 15 SEC schools to better understand how TAT leaders describe and operationalize success. The unit of analysis for this study was TAT leaders. I used a nonprobability sampling method in this study known as snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Nonprobability sampling is the process of selecting participants from a nonrandom sample and preferred for qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This sampling method allowed me to select

participants from TATs and ask for referrals to better understand how leaders describe and operationalize success from the perspective of those who lead (Creswell, 2014; Honigmann, 1982; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Stake, 1988).

I engaged in two forms of data collection—semi-structured interviews and document analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I collected thick, rich data and analyzed it so that it "makes sense" (Firestone, 1987, p. 19) to the reader. The interviews and documents provided data to answer the research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ponterotto, 2006). I engaged in data collection until the point of saturation. Saturation was achieved when data collection became redundant and no new information was forthcoming (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Saturation became evident as more than half of the participants described threat assessment in similar ways. Also, new data on the topic of operationalizing team success slowly decreased with each interview.

A basic qualitative study was ideal to conduct in-depth interviews, review documents, and analyze the experiences of those who lead TATs. Each tragedy that occurs at IHEs brings new challenges and criticisms with an ever-increasing call for successful prevention efforts (Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022). This research is important to understand how TAT leaders describe and operationalize success (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

Context

The SEC (2025), established in 1933, "has provided leadership on the vital issues facing intercollegiate competition." At the beginning of the study, there were 14-member schools in the SEC: University of Alabama, University of Arkansas, Auburn University, University of Florida, University of Georgia, University of Kentucky, Louisiana State University, University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, University of Missouri, University of South Carolina,

University of Tennessee, Texas A&M University, and Vanderbilt University. The University of Oklahoma and University of Texas joined the SEC (2025) July 1, 2024, increasing conference membership to 16 schools. The University of Tennessee is not included in this study. UTK is my alma mater and employer. The unit of analysis for this study was TAT leaders (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1988). Using the snowball sampling method, I included TAT leaders from IHEs beyond the SEC. Examining data from participants from as many IHEs as possible from the perspective of the TAT leader helped to cultivate greater variation across cases and strengthen trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). For the purposes of this research, a basic qualitative study is ideal to conduct in-depth interviews and analyze the experiences of those who lead TATs.

Participants

The unit of analysis, or cases, for this study was TAT leaders. I used a nonprobability, or purposeful, sampling method known as snowball sampling (Chein, 1981; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Criteria for study participation included prospective participants currently leading a TAT and having served on the team in some capacity for at least one year or 12 consecutive months. Serving on the team for at least one year increased the likelihood that an individual had a foundational understanding of team-specific protocols, has worked on a case, and/or has engaged in some level of training for that specific team and institution. The sample size was dependent upon on the number of TAT leaders willing to participate.

Gatekeepers are “individuals at the site who provide access to the site and allow or permit the research to be done” (Creswell, 2014, p. 188). As a researcher and a human resources professional in higher education, I have threat assessment contacts at each SEC school. These contacts may serve as gatekeepers to participants, as well as any documentation for review, such

as any institution-specific protocols to better understand how they operationalize success. This research involved human subjects and therefore was submitted to the institutional review board (IRB) for approval. IRB review is intended to provide protection against human rights violations (Creswell, 2014). Upon IRB approval, an email was sent to gatekeepers to inform them of the study and develop a prospective participant list.

Next, I sought participants from TATs in the SEC as TATs are a recognized group in the SEC. I sent an initial request for participants, followed by three reminders. A total of nine individuals responded to the requests, completed a demographic questionnaire, and signed an informed consent. However, only seven engaged to schedule an interview and participate in the study. As I interviewed key participants who met the criteria for my study, I asked each to refer me to other potential participants who work in threat assessment in higher education (not necessarily in the SEC). Referrals were provided and two additional participants engaged in the study because of snowball sampling for a total of nine participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

I assigned pseudonyms to each participant and institution to assist with anonymity (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I included a participant table with pseudonyms and relevant demographic data (see Table 1). Demographic data included participant pseudonyms, highest education level, age range, race, gender, and role. Participants also provided their years of experience in higher education, years of experience at current institution, total years on a TAT, and total years leading a TAT (see Table 2). All participants met the following criteria for study participation: Are you a current higher education professional (employee)? Do you currently hold a leadership role on a TAT at your institution (e.g., chair, co-chair, coordinator, or

other team leadership role)? Have you served on your current TAT (in any role) for at least 1 year (12 months, consecutive or nonconsecutive)?

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant pseudonym	Education level	Age range	Race	Gender	TAT role
Apple	Graduate degree	51–60	n/a	n/a	Director
Dogwood	Graduate degree	41–50	White	Female	Chair
Fig	Graduate degree	41–50	White	Woman	Cochair
Ginkgo	Graduate degree	71+	White	Male	Chair
Mango	Graduate degree	41–50	White	Male	Chair
Maple	Graduate degree	41–50	White	Female	Leading member
Olive	Graduate degree	41–50	White	Male	Chair
Tulip	Graduate degree	61–70	White	Female	Chair
Turpentine	Graduate degree	31–40	White	Male	Chair

Note. n/a reflects information participants chose not to provide.

Table 2

Participant Total Years of Service

Participant pseudonym	In higher education	At current institution	On a TAT	Leading a TAT
Apple	25	13	8	3
Dogwood	17	17	15	13
Fig	22	22	14	2
Ginkgo	40	28	15	15
Mango	25	5.5	10.5	10.5
Maple	18	18	10	10
Olive	23	4	4	2
Tulip	31	31	11	1.5
Turpentine	15	4	2	2

Demographic responses revealed that all participants earned a graduate degree. All participants except one who chose to not provide a response identified as White. Five participants ranged in age from 41–50 with only one participant in each of the age ranges 31–40, 51–60, 61–70, and 71+. Four participants identified as female, four as male, and one participant did not provide a response. In addition to optional demographics, data was collected on years of service.

All participants reported having 15 or more years of service in higher education. Eligibility for inclusion in the study required that participants lead a TAT. However, the participant survey data showed that participants identified leadership roles differently. The majority of participants labeled their role as *chair*, one participant reported *co-chair*, and another director. One third of participants have worked only at their current institution. Five participants served in another role on a TAT before assuming a leadership role, and three participants lead a TAT immediately upon joining the team. When asked how they moved into a TAT leadership role, participants provided varied career backgrounds but ultimately had two pathways to TAT leadership. First, the majority inherited their leadership role on the team by virtue of their position at the institution (e.g., role in student affairs/division of student life). Second, there were four participants who slowly transitioned into the role due to their longstanding membership, training, and/or high level of engagement with the team.

Data Collection

I engaged in two forms of data collection—semi-structured interviews and document analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thick, rich data was collected and analyzed in detail so that it "makes sense" (Firestone, 1987, p. 19) to the reader. The interviews and documents provided data to answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ponterotto, 2006). The

interview protocol was developed using Bolman and Deal's (2021) organizational frames model. Table 7 illustrates each interview question and corresponding frame(s). This may reinforce the idea that a multi-frame perspective is more likely to yield success. I engaged in data collection until the point of saturation. Saturation is achieved when data collection becomes redundant and no new information is forthcoming (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Table 7

Interview Protocol & Framework

Interview Question	Frame(s)
Describe your leadership style.	Multi-Frame
How did you first become involved in TA in higher education?	Multi-Frame
When/how did you move into a leadership role on the TAT?	Multi-Frame
Describe TA protocol or practice at your institution.	Structural
a. Do responses vary related to students, faculty, & staff?	Structural
b. Is the protocol based on a specific TA model or best practice?	Structural
c. Are you willing/able to provide a digital copy of the protocol(s) or, if applicable, TA policy?	Structural
Tell me about the challenges/successes of leading a TAT.	Multi-Frame
How do you maintain team engagement? Individuals? Team?	Human Resource
Tell me about professional development for team members.	Multi-Frame
Without revealing identities, tell me about a time the TAT:	
a. Implemented prevention strategies	Multi-Frame
b. Implemented intervention strategies	Multi-Frame
c. If applicable, implemented postvention strategies	Multi-Frame
Thinking about examples shared, what would you change?	Political
How do you define success?	Symbolic
How do you operationalize success?	Multi-Frame
Is there anything else you would like to share?	Multi-Frame

Note. multi-frame reflects two or more frames.

Interviews

Interviews are a conversation with a purpose to help answer the research question (Creswell, 2014; Dexter, 1970; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semi-structured interviews helped me to better understand the participants' experiences and perspectives leading a TAT and how they make meaning from those experiences (Seidman, 2013). Interviews can capture data that cannot be observed such as feelings and how participants interpret the world around them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Patton (2015) said that interviews help to find what we cannot directly observe and ultimately "allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 426).

I conducted semi-structured interviews with each interview lasting approximately 40–75 minutes in duration. I recorded and conducted all interviews synchronously via a virtual video platform (e.g., Zoom). Strengths of virtual interviews include the elimination of geographic constraints and ease of video recording; weaknesses include technical (equipment/connection) difficulties and confidentiality concerns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Salmons, 2015). Advances in virtual platforms and an increase of their use since the global pandemic now allow researchers to readily interview participants with ease and security (Swerzenski, 2021). Semi-structured interviews best served this study as they allowed for open-ended questions and more flexibility during the interview process (Creswell, 2014). I used a constructivist epistemology by co-constructing the data through asking good questions, minimizing my bias, and member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Roulston, 2010).

Quality interview questions can yield rich, meaningful data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I developed questions that evoked experience, behaviors, opinions, values, feelings, and knowledge as well as sensory questions about what participants saw, heard, etc. (Patton, 2015). I included demographic questions to advance my understanding of the

participants and their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). I also employed probing questions as needed during interviews to further explore a question, response, or topic (Seidman, 2013). See Appendix F for the interview protocol. As the researcher, and a peer in the field of threat assessment, I kept my biases in check and avoided leading, yes/no, and why questions; knowing my background in higher education and threat assessment might cause participants to feel pressured to respond in a particular way or feel interrogated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There was also the possibility that participants would under or overshare knowing my role on a TAT.

A pilot of the interview protocol was conducted with individuals serving on IHE TATs who may not meet the criteria for study (e.g., they have not served on the current team for a minimum of one year) and others who may have previously served on a TAT. Pilot interviews allowed me to practice interviewing as well as test and refine my interview questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). A pilot of my interview protocol helped ensure quality questions. I was also mindful of how I framed probing questions. I regularly communicate with faculty and staff on difficult subject matter given my role in human resources and on the TAT via investigation interviews, case review, and daily communications. Therefore, I have experience navigating interviews and asking probing or exploratory questions.

Last, I took descriptive, reflective field notes during and immediately after interviews to check my biases and further familiarize myself with the data. This was important in my efforts to center the participants' voices. Doing so also added to the integrity of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Document Analysis

I engaged in document analysis of "written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 4). This included documents such as written policies, protocols, any material relevant to TATs, or other public records. If an institution had a formal policy or website dedicated to threat assessment, I accessed the documents via institutional websites. Another means for accessing team documents was from the participants. The documents and records provided historical context and process details that I may not have obtained from the interviews. I analyzed the documents, when available, to gain a foundational knowledge for each team's process before conducting interviews and coding the data. The document analysis supplemented the interview data.

Data Analysis

For this study, data collection and analysis were concurrent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A basic qualitative research study was ideal to conduct in-depth interviews, review documents, and analyze the lived experiences of those who lead TATs. The constant comparative method is an inductive and comparative method commonly used in qualitative research to identify similarities, differences, and patterns in the data to generate findings (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, my analysis began with the first document and continually evolved throughout the entire study. This was done through careful data organization and management, coding, and created themes.

Data Organization

The process of data analysis is "the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it" (Flick, 2014, p. 5). For analysis to

be ongoing and meaningful, the data must be organized from the beginning. First, I read the documents provided by each institution. While comparing those documents, I made notes in the margins, highlighting similarities and circling any notable differences. I took field notes from any observations during interviews and reviewed them after each interview. Conducting document analysis before and after each interview allowed me to compare what was stated in the interview to what is identified in the policy, protocol, or website. These often aligned, affirming what TAT leaders shared.

After the document analysis, I transcribed and analyzed each interview before proceeding to the next interview. I reviewed each transcript multiple times to become familiar with the data and compared my notes to the notes from the completed interviews. This practice informed future interviews and helped cultivate themes, gaps, and other findings for analysis and member checking (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). I collected and analyzed enough data to draw necessary conclusions and stopped at the point of saturation, when further data collection did not produce value-added insights (Flick, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Coding

I used a coding process to organize the data and easily retrieve specific data (Saldaña, 2016; Strauss, 1987). Coding is the process of synthesizing data into segments of information to make meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Before I began coding, I considered the story I am trying to tell and created codes using words and colors that helped answer my research questions; these were *a priori* codes or pre-set codes (Gibbs, 2018; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). I created the *a priori* codes based on the research

question, interview questions, and theoretical framework. I included a table with *a priori* codes (see Table 6).

Table 6

A Priori Codes

A Priori Codes
Structural
Human Resources
Symbolic
Political
Expectations
Training

The theoretical framework for this study was Bolman and Deal's (2021) organizational four-frame model; the frames that served as codes are structural, human resources, symbolic, and political. The *a priori* codes served as categories or ideas, although I created other codes as data was collected and analyzed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Codes were compiled into a separate master code spreadsheet for reference as I reviewed each case transcript and document(s) (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also maintained a clean copy of all transcripts and documents.

I used open coding to code the data. Open coding means that I am open to anything that could emerge from the data and will group similar open codes for more analytical coding and meaning making (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Open coding ensured I was open to categories or ideas as I identified them in addition to any *a priori* codes. To keep the open codes

manageable, I grouped codes into larger categories, or themes, when appropriate with axial coding (Charmaz, 2014; Jones et al., 2014). All coded data was placed in a new document called a case record and included the original codes, line numbers, pseudonyms, etc. for reference (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This assisted with meaning-making and synthesizing the findings in an organized and inductive way (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014). The number of categories emerged from the data analysis process; however, the goal was to synthesize the data to reflect a smaller number of relevant themes for the findings (Creswell, 2014). I inductively organized my data through coding and deductively interpreted my findings using my theoretical framework (Chinn, 2013; Creswell, 2014).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research achieves trustworthiness through thoughtful and rigorous research design and establishing credibility (Given, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I developed trustworthiness through journaling, triangulation, member checking, rich description, and peer debriefing. Trustworthiness was further established via ethical considerations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I kept a reflective daily journal throughout the study. I took notes to capture my reflections as the researcher, emerging themes, ideas, edits, and modifications to the methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The reflective journal also helped me reflect in real time and make meaning of what I read and/or heard (Silverman, 2016). The journal notes assisted with triangulation.

Triangulation is used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of a study. I analyzed interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents to generate consistent findings and reduce my bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). The use of multiple data collection methods has been described as multiple methods triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Comparing and

analyzing the interview transcripts with documents ensured the findings were not based on a single method or source and confirmed information shared during interviews (Patton, 2015).

I also engaged in member checking to develop trustworthiness and enhance the authenticity of my transcripts and interpretation (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I sent a copy of the interview transcripts and my preliminary findings and themes, to participants to confirm their responses were accurately captured. Six participants responded to member checking without comments or feedback. One participant provided feedback with track changes for clarity. Member checking was done at various stages of the research process to ensure accurate data collection and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). This decreased the chances I misinterpreted what was shared and allowed for fact-checking and updating of data by the participants (Maxwell, 2013; Nobel & Heale, 2019). I also adequately engaged in data collection until the point of saturation and conducted a review for discrepant data to support alternate explanations (Patton, 2015).

I provided rich description which facilitates transferability (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Transferability is "the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be generalized or transferred to other situations" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 265). I attempted to collect sufficient, rich, descriptive data to generalize, or apply the findings more broadly (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The reliability, or dependability, of qualitative research means the study findings are consistent with the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used peer debriefing, another form of triangulation, to develop trustworthiness (Creswell, 2014). I met periodically with my dissertation chair to review my work and discuss the data analysis process, as well as the findings. Peer review with my dissertation committee is another way I ensured a

knowledgeable review to enhance trustworthiness. Throughout this study I maintained an awareness of my individual experiences as they could bias the data analysis and interpretations of others' lived experiences.

Finally, I kept a reflexive journal to establish an audit trail. An audit trail in qualitative research provides details about data collection, interpretation, and how decisions are made (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used the audit trail to maintain my notes and log how I arrived at my findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 252). An audit trail may help others replicate the study and helped me demonstrate how I arrived at the findings in the most effective way (Dey, 1993; Nobel & Heale, 2019; Richards, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

A researcher properly accounting for ethical considerations fosters the integrity of a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The trustworthiness of a study can be connected to the trustworthiness of the researcher (Patton, 2015). For documents I obtained public, institutional documents (e.g., policies) or documents submitted by participants (e.g., team protocols or handbooks). The assumption was that much of the documentation was either publicly posted or willingly submitted for research purposes; thus, minimizing ethical issues such as authenticity or accuracy of the document. As a precaution, documents and data were stored in multiple places (i.e., on a laptop and jump drive). Sources were saved in a reference manager system (i.e., Mendeley) and stored on a secure cloud for easy synchronization and retrieval.

IRB approval, informed consent, and the use of pseudonyms safeguarded against ethical issues for this study which involved human subjects. Throughout this study I provided clear research objectives, transcripts, and preliminary findings to participants. By doing so, I built rapport, trust, and even checked my work. These efforts addressed the rights, needs, and privacy

of voluntary participants (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, I remained aware of my role, biases, and how that might affect relationships of the people, not simply the study participants (Tracy, 2013). While interviewing participants about their lived experiences serving on TATs, I was respectful and ethical in my approach (Stake, 2005). Threat assessment and prevention can be challenging and emotional. This study required me to ask participants probing questions about sensitive topics related to their work (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Spradley, 1980). Therefore, I acknowledged that my insider/outsider issues and reflexivity are also important to note for the integrity of this study.

Insider/Outsider Status and Reflexivity

The integrity of any study can be affected by the relationship the researcher has with the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For me, this included the possible effect of insider/outsider issues, my leadership role on a TAT, my professional experiences with threat assessment, and personal experiences with gun violence. My reflexivity helped me acknowledge my status, perspective, biases, and any assumptions that may affect the study or me as the researcher (Maxwell, 2013). My role as a current leader of a TAT makes me an "insider" in terms of threat assessment and case management in threat assessment in the SEC (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, I am an outsider to specific institutions or teams. I used my leadership role on a TAT and professional experiences with threat assessment to examine and interpret the data. This lens also informed data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I have served on a TAT for much of my career and by extension view threat assessment as valuable work for the safety and well-being of a campus community. I was mindful of this potential bias during interviews and read transcripts multiple times to ensure the participants' voices exceeded mine when sharing their experiences. Although insider status and my role can

build rapport with other threat assessment professionals (study participants), it may also affect their responses to questions. I was clear about my research objectives throughout the study to minimize questions and maximize transparency. I wanted to honor the nature of qualitative research and conduct research with people, not on people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A researcher and the research process can be thought of as interacting through reflexivity (Probst & Berenson, 2014). One purpose of threat assessment is to mitigate risk and prevent tragedy such as an active shooter. Questions about the work of the teams could evoke emotions from participants who may have personally experienced trauma or distress in the workplace or otherwise. Outside of work, I have been threatened with a weapon where an attacker aimed and fired a firearm at me. Participants may not know that I have direct experience with gun violence. Although it was not a driving factor for my interest in this study, I recognized it could affect my reactions to participant responses. Therefore, I was mindful of this possibility entering each interview. By acknowledging my status, experiences, and opinions throughout the study, I engaged in a more robust analytical approach to developing the findings.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I present the research questions that guided this study. I discussed the rationale for this basic qualitative research study and outlined the research design, participants, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, insider/outsider status, and my reflexivity. Data collection and analysis explored how TAT leaders describe and operationalize success.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In Chapter 4, I present the experiences of individuals who lead TATs in higher education, and how they describe and operationalize success. To accomplish this, I interviewed nine TAT leaders from U.S. higher education institutions (see Table 3). I also conducted document analysis for the nine participating institutions (see Table 4). Through the document analysis, interviews, and using Bolman and Deal's (2021) organizational frames model, I identified four primary themes: *establishing and maintaining norms, acquiring and leveraging resources, recognizing the human element,* and *commitment to protecting campus* (see Table 5). This chapter begins with the findings of the document analysis across institutions. Then I highlight four prevalent themes from the study and the chapter ends with a summary. Document analysis was the next step in this study.

Document Analysis

For this study I engaged in document analysis of written and digital material relevant to threat assessment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which included written policies and procedures, TAT webpages, and reporting options. If a participant institution had a formal, public policy or website dedicated to threat assessment, I accessed the documents via institutional websites. Another means of accessing TAT-related documents was from the participants. I analyzed the documents when available, to gain a foundational knowledge for each team's process before conducting interviews and coding the data. The documents supported the participants' responses and provided details the interviews did not.

I reviewed the websites for the nine participating institutions and identified two with publicly available threat assessment policies. The policies indicated the institution should

establish a TAT, or in one case, a threat assessment office. Although the remaining seven participant institutions did not have a formal, public policy specific to threat assessment. However, they did have other safety policies that addressed threats and reporting. One participant shared during the interview that a new threat assessment policy is currently under review and not yet available which aligned with the document analysis. All nine institutions had a web presence for care and resilience, reporting instructions, and/or threat assessment. However, only three institutions listed threat assessment information about the team directly on their webpage whereas others marketed the reporting options for care and resilience in a variety of ways and kept the TAT and protocols less prominent to the campus community.

Finally, I reviewed team protocols from two institutions who also had the process on their institutional website. Both protocols outlined report intake, assessment, and case management steps that the TAT follows. I was unable to obtain written team protocols from the other seven institutions, neither from public websites nor directly from the participants. During the interviews, all participants indicated the use of a model or rubric, or combination of assessment tools; however, none were provided for document analysis. The model or rubric served as the protocol in all cases. Furthermore, participants shared using more than one model before settling on their current model or combination of tools. Although participant expectations centered around team norms, it also had implications for policy and institutional norms to a degree. For a summary of the document analysis findings see Table 4. In the next section, I discuss the qualitative themes and subthemes created through document analysis, interviews, and Bolman and Deal's (2021) organizational frames model (see Table 5).

Table 3

Participant and Institution Pseudonyms

Participant pseudonym	Institution	TAT Role
Apple	Sun College	Director
Dogwood	Mercury State University	Chair
Fig	Venus University	Cochair
Ginkgo	Earth University	Chair
Mango	Mars College	Chair
Maple	Jupiter State University	Leading member
Olive	Saturn University	Chair
Tulip	Uranus University	Chair
Turpentine	Neptune College	Chair

Table 4

Document Analysis

Participant institution	Threat assessment policy	TAT webpage	Other care/resilience webpage	Reporting information & tools	TAT protocol
Apple	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not available
Dogwood	No	No	Yes	Yes	Not available
Fig	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ginkgo	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mango	No	No	Yes	Yes	Not available
Maple	No	No	Yes	Yes	Not available
Olive	No	No	Yes	Yes	Not available
Tulip	No	No	Yes	Yes	Not available
Turpentine	No	No	Yes	Yes	Not available

Table 5

Themes

Theme	Subtheme
Establishing and maintaining norms	Team dynamics, membership, engagement
Acquiring and leveraging resources	Funding, models & tools, experts & partnerships
Recognizing the human element	
Commitment to protecting campus	

Themes

In this section, I present four themes I identified from this basic qualitative study: establishing and maintaining norms, acquiring and leveraging resources, recognizing the human element, and commitment to protecting campus. The themes reflect the participants' experiences leading TATs in higher education and answer the research questions of how they describe and operationalize success. I used Bolman and Deal's (2021) organizational frames model as the theoretical framework to guide the study and cultivate themes. Although each theme connects to a primary frame from Bolman and Deal's model, all themes intersected among the four frames for best practice of multi-disciplinary teams. I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 5. The next four sections highlight the thematic findings. The first theme created was establishing and maintaining norms.

Establishing and Maintaining Norms

Establishing and maintaining norms was the first theme identified. Participants described their individual and shared experiences related to establishing and maintaining team norms from

the leadership perspective. I present three subthemes to illustrate their experiences—team dynamics, membership, and engagement.

Team Dynamics. Team dynamics was the first subtheme identified from the data. Team dynamics were uniquely described by multiple participants as collaborative silos. They were considered collaborative because members worked together on threat assessment cases as a collection of diverse subject-matter-experts. Yet they were siloed, since their paths did not typically cross otherwise (e.g., day-to-day duties of campus police vs. dean of student's office vs. human resources, etc.). This together, yet separate dynamic presented challenges for leaders to establish team cohesion and an environment of trusting partnerships. Apple, who has worked in higher education for 25 years, described her team dynamics.

> Whenever you assemble a team, you want to assemble a team that's experts in their field that has experience working with students. A team that's comfortable enough knowing each other that you can challenge someone's opinion without being offended. Everybody needs to be comfortable enough with one [another] to say, "No." but also to say, "okay, we trust you, you're the lead on this one." And that's the challenge of the chair, to lead those conversations where everyone feels comfortable enough to speak their piece and not let one or two departments railroad the conversation.

Participants also noted volume of cases and pace can be a challenge for maintaining a healthy team dynamic. Olive, who has worked in higher education for 23 years, said, "Fortunately, our caseload is such, it allows us to do that [review all cases at every meeting]. And not everybody, I'm sure, has that luxury, but we do." For periods of high case volume, Fig noted, "We are communicating daily multiple times a day" and acknowledged the acquisition of a case coordinator was helpful organization and communication with TAT members. Each participant

acknowledged the work of the TAT is in addition to their regular institutional roles. However, despite the limited availability (for TAT meetings) of team members, participants described their team dynamics as respectful and collegial with strong relationships. Ginkgo, who has worked in higher education for 40 years and led a TAT for 15, echoed this sentiment:

> Successes, I would say, [has] been that as a team, we have built a pretty cohesive perspective and process. And among ourselves, I think we communicate. We're pretty open. I think we've always been able to respond appropriately. Nothing's perfect, but I think we've developed a really solid process through the relationships that we have.

The importance of building relationships and trust among the team was described by participants as necessary for this work and challenging since they do not work together consistently. Even with good relationships, threat assessment caseload can create a divide. Mango, who has worked in higher education for 25 years and led a TAT for 10.5 years, described team dynamics and caseloads at their institution.

> There's still a limited number of people that kind of carry the lion's share of the work, and maybe that's normal and appropriate by virtue of their role. But I just wonder how others are doing it. If others have found more ways to engage their members even more.

Participants shared a desire for more engagement and for each team member to know their voice matters. This was a driving factor in leadership's intentionality around assigning action items, speaking points on the agenda, and making space for member feedback. Mango continued,

> So, we try to create an atmosphere where people feel confident [in] whatever role they hold on campus. Whatever seat they occupy around the BIT [or TAT] conference table. That their voice matters. Their perspective matters, and we want to bring as much data and insight to bear on every case as possible.

Another aspect of team dynamics that emerged was the number and type of teams at each institution. There were one, two, or in one case three TATs at an institution: one for students, one for employees, and one for others (e.g., not students or employees). However, most institutions had two TATs—one for students and one for employees/others. The remaining institutions had one TAT. Most participants stated their institution/team consistently debated how many teams their institution should have and noted institution size, protocol consistency, and meeting the needs of constituents as factors. To mitigate case volume and provide care, each institution had some version of a support team that conducted early intervention or case management prior to escalation of a case to the TAT. These teams were described as behavioral intervention team (BIT), employee behavioral intervention team (EBIT), behavioral assessment team (BAT), behavioral risk assessment committee (BRAC), and student behavioral issues committee (SBIC), to name a few. These teams addressed lower-level cases (e.g., nonthreat) from a care and resilience lens before escalating them to the TAT as needed. Conversely, the TAT would send cases to these teams as situations de-escalated. Tulip, who has served on a TAT for 11 years, shared, "So instead of two teams, it'd be maybe one team specifically for threat assessment, and then arms of teams to continue the care and support or whatever the case kind of calls for."

The dynamics between TATs and other support teams, such as a BIT, were also noted. Fig, whose institution has one TAT, described their TAT in this way, "our team is kind of a BIT-TAT team." They said, "when I think of success, I think of a team that is respectful, collegial, and invested." Whereas Olive, whose institution has a BIT and TAT, spoke about cross-team dynamics, "[There can be] a lot of frustration among our team members in not feeling like they have all of the information they need to have involving a case once it involves the [TAT]." Other participants shared that dynamics between teams presented a challenge if communication was

lacking. Frustration sometimes arose when it came to who owned a case. Members might also become fatigued if they serve on the BIT and TAT which happened in some instances of membership overlap. Accordingly, participants emphasized the TAT leader as responsible for addressing these issues with team members.

Membership. Membership was the next subtheme identified under establishing and maintaining norms. TAT team size ranged from four to 14 members and varied as some institutions had proxies or a backup for certain members. Participants described the TAT leadership role as a helpful partner to all members in preparation for meetings. Maple, a leading member of the Jupiter State University TAT, commented,

> I think too that [engagement] ebbs and flows depending on time of year. There are certain positions that have a backup. So, we know that our director of the counseling center…that sometimes the associate director comes, sometimes the assistant director. And I think my perception and working with them, they do a great job of making sure that whoever is going to be at the table that day is ready to go.

Departmental representation on TATs varied by institution. The units/offices common to all included dean of students' office or student affairs, campus police, and student counseling center. Legal counsel was consistently described as an advisory unit to the TAT, who joined meetings regularly or as needed. Variations in membership representation (e.g., as either a standing member, ad hoc member, or partner to one or more TATs in each institution) included Title IX, human resources, faculty affairs, institutional equity, office of the ombuds, student housing, student conduct, and student disability services. Only two participants noted additional partnerships with the international student service office for intervention with cases involving international students. Olive stated the Saturn University TAT successfully identified a pattern

and implemented a prevention strategy to support international students in partnership with the international student service office.

> We've had sort of a rash of concern over international students and issues that could be considered maybe sexual harassment where it, it's more along the lines of boundary setting because Title IX really truly never had to become involved in them. They took cases, did review, but never had to do formal investigations. But we [the TAT] started noticing that there was enough of a pattern that we began working with the international student service office to provide some additional information for their orientation [for international students].

Likewise, Turpentine added that Neptune College has a high number of international students and partners across campus for intervention needs and "there's a variety of folks that have contribution points towards [international] students in situations [where] they need extra intervention." Effective partnerships and communication between members during and outside TAT meetings was a prevalent norm facilitated by the TAT leader. Olive surmised,

> And so, it's created a lot of communication back and forth between departments, which is helpful. Things like between my role and student affairs, checking in with things on [the] human resources side and then to be able to check in with contacts in the police department, etc. That's been a success in terms of our teamwork and cooperation.

Engagement was the next subtheme identified. It is grounded in setting expectations and holding TAT team members accountable.

Engagement. Engagement is the third subtheme under establishing and maintaining norms. One common engagement challenge among participants was establishing expectations for meeting frequency that met the case volume load and team goals. Mango noted the time of year

can dictate meetings, “Sometimes in the summer we won’t meet every week, but in the school year we’re pretty much meeting weekly.” Fig even mentioned efforts between standing meetings to meet demand, “We’re trying to send out information, get information, and make some decisions sometimes between team meetings.” Seven teams meet weekly to review cases, one team meets monthly, and one meets as needed. All teams meet as needed for new or escalated cases. Participants noted the volume of cases and cadence of meetings, if high, could cause burnout, or if low, could cause disengagement. Participants shared challenges TAT leaders encounter to maintain reasonable meeting expectations. Mango commented,

> Up until about 2 years ago, there was one team, and we would just sort of ad-lib in those employee cases. Well now, we actually have an EBIT [TAT] and BIT [TAT] totally separate [but] still some of that same crossover [of members]. The downside is that group [EBIT] still doesn’t meet that often, so they really still aren’t in a good rhythm and weekly kind of workflow. So, it’s always a little clunky I think when it does meet, but it’s doing good work.

Meeting norms varied by institution and the total number of teams, but in all cases, meetings were viewed as a time to reinforce roles and responsibilities. Another challenge was establishing and maintaining expectations and accountability for members’ roles and responsibilities, especially when cases did not involve all represented office equally. For example, if faculty or staff were not involved in a case the faculty affairs TAT member or human resources TAT member might not be as engaged. There was shared intentionality around establishing the agenda and assigning action items to increase team engagement. Apple responded,

> So, the challenge of leading [the TAT] is keeping everyone focused on what’s important in the meeting because you’re talking about situations that may not involve everyone in

> the meeting [at that time]. It is [often that] different members [of the team] who actually know more about the situation than I do because it originated in their office, or they have expertise in it. They're leading that discussion [on the agenda]. So pretty much everyone in the meeting is going to speak at some point in time. That makes them kind of engage with the agenda and be on their toes with the information they present.

Participants also discussed setting a purposeful agenda beyond casework to further establish expectations. Turpentine, who chairs the Neptune College TAT, noted the importance of taking time with the team to seek process improvements and conduct or identify professional development opportunities during meetings.

> Operationalizing success is going to be contingent on continued critique and improvement over the process. There is a pulling together. So that builds some sort of accountability and team feel, but I'm not sitting there wasting their time and we're trying to build in things that could also be viewed as professional development for them.

Most participants were grateful for actively involved team members who understood the expectations of their unique TAT role. Participants said disengagement is rare in this type of work and usually seems to stem primarily from unclear expectations. Fig, who has served on a TAT for 14 years, described an incident of low responsiveness that was remedied with simple but direct communication.

> Only recently have I had one member who wasn't returning emails or responding as quickly as would be helpful. And so, I had a one-on-one meeting with him and just said, "Here's the expectation and here's what I need from you." And I don't know, I think maybe he just didn't know that. And so, [once] we had that conversation, then he was able to do those things. So that was helpful.

Consistent with Fig's experience, Mango described ways to proactively clarify expectations and accountability to include periodic one-on-one meetings with members to check in.

> I think [that] was a good individual level engagement because I went to those meetings with a couple of purposes. One is like, "Hey, I just want to get your thoughts on how it's going and do you see any ways we could improve?" And then also just want to make sure that they really do understand their role and how important their perspective is. And I wanted to make sure they just technically knew how to do all the things in Maxient, the [student conduct case management] system.

TAT leaders meeting with members one-on-one was considered an effective way for leaders to acquire team feedback related to team norms. Fig had new team members interview existing members to bolster engagement, "I think that starting out that way has helped with the engagement because they're learning about the process in general, the process at [Venus University], and then they're meeting with the other individual team members."

Recognizing and understanding team dynamics, membership, and engagement were subthemes for establishing and maintaining TAT norms. The strength and health of team dynamics influenced the work of the TAT. Selecting the right team members, setting expectations, and holding those members accountable were necessary and vital for success. Summarizing roles and responsibilities in a written protocol or handbook was preferred, but participants acknowledged once established they were rarely used, and the risk rubric tools were leveraged more often.

Acquiring and Leveraging Resources

The second theme created was acquiring and leveraging resources. Participants discussed successes and challenges related to funding, tools, and partnerships. As a result, the following subthemes emerged: funding, tools, and experts and partnerships.

Funding. Funding was the first subtheme created as participants quickly referenced financial support of for TAT work. Most participants confirmed their TAT has some funding, or budget, although one participant said there is no consistent funding for threat assessment. All participants expressed a desire for more or consistent funds. Sources of funding varied by institution. Two institutions noted the president's office supported the TAT whereas the rest noted financial support from the dean of students' office, especially for student-focused TATs. They also shared that a variety of offices/units contributed to TATs based on membership or team focus. For example, departments such as campus police, human resources, or faculty affairs contributed to learning opportunities for members to advance their knowledge in threat assessment and case management. Modest funding was used for TAT marketing which mainly focused on care and resilience resources and awareness of reporting options. Dogwood, who has chaired the TAT at Mercury State University, indicated part of the budget was used for informational folders for faculty and staff. Additional financial successes were shared by several participants and included staffing an intern, training/educational opportunities, and resources on active shooter preparedness. However, the primary budget goal was to hire a full-time administrator/staff for threat management.

Three participants said they were able to fund a full-time or part-time position to coordinate threat assessment cases, such as a TAT coordinator or threat manager. This funding allowed teams to better organize, track, and operationalize case work. Acquiring this position

was described as a significant success. Fig commented, “So now that we have this coordinator role, we’ve been able to do more things [like] making timelines.” Whereas, Turpentine noted, their threat manager “came [to Neptune College] with a wealth of information.” Of the remaining six participants, five discussed how acquiring funding specifically for a permanent case manager type role would be ideal. Tulip surmised, “What would be helpful on our team would be to have a case manager that was coordinating everything, [because] all of us have other primary jobs that are full-time jobs that take up a lot of time.” Besides a dedicated role for threat assessment, participants agreed the next highest cost was the investment in team training opportunities. However, a challenge was deciding when and what to leverage. Apple noted “We [threat assessment professionals] spend the most money on the least likely scenario.” Participants agreed that institutions struggle to balance overspending on the least likely, but worse, scenario and maintaining day-to-day safety. Investments in the best tools, model, or expert advice was considered a major expense. Leveraging the right model for the institution was forefront for all participants.

Tools. Tools comprised the second subtheme under acquiring and leveraging resources. One common tool for all institutions was the use of a case management system. The Maxient system, used for student case management, was consistently used by all institutions. In some cases, participants noted using an additional database or case management system. Dogwood, a TAT leader for 13 years, said Mercury State University used the Awareity system solely for TATs and case management. This was unique as no other institution had a sole purpose system. Other resources participants referenced included an employee assistance program, LiveSafe application, online reporting forms, and hotlines for students and employees. Participants described the use of hotlines as a long-standing valuable tool for reporting concerns. Tulip

shared, “The very first and probably most important strategy that was introduced many years ago was our behavior concerns advice line.”

Participants considered memberships in threat assessment associations as a valuable tool for TATs, given the resources available through the associations. Associations referenced included The Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP) and The National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment (NABITA). The TAT leader and, in some cases select teammates, were ATAP members. When funding was an issue, Turpentine shared, “We’ve [dean of students office] offered to cover folks’ memberships on ATAP.” Dogwood responded, “I’m a member, and several of our teammates are members of ATAP. A lot of the training we get is through ATAP.” Similarly, Fig concluded “A lot of us are members of ATAP, and so we can do some trainings for free through that.” Participants found the resources available through professional associations invaluable.

In addition to using effective tools, another challenge was finding the right model, or risk rubric, to meet institutional and TAT needs. Models discussed by participants included SIGMA Threat Management, the NABITA Model, the WAVR-21 Instrument (Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk), The Cawood Assessment and Response Grid, and the CTAP-25 tool (Communications Threat Assessment Protocol; Awareity, 2025; CTAP-25, 2025; Deisinger et al., 2008; eWAVR Partners, 2025; NABITA, 2025). Some institutions leveraged only one model whereas others used more than one, or some combination to create their own process for threat assessment. Training on a risk rubric was costly for TATs and difficult to maintain as teams experienced turnover. Ultimately participants were aligned on the premise that a risk rubric was necessary for best practices, but that institutions and TATs, had to find the right tool or combination of tools. Although there are popular and effective models available, there is not one

clear model for threat assessment in higher education based on the findings of this study. One factor that often-led institutions to a preferred model was subject-matter experts.

Experts and Partners. The final subtheme created under acquiring and leveraging resources was experts and partners. people, both internal and external to the institution, served as expert resources according to participants. The external subject-matter experts named included Gene Deisinger, Marisa Randazzo, and Jim Cawood. Dr. Deisinger is a nationally recognized expert in threat assessment and provides consultation and training to IHE (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). He was mentioned most often by participants as a source of knowledge. Marisa Randazzo is another national expert on threat assessment and targeted violence who spent 10 years with the Secret Service (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). Mango and Ginkgo both said their teams used some of Randazzo's material. Jim Cawood has worked in threat and violence risk assessment, behavioral analysis, and violence prevention for over 25 years (Awareity, 2025). Some participant institutions invited these experts to campus to lead learning opportunities and provide feedback on current protocols. Fig spoke about investing in expert feedback, "But it's helpful when Gene [Deisinger] has come, he's watched our process and given us feedback on our process. He's [Deisinger] done trainings and then audits for us."

Regular investment in expert resources proved to be a challenge for participants due to cost. A more economical resource to leverage for threat assessment and case management was internal partnerships. Participants leveraged senior administration to promote care and resilience information to the campus community as a prevention strategy. Turpentine shared how their institution created a threat assessment "roadshow" to increase campus awareness and knowledge.

> We've done a lot of roadshows this past year, just going to the faculty and staff and department heads and leadership to let them know about the processes that we've created.

> The roadshow, it made us realize we need to go out [more] and get in front of department heads and assistant associate deans who often have to handle some of those HR behavioral things with staff and faculty.

Maple also spoke about operationalizing success by making campus leaders aware of the work of the TAT, but not in an overt way.

> There is so much behind the scenes and yet there's a lot that's taking place and a lot of training that does need to happen. And so how do you leverage that success that no one really knows about to say, "Hey, we're doing all of this and we need to get in there to make sure that we're talking at the undergraduate dean's meetings so that they all know what's going on." So, how do you do that in a delicate way that it's like this work is important and campus needs to know about it, but you may never know [what happens in case management].

In addition to partnering with administrators, campus partnerships proved to be helpful intervention cases and postvention efforts of the TAT. Ginkgo characterized the balance of coordinated response efforts with campus partners:

> The other thing I think is it's important is that with students and with staff, we have mechanisms and means by which we can respond. We have HR staff, for example, who are, that's their designated role that is to assist faculty and staff. If there's some sort of difficulty, there's a process. And with students, in addition to threat assessment, there's a student of concern process. They have their own form.

Mango echoed a similar sentiment that it takes a concerted effort to support a person of concern and discussed postvention partnerships.:

> So, the interesting thing for us, I think we do some good work in the postvention space to care for impacted communities in the residence hall wing, the fraternity chapter, the student organization, whatever it is to make sure that we're following up to care for others who've been impacted by that kind of a crisis [suicide]. It's not really BIT [or TAT] as a whole, it's doing that work. It's members of BIT, it's the dean of students, it's the case managers, it's the counseling center, but it's not like the entire (BIT/TAT] team is managing that after action work.

Leveraging partners to succeed was a common strategy. Ultimately, the management of resources was a team effort and did not solely fall to the leader.

Although acquiring resources was considered a challenge for participants, it also presented opportunities to leverage funds, tools, experts, and partnerships in creative ways. Limited funding was found to be a barrier for TATs, but campus partners were often helpful in offering or securing resources as needed. Leaders and TATs often had to determine the best combination of tools and training/education for their team and institution. There is no preferred model for threat assessment in higher education based on the study findings. However, participants confirmed that acquiring and leveraging resources was paramount for this work. The next theme highlights another vital aspect of operationalizing threat assessment, the people.

Recognizing the Human Element

Recognizing the human element was the third theme identified. All participants discussed the human element of threat assessment. Fig summarized threat assessment, "We always kind of say it's a little bit of an art and a little bit of a science put together." The effect of threat assessment on people was prevalent among participants. They referenced person(s) of concern, the campus community, TAT members, and TAT leaders. Participants spoke about their own

mindfulness regarding person(s) of concern. Apple discussed the term “threat assessment” and its potential impact on person(s) of concern.

> So, we [leaders] have to be very careful on how it’s presented because whenever threat assessment [the team] by virtue of their name presents something, everyone in the room assumes that person’s a threat. Oh, threat assessment’s looking at that person, he must be dangerous because threat assessment is looking at him. So, I [as leader] have to be very careful when we present information to make sure that we counterbalance the name threat assessment.

Another aspect of mindfulness for person(s) of concern was the consideration of whether to approach the person of concern or an ally first. Fig noted the importance of a strategic approach.

> Oftentimes we’re trying to weigh what we imagine a pro or con to be of talking to the person themselves, the person of concern themselves, or talking to a roommate, a parent, a spouse. We often will start those conversations with the ally, and so we’ve actually shifted. And we still have those conversations, but we’ve shifted a little bit more to kind of going in directly with here’s what our concern is.

Maple shared similar experiences connecting person(s) of concern with resources or discovering how they came to the attention of the team, asking the team where the student is connected and if they know about resources that may serve as a practical connection point. Maple admitted initiating the conversation with a student of concern can be awkward and unhelpful, “Because it can be also off-putting. If you reach out to a student, you’re like, “Oh, hey, your dad called and said all of these things.”

Participants further discussed plans for institutional outreach, whether from the TAT, BIT, or other resource and the impact on person(s) of concern. Apple commented.

> And so, I wouldn't think there is a blueprint for success other than going into each [case], treating a student like a human being, giving due process, and keeping everyone safe. If you do those three things, you can navigate what's going on and then weigh it out.

Recognizing the human element for the person(s) of concern was only the start. Participants also spoke about the campus community.

The campus community was another aspect of the human element. Participants shared the importance of analyzing potential impacts to the campus community during prevention, intervention, and postvention. Doing so often helped TATs identify potential solutions which included outcomes such as awareness campaigns with resources on domestic violence, suicide prevention, or international student support. Proper resource support was imperative as campus community members were sometimes perceived to have psychological fears associated with a situation or case. Mango stressed the importance of ensuring the campus community feels supported and informed.

> [Following a student case with dismissal] So, you've got a department secretary who was feeling really frazzled and a faculty member who was [also]. So, people felt really impacted and concerned for their [own] safety. And so, I guess I think from maybe postvention, making sure that we're [the TAT] doing our very best work to really check in on them, make sure they understand, to the extent we're able to share with them some details to try to put them at ease without divulging too much information.

He continued,

> I take responsibility for me [as leader] to want to do better work to make sure that we pay a lot of attention to impacted students, maybe if they've experienced a crisis with one of their friends. But I don't know that we do it as well, if it's maybe some faculty/staff.

> Where a disruptive student or disruptive colleague has caused a bit of a stir and they're concerned, I think maybe we [the TAT] think, "Oh, they're big boys and big girls, they can handle it. But I think we need to make sure that we do good work to check in on them and make sure they feel supported and as informed as we can let them be.

Connecting people and processes is important for recognizing the human element. Turpentine elaborated on TAT outreach opportunities to small departments.

> I think with our employee team, because it's such a big system, I think that there are gaps in connecting to some of the smaller departments and making sure that our information is out there and providing those prevention strategies and what to look for. What to be mindful of when we think about employee terminations. How are we doing that? So, I think that there's a lot of opportunities there.

The impact to campus communities, regardless of size was important to TAT leadership. However, another group's well-being that resonated with TAT leaders was the TAT itself. Participants spoke about the importance of self-care for themselves and team members. They noted ways to mitigate the heaviness of this work and to reduce the impact on team members' mental health and well-being. Mango summarized the impact of meeting content and time spent together.

> I try to keep the meetings…as though they can be heavy, but I still try to keep things lighthearted and that we try to have a good time together. We meet once a week for an hour or whatever it is because it is heavy work, and I also want to just have people enjoy the time and not make it just a meeting they don't look forward to going to because it's not run well or because it's just a bad atmosphere. And then, once in a while, we have

> done some trainings or maybe [I] bring in some treats or snacks. Something fun just to thank them as well.

Olive echoed sentiments of care and resilience for the team. “What we do is heavy. We also try to do things light and try to do [fun] things outside of our normal standard meetings.” Maple summarized the human element of a TAT from a leadership perspective.

> Individuals [on the TAT] are whole people. They’re full human beings and bring all of that to work. That is just work, [it] is one part of their full humanness. And so even though I have high responsibility, high expectations, I think it’s apparent in the work that I do with people that I work with, that I also care about them as humans and that we have open lines of communication so that we’re all on the same page as best as possible.

“Being on the same page” is essential; and therefore, participants had to consider their personal well-being. Olive described the weight of the leadership role in addition to their regular duties, “It is challenging just because of the…it is everybody’s bonus stuff.” Moreover, Olive addressed the necessity for TAT leaders to navigate challenges associated with workplace politics and “red tape” as they manage cases, “But in terms of those challenges, then you have also internal university leadership, red tape things.” Apple considered the politics of threat assessment and the struggle with the narrow focus on worst case scenarios, “I think the business of threat assessment has their priorities flipped. Yeah, you’ve got to prepare for the worst, but it’s not what people or threat assessment teams are going to deal with on a daily basis.”

Participants shared how they grappled with personal experiences accepting case outcomes. Whether positive or negative, the people and situations just stay with them. Mango had this to say about the personal impact as a leader on two cases, “I don’t know if we could have made a difference. But those couple, they kind of haunt me.” Although the personal impact

of the cases was daunting for leaders, another aspect of recognizing the human element was the unknown. According to participants *the unknown* can be scary, especially when there are potentially high stakes situations at play. Participants evaluated the unknown for cases to identify potential gaps or to reinforce the scope of the TAT. Examples of the unknown included students with an undiagnosed illness or unwillingness to register with the office of disability services. Furthermore, participants were bothered by cases where a student never exhibited behavior that raised a red flag or made on to TAT or BIT radar. Maple provided an example of student deaths by suicide and the mental challenge for TATs when there were no known signs.

> The first question we always say is, were they on our radar? I hate that. And when the answer is no, it's right. It's like, oh, okay, it wasn't anyone that we're working with. And then we're like, oh my gosh, but we didn't, how could we have [connected with the student to prevent this]?

Participants also noted the larger the institution the higher the likelihood of more issues that could go unnoticed. They acknowledged that TATs are unable to intervene if they do not know about an issue. The challenge ultimately became getting the campus community engaged with reporting tools. Last, participants discussed not knowing where person(s) of concern end up, in other words, what happened to them after a crisis. Fig asked, "Is it successful that the incident didn't happen? I mean, feels successful. And I've often wondered what has happened to [that person]." Mango further elaborated, expressing concern for a student who left the institution.

> They're no longer our student. We don't owe an obligation technically to continue to check in and provide support. We can't provide counseling resources anymore. They're not our student. But I wonder like, gosh, was there anybody else? Could we have just as a courtesy, stayed in contact with the parent a little longer to just check in?

Recognizing the human element of this work was considered impactful and the unknowns difficult to accept.

Recognizing the human element prevailed as an undeniable aspect of threat assessment, largely due to the effects on people and the unknown. Participants concluded that for any TAT to succeed the human element must remain a high priority when strategizing a case. Groups of people effected, included person(s) of concern, the campus community, TAT members, and TAT leaders. The unknowns presented challenges for leaders and proved difficult to navigate or even forget once a case was closed. Participants were keenly aware of the human element in potentially high stakes situations. They acknowledged the stress that was evoked but quickly pivoted to why they chose to do this work. Thus, shifting to a commitment to protecting campus.

Commitment to Protecting Campus

The fourth theme created was the commitment to protecting campus. Participants were all goal-oriented and eager to protect and serve students, faculty, and staff. Analysis revealed leadership qualities in tandem with personal and professional motivation comprised a commitment to protecting campus. Participants shared the leadership qualities they possess and that they considered important for TAT success. These qualities and characteristics included leading by example, creating space for critical feedback, building trust, empowering others, collaboration, and humility. Participants frequently described their leadership style as "collaborative, facilitative, or trusting." Whereas others, described their leadership style as "direct, authentic, or inclusive." They also discussed threat assessment communications and their ability to promote the work of the TAT in delicate but bold way. Maple noted that mitigating high stakes cases so they do not reach the president's desk is a measure of success.

> We do all of this work pretty much behind the scenes. You don't want it to be public. And I think that's success. When you are doing all of these things and impacting the day-to-day life of so many students and getting them the resources that they need so that they are able to graduate, that it hasn't risen to the level that it's across the president's desk.

Participants shared a desire for the team to excel in this highly emotional and volatile work. Participants were motivated by a variety of factors and characterized their motivation in unique and overlapping ways. Olive kept professional responsibility and an institutional duty of care for the student as a top priority. Moreover, to fulfill that duty, he was driven by a continuous thirst for knowledge, to learn more about threat assessment and to elevate the practices at Saturn University.

> Once I took on leadership of that area, I really had to think about what motivates me to be good at this. And that sort of responsibility for students for campus was a big thing. And so that's sort of what I used to drive my ongoing interest in learning that [threat assessment] and being good at that.

Whereas Apple desired to protect the institution with due process and compassion.

> Our threat assessment, our BIT team, I think it is really, really efficient. It's not perfect, but I think we do a good job of recognizing threats and addressing them as a team to protect the university in a really expedited and efficient manner while also weighing due process, pumping the brakes enough to not let whatever's going on get ahead of just rational thought because immediately everybody's like, "Oh, easy, kick him out until we figure it out." Well, what's driving it? Is someone at risk? Is there documented threats? And so, I think we do a very good job within where we're at to protect our campus and students and also be compassionate and still work with students as students.

Fig preferred to identify patterns and implement solutions. She shared a successful, solution-oriented example based on student suicide data.

> I think we're constantly looking at what we do. We need to pay attention to and do better? Because ultimately, if something happened, we would do a retrospective review, which we've done. We had a student who killed themselves on our campus. And so, we looked back at, and it wasn't even somebody that our team was monitoring. But we looked back to say, "What did we know as a university? Where were the gap areas? What did we not know?" And one thing that we found from that person, in particular and then another situation was that those people both had a very low…; their GPA dropped a full point within a semester. And so now we have formed a subcommittee with some academic advisors and some IT folks to say, "If somebody's GPA drops a substantial amount in a semester, what are we doing?"

Maple was motivated to support students in crisis and set them up for success. She also expressed a desire to achieve success in modest but noteworthy ways.

> One person's crisis may not be for another, but it is for them. We don't want to invalidate that. But yeah, I think that, and I, that kind of goes back to the question before, families don't send their kids off to school thinking that anything's ever going to happen, and that's okay, but how can we set them up for success better, especially students that need more long-term care? That's kind of [another] measure of success. We do all of this work pretty much behind the scenes. You don't want it to be public. And I think that's the success when you are doing all of these things and impacting the day-to-day life of so many students and getting them the resources that they need so that they are able to graduate, that it hasn't risen to the level that it's across the president's desk.

Mango was motivated to strive for a higher caliber of success through intentional measures. He was adamant that operationalizing success thrived when completed as a team effort.

> That's one way that we operationalize success…is that I think we all as a team agree that since we went through that and we put some new additional measures in place of how we're working as a team, that we've become better, that we're more effective, that we are operating, I think, in a higher caliber way than before because we've tried to be very intentional about what we've learned and putting it into practice.

Building upon Mango's notion of team intentionality, Olive expressed the importance of paradigm and reframing how we view the work as a team. He believes success can manifest given the right outlook and he encouraged the TAT to collectively reframe the work of threat assessment from a scary thing to an opportunity for connection.

> And as we've gotten involved in it, there are a lot of ways to reframe it and to look at it and to see it as being supportive and helpful. Finding ways to connect people [and] the resources. It's sort of put us at a point where we are recognizing what's happening…like mental health…across mental health issues, across young people. We're seeing struggles and our staff and faculty growing and things. But I think reframing it that way of where it's not this scary thing, but that it's this opportunity to meet people where they are and to help them and to move them from a place of concern to a place of success is really powerful.

Dogwood was motivated to "connect all the dots" with consistent processes and confidence.

> Setting the structure for the teams and being really clear about the process is how ultimately we operationalize it [success]. Being consistent and the work that we do and consistently triaging cases, connecting all the dots and being confident that we are able to

> do that, that we have access to all the things that we need to have access to, to be able to connect the dots, I think helps us to operationalize or preventing violence, which is success.

Ginkgo, who revealed their sister worked at Virginia Tech during the 2007 tragedy, was motivated to avoid two major errors of TATs, "that's under responding or over responding." Institutions must consistently balance these two actions to find the best path forward for a situation. This continues to be a challenge for all TATs. Tulip simply wanted to achieve success through reduced escalations, responses, and support for those impacted, including the person(s) of concern. Last, Turpentine was motivated to educate the campus community through telling the story of the TAT to "further solidify it as a trusted approach and resource for campus."

Participants expressed a strong commitment to protecting campus. This was evident through their leadership qualities and motivation to cultivate teams that engage in good work. Increases in enrollment resulted in growth in case numbers and ultimately case complexity, which was described as interesting opportunities to meet people where they are. Participants expressed gratitude for the TATs, noting they are an important institutional team. Successful TATs find resolution with the least amount of harm, thus strengthening the ecosystem of care and resilience for their respective campus communities.

Summary

In this chapter, I present the experiences of individuals who lead TATs in higher education, and how they describe and operationalize success. I conducted document analysis for the nine participating institutions which included a review of public policies, TAT webpages, protocols, and reporting options. Last, I identified four themes with subthemes through the document analysis, participant interviews, and Bolman and Deal's (2021) organizational frames

model: establishing and maintaining norms included subthemes of team dynamics, membership, and engagement. Acquiring and leveraging resources included subthemes of funding, tools, and experts and partnerships. Recognizing the human element explored the personal side of threat assessment which included the effects on people and the unknowns of doing this work. Last, commitment to protecting campus explored leadership qualities, demographics, and participant motivation. I identified and developed all themes using Bolman and Deals (2021) four-frame model. This framework in conjunction with interview responses reinforced the notion that a multi-frame perspective is more likely to succeed. In Chapter 5, I connect the study findings to the literature and the theoretical framework that guided the study. I then present implications for higher education, study limitations and conclude with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I connect the study findings to the literature and the theoretical framework, offer implications for higher education, discuss the study limitations, and present recommendations for future research. Qualitative research is a method to uncover and interpret meaning where the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I wanted to examine the experiences of TAT leaders in higher education to understand how they describe and operationalize success, often in the absence of a tragic event. A basic qualitative study was the ideal methodology to conduct in-depth interviews, review documents, and analyze the experiences of TAT leaders (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The theoretical framework selected for this study was the four-frame model by Bolman and Deal (2021). This model can assist leaders as they navigate workplace challenges and find solutions using the four frames—structural, human resource, political, and symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2021). This framework allowed me to examine the experiences of participants more deeply through a leadership lens. Although there is literature on threat assessment and multidisciplinary teams who mitigate risk to enhance campus safety, it is unclear how TAT leaders at IHE describe and operationalize success (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Guided by the following research questions, this study contributes to the literature.

RQ1: How do TAT leaders describe success?

RQ2: How to TAT leaders operationalize team success?

To answer the research questions, I engaged in two forms of data collection: semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Nine participants were recruited using a criterion-based sampling method, known as purposeful or snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Pre-determined criteria for study participation included prospective participants currently leading a TAT in higher education and having served on the team in some capacity for at least one year or 12 consecutive months (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). I interviewed nine TAT leaders to understand their individual and shared experiences. The study offers TAT leaders, team members, and other institutional stakeholders—such as campus partners/offices or senior administrators—implications to enhance the success of TATs. The following sections summarize the study findings and connect them to the literature and theoretical framework. I also present implications for higher education, study limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Study

The study findings highlight the experiences of individuals who lead TATs in higher education, specifically to illustrate how they describe and operationalize success. The individual and shared experiences of participants informed the creation of four themes. I identified and created the following themes by conducting data analysis using Bolman and Deal's (2021) model.

Establishing and Maintaining Norms—Examining experiences establishing and maintaining team norms from the leadership perspective through team dynamics, membership, and engagement.

Acquiring and Leveraging Resources—Analyzing successes and challenges with acquiring and leveraging resources such as funding, tools and models, and experts and partnerships.

Recognizing the Human Element—Understanding the importance of recognizing the human element in threat assessment, especially the potential effect on people and the weight of the unknown.

Commitment to Protecting Campus—Identifying leadership qualities and motivation for a personal and professional commitment to protecting campus.

Establishing and Maintaining Norms

The findings from this study revealed how TAT leaders established and maintained team norms through examination of team dynamics, membership, and engagement. Multidisciplinary teams bring diversity of perspective and subject-matter experts together for collaborative and creative problem-solving and serve as best practice in threat assessment (Cornell et al., Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). The endorsement of multidisciplinary teams to manage threat assessment and prevention efforts is evident from the literature (Cornell & Allen, 2011; Deisinger et al., 2008; Dunkle et al., 2008; Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2010; Hemphill & LaBanc, 2010; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Sokolow et al., 2009). However, with so much autonomy to establish guidelines for threat assessment in higher education, having an engaged team and effective protocol is paramount (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Team dynamics was noted by participants as critical for establishing and maintaining norms. Apple expressed that successful team dynamics stemmed from a multidisciplinary group of experts that are comfortable enough to challenge others' opinions, yet trusting of their teammate's expertise. Participants revealed regular communication is critical to the work. Olive and Fig stated their teams meet weekly and even communicate between meetings, multiple times a day if necessary. TAT members serve in these roles in addition to their regular duties which can create challenges for members (Bolante & Dykeman, 2017; Deisinger, et. al., 2008). Despite the limited availability (for TAT meetings) of team members, participants described their team dynamics as respectful and collegial with strong relationships. Ginkgo affirmed that nothing is perfect, but their TAT developed a solid process through their relationships. In addition, Apple and Mango

highlighted leadership's intentionality around assigning action items, agenda speaking points, and making space for member feedback. Team dynamics across teams was also highlighted by participants.

Participants discussed cross-team dynamics, given some institutions may have more than one TAT and/or behavioral intervention teams (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Most participants stated their institution/team consistently debated how many teams their institution should have and noted institutional size, protocol consistency, and meeting the needs of constituents as factors. Participants discussed membership including best practices imploring the use of legal counsel throughout case management and threat assessment (Deisinger et al., 2008; Nolan & Moncure, 2012). Although all members of a TAT fulfill a critical role, the mental health professional is valued for behavioral assessment (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). This study found units/offices common to all teams included dean of students' office or student affairs, campus police, and student counseling center; and legal counsel in an advisory capacity (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). However, participants' revealed variations in membership representation (e.g., as either a standing member, ad hoc member, or partner to one or more TATs in each institution) which included Title IX, human resources, faculty affairs, institutional equity, office of the ombuds, student housing, student conduct, student disability services, and international student services.

Participants emphasized expectation setting and accountability as essential for engagement. Protocols and practices should include a spirit of care, as well as compliance to achieve best practices for a safer campus community (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Two participants provided a team protocol for their institution as recommended by threat assessment experts (Cornell et al., 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). However, the

remaining seven participants did not have a written protocol and relied on their risk rubric or model. Mango shared that one-on-one meetings helped with clarifying expectations; whereas, Fig featured an onboarding process to include interviews of existing members. Establishing and maintaining team norms for TATs can be achieved through successful team dynamics, proper membership, and consistent engagement (Cornell et al., 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

Acquiring and Leveraging Resources

Although TATs initially may have been implemented due to active shooter incidents, current TATs provide vital support and intervention through threat assessment and case management for a wide variety of needs (Barker & Yoder, 2012; Binder, 2015; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Randazzo & Cameron, 2012). TATs are touted as a more cost-effective threat prevention strategy than zero-tolerance policies or intricate building security systems (Cornell et al., 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2011). However, this study analyzed successes and challenges with acquiring and leveraging resources and found that funding is a consistent challenge.

Despite having a budget, all participants expressed a desire for more or consistent funding. Sources of funding varied by institution as did support from senior administration. Modest funding was used for marketing, whereas most funds were invested in learning opportunities for the TAT. Apple noted that Sun College spends the most money on active shooter training, but the needs are greater for mental health support and other resources in the prevention space. Findings revealed a perception that threat assessment tends to focus on worst-case scenario, and thus least likely scenario, when attention may be better served in other ways. Apple commented, “I think the business of threat assessment has their priorities flipped.”

Institutions must find what is optimal for spending and supporting TATs in the most valuable and effective ways. Fig, Olive, and Ginkgo all shared that leveraging free resources (e.g., via association memberships) when possible was ideal. In some cases, TATs were supported by the president's office and had sufficient funds. With or without funding, the next challenge identified was acquiring and leveraging the right tools.

Prevention efforts strive to enhance education and outreach (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). However, they are not perfect; one drawback is the failure of TATs to follow through in part, or at all, on case management plans (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; Pollard et al., 2012). The findings revealed the primary goal of TAT leaders was to secure a full-time position for threat management. However, acquiring funds for a full-time or part-time position dedicated to case management presented a significant challenge. Three participants said they were able to fund a full-time or part-time position to coordinate threat assessment cases for the team, such as a TAT coordinator or threat manager. This allowed teams to better organize, track, and operationalize case work. Fig acknowledged the coordinator role has enabled Venus University to have greater impact such as make detailed timelines and extended follow up with cases. Of the remaining six participants, five of them discussed how acquiring funds specifically for a permanent coordinator or case manager position would be ideal. Beyond a dedicated position, other helpful tools noted were a case management system, employee assistance program, LiveSafe application, online reporting forms, and hotlines for students and employees.

All participants used some form of a case management system and regarded it as a useful tool for secure information sharing and management of a case. The need for reporting tools, such as online forms, reinforced the TATs dependence on the campus community to speak up. One

challenge for TATs is their reliance on faculty, staff, students, and the community at large to report concerning behavior (Cornell et al., 2021). Reports on previous gun violence incidents have shown that students speak up, but not always in time (Northern Illinois Review Panel, 2008; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). In addition, employees may report concerns about others, but in some cases, there may be fear associated with raising concerns to the administration or others (Sokolow et al., 2014). Participants further described the use of hotlines as a long-standing valuable tool for reporting concerns. However, participants that did not have an employee-focused team highlighted gaps in reporting. For example, Maple stated the Jupiter State University campus police asked the TAT where to forward calls of employee concerns that do not warrant law enforcement but may need intervention. Jupiter State may consider expansion of the TAT to include human resources or the creation of an employee hotline. Mango also identified the need for an employee-care phone line, but acknowledged an office such as human resources would need to staff that initiative which is beyond the scope of the TAT.

Various threat assessment models use a risk rubric and guide multidisciplinary teams for best practices in effective prevention, intervention, and postvention strategies (Awareity, 2025; Cornell et al., 2021; CTAP-25, 2025; Deisinger et al., 2008; eWAVR Partners, 202; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; NABITA, 2025; Paterson, 2020). Some institutions leveraged only one model whereas others used more than one, or some combination to develop their own process for threat assessment. Findings show that TAT leaders grapple with identifying the best model(s) for the team, institution, and budget. The model informs which external expert to leverage, and experts often support their preferred model. The model and expert-led training can be costly. TAT leaders had to determine the best, most feasible option for their TAT.

Leveraging internal partners for success was another common strategy. Although school shootings have received the most attention, there are various types of violence that often create fear and concern for students, parents, and employees (Bockler et al., 2013; Pollard et al., 2012; Turanovic & Siennick, 2022). Stalking, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, hazing, as well as drug and alcohol induced violence are other types of violence on contemporary college campuses (Drysdale et al., 2010; Paterson, 2020). Thus, creating partnerships with offices such as Title IX and human resources described as essential for success. However, the standing membership of these units on the team was found to be inconsistent. Campus partners were often helpful in cultivating or securing resources as needed with TAT leaders and teams determining the best combination of tools, models, and training for their team and institution.

Recognizing the Human Element

The work of gathering and responding to information in the form of threat assessment and case management can be daunting (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Participants affirmed those serving on TATs are doing so in addition to their full-time jobs, although some institutions hire a case manager (Cornell et al., 2021; Meloy & Hoffman, 2021; Schiemann & Van Brunt, 2018; Sokolow et al., 2014). TATs strive to mitigate risk early by identifying students and employees of concern, and should consider legal risk and nondiscriminatory best practices when developing a plan (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TATs may be confronted with difficult cases where community members have a mental illness, personal stress, active disciplinary action, or are experiencing suicidal ideation (Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2010; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TATs must operate in the bounds of reason and limited resources for students, faculty, and staff (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Findings revealed the importance of recognizing the human element in threat assessment, especially the potential effect on people and the weight of the unknown.

The physical and mental safety of faculty, staff and students can affect how they work and learn (Bolante & Dykeman, 2017). TAT leaders must balance the safety, rights, and responsibilities of all parties (Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2010; Marshall & Clark, 2023; Paterson, 2020). The human element illustrated in this study were the person(s) of concern, campus community, TAT members, and TAT leaders. Participants coalesced around the notion that the effects on people involved can be difficult. Apple spoke about the perceived label from being on threat assessment's "radar." Maple added there is value in forming a strategy for how to approach a person of concern.

Care for campus community was highlighted as a potential gap by participants. Mango, Turpentine, and Dogwood discussed a lack of follow up close cases with campus community members who may have reported a concern. Mango specifically expressed the need to acknowledge general steps for safety and sharing resources with faculty and staff. The well-being of TAT leaders and members and also was unveiled as a harsh reality of the work. Ethical and trauma-related issues for individual team members or the team at-large may be prevalent due to the difficult subject matter of each case (Cornell et al., 2021; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Participants spoke about the importance of self-care for themselves and team members. They described threat assessment cases as "haunting, heavy, or scary." The unknown and ultimate question of what more could we have done significantly influenced team members and leaders alike.

Commitment to Protecting Campus

The increase in active shooter incidents in the 1990s, punctuated with the mass tragedy at Columbine, ignited security concerns and a call for threat assessment in K–12 schools (Curran et al., 2020; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018). The 2007 Virginia

Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech; Blacksburg, Virginia) shooting heightened safety concerns at post-secondary institutions, serving as a catalyst for the establishment of TATs in higher education (Cornell, et al., 2021; Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018; Paterson, 2020). However, empirical data shows, compared to home, commerce, and other environments, schools are among the safest places (Blair & Schweit, 2014; Muschert, 2007; Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022). The findings revealed that being considered among the safest places does not eliminate campus safety challenges or criticisms for TATs in higher education (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Even without a tragedy or requirement by law, most IHE have implemented policy and/or some form of a TAT to mitigate risk and enhance safety (Bolante & Dykeman, 2015; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). The commitment to protecting campus is critical for leaders and teams to succeed.

Leadership qualities shared included leading by example, creating space for critical feedback, building trust, empowering others, collaboration, and humility. Participants described their leadership style as "collaborative, facilitative, or trusting.;" whereas others described their leadership as "direct, authentic, or inclusive." Demographic responses revealed each participant earned a graduate degree and had more than 15 years of experience in higher education. Most had experience serving on a TAT before taking a leadership role. These findings affirmed that those in TAT leadership roles consistently brought education and experience to the team. Further, it was discovered that all TAT leaders interviewed shared a commitment to protecting campus that was regularly reinforced with the team. Motivating factors included a desire to learn more, incorporating due process with compassion, and promoting creative problem-solving in high stakes situations. Findings illustrated a shared desire to do great work in this critical space with quiet determination, humility, and resilience. Maple discussed the importance of ensuring

the administration is supportive of threat assessment because of a successful team effort, and not because cases have hit their desk or made it to the media. In other words, TAT leaders contemplate how to proactively and quietly tell the threat assessment success story with data to stakeholders.

Four-Frame Model

Leaders and teams who adapt their leadership style and view situations from a multi-frame perspective tend to be more successful (Bolman & Deal, 2021; McArdle, 2013; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; Monahan & Shah, 2011; Pierce, 2012). This framework guided the study and helped to answer the research questions regarding how do TAT leaders describe and operationalize success. Threats come in many forms, including but not limited to, self-harm, gun violence, lone actor terrorism, cyberthreats, insider threats, and more (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). These incidents can quickly escalate to a crisis and significantly test organizations and TATs (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Innovative responses to crisis stem from using the four-frame model and applying the frames as appropriate; no frame fits every situation (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Roberts, 2010). The four frames—structural, human resource, political, and symbolic—can serve as lenses through which TATs conduct threat assessment and case management to navigate threats in innovative and effective ways (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). This study found that TAT leaders used a multi-frame perspective across themes to operationalize success. The following four sections explain how TAT leaders operated under a multi-frame perspective.

Structural Frame. Findings demonstrated use of the structural frame most often when establishing and maintaining team norms and acquiring and leveraging resources. TAT leaders served as social architects who used the structural frame to establish and enforce structures and

rules to meet goals (Bolman & Deal, 2021). TATs that are lead through the structural frame know the value of a clear protocol, defined roles, and a solid understanding of how such rules and roles operate in tandem during a threat or crisis. Rational thinking and problem solving grounded in policies and procedures are hallmarks of the structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). All participants revealed that establishing and maintaining team norms contributed to the TATs ability to operationalize success. TAT leaders spoke about established policy and procedures as road maps for the work. Some institutions lacked formal policy or protocol, whereas others had them but acknowledged the need for revision. Continuous evaluation of the work, policy, and procedures aligns with assumptions from the structural frame such as ensuring an effective structure fits the organization's current circumstances and restructuring when necessary (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Acquiring and leveraging resources, such as a risk rubric model, laid a structural foundation for TAT success according to leaders. Models and opportunities for team collaboration highlighted another structural assumption, organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and appropriate division of labor (Bolman & Deal, 2021). In this study, it was found the division of labor varied based on the needs of the case.

Human Resource Frame. The human resource frame supports an organizational shift from processes and productivity to people and relationships; thus, the human resource lens views the people that comprise an organization, or team, as an extended family (Bolman & Deal, 2021). TAT leaders described team relationships as strong or solid. Mango, Olive, and Fig specifically discussed ideas that centered keeping the work fun and taking breaks simply to connect outside of the work. All participants alluded to teambuilding opportunities or well-being needs of people involved. Recognizing the human element found that many constituencies such

as person(s) of concern, the campus community, TAT members, and even TAT leaders should be recognized for their humanity in threat assessment cases. This discovery aligned with assumptions of the human resources frame. One assumption is that organizations exist to serve human needs; another is that meaningful and satisfying work reciprocates talent and energy toward success (Bolman & Deal, 2021). This study found that TAT leaders and team used the human resource frame to value the individual by mindfully balancing the needs of the individual and the organization. This often revealed itself in tandem with the use of the structural frame. In other words, TAT leaders used the structural and human resource frames to balance process and people as necessary.

Political Frame. Leaders who use the political frame rely on networking and negotiating between interest groups for scarce resources. TATs who used this frame were aware of limited resources, hidden agendas, and the need to make tough decisions in a crisis (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Findings illuminated that TAT leaders were often responsible for balancing the needs of various stakeholders creatively. The political frame assumes that goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for the respective interests (Bolman & Deal, 2021). For example, TAT leaders empowered teams to think broadly in cases where an employee reported a student of concern—what do we know and what considerations and steps should be taken with everyone involved. Having subject matter experts on a TAT diversified perspectives and was found to enhance the use of the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Legal counsel was identified as a trusted advisor in this, and all, frames. TAT leaders also acknowledged the presence of “red tape” and varied support from

administration. Whether or not the TAT had support from senior administration, the TAT leader leveraged the political frame when navigating resources, actions items, and even case outcomes.

Symbolic Frame. Symbols can help people make meaning, hold onto hope, or believe in something greater (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Often considered artists, authentic leaders who use the symbolic frame can foster energy and enthusiasm around a common goal, such as in a response to a threat (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TAT leaders described their individual leadership styles as facilitative, collaborative, and/or authentic. Apple, Maple, Mango, and Ginkgo discussed what the term threat assessment represents. Apple noted the importance of helping the team maintain objectivity, just because a person of concern is on the threat assessment radar does not mean they are an imminent threat. Maple emphasized the humanity of each individual and the value of holding care and resilience at the forefront. Mango and Ginkgo both reflected on the history of threat assessment and the lessons learned from significant tragedies that paved the way for threat assessment practices in educational environments. Findings revealed the symbolic frame was often leveraged in tandem with other frames. Although procedure, people, and politics were intertwined throughout case management, the symbolic frame served as a steady undercurrent to remind TATs of why they do this work. TAT members who believe they are part of something greater than themselves may feel inspired, energized, and take pride in their work (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Implications for Higher Education

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of individuals who lead TATs in higher education, specifically to understand how they describe and operationalize success. Furthermore, I sought to learn how team leaders, not policy or standards, describe and operationalize success; and understand how that manifests in practice for them. Bolman and

Deal's (2021) four-frame model framed this study to better understand the experiences of TAT leaders. Below, I provide implications for TAT leaders and teams to better operationalize success. The findings offer insights that can assist leaders and other stakeholders as they strive to elevate threat assessment and case management at IHEs. By acting upon the study implications, TAT leaders and their teams may inform institutional policy and procedures and potentially enhance engagement. I provide the following implications based on the study findings: (a) develop accessible guidance, (b) provide consistent and effective engagement opportunities, (c) cultivate stronger threat assessment networks and partnerships, (d) implement intentional resilience strategies, (e) highlight commitment to protect campus through stories and data; and 6) invest in a coordinator or threat manager position.

Develop Accessible Guidance

Findings from this study illustrated the need for establishing and maintaining policy, procedures, and reporting tools. There were participating institutions that had a threat assessment policy and ones that did not. Participants whose institution did not have an official policy for TAT establishment, or clear support from administration, expressed a desire for one or both. As a direct result of active shooter tragedies, only a few states have implemented laws to mandate TATs in K–12 and postsecondary school systems. These states include Virginia, Illinois, Connecticut, and Florida (Bennett & Bates, 2015; Office of Safe Schools, 2020). Unfortunately, each state experienced a tragedy before enacting requirements. This study revealed that whereas institutions may have implemented a TAT or behavioral intervention team due to legal requirement or proactivity, they may not have developed a formal policy. A policy symbolizes official institutional support for the TAT, provides guidance for establishing a TAT, and informs the campus community of safety measures related to threats (Bolante & Dykeman, 2015; Meloy

& Hoffmann, 2021). Another important resource noted was guidance specifically for the TAT. Guidance for the TAT was characterized as a handbook, manual, or protocol that was separate from the risk rubric model. Unlike public policies, TAT guidance can be internal to the TAT and not necessarily available to the campus community. Two institutions had guidance publicly posted whereas the remaining institutions had, or were developing, guidance solely for the team. Current team guidance should be accessible to all members in a secure place (e.g., case management system, shared drive, Microsoft Teams channel, etc.) and be re-evaluated periodically for updates. TAT guidance can also be helpful when onboarding new team members.

A team guidance document is a good place to define multiple teams and general direction for cross-team collaboration. For example, partnership with a behavioral intervention team and expectation setting for escalation of cases could add value (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Reporting tools were also highlighted as useful mechanisms to identify person(s) of concern (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Online forms and telephone hotlines were shared as two ways that concerns could be reported. However, TAT leaders acknowledged information ultimately comes to the TAT through a multitude of channels, such as other campus units/offices. Online forms were noted as a leading source of reporting. Accessible reporting options of all kinds may increase opportunities for the TAT to make case connections across campus units and mitigate risk earlier in a case (Cornell et al., 2021; Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Institutions should consider development of a formal policy and accessible guidance for teams and the campus community.

Provide Consistent and Effective Engagement Opportunities

The study findings and the existing literature, encourage leaders to provide consistent and effective engagement opportunities to empower a successful team (Bennett & Bates, 2015; Bolante & Dykeman, 2017; Bolman & Deal, 2021; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TAT leaders spoke at length about leading initiatives for onboarding, training (annual and as needed), and check-ins with members. Furthermore, they emphasized the value in finding the ideal case management system and risk rubric model for their institution.

Successful onboarding recommendations included new members conducting interviews with existing members and individual meetings with the chair to review established team guidance, such as a written protocol. Training was the largest category for engagement strategies, with annual training, quarterly training, and information sharing on relevant topics. Free opportunities were leveraged through association membership. Some institutions even paid for association memberships such as ATAP or NABITA. Check-ins with members allow TAT leaders to give and receive feedback on individual and team performance and clarify expectations. This was viewed as a great way to engage with team members. When feasible, use of a case management system and risk rubric model elevated TAT performance according to participants and teamwork (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). TATs were better positioned to identify patterns and trends for problem-solving. Institutions should provide consistent and effective engagement opportunities.

Cultivate Stronger Threat Assessment Networks and Partnerships

Partnerships between offices in TATs and campus offices external to TATs were found to be essential for prevention, intervention, and in some cases postvention strategies (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Cross-team collaboration was noted as a cause for celebration or frustration

depending on the experience. All participants expressed a desire to know more about what other teams are doing in the field of threat assessment in higher education and considered, or conducted, benchmarking. It became apparent that multiple institutions were duplicating efforts across threat assessment networks. The study findings illustrated a shared desire to cultivate stronger threat assessment networks and partnerships. Institutions and TAT leaders may accomplish this through increased communication with existing networks or threat assessment associations.

Implement Intentional Resilience Strategies

Recognizing the human element was a prevalent theme in this study. Constituencies such as person(s) of concern, the campus community, TAT members, and even TAT leaders were identified as being affected by threat assessment in a variety of ways. One leader noted two cases that still "haunt" them, whereas others alluded to wondering how persons of concern are doing or what more the team could have done to help. Leaders who implement intentional resilience strategies for themselves and the team place value on people over process, which can be critical in threat assessment and case management (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Resilience strategies for person(s) of concern included retrospective reviews and creative thinking about outreach. During retrospective reviews the team would discuss a case prior to closing the case to identify any patterns, trends, or anything that might have been missed. The Venus University TAT found during a recap meeting (lookback) where at least two student deaths by suicide involved students whose grade point average (GPA) had dropped a full point within one semester. As a result, a subcommittee of academic advisors and information technology staff was formed to review data around sudden drops in GPA. The subcommittee, in partnership with the TAT, evaluates any necessary steps to set student(s) up for success.

The campus community was regarded as another vulnerable constituency. TAT leaders reflected on ways to follow up with faculty and staff to promote safety resources and reporting options, while also bringing resolve to a case without oversharing personal details. One leader added that simply acknowledging the team is working a situation and expressing gratitude for the report of concern can build trust, bring peace, and potentially avoid psychological fear. These combined efforts can promote resilience among the campus community. Intentional resilience strategies for TATs and leaders included lunch together, fun activities outside of work, and reminders to leverage support resources for themselves as needed. TAT leaders should implement intentional resilience strategies for all stakeholders.

Highlight Commitment to Protect Campus through Stories and Data

Since the 1980s, colleges and universities have witnessed an increase in tragedies on campus, reaching an all-time high in 2021 (Blair & Schweit, 2014; FBI et al., 2021). In the diverse, complex, and legal environment of higher education, threat assessment and TAT prevention, intervention, and postvention strategies are critical to the safety and well-being of campus communities (Cornell et al., 2021; Heilbrun et al., 2009; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Findings illuminated a commitment by TAT leaders to protect campus. Participants shared what motivates them as leaders to do good work. Motivating factors included a desire to learn more, incorporating due process with compassion, and promoting creative problem-solving in high stakes situations. One goal of TAT leaders is to gain support from senior administration and increase awareness of resources without making a media "splash." TAT leaders should highlight the commitment to protect campus through stories and data. Consideration should be given to how much information about team protocol and strategy belong on a publicly available site. At minimum, information that echoes policy and provides reporting options for concerns should be

present. However, more detailed data and thematic stories presented via an executive summary to leadership could create more awareness and buy-in from senior administration, deans, directors, and department heads which in turn may create opportunities to promote resources and reporting tools. TAT leaders contemplated how to proactively, and quietly, tell the threat assessment success story with data to stakeholders. Therefore, leaders should find ways to highlight the commitment to protect campus through stories and data.

Invest in a Coordinator or Threat Manager Position

The costs associated with being unprepared during and after a disaster could cripple an institution, marking the beginning of a long, daunting recovery (Deisinger et al., 2008; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Threat assessment may help avoid a disaster with early detection and intervention efforts (Cornell at al., 2021). Investment in a full-time or part-time position to coordinate threat assessment cases, such as a TAT coordinator or threat manager, could allow for more proactive TAT strategies and action. Findings showed that teams who had this role were well-positioned to organize, track, and operationalize case work. Teams that did not have this role expressed a strong desire to have one in the future. Acquiring this position was described as a significant success. Institutions should invest in a coordinator or threat manager position.

Limitations

Limitations are boundaries beyond the researcher's control or influence and are "factors that may have an effect on the interpretation of the findings or on the generalizability of the results" (Lunenberg & Irby, 2008, p. 84). The following limitations may have affected this study and are in no order.

1. The topic of threat assessment can be sensitive and difficult. Participants may not have shared openly or felt comfortable responding to questions.

2. Higher education institutions varied in terms of size, location, demographics, policy, and procedure. Therefore, participants' lived experiences varied.
3. Documents varied as some were out-of-date according to participants when compared to practice as stated in interviews.
4. Conducting interviews virtually limited my ability as a researcher to make in-person observations, study the field, and build stronger rapport with participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study illuminated the experiences of TAT leaders, specifically to understand how they describe and operationalize success, there are additional opportunities for future research. This study began with a call for participants in the SEC and expanded due to snowball sampling. There could be benefits to conducting future qualitative research on this topic to include a wider net (beyond the SEC). Another recommendation is to target similar institutions such as smaller public or private institutions where the number and type of TATs may be more consistent across cases. This study could also be replicated from the perspective of former (not current) TAT leaders or from the perspective of current TAT members themselves. The combination of findings from this study and those involving former leaders or current members could provide a more comprehensive analysis based on multiple perspectives.

Another way to learn more about TAT leadership is through a case study. A case study of threat assessment at IHEs could reveal why or how TATs operate as they do (Miles, et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). Studying each institution as an individual case could provide an understanding of internal policies, procedures, relationships, successes, and challenges associated with threat assessment. A case study could also highlight the complexities of leading threat assessment in the context of one institution. Further, a comparative case study

on threat assessment between institutions that have experienced an incident of mass violence and those that have not, could yield insight. Future research could focus on the institutions, leaders, or team members.

Conclusions

In this study, I examined the experiences of TAT leaders, specifically to understand how they describe and operationalize success. Findings from this study provided implications for TATs while highlighting four key themes around team norms, resources, people, and a commitment to safety. Bolman and Deal's (2021) model framed this study and illuminated the paradigm of TAT leadership during threat assessment and case management. This research can inform institutional policy and procedures and potentially motivate the people doing this work. The findings offer valuable insights that can assist leaders and other stakeholders as they strive to elevate threat assessment and case management at IHEs.

There is a body of knowledge, including several recognized risk rubric models, about threat assessment (Awareity, 2025; Cornell et al., 2021; CTAP-25, 2025; Deisinger et al., 2008; eWAVR Partners, 2025; Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021; NABITA, 2025; Paterson, 2020). However, there is limited research from the perspective of those who lead TATs in higher education. Each tragedy that occurs at IHEs brings new challenges and criticisms with an ever-increasing call for successful prevention efforts (Bennett & Bates, 2015; Office of Partner Engagement et al., 2022). This research is important to understand the experiences of those leading threat assessment in higher education as they have first-hand knowledge of receiving and responding to threat(s). Administrators and other stakeholders alike must seek to understand the experiences of TAT leaders through thorough qualitative analysis. Doing so could provide institutions with implications for strengthening the ecosystem of care and resilience for the campus community.

Moving forward, leaders must continuously strive to elevate threat assessment practices. The seemingly endless stream of threats and concerns make it imperative to develop accessible guidance, provide consistent engagement opportunities, cultivate stronger networks, implement intentional resilience strategies, highlight a commitment to protect campus through stories and data, and invest in a coordinator or threat manager. With a proactive and strategic approach, institutions can establish consistent and effective protocols for threat assessment that recognize the human element and promote a safe place to work and learn.

REFERENCES

Acts and laws, passed by the general court or assembly of the province of New-Hampshire. (1716). B. Green. https://name.umdl.umich.edu/N00734.0001.001

Alathari, L. (2018, March 14). *Written testimony of USSS national threat assessment center protective intelligence & assessment division chief Lina Alathari for senate committee on the judiciary.* Hearing titled "See something, say something: Oversight of the parkland shooting and legislative proposals to improve school safety." Department of Homeland Security. https://www.dhs.gov/news/2018/03/14/written-testimony-usss-senate-committee-judiciary-hearing-titled-see-something-say

Albrecht, S. (2010). Campus safety: Threat assessment teams strive to prevent or manage violence at schools and workplaces. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, 79*(2), 15–24. http://leb.fbi.gov/2010/february/leb-february-2010

Allen, K., Cornell, D., Lorek, E., & Sheras, P. (2008). Response of school personnel to student threat assessment training. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 19*(3), 319–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243450802332184

Allen, T. J., & Lengfellner, L. G. (2016). Campus violence: Improving safety in a university setting. *Professional Safety, 61*(02), 28–32. http://www.asse.org/assets/1/7/F1Allen_0216.pdf

Amada, G. (2007). The massacre at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 22*(2), 3–11. https://doi.org/10.1300/J035v22n02_02

Anfara, V., & Mertz, N. (2015). *Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research*. (2nd ed.). Sage.

Argyris, C. (1957) *Personality and Organization*, New York: Harper Collins.

Argyris, C. (1964) *Integrating the Individual and the Organization*, New York: Wiley.

Argyris, C., & Schon, D. A. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness* Jossey-Bass.

Awareity. (2025). *Cawood Assessment Grids*. https://www.awareity.com/cawood-assessment-grids

Bakioglu, A., Keser, S., Korumaz, M., & Didin Ala, S. (2022). A phenomenological research on the role of emotional orientation in academics' professional lives. *Journal of Pedagogical Research, 6*(1), 196–213. https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.2022175848

Barker, G., & Yoder, M. E. (2012). The Virginia tech shootings: Implications for crisis communication in educational settings. *Journal of School Public Relations, 33*(2), 78–101. https://doi.org/10.3138/jspr.33.2.78

Bennett, L., & Bates, M. (2015, Fall). Threat assessment and targeted violence at institutions of higher education: Implications for policy and practice including unique considerations for community colleges. *EJEP: Ejournal of Education Policy,* 1–16. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1158126.pdf

Binder, D. (2015). Can we save these hallowed halls of academe? *Regent University Law Review, 28*(2), 253–298. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1010710

Birnbaum, R. (2013). Ready, fire, aim: The college campus gun fight. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 45*(5), 6–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2013.812462

Blair, J., & Schweit, K. W. (2014). *A study of active shooter incidents, 2000–2013.* Texas State University and Federal Bureau of Investigation. https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-study-2000-2013-1.pdf/view

Blanchard, J. (2007). University tort liability and student suicide: Case review and implications for practice. *Journal of Law as Education, 36*(4), 461–477. https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2237&context=jled

Blumenstyk, G. (2015). *American higher education in crisis? What everyone needs to know.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/wentk/9780199374090.001.0001

Bockler, N., Seeger, T., Sitzer, P., & Heitmeyer, W. (2013). *School shootings: International research, case studies, and concepts for prevention*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5526-4

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2011). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Pearson.

Bohnenkamp, J. H., Patel, C., Connors, E., Orenstein, S., Ereshefsky, S., Lever, N., & Hoover, S. (2022). Evaluating strategies to promote effective, multidisciplinary team collaboration in school mental health. *Journal of Applied School Psychology, 39*(2), 130–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/15377903.2022.2077875

Bolante, R., & Dykeman C. (2017, February). Threat assessment teams for institutions of higher education: A review of key ideas and practices for professional counselors. *VISTAS Online*, Article 29. https://bolante.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/07 /BolantePublicationAmericanCounselingAssociationTATArticleFeb.2017.pdf

Bolante, R., & Dykeman, C. (2015). Threat assessment in community colleges. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management, 2*(1), 23–32. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/us4vn

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2021). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (7th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Borum, R., Cornell, D., Modzeleski, W., & Jimerson, S. (2010). What can be done about school shootings? A review of the evidence. *Education Researcher, 39*(1), 27–37. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x09357620

Boynton, A. (2003). Securing college campuses in the face of terrorism. *Campus Law Enforcement Journal*, *33*, 15–17. http://www.ncjrs.gov/App/publications/abstract.aspx?ID=203626

Broadhurst, C. (2010). We didn't fire a shot, we didn't burn a building: The student reaction at North Carolina State University to the Kent State Shootings, May 1970. *North Carolina Historical Review 87*(3), 283–309. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23523831

Bryant, L. (2021). A Narrative Inquiry on Experiences of Title IX Coordinators in the Southeastern Conference [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Tennessee]. Trace. https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/6676

Cacialli, D. O. (2019). The unique role and special considerations of mental health professionals on threat assessment teams at institutions of higher education. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, *62*, 32–44. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlp.2018.10.005

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Chein, I. (1981). Appendix: An introduction to sampling. In L. H. Kidder (Ed.), *Selltiz, Wrightsman & Cook's research methods in social relations* (4th ed., pp. 418–441). Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Chekwa, C., Thomas, E. J., & Jones, V. J. (2013). What are college students' perceptions about campus safety? *Contemporary Issues in Education Research, 6*(3), 325–332. https://doi.org/10.19030/cier.v6i3.7903

Chinn, M. N. (2013). *Managing threats: Examining intra-organizational collaboration between academic and student affairs divisions* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Mississippi]. https://egrove.olemiss.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1621&context=etd

Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice. (2024, June 24). *Americans with Disabilities Act Title II regulations: Nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in state and local government services*. https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/regulations/title-ii-2010-regulations/

Colloff, P. (2006, August). 96 minutes. *Texas Monthly Magazine*. http://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/96-minutes/

Constitutional amendment lowering the voting age to eighteen: 26th Amendment: Joint Resolution proposed by Congress, March 23, 1971: Amendment certified by Administrator of General Services, July 5, 1971. (1971). https://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record/276651

Cornell, D. (2010). Threat assessment in college settings. *Change*, *42*(1), 8–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/00091380903448997

Cornell, D. G. (2020). Threat assessment as a school violence prevention strategy. *Criminology & Public Policy, 19*(1), 235–252. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12471

Cornell, D. G., Mayer, M. J., & Sulkowski, M. L. (2021). History and future of school safety research. *School Psychology Review, 50*(2–3), 143–157. https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2020.1857212

Cornell, D., & Allen, K. (2011). Development, evaluation, and future directions of the Virginia student threat assessment guidelines. *Journal of School Violence, 10*(1), 88–106. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2010.519432

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research approaches*. Sage.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the* CTAP-25. (2025). *Communications threat assessment protocol*. https://ctap25.com/

Curran, F. C., Fisher, B. W., & Viano, S. L. (2020). Mass school shootings and the short-run impacts on use of school security measures and practices: National evidence from the Columbine tragedy. *Journal of School Violence, 19*(1), 6–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2019.1703713

Cyert, R. M., & March, J. G. (1963). A *behavioral theory of the firm*. Prentice Hall.

De Haven, H. (2009). The elephant in the ivory tower: Rampages in higher education and the case for institutional liability. *Journal of College and University Law, 35*(3), 503–612. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1448090

Deisinger, G., Randazzo, M. R., O'Neill, D., & Savage, J. (2008). *The handbook for campus threat assessment & management teams*. Applied Risk Management.

Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Dexter, L. A. (1970). *Elite and specialized interviewing*. Northwestern University Press.

Dey, I. (1993). *Qualitative data analysis: A user friendly guide for social scientists*. Routledge.

Drysdale, D. A., Modzeleski, W., & Simons, A. B. (2010). *Campus attacks targeted violence affecting institutions of higher education*. https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/admins/lead/safety/campus-attacks.pdf

Dunkle, J. H., Silverstein, Z. B., & Warner, S. L. (2008). Managing violent and other troubling students: The role of threat assessment teams on campus. *Journal of College and University Law, 34*(3), 585–636. https://www.nacua.org/docs/default-source/jcul-articles/jcul-articles/volume34/34_jcul_585.pdf?sfvrsn=dd8789bf_12

Education Commission of the States. (2022). *Guns on college campuses. 50-state comparison: Postsecondary campus safety 2022*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED625504.pdf

Eells, G. T., & Rockland-Miller, H. S. (2010). 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. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2011.532470

eWAVR Partners. (2025). *Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk*. https://wavr21.com/

Executive summary. (2008). *New directions for student services*, supplement. https://cra20.humansci.msstate.edu/fulltext.pdf

Fallahi, C. R., Austad, C. S., Fallon, M., & Leishman, L. (2009). A survey of perceptions of the Virginia tech tragedy. *Journal of School Violence, 8*(2), 120–135. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220802074017

Fast, J. (2008). *Ceremonial violence: A psychological explanation of school shootings*. Overlook Press.

Fein, R. A., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W. S., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2004). *Threat assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and to creating safe school climates*. U.S. Department of Education. https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf

Finkel, E. (2016). Tangled up in blue: Boosting mental health services at community colleges. *Community College Journal, 86*(5), 39–42. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1097541

Firestone, W. A. (1987). Meaning in method: The rhetoric of quantitative and qualitative research. *Educational Researcher, 16*(7), 19–21. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x016007016

Flannery, D. J., Fox, J. A., Wallace, L., Mulvey, E., & Modzeleski, W. (2021). Guns, school shooters, and school safety: What we know and directions for change. *School Psychology Review, 50*(2–3), 237–253. https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966x.2020.1846458

Flick, U. (2014). Mapping the field. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 3–18). Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243.n1

Follett, M. P. (2009). *The new state: Group organization, the solution of popular government.* Kessinger Publishing. (Original work published 1918)

Fox, J. A., & DeLateur, M. J. (2013). Mass shootings in America: Moving beyond Newtown. *Homicide Studies, 18*(1), 125–145. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088767913510297

Gibbs, G. (2018). *Analyzing qualitative data*. Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526441867

Given, L. M. (2016). *100 questions (and answers) about qualitative research*. Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483398655

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine. https://doi.org/10.1097/00006199-196807000-00014

Harwood, V. (2011). Connecting the dots: Threat assessment, depression, and the troubled student. *Curriculum Inquiry, 41*(5), 586–609. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873x.2011.00566.x

Haynes, M. I. (2013). Workplace violence: Why every state must adopt a comprehensive workplace violence prevention law. *Cornell HR Review, 2013*, 1–11 https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/73033

Heilbrun, K., Dvoskin, J., & Heilbrun, A. (2009). Toward preventing future tragedies: Mass killings on college campuses, public health, and threat/risk assessment. *Psychological Injury & Law, 2*, 93–99. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12207-009-9040-9

Hemphill, B. O., & LaBanc, B. H. (2010). *Enough is enough: A student affairs perspective on preparedness and response to a campus shooting*. Stylus Publishing.

Henning, G. (2007). Is "in consortio cum parentibus" the new "in loco parentis?" *NASPA Journal, 44*(3), 538–560. https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1835

Herzberg, F. (1966). Work and the Nature of Man. Cleveland, OH: World Pub. Co.

Hoisington, S. (2017). Campus fears drive boom in threat-assessment teams. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/campus-fears-drive-boom-in-threat-assessment-teams/?cid2=gen_login_refresh&cid=gen_sign_in

Honigmann, J. J. (1982). Sampling in ethnographic fieldwork. In R. G. Burgess (Ed.), *Field research: A sourcebook and field manual* (pp. 79–90). Allen & Unwin.

Hume, H., & Perreault, G. (2022). Media and mass shootings: Field theory in CNN news coverage of the Columbine High School and Parkland High School mass shootings. *Electronic News, 16*(3), 147–163. https://doi.org/10.1177/19312431221111380

Hunt, M. L., Hughey, A. W., & Burke, M. G. (2012). Stress and violence in the workplace and on campus: A growing problem for business, industry, and academia. *Industry and Higher Education, 26*(1), 43–51. https://doi.org/10.5367/ihe.2012.0076

Jaeger, C., Durrenberger, G., Kastenholz, J., & Truffer, B. (1993). Determinants of environmental action with regard to climatic change. *Climate Change, 23*, 193–211. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01091615

Janosik, S. M., & Plummer, E. (2005). The Clery Act, campus safety and the views of assault victim advocates. *College Student Affairs Journal, 25*(1), 116–130. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ957017.pdf

Johnson, P. R., & Gardner, S. (1999). Domestic violence and the workplace: Developing a company response. *Journal of Management Development, 18*(7), 590–597. https://doi.org/10.1108/02621719910284440

Jones, S. R., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. (2014). *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental elements and issues* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203123836

Junod, T. (2014, October 14). Everything we think we know about mass shooters is wrong. *Esquire*. https://classic.esquire.com/everything-we-know-about-mass-shooters-is-wrong/

Katzenbach, J. R., & Smith, D. K. (1993). *The wisdom of teams: Creating the high-performance organization*. Harvard Business School Press.

Keller, E. W., Hughes, S., & Hertz, G. (2011). A model for assessment and mitigation of Threats on the college campus. *Journal of Educational Administration, 49*(1), 76–94. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231111102072.

Keneally, M. (2019). *The 11 mass deadly school shootings that happened since Columbine*. abcNEWS.com. https://abcnews.go.com/US/11-mass-deadly-school-shootings-happened-columbine/story?id=62494128

Kerlinger, F. N. (1986). *Foundations of behavioral research*. (3rd ed.) Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Kim, M., Sharman, R., Cook-Cottone, C. P., Rao, H. R., & Upadhyaya, S. J. (2012). Assessing roles of people, technology, and structure in emergency management systems: A public sector perspective. *Behaviour & Information Technology, 31*(12), 1147–1160. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929x.2010.510209

Kohut, A. (2000, April 17). *A year after Columbine: Public looks to parents more than schools to prevent violence.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2000/04/19/a-year-after-columbine-public-looks-to-parents-more-than-schools-to-prevent-violence/

Lake, P. F. (2009). *Beyond discipline: Managing the modern higher education environment.* Hierophant Enterprises.

Lake, P. F. (2013). *The rights and responsibilities of the modern university: The rise of the facilitator university* (2nd ed.). Carolina Academic Press.

Langman, P. (2015). *School shooters: Understanding high school, college, and adult perpetrators.* Rowman & Littlefield. https://doi.org/10.5771/9781442233577

LeCompte, M. D., & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research* (2nd ed.). Academic Press.

LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (2010). *Designing & conducting ethnographic research: An introduction* (2nd ed.). AltaMira Press.

Lewis, J., & Hensley, T. (1998). The May 4 shootings at Kent State University: The search for historical accuracy. *Council for the Social Studies Review, 34*(1), 9–21. https://www.kent.edu/may-4-historical-accuracy.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage. https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8

Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. H. (1995). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis.* Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Lunenberg, F. C., & Irby, B. J. (2008). *Writing a successful thesis or dissertation: Tips and strategies for students in the social and behavioral sciences*. Corwin Press.

Lyons, M. (2016). University safety culture: a work-in-progress? *Australian Universities' Review, 58*(1), 45–53. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1091201.pdf

Marshall, J. M., & Clark, B. L. (2023). A systematic literature review of educational leadership and U.S. school shootings: establishing a research agenda. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 59*(3), 594-632. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X231166335

Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality.* Harpers.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Mayo, E. (1933). *The human problems of an industrial civilization*. Macmillan Company.

Mayo, E. (1945). *The social problems of an industrial civilization.* Harvard University, Graduate School of Business Administration

McArdle, M. K. (2013). The next generation of community college leaders. *Community College. Journal of Research and Practice, 37*(11), 851–863. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2010.482483

McCusker, K. M., & Witherow, L. B. (2012). Bereavement on the college campus: establishing an effective ritual for the classroom and beyond. *About Campus, 17*(1), 12–18. https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.21068

McDonald, S. (2008). *The fundamentals FERPA.* https://www.stetson.edu/law/conferences/highered/archive/media/higher-ed-archives-2009/document/i-mcdonald-fundamental-ferpa-pdf.pdf

McGee, M., & Platt, R. E. (2015). The forgotten slayings: memory, history, and institutional response to the Jackson State University shootings of 1970. *American Educational History Journal, 42*(1), 15–32. https://www.infoagepub.com/products/American-Educational-History-Journal-Vol-42

McGregor, D. (1960). *The human side of enterprise.* McGraw-Hill.

McIntyre, J. J., Spence, P. R., & Lachlan, K. A. (2011). Media use and gender differences in negative psychological responses to a shooting on a university campus. *Journal of School Violence, 10*(3), 299–313. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2011.578555

Meloy, J. R., & Genzman, J. (2016). The clinical threat assessment of the lone-actor terrorist. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 39*(4), 649–662. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psc.2016.07.004

Meloy, J. R., & Hoffmann, J. (Eds.). (2021). *International handbook of threat assessment* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/med-psych/9780190940164.001.0001

Meloy, J. R., Hoffman, J., Guldimann, A., & James, D. (2012). The role of warning behaviors in threat assessment: An exploration and suggested typology. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 30*(3), 256–279. https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.999

Merriam, S. B., & Grenier, R. S. (2019). *Qualitative research in practice* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. (2016). *Qualitative research* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Midlarsky, E., & Klain, H. M. (2005). A history of violence in the schools. In F. Denmark, H. Krauss, R. Wesner, E. Midlarsky, & U. Gielen (Eds.), *Violence in schools: Cross-national and cross-cultural perspectives*. Springer-Verlag.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis*. Sage.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook.* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Modzeleski, W., & Randazzo, M. R. (2018). School threat assessment in the USA: Lessons learned from 15 years of teaching and using the federal model to prevent school shootings. *Contemporary School Psychology, 22*(2), 109–115. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-018-0188-8

Monahan, M. L., & Shah, A. J. (2011). Having the right tools: The leadership frames of university presidents. *The Coastal Business Journal, 10*(1), 14–30. https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/cbj/vol10/iss1/2/

Muschert, G. W. (2007). Research in school shootings. *Sociology Compass, 1*(1), 60–80. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00008.x

National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment. (2025). [Homepage]. https://www.nabita.org/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *Balancing student privacy and safety: A guide to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act for colleges and universities* [Pamphlet]. https://nces.ed.gov/forum/dataethicscourse/additional-materials/family-educational-rights.pdf

Neutens, J. J., & Rubinson, L. (2014). *Research techniques for the health sciences*. Pearson.

Nobel, H., & Heale, R. (2019). Triangulation in research, with examples. *Evidence Based Nursing, 22*(3), 67–68. https://doi.org/10.1136/ebnurs-2019-103145

Nolan, J. J., & Moncure, T. J. (2012). The legal side of campus threat assessment and management: what student counselors need to know. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 26*(4), 322–340. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2012.711182

Northern Illinois Review Panel. (2008). *Report of the February 14, 2008 shootings at Northern Illinois University.* https://www.niu.edu/forward/_pdfs/archives/feb14report.pdf

O'Neill, D., Fox, J. A., Depue, R., & Englander, E. (2008). *Campus violence prevention and response: Best practices for Massachusetts Higher Education*. Massachusetts Department of Higher Education.

O'Toole, M. E. (1999). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective.* National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Office of Partner Engagement, Criminal Investigative Division, Critical Incident Response Group, Federal Bureau of Investigation, & Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center at Texas State University. (2022). *Active shooter incidents in the United States in 2021*. https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-in-the-us-2021-052422.pdf/view

Office of Safe Schools. (2020). *Model behavioral threat assessment policies and best practices for K–12 Schools*. https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/18612/urlt/threatassessment-model-policies.pdf

Okada, D. T., & Pollard, J. W. (2021). Community-based threat assessment and higher education. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 35*(4), 406–417. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2020.1753609

Olzak, S. (2023). School shootings, protests, and the gun culture in the United States. *Social Forces, 102*(1), 116–138. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soad019

Paludi, M. (2008). *Understanding and preventing campus violence.* Praeger. https://doi.org/10.5040/9798216029267

Paterson, J. (2020). Safety scene. *Journal of College Admission, 246*, 32–37. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1258826

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.

Pavela, G. (2010). College suicide: A law and policy perspective. *The https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/crsj/vol17/iss1/3*

Pierce, S. R. (2012). *On being presidential: A guide for college and university leaders*. Jossey-Bass.

Pollack, W. S., Modzeleski, W., & Rooney, G. (2008). *Prior knowledge of potential school-based violence: Information students learn may prevent a targeted attack*. U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education. https://doi.org/10.1037/e684892012-001

Pollard, J. W., Flynn, C., & Eells, G. T. (2015). The role of threat assessment and management in college counseling: How's that net working? *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 29*(4), 248–256. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2015.1072453

Pollard, J. W., Nolan, J. J., & Deisinger, E. D. (2012). The practice of campus-based threat assessment: An overview. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 26*(4), 263–276. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2012.711142

Ponterotto, J. G. (2006). Brief note on the origins, evolution, and meaning of the qualitative research concept thick description. *The Qualitative Report, 11*, 538–549. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2006.1666

Probst, B., & Berenson, L. (2014). The double arrow: How qualitative social work researchers use reflexivity. *Qualitative Social Work, 13*(6), 813–827. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325013506248

Randazzo, M. R., & Cameron, J. K. (2012). From presidential protection to campus security: A brief history of threat assessment in north American schools and colleges. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 26*(4), 277–290. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2012.711146

Reddy, M., Borum, R., Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Berglund, J., & Modzeleski, W. (2001). Evaluating risk for targeted violence in schools: comparing risk assessment, threat assessment, and other approaches. *Psychology in the Schools, 38*, 157–172. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.1007

Richards, L. (2015). *Handling qualitative data* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Rinehart-Thompson, L. A. (2009). Amendments to FERPA regulations: New changes attempt to balance safety and privacy in student records. *Journal of American Health Information Management Association, 80,* 56–57. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19663146/

Roark, M. L. (1987). Preventing violence on college campuses. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 65*, 367–371. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1987.tb00732.x

Roberts, C. M. (2010). *The dissertation journey: A practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation.* Corwin Press. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452219219

Rodrigues, M., & Goodman, S (2022, November 14). “I’m so in shock”: In one day, UVA and U. of Idaho are rocked by separate tragedies. *Chronicle of Higher Education.* https://www.chronicle.com/article/uva-student-charged-with-murdering-3-others-4-u-of-idaho-student-deaths-under-homicide-investigation

Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective interviewing: A guide to theory and practice*. Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446288009

Sabin, J. (1864). *Catalogue of the entire library of Andrew Wight of Philadelphia. J*. E. Cooley. https://archive.org/details/acatalogueentir01sabigoog/page/n6/mode/2up

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Salmons, J. (2015). *Qualitative online interviews* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Sanburn, J. (2015). A familiar tragedy calls for unfamiliar solutions. *Time*, *186*(15), 11–13.

Schiemann, M., & Van Brunt, B. (2018). Summary and analysis of 2018 NABITA survey data. *Journal of Behavioral Intervention Teams, 6,* 42–57. https://www.nabita.org/resources/summary-and-analysis-of-2018-nabita-survey-data/

Schuchman, M. (2007). Falling through the cracks—Virginia Tech and the restructuring of college mental health services. *New England Journal of Medicine, 357*(2), 105–110. https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmp078096

Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.

Silver, P. F. (1983). *Educational administration: Theoretical perspectives on practice and research*. Harper & Row.

Silverman, D. (2016). *Qualitative research* (4th ed.). Sage

Silverman, M. (2008). Campus security begins with caring. *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* http://chronicle.com/article/Campus-SecurityBegins-With/36211

Sokolow, B., Lewis, S., Van Brunt, B., Schuster, S., & Swinton, D. (2014). *Book on BIT* (2nd ed.). National Behavioral Intervention Team Association.

Sokolow, B., Lewis, W. S., Schuster, S. K., Swinton, D. C., & Van Brunt, B. J. (2014). *Threat assessment in the campus setting* [NABITA 2014 whitepaper]. www.nabita.org.

Somers, P., & Valentine, M. (2020). *Campus carry: Confronting a loaded issue in higher education*. Harvard Education Press.

Southeastern Conference. (2025). *History of the Southeastern Conference.* https://www.secsports.com/history

Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Stake, R. E. (1988). Case study methods in educational research: Seeking sweet water. In R. M. Jaeger (Ed.), *Complementary methods for research in education* (pp. 253–278). American Education Research Association.

Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). (443–466). Sage.

Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge University Press.

Strauss, A. (1995). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511557842

Stuart-Cassel, V., Bell, A., Springer, J. F. (2011). *Analysis of state bullying laws and policies.* Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, U.S. Department of Education.

Sukhera, J., & Schwartz, H. (2023). Reflections on Sandy Hook: A decade later. *Academic Psychiatry, 47*, 486–487. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-023-01792-8

Sulkowski, M. L., & Lazarus, P. J. (2011). Contemporary responses to violent attacks on college campuses. *Journal of School Violence, 10*(4), 338–354. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2011.602601

Swerzenski, J. D. (2021). Why teaching technology must adapt to our teaching. Forum: Pandemic pedagogy and student learning. *Communication Education, 70*(2), 211–213. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2020.1857414

Sypawka, W., Mallett, W., & McFadden, C. (2010). Leadership styles of community college academic deans. *The Community College Enterprise, 16*(1), 63–73. https://www.schoolcraft.edu/cce/

Taylor, F. W. (1911). *The principles of scientific management*. The Plimpton Press.

Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods*. Wiley and Sons.

Thelin, J. (2011). A *history of American higher education* (2nd ed). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Thomas, N. L. (1991). The new in loco parentis. *Change, 23*(5), 32–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.1991.9939878

Thornton, S. J. (1993). The quest for emergent meaning: A personal account. In D.J. Flinders & G. E. Mills (Eds.), *Theory and concepts in qualitative research* (p. 68–82). Teachers College Press.

Tolstoy, L. (1970). *Anna Karenina*. W.W. Norton & Co.

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Turanovic, J. J., & Siennick, S. E. (2022). *The causes and consequences of school violence: A review*. National Institutes of Justice. https://schoolsafety.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Causes-and-Consequences-of-School-Violence-A-Review.pdf

U.S. Department of Education, & Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2019, December). *Joint guidance on the application of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) to student health records*. https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/resources/joint-guidance-application-ferpa-and-hipaa-student-health-records

U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *The handbook for campus safety and security reporting.* https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/handbook.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. (2021). *What is a threat assessment team?* https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/faq/what-threat-assessment-team

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2013, July). *Summary of the HIPAA privacy rule*. https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/laws-regulations/index.html

Van Brunt, B. (2012). *Ending campus violence: New approaches to prevention*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203149560

Van Hasselt, B., & Bourke, M. (2018). *Handbook of behavioral criminology*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-61625-4

Virginia Tech Review Panel. (2007). *Mass shootings at Virginia Tech: Report of the Virginia Tech Review Panel presented to Timothy M. Kaine, Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia*. https://lccn.loc.gov/2008397165

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R. A., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2004). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. U.S. Department of Education. https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf

Wagoner, J., Jr. (1985). Honor and dishonor at Mr. Jefferson's University: The antebellum years. *History of Education Quarterly, 26*(2), 155–179. https://doi.org/10.2307/368735

Wang, K., Chen, Y., Zhang, J., & Oudekerk, B. A. (2020). *Indicators of school crime and safety: 2019* (NCES 2020-063/NCJ 254485). National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020063.pdf

Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization*. Oxford University Press.

Whitting, C. (2005). Duty of care: An analytical approach. *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies, 25*(1), 33–63. https://doi.org/10.1093/ojls/gqi003

Wilson, K. R., & Karus, L. (1983). Sexual harassment in the university. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 24*, 219–224. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ285075

World Health Organization. (2002). *World report on violence and health: Summary*. https://www.who.int/news/item/03-10-2002-first-ever-global-report-on-violence-and-health-released

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage.

Zdziarski, E. L., Dunkel, N. W., & Rollo, J. M.. (2007). *Campus crisis management.* Wiley & Sons.

Zott, C., & Huy, Q. N. (2007). How entrepreneurs use symbolic management to acquire resources. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *52*(1), 70–105. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.52.1.70

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Initial IRB Approval

March 04, 2024

Dorian L McCoy,
UTK - EHHS DEI

Re: UTK IRB-24-08023-XP
Study Title: A Basic Qualitative Study of the Experiences of Those Who Lead Threat Assessment Teams in Higher Education

Dear Dorian L McCoy:

The UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your application for the above referenced project. It determined that your application is eligible for expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1), categories (5), (6), and (7). The IRB has reviewed these materials and determined that they do comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval by the IRB of your application (Version 1.5) as submitted, including:

Documents Stamped:

- J Roe IRB Informed Consent (English) - (Version 1.1)
- J Roe IRB Interview Protocol - (Version 1.1)
- J Roe IRB Email Recruitment - (Version 1.1)
- J Roe IRB Social Media Request - (Version 1.1)

That have been dated and stamped IRB approved. You are approved to enroll a maximum of 30 participants. Approval of this study will be valid from 03/04/2024 to 03/03/2025.

Any revisions in the approved application, consent forms, instruments, recruitment materials, etc., must also be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Finally, re-approval of your project is required by the IRB in accord with the conditions specified above. You may not continue the research study beyond the time or other limits specified unless you obtain prior written approval of the IRB.

Sincerely,
Lora Beebe, Ph.D., PMHNP-BC, FAAN
Chair

Appendix B: Revision IRB Approval

March 06, 2025

James Patrick Biddix, PhD
UTK – College of Education, Health, & Human Sciences - Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Re: UTK IRB-24-08023-XP
Study Title: A Basic Qualitative Study of the Experiences of Those Who Lead Threat Assessment Teams in Higher Education

Dear James Patrick Biddix:

The UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your application for **revision** of your previously approved project, referenced above.

The IRB determined that your application is eligible for **expedited** review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(2). The following revisions were approved as complying with proper consideration of the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects:

Application Version 1.6

- Amendment removes Dorian McCoy from the UTK study team
- Amendment updates the application to correctly list James Biddix where necessary
- Amendment adds a reliance agreement with University of South Carolina
    - UTK is the Reviewing site
    - USC is the Relying site
- Amendment adds Rev.com for data transcription

Document Stamped:

- J Roe IRB Informed Consent (English) - (Version 1.3)

Documents Acknowledged:

- Reliance_Agreement_Template_-_SMARTIRB_UTK_Reviewing_-University_of_South_Carolina_-_Dorian_McCoy_- - (Version 1.0)
- Local Context Review Form - University of South Carolina - Dorian McCoy - UTK IRB-24-08023-XP USC Completed - (Version 1.0)
- D McCoy USC External Review Initial Approval 02 26 2025 (002) - (Version 1.0)

Voided Document:

- J Roe IRB Informed Consent (Version 1.1)

Approval does not alter the expiration date of this project, which is 03/02/2026.

Any additional revisions in the approved application, consent forms, instruments, recruitment materials, etc., must be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Finally, **re-approval** of your project is required by the IRB in accord with the conditions specified above. You may not continue the research study beyond the time or other limits specified unless you obtain prior written approval of the IRB.

Sincerely,
Lora Beebe, Ph.D., PMHNP-BC, FAAN
Chair

Appendix C: Recruitment Emails

Recruitment E-mail One

Subject: PhD Candidate Seeking Research Participants for a Threat Assessment Study | Your Participation Is Requested

Body of Email:

Greetings,

My name is Julie Roe, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in the Higher Education Administration Program. I am also the Human Resources Employee Relations Manager and team lead for faculty and staff threat assessment.

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in a research study regarding the experiences of individuals who lead threat assessment teams (TATs) in higher education, specifically to understand how they operationalize and define success. Eligible participants must currently serve as a TAT leader and have served on the team in some capacity for at least one year or 12 non-consecutive months.

If you choose to participate in this research study, I will first ask you to complete a 5-minute survey including an informed consent form (link below). Next, I will contact you to schedule a 60–75-minute interview via Zoom. I will record the interview session so data can be transcribed and analyzed for research purposes only.

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate in the study please click the link below. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me (jmonday@utk.edu, (865) 776-3554) or Dr. Dorian McCoy (dmccoy5@utk.edu, (865) 974-6140). I also kindly ask that share my contact information with any persons who may be eligible and interested in participating in this research.

Thank you for your consideration. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Follow this link to the Survey:

[link]

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [link]

Kindest regards,
Julie Roe

Recruitment Email 2

Subject: PhD Candidate Seeking Research Participants for a Threat Assessment Study | Your Participation Is Requested—Reminder

Body of Email:

Greetings,

I am writing regarding the email requests I sent you in December 2024 to include you in a research study about the experiences of individuals who lead threat assessment teams (TATs) in higher education, specifically to understand how they operationalize and define success.

I would very much appreciate your participation in this research study as a higher education professional in threat assessment. If you choose to participate in this research study, I will ask that you join me via Zoom for a 60–75-minute interview. I will record the interview session so data can be transcribed and analyzed for research purposes only. I also kindly ask that you consider forwarding this information to any persons who may be eligible and interested in participating in this research.

Follow this link to the Survey: [link]
Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [link]

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate in the study or if you have any questions about the study, please contact me (jmonday@utk.edu, (865) 776-3554) or Dr. Dorian McCoy (dm124@mailbox.sc.edu).

Kindest regards,
Julie Roe

Recruitment Email 3

Subject: PhD Candidate Seeking Research Participants for a Threat Assessment Study | Your Participation Is Requested—Final Request

Body of Email:

Greetings,

I am writing to follow-up on the email I sent you on [date], 2025 about a request I made to include you in a research study regarding the experiences of individuals who lead threat assessment teams (TATs) in higher education, specifically to understand how they operationalize and define success. Eligible participants must currently serve as a TAT leader and have served on the team in some capacity for at least one year or 12 non-consecutive months.

I would very much appreciate your participation in this research study as a higher education professional in threat assessment. If you choose to participate in this research study, I will first ask you to complete a 5-minute survey including an informed consent form (link below). Next, I will contact you to schedule a 60–75-minute interview via Zoom. I will record the interview session so data can be transcribed and analyzed for research purposes only.

Follow this link to the Survey: [link]
Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [link]

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate in the study, please click the link above. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me (jmonday@utk.edu, (865) 776-3554) or Dr. Patrick Biddix (pbiddix@utk.edu).

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Kindest regards,
Julie Roe

Response Email to Interested Participants

Subject: Participation in Research Study on Threat Assessment - Schedule Interview

Body of Email:

Greetings,

Thank you for expressing an interest in this research study about the experiences of individuals who lead threat assessment teams (TATs) in higher education, specifically to understand how they operationalize and define success. I have received your completed participation survey and informed consent—thank you! You should have automatically received a copy of your responses; please let me know if you did not.

Next, I would like to schedule a 60–75 minute, Zoom interview with you at your convenience between [dates], 2025. Send some preferred dates/times and I will setup the Zoom link and send a calendar hold. Also, if you have TAT information that would be helpful for me to review in advance for this study, please send that to me as well (example: link to relevant university policy, team protocol, public webpage, etc.).

As a reminder, participation in this research study is completely voluntary. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me (jmonday@utk.edu, (865) 776-3554) or Dr. Dorian McCoy (dmccoy5@utk.edu, (865) 974-6140).

Kindest regards, Julie Roe

Appendix D: Participation Survey and Informed Consent

Participation Survey With Informed Consent

Thank you for initiating the participant survey. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of individuals who lead threat assessment teams (TATs) in higher education, specifically to understand how they operationalize and define success. The following research question will guide this study: How do threat assessment team leaders operationalize and define success?

This survey must be completed prior to the interview and includes eligibility screening questions, informed consent, a reminder of resources, and optional demographic questions. Once the survey is complete, I will contact you to schedule an interview.

In addition to interviews, I will review available threat assessment documents from participants in advance of each interview. Examples include, but are not limited to, institutional threat assessment policies, procedures, protocols, and/or models used. If you would like to share any documents for this study, please email them to me at jmonday@utk.edu.

Eligibility Screening Questions

- Are you a current higher education professional (employee)?
  [select yes or no]
- Are you in a leadership role on a TAT (examples: chair, co-chair, coordinator, or other team leadership role)?
  [select yes or no]
- Have you served on the current TAT (in any role) for at least 1 year (12 months, non-consecutive)?
  [select yes or no]

If you answered yes to all the screening questions, proceed to informed consent for Research Participation.

Informed Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: Strengthening the Ecosystem of Care and Resilience: A Basic Qualitative Study of the Experiences of Those Who Lead Threat Assessment Teams in Higher Education
Researcher(s): Julie Roe, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Dr. Dorian McCoy, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?
We are asking you to participate in this research study because you are a professional in higher education currently serving on a threat assessment team in a leadership role.

What is this research study about?
The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of individuals who lead threat assessment teams (TATs) in higher education, specifically to understand how TAT leaders operationalize and define success.

How long will I be in the research study?
If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last for approximately 60–75 minutes in a virtual interview with a potential for an additional 10–45 minutes for member checking (or verification of transcripts and preliminary data). Total 60–120 minutes.

What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?
Prior to the interview, participants will be asked to complete a brief survey that will be administered via Qualtrics. The survey includes eligibility screening questions, informed consent, a reminder of resources, and optional demographic questions. We will invite participants to reach out if they would like well-being resources in their local area. By completing the form and selecting "I consent to participate," interview participants grant their consent to participate in the research study and advance to the next section of the survey.

We will ask you to participate in a 60–75-minute interview with the student investigator. The interview will take place via a virtual platform (i.e. Zoom). Participants will meet with the student investigator, and the student investigator will use that time to ask the participant approximately 12 questions about their experience leading threat assessment teams (TATs) in higher education, specifically to understand how TAT leaders operationalize and define success.

What happens if I say "No, I do not want to be in this research study"?
Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision won't affect you professionally.

What happens if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?
Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to stop before the study is completed, you can contact the PI or student investigator with your decision. The PI or student investigator will ensure that data from your participation is promptly disregarded and deleted, to ensure compliance.

Are there any possible risks to me?
It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

Other potential risks for participation include psychological, mental, and emotional factors. For example, reliving experiences from a threat assessment case, crisis, or similar personal trauma may incite anxiety or depression, and mental stresses that may cause fatigue, sadness, crying, or otherwise.

Reminder of Resources:
We wish to remind all participants of the National 988 Crisis Lifeline as well as your local Employee Assistance Program. If you would like assistance finding additional local support, please let us know.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?
We do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. However, your participation may help us to learn more about the lived experiences of those leading a threat assessment team (TAT) in higher education, specifically to understand how TAT leaders operationalize and define success. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?
We will protect the confidentiality of your information by altering all names and replacing them with pseudo names, both in the interview transcriptions and the study report. The researchers will be the only individuals with access to your consent forms, audio-recorded interviews, and the transcriptions. Recorded data will be transcribed using Rev.com and user data may be used for machine learning for the purposes of testing, tuning, optimizing, validating, or otherwise enhancing the AI tool that powers the service. Please note that Rev.com may update their Terms of Service without notifying the investigators or you, which may affect how your data is stored in the future.

If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?
We may share your research data with other researchers without asking for your consent again, but it will not contain information that could directly identify you.

Will I be paid for being in this research study?
You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Will it cost me anything to be in this research study?
It will not cost you anything to be in this study.

What else do I need to know?
We will initially reach out to 15 institutions to find participants for this study. We will use the snowball sampling method and collect additional participants via referral until the point of saturation or such time there are no more willing participants. We will only interview those that meet the criteria set forth in this study. The information you and other participants will provide is essential to understanding the lived experiences of those leading threat assessment teams. Because of the potential small number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone could identify you based on the information we collected from you.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?
If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers:

Julie A. Roe
jmonday@utk.edu
(865) 776-3554

Dr. Dorian McCoy (Associate Professor and College of Education, Health and Human Sciences Director of Access & Engagement)
dmccoy5@utk.edu
(865) 974-6140

Dr. Patrick Biddix (Professor, Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies—College of Education, Health and Human Sciences)
pbiddix@utk.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT: I have read this electronic form, and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By selecting "I consent to participate in this research study," I agree to be in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this survey document after completion.

__ I consent to participate in this research study.

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the study to the participant and answered all questions. I believe that the participant understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to be in the study.

Optional Demographic Questions - Survey

1. First and last name:
2. Highest education level:
3. Age: *circle one* 21–30 31–40 41–50 51–60 61–70 71+
4. Race:
5. Gender identity:
6. Professional Title/Role:
    a) Please describe your professional role at your institution (job title and responsibilities).
    b) Please describe your role on the threat assessment team at your institution.
    c) Total years of experience in higher education
    d) Total years of experience at current institution
    e) Total years serving on a threat assessment team
    f) Total years serving on a threat assessment team in a leadership role

Thank you for completing the participant survey. I will contact you to schedule an interview in the coming days. If you would like to share any documents for this study, please email them to me at jmonday@utk.edu. If you have any questions, you may email or call me at (865) 776-3554.

Julie Roe

Appendix E: Member Checking

Subject: Member Checking—Research Study—TAT Leader

Body of Email:

Thank you again for participating in my research study regarding the experiences of individuals who lead threat assessment teams (TATs) in higher education, specifically to understand how they operationalize and define success.

I have attached a copy of the transcript from our [date], 2025, interview. Please review it for accuracy and let me know if you wish to make any changes as soon as possible. Once I hear from you, I will move forward with data analysis.

If you have TAT information for your institution that would be helpful to include for document analysis, please send that to me at this email address (examples: link to relevant university policy, team protocol, handbook, public webpage, etc.).

Lastly, I have attached a copy of your signed consent form and survey for your convenience.

Take care,
Julie Roe

Appendix F: Interview Protocol
Interview Protocol

Interview #: _____

Pseudonym: _____

Date: _____

Purpose of Study:
The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of individuals who lead threat assessment teams (TATs) in higher education, specifically to understand how they operationalize and define success.

Research Question:
How do threat assessment team leaders operationalize and define success?

Inclusion Criteria:

- Must be a current higher education professional (employee).
- Must be in a leadership role on a TAT (examples: chair, co-chair, coordinator, or other team leadership role).
- Must have served on the TAT (in any role) for at least 1 year (12 months, non-consecutive).

Participant Survey (completed prior to interview):
Prior to the interview, participants will be asked to complete a brief survey that will be administered via Qualtrics. The survey includes eligibility screening questions, informed consent, a reminder of resources, and optional demographic questions. By completing the informed consent portion of the survey and selecting "I consent to participate," interview participants grant their consent to participate in the research study and advance to the next section of the survey.

Opening Statement:
First, I want to thank you for your participation in this study. My name is Julie Roe, and I am a doctoral candidate within the Higher Education Administration program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am currently conducting a basic qualitative study to examine the experiences of individuals who lead threat assessment teams (TATs) in higher education, specifically to understand how they operationalize and define success. I encourage you to be as open and honest as possible based on your level of comfort.

Thank you again for completing the participant survey and informed consent prior to our meeting today. If at any time you feel uncomfortable and need to take a break, or stop the interview, please let me know and I will end the interview immediately. You may withdraw from the interview at any time. I would like to remind you about the National 988 Crisis Lifeline as well as your local Employee Assistance Program. If you would like assistance finding local support,

please let me know. If, for some reason, you feel as though you can no longer participate due to your mental well-being, the local resource(s) may be helpful to you personally.

This interview will last approximately 60—75 minutes and your participation is voluntary. Your responses will remain anonymous as I will use pseudonyms for all participants.

Please do not hesitate to ask for clarification about any of the interview questions. I want to remind you that I am recording the interview for transcription purposes to ensure accurate data, but your identity will remain anonymous. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions:

1. Describe your leadership style.
2. How did you first become involved in threat assessment in higher education?
3. When/how did you move into a leadership role on the threat assessment team (TAT)?
4. Describe the threat assessment protocol or practice used at your institution.
    a. Do responses vary related to students of concern versus faculty/staff of concern?
    b. Is the protocol based on a specific threat assessment model or best practice? If so, please tell me about that.
    c. Are you willing/able to provide a digital copy of the protocol(s) or, if applicable, threat assessment policy? I will also review any available documents from each institution as part of this qualitative study.
5. Tell me about the challenges /successes you face leading a TAT.
6. How do you maintain team engagement? For individuals? For the team?
7. Tell me about professional development for team members?
8. Without revealing identities of persons of concern, tell me about a time when the TAT successfully:
    a. Implemented prevention strategies?
    b. Implemented intervention strategies?
    c. And if applicable, implemented postvention strategies (following a violent event/incident)?
9. Thinking about the examples shared, what, if anything, would you change?
10. How do you define success of a TAT?
11. How do you operationalize success?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Closing Statement:

Thank you again for your participation today. This concludes the interview. I will transcribe the interview and provide a copy for your review and feedback in the coming days. Please let me know if you have any questions.

VITA

Originally from Knoxville, Tennessee, Julie Roe has spent her entire life in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains. She is the daughter of James and Rebecca Monday. After graduating from South Doyle High School Julie transitioned to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where she acquired a bachelor's degree in Finance and Administration and a master's degree in Human Resource Management both from the Haslam College of Business. She spent most of her professional career working in various human resources offices in higher education at both the system and campus level. Her love of the college atmosphere grew, and it was during this time that she decided to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Higher Education Administration. Her research interests include care and resilience programs for faculty and staff, threat assessment, case management, and human resources in higher education. After graduation, she plans to continue her career in higher education to strengthen care and resilience for faculty, staff, and students and elevate threat assessment at the University of Tennessee. Julie is especially grateful to her husband, Brian Roe, and her two children. Their unwavering love and support motivated her to reach her academic goals. She is also appreciative of her many friends, colleagues, and peers who inspire her daily.