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Awareness and Understanding of a College Active Shooter Crisis Plan

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Christopher Williams

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Awareness and Understanding of a College Active Shooter Crisis Plan

by

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Abstract

Gun violence on college campuses has gained the attention of campus leaders, leading to an active shooter policy and procedure development and implementation. There was little awareness within the campus leadership of a college in the Southeast United States on the college's active shooter policy and procedures. Guided by Coomb's crisis management plan model, the purpose of this case study was to explore how information was provided to students, faculty, and staff regarding how to respond to an active shooter on campus. Purposeful sampling was used to identify 16 participants (6 students, 5 faculty, and 5 administrator/staff) who were interviewed in person. Data analysis included content analysis for the documents and open and axial coding for the interview data, followed by identification of emergent themes. The outcomes included significant variations and inconsistencies among students, faculty, and staff regarding awareness and understanding of how to respond to an active shooter crisis. Overall, students demonstrated the least awareness and understanding. Based on the findings, a project was developed consisting of recommendations to augment the current active shooter procedures and to develop a comprehensive active shooter policy. The results of the study could promote increased awareness, understanding, and preparation for students and employees of technical and community colleges regarding an active shooter policy and procedures, thus increasing safety and confidence on campus.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Institutions of higher education are intended to expand students' thinking, assist students in obtaining practical skills, and offer them opportunities for personal and professional growth (Green, 2013). However, active shooter crises have jeopardized student pursuit of higher education. The U.S. public reacts with particular shock to active shooter crises on college campuses due to a constructed belief that higher education sites are excluded from acts of violence (Madfis, 2014). Active shooter crises cannot be predicted. Therefore, it is important that students are prepared for such an event and are aware of the implemented precautions for an active shooter crisis.

Carter (2011) shared that safety precautions include a range of considerations, such as emergency notification systems that inform those in danger when an accident or crisis occurs. Hughes and Johnson (2012) stated that although higher education administrators hope that they will not need a crisis management plan for a campus disaster, a prescriptive plan for various types of emergencies could mean the difference between life and death. The level of awareness of the safety plans and procedures is equally as important as having a prescriptive safety plan.

The level of awareness has been highlighted by violence on collegiate campuses, which has become a concern for the campus personnel and the surrounding community (Thompson, Price, Mrdjenovich, & Khubchandani, 2009). Violence perpetrated through firearm usage increased within the last decade on college campuses in the United States. Kraus (2013) reported that out of 30 active shooter school crises, between September

2009 and January 2013, 11 staff members and 36 students were fatally wounded. Active shooter crises that occurred at colleges or universities since year 2010 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Collegiate Campus Shootings

Location	Date	Fatalities	Wounded	Source
Umpqua Community College, Roseburg, Or	October 1, 2015	9	0	Chiu, 2015
Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Az	October 9, 2015	1	3	Roberts, 2015
Lone Star College-North Harris, Tx	January 22, 2013	0	2	Kraus, 2013
Oikos University, Ca	April 2, 2012	7	3	Kraus, 2013
San Jose State University, Ca	May 10, 2011	2	0	Kraus, 2013
Ohio State University, Oh	March 9, 2010	1	1	Kraus, 2013
University of Alabama in Huntsville, Al	February 10, 2010	3	3	Kraus, 2013

Definition of the Problem

Problem

Active shooter awareness and response was heightened at a community college located in the Southeast portion of the United States. The active shooter procedures are intended to instruct individuals how to respond in the case of an active shooter crisis on

campus. The local Southern college of study (hereafter referred to as Southern Tech) began sharing active shooter information with employees and implementing tools on campus to use during an active shooter crisis. However, there was a problem linked to the implementation of the procedures in the development of the active shooter safety procedures. Implementation refers to methods of how information and awareness regarding how individuals should respond to an active shooter crisis was made available to stakeholders. The gap in practice that was investigated included the dissemination of procedures to both employees and students. However, only collected data would confirm if there was a variation in how information was shared with students and employees. The goal of this research study was to determine the levels of awareness and understanding of students and employees regarding how to respond to an active shooter.

After an announcement regarding implementation of an active shooter procedure at staff development meeting by the former chief of police (R. Herring, personal communication, April 4, 2013), nearly a year had passed without any updates being posted or dispersed among students, faculty, and staff. The chief, along with an active shooter simulator video, implied at the staff development meeting that the college was preparing to draft a policy for an active shooter. Since that announcement, a new police campus chief was hired in October 2013. After contacting the new police campus chief regarding an active shooter update for the college, he informed me that revising campus policies was on his primary agenda, which included the active shooter policy (M. Gerbino, personal communication, November 20, 2013). Information was needed as the United States continued to have active shooter crises.

The United States has experienced an increase in active shooter events in the last few years (Mechem, Bossert, & Baldini, 2014). Sulkowski and Lazarus (2011) reported that when compared to their nearby communities, college campuses were typically safer; however, violent attacks regarding firearms have increased at colleges and universities. On October 9, 2015, just over a week after the Umpqua shooting, another student was killed at Northern Arizona University's Flagstaff campus, which contributed to another week of violence in higher education. (Rogers, 2015). After the Umpqua shooting, students stated that firearms should be allowed on campus (Healy & Turkewitz, 2015). Within the last 5 years, several states have begun legally permitting these weapons onto campuses including, Utah (Utah Code Ann. § 53B-3-103(2)), Colorado (C.S. R. §16-11-127), and Arkansas (Arkansas Code § 5-73-322). However, Southern Tech prohibits firearms on the college campus. The campus policy (Georgia code §16-11-127) regarding weapons stated that they were not allowed on campus, and this ban will continue to be reinforced by the new bill (H.R. 826). Nevertheless, this policy does not make the college immune to an active shooter crisis.

An active shooter crisis can place anyone at risk, and of the nearly 12,000 aggravated assaults in higher educational institutions in the United States since 2007, the crisis has caused more than 149 deaths at public and private colleges (Hoang, 2014). Criminal information must be accessible by all colleges and universities. Guffey (2013) shared that the Clery Act, a federal law developed in 1990 by the U.S. Congress, mandated that colleges and universities disclose criminal acts on or near their campus in annual reports. The Clery Act was revised in 1998 to implement better support and

standardization of the reporting (Scribner et al., 2010). The Congressional level of the U.S. government deemed it significant enough to require colleges to provide awareness to students, employees, and the public of their campus' history of on-campus violence or other criminal incidents. The information on the college website is in compliance with this law, and individuals can be made aware of the campus crime statistics via the college's website.

Campus incidents involving firearms have impacted education locally and nationally. In addition to firearms playing a factor in collegiate crimes, attention was given to colleges being adequately prepared for a college shooting. Delatorre (2011) stated that in the aftermath of the shooting at Virginia Tech, Governor Kaine of Virginia and President Bush commissioned panels to provide preventive ideas that deterred future incidents of mass violence from occurring at higher education institutions. This national action initiated by the Bush administration focused on the importance of colleges and universities being prepared for any active shooter crisis. The initiative influenced postsecondary institutions to increase the prevalence of surveillance cameras, alert systems, and the hiring of more security guards as preventive measurements (Negrea, 2014).

Preventive and responsive measurements were created at Southern Tech for a comprehensive active shooter emergency procedure plan. Stakeholders' perceptions of the active shooter procedures were indicative of how well the procedures were implemented. If higher education institutions are prepared for an active shooter, the procedures must ensure that students and employees are aware of how to react to an

active shooter situation. The following information was developed in 2010 regarding how to respond to an armed person at the study site. Although the author was anonymous (Southern Tech, 2010), individuals were instructed to

- Call the police department if you see an armed person on campus with a description and location of person
- Remain in classroom, offices, or predetermined location until you are sure the danger no longer exists
- Call for help when it is safe to do so

The most recent event that occurred regarding the development and implementation of the active shooter procedures was July 25, 2014. Campus chief of police emailed all college employees of a mandatory faculty and staff development day training. He stated that training was being held regarding how to respond to an active shooter on campus. The chief also stated that the campus police department had prepared a web-based training that would be accessible on the college's website for faculty, staff, and students (M. Gerbino, personal communication, July 8, 2014).

Shortly after the faculty and staff meeting, safety measurements were implemented on campus, such as evacuation chairs. Evacuation chairs are folded devices used to evacuate individuals from stairs to level ground (Morrish & Morrish, 2011). Evacuation chairs, a new emergency resource that arrived at the campus, were placed in various areas of the building such as at the top of stairwells. Evacuation chairs could be instrumental in assisting individuals, such as those with physical disabilities, to a safe location in the event of an active shooter on campus.

The information that was given at the faculty and staff development day was imperative to the development and implementation of the active shooter safety plan. However, the purpose of this research was multilayered. I investigated how the procedures were developed, but also focused on problems that arose associated with the implementation such as how information was dispersed to students regarding an active shooter.

Georgia Gun Laws

Gun laws changed July 1, 2014 in Georgia. Governor Deal signed a bill (H.R. 60) into law April 23, 2014. The law allowed individuals who had a license to carry guns to legally take their firearms into churches, bars, airports, government buildings, and (with permission) schools. Although legalized discretion was given, organizations such as churches and bars can decide not to allow firearms into their establishment. However, a second bill (H.R. 826) was developed with the supporting three-page document prohibiting firearms on school campuses (“A Shot and a Beer,” 2014). Unlike Georgia’s neighboring state of Florida (H.B. 2005) that made it legal for any individual at least 21 years of age with a license to carry to bring a firearm to college campuses, Georgia does not permit firearms at colleges and universities. The policies prohibiting firearms are dictated by laws passed down by the state of Georgia Legislature. Policies and laws regarding firearms are related to this study because firearms are the primary weapon of active shooters. However, despite gun laws in an institution, gun laws are not a deterrent for active shooters. Active shooters are not looking to adapt to the law; however, those who enforce the laws are adapting to active shooters.

Savannah-Chatham Police Chief Lumpkin planned to approve a policy that would equip his 300 patrol officers with semiautomatic rifles (Coleman, 2015). The reason for this weaponry upgrade was because law enforcement officers are engaging with active shooters, and other armed criminals, with more powerful and effective firearms. Port Wentworth Police Chief Libby believed his officers needed to be able to equally defend themselves and offered training for his officers to survive and effectively eliminate a threat (Coleman, 2015). Southern Tech's police department supported this theory as well. Chief Gerbino of Southern Tech stated that his officers had been equipped with assault rifles, and that if an active shooter situation occurred at an institution, officers would benefit from addressing the threat from a distance and with a level of firepower that suppressed the threat (Coleman, 2015).

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Welch (2013) suggested that public safety professionals, as well as education and community leaders, have not created methods to avoid acts of violence. However, some actions have been taken to implement more available safety resources. Hoover (2008) stated that the National Center of Personal Protection and Safety created a training video called *Shots Fired-When Lightning Strikes*. Multiple postsecondary institutions, over 300, have purchased the licensed DVD (Spivey, 2007). Hoover further indicated that colleges and universities saw the DVD because it was necessary for students, instructors, and staff to be knowledgeable of a plan for a crisis related to an active shooter on campus. The National Institute of Justice is collaborating with faculty, staff, and administrators to

create a safer learning environment by producing materials promoting prevention and proper response to an active shooter crisis (Schuster, 2009).

After shots were fired on campus at Armstrong University, a local university President instructed the student government association to sponsor an active shooter presentation open to students, faculty, and staff (Coleman, 2015). This increase of awareness is needed for students at Southern Tech. Although no students were harmed at Armstrong University, the campus saw the urgency of raising awareness for everyone, including students. However, it is rare for no one to be harmed during these crises. When a professor was killed at Delta State University, a fellow English professor stated that the university did a poor job of informing the faculty, staff, and students of the emergency (Leff & Foley, 2015). It is at those critical times when technology can be a medium of dispersing urgent information.

Lang (2012) stated there are too many university security personnel who did not believe advanced technology was needed to secure a college campus. On the contrary, many colleges and universities have implemented a communication system as advanced technology, which can transmit a multitude of alerts to students, faculty, staff, and campus security (Butler & Lafreniere, 2010). Lang stated that individuals need to be alerted of danger, and technology can be used to communicate better potential threats on college campuses. Lang supported the needed balance of an adequate public safety staff and an alert system that describes the severity of the danger of an active shooter on campus.

The college in this study has experienced criminal acts. Since 2012, there have been three sexual offenses, five robberies, nine vehicular robberies, and four aggravated assaults (Gerbino, 2015). The college had not experienced an active shooter event. Nonetheless, the goal is to have proactive protective measures, safety procedures, and standards for such a crisis just as at other local institutions. At the mandatory faculty and staff meeting on July 25, 2014, Chief Gerbino offered protective measures. However, it was only for employees. Since then, no meetings for employees or students have occurred. This absence of information is indicative of the gap in practice. Innocent people could be seriously harmed or killed if they are not aware of how to respond to an active shooter at Southern Tech. The absence of awareness and preparation will result in panic and individuals making poor decisions that could result in injury or death (Johnson et al., 2016).

A student at Southern Tech stated, “I would run out of my classroom for my car as fast as I could because I can’t be a statistic” (J. Littlejohn, personal communication, January 4, 2015). Her response contradicted what staff and faculty were informed of at the meeting in July, 2014. Southern Tech’s safety standards should be applicable, accessible, and the same for everyone to prevent harm or death in any campus crisis. Perhaps examining what other colleges or universities implemented would be beneficial.

Georgia State University, a local institution located in Atlanta, received recognition in August 2012 for having superior safety standards. The Southern university was awarded accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Administrators after passing onsite assessments of more than 400 standards related to

campus public safety services (Parfitt, 2012). Although the college of this study had not received such recognition, collaborating with Georgia State University's public safety services regarding a study project may be beneficial. Collaborative efforts and building partnerships with other colleges can have positive ramifications (Kautzman & Little, 2011).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Dorn and Satterly (2012) stated that planning and training for an active shooter response has become a new trend in secondary and postsecondary schools. Although Southern Tech had not experienced an active shooter crisis, it is not the existence of an active shooter crisis that warrants a safety policy; it is the possibility of the crisis occurring. Kautzman and Little (2011) stated that to control and protect the learning environment, people must work within colleges and universities for developing safety plans, or a policy, that identifies and informs individuals how to respond to a crisis. In this study, I captured active shooter emergency plans, procedures, and the implementation that influenced how all stakeholders perceived the procedures for an active shooter. I revealed how students and employees are not equally knowledgeable of how they should respond to an active shooter crisis. Institutions are expected to be committed to providing adequate safety general welfare of their students (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008). Safety plans should also be tested for reliability before an actual crisis.

Wang and Hutchinson (2010) indicated that before any major disaster, a crisis management strategy plan must be tested for weaknesses and corrections made within the system. If an active shooter safety plan is going to be successful in development and

implementation, then ensuring the plan is reliable prior to being needed will be helpful. Training how to respond to an armed intruder at institutions, such as Colorado Schools of Mines and Arkansas State University, has become a familiar part of fall orientation (Coleman, 2015). However, students at Southern Tech were not given such information during informative sessions. Barnes, an engineering student at the University of Minnesota, received a booklet during orientation that failed to mention anything regarding an active shooter situation (Coleman, 2015).

Literature that gives students a connected and prescriptive plan to respond to an active shooter can be a lifesaver if it is accessible. However, in some cases, there is a disconnect between faculty and staff. All faculty and staff may not be equally knowledgeable of how to respond to an active shooter. Turton, of West Virginia University's Faculty Senate, said he was not familiar with the college's active shooter plan until questions from a news reporter influenced him to research the plan (Coleman, 2015). In the aftermath of recent campus violent acts, some professors, students, and administrators asked if their institution needed to do more to deliver potentially life-saving information (Coleman, 2015). The question of whether a college is prepared for an active shooter is not only an issue at Southern Tech. It is being echoed throughout the country. Morse, who presides over the entire Academic Senate for California's 113 community colleges, stated that he believed everyone was frightened regarding asking questions if their campuses were prepared for an active shooter (Coleman, 2015). The intent of this study was to explore the implementation of an active shooter plan and how

the implementation impacted the awareness level of students and employees of how to respond to an active shooter.

Definitions

Active shooter: A person with a firearm attempting to take the lives of people (Frazzano & Snyder, 2010).

Clery Act: A federal law developed in 1990 by the United States Congress that mandated that colleges and universities disclose criminal acts on or near their campus in annual reports (Guffey, 2013).

Crisis: An unexpected event, or series of events, that leads to violent situations that jeopardizes and disrupts an organization's day-to-day operations and presents a threat to overall safety (Jaques, 2010).

Crisis management plan: A prescriptive plan created to offer effective communication and guidelines for responding in a system that is adaptable to any crisis (Schill, 2009).

Risk communication: Method of communicating messages that explain events, causes, possible outcomes, and harm-reducing information for those who could be harmed during the crisis (Palttala & Vos, 2013).

Significance

The study proved to be significant by providing awareness and understanding regarding an active shooter crisis among students, faculty, and staff. The failure to be adequately informed and prepared could mean the difference between life and death for hundreds of people. The perception, as well as the understanding, of an active shooter

plan is directly connected to what individuals know about the procedures. It is unrealistic to expect an individual to have an understanding of what he or she has no knowledge of regarding how to respond to an active shooter on campus. This study was needed to highlight the discrepancies between employees' and students' perception and awareness of an active shooter protocol.

Coleman (2015) argued that making students and employees aware of and how to respond to active shooters is a challenge. Chief Hackenberg of California University-San Marcos stated that in a real life active shooter crisis, most people will panic and hesitate with a lack of preparedness. Students, faculty, and staff cannot afford to be unprepared (Coleman, 2015). Southern Tech, as a 2-year school, could be at a further disadvantage. The challenges can be more acute for 2-year colleges because it is rare the institutions have their campus police department to conduct imperative training exercises for employees and students (Leff & Foley, 2015). Southern Tech's main campus is headquarters for the police department. However, the satellite campuses tend to have security based on the availability of security personnel. Hemphill and LaBanc (2012) stated that satellite campuses tend not to have the same presence of emergency response security as the main campus. A department chair stated that the other four campuses were at more of a disadvantage than the main campus because they had less security than the main campus (P. Riley, personal communication, November 23, 2013). Irrespective of the size, population, or location of the campus, safety must be a priority.

Safety at colleges and universities has become problematic as it pertains to random shootings. Hemphill and LaBlanc (2012) reported that a university is expected to

be an institution that is committed to life and safety. The increase in violence at higher education institutions warrants concern. However, due to the unpredictability of an active shooter, procedure development is a significant cornerstone for a foundation of safety at colleges and universities. In this study, I explored how active shooter procedures were implemented and perceived at Southern Tech to ensure safety for all stakeholders in the case of an active shooter crisis.

Guiding Research Questions

The results of this project study provided informative data of the problem from the point of view of (a) students, (b) campus security, (c) staff (i.e., directors, academic deans, campus deans, vice presidents), (d) campus threat assessment team, and (e) faculty senate. Maxwell (2012) stated that research questions are used to determine what the researcher wants to know specifically about the participants who are being studied and what is it that the researcher does not know but wants to learn. Therefore, the two major research questions were

1. How did Southern Tech provide information to students, faculty, and staff regarding how to respond to an active shooter?
2. How are the active shooter procedures perceived by the stakeholders?

Review of the Literature

Review of the Topic Literature

To find literature for this literature review, I used search terms and databases. Key search terms included *safe learning environment*, *safe learning environment in higher education*, *crisis management*, *college campus disaster*, *crisis risk*, *crisis communication*,

college emergency safety plan, active shooter, active shooter policy, active shooter in higher education, Virginia Tech's shooting, policies in higher education, andragogy, Second Amendment, guns at colleges and universities, and firearms at Georgia colleges.

The various databases that provided information regarding these terms were Google Scholar, ERIC, ProQuest Central, and Education from SAGE. Although I focused on the increase of violence in higher education within the last decade, I searched for relevant research that began in January 1970 until December 2015.

Conceptual Framework

The focus of this case study was on the active shooter procedures at Southern Tech and how they prepared students, faculty, and staff for an active shooter crisis. The crisis management plan model served as the conceptual framework for this study, which guided the research and interpret the data. A crisis management plan refers to a premeditated activity dedicated to the incident response, how individuals respond to the crisis, and how people are prepared for the unpredictable emergency (Jacques, 2010). Coomb's crisis management plan helped with offering an answer to how stakeholders of Southern Tech were informed of how to respond to an active shooter.

Pre-crisis. Coombs's pre-crisis stage referred to prevention and preparation. Crisis managers typically detect warning signs and then take action on preventing the crisis (Coombs, 2014). However, signs of danger are typically apparent after the crisis. Warning signs are often hindsight and are described by family members, peers, and teachers who did not voice their concerns (Kautzman & Little, 2011). Virginia Tech female students reported stalking behavior and inappropriate and violent writings by

active shooter Seung-Hui to the campus police weeks before his campus shooting (Kautzman & Little, 2011). However, Virginia Tech police did not have a plan for keeping individuals presumed unsafe off campus (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1995). If Southern Tech can prevent an active shooter crisis, then students, faculty, and staff should play a role in keeping the campus safe. Colleges and universities must operate on the premise that every student, faculty, and staff member is a sensor for credible threats (Ergenbright & Hubbard, 2012). If warning signs are not reported and addressed, evading an active shooter crisis will be difficult. Therefore, planning how to respond to the crisis should be an instrumental stage regarding crisis management.

A crisis is unpredictable; but, it should not be unexpected (Coombs, 2014). An active shooter on a college campus cannot be predicted; however, that does not mean it should be unforeseen. Therefore, preparation should include ensuring that students and employees are aware and understand how to respond to the crisis. The precrisis phase was conducive to this study by providing the structure for exploring Southern Tech students' and employees' understanding regarding preparing and responding to an active shooter.

Crisis. The crisis phase is the main reason for prevention and preparation. The crisis has two substages: crisis recognition and crisis containment. Recognizing a potential threat could mean the difference between life and death. A best practice for crisis recognition is educating students, faculty, and staff on how to recognize and respond to signs of potential threats (Kautzman & Little, 2011). People who know what signs to look for and to whom they should report these threatening signals would be

empowered to act as a cohesive unit to promote a safe learning environment. However, if a crisis breaches the recognition stage, then containing the crisis should become the next priority.

Containing can save lives and limit harm to others by placing a parameter around the event. Containment refers to limiting a suspect's movement and isolating the person to a secluded area until the appropriate response unit arrives (Frazzano & Snyder, 2014). If the crisis can be contained, then the aftermath could consist of more survivors. Communication with students, faculty, and staff is an important facet of the containment phase (Coombs, 2014). Crisis communication refers to the process, collection, and dissemination of information needed to address a crisis (Coombs, 2014). The purpose of crisis management and communication is to avert danger from individuals who could be potential victims of the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2011). Failure to effectively communicate such a crisis could have irreversible ramifications on the lives of stakeholders at Southern Tech.

Postcrisis. The steps that institutions or organizations take after a crisis are equally as important as the prevention and preparation taken prior to the event. Once a crisis is deemed to be over and resolved, the institution must consider what to do next (Coombs & Holladay, 2011). Southern Tech stakeholders need to know how to respond when the crisis is over, which depends on communication. Counseling services should be available and individuals should be aware that the crisis is over in the postcrisis stage. Institutions are considered negligent when they do not take actions to either reduce or eliminate a known or foreseeable risk that could involve harm (Coombs & Holladay,

2011). Collectively, precrisis, crisis, and postcrisis must be implemented by colleges and universities.

The mentality of “it cannot happen here” is referred to as the mindset of a voluntary victim (Johnson et al., 2016). A student, faculty, or staff believing an active shooter crisis could not occur at their institution has become a victim of voluntary negligence. An individual who has failed to understand how to respond to an active shooter has voluntarily become vulnerable to the crisis. Southern Tech can create better awareness and understanding for students, faculty, and staff by using these stages of the crisis management plan.

Crisis management. The need for a crisis management system has grown over time. Crises can range from natural disasters to terrorist attacks (Kienzle, Guelfi, & Mustafiz, 2010). Active shooter crises at colleges and universities also belong to these disasters. Acts of violence, such as those involving active shooters, have impacted postsecondary institutions, causing them to examine and implement procedures and policies for the overall safety for students and employees (Baker & Boland, 2012). These safety guidelines, procedures, and policies contribute to the institution’s overall crisis management plan, which served as the conceptual framework for this study. An active shooter crisis is unpredictable; however, an individual’s response should be a predictable and learned behavior.

A crisis management plan encompasses the teaching of this behavior so that individuals will be knowledgeable and aware of an active shooter response. The crisis management plan model provided a guide in this research of how the procedures for an

active shooter at Southern Tech were developed and implemented. The crisis management plan model, as it pertains to the conceptual framework, can also assist with broadening the active shooter procedures for improvements. Just as a curriculum is occasionally modified or critiqued to ignite new ideas for students, a crisis management model can be the catalyst for an improved active shooter emergency plan.

Federal or state legislation requires colleges and universities to develop emergency plans to address and prevent victimization (Fisher & Sloan, 2014). Southern Tech must also meet this requirement. Fisher and Sloan (2014) stated that the U.S. government mandates that colleges provide stakeholders with descriptions of policy and procedures. However, before this mandate is effective, procedures and policy have to be developed. As a part of developing a crisis management plan, there needs to be a level of awareness of the risk that is influencing the necessity of the crisis management plan. Communication and education are key for people being cognizant of a risk, which is a prerequisite for an individual being prepared for a crisis (Hyvärinen & Vos, 2015). Decision sciences have historically defined risk as a function of an unplanned event's probability to disrupt or implicate some future event (Eiser et al., 2012). A risk, as it pertained to this study, is an active shooter crisis occurring on campus and the danger associated with the crisis. To ensure there is an awareness of the risk, it is important that those who create the procedures and policies consider various factors.

Leaders who develop policies and procedures pertaining to firearms must make sure that these laws do not weaken the institution's atmosphere. The best decisions reflect the safety of all stakeholders and community (Morse, Sisneros, Perez, & Sponsler, 2016).

Southern Tech's college climate could be negatively impacted if students and employees are not aware of an appropriate active shooter response. Active shooter procedures were created and employed as a part of an emergency operation plan. It is not logical to gather information on results without the presence of information concerning how the procedures, protocol, or policy were created and implemented (Paulsen & Smart, 2013). Therefore, those involved in the making of the procedures need to be aware and knowledgeable of the potential risk.

A critical aspect of an effective crisis management plan is communication. Everyone plays a role in ensuring crisis communication is as effective as possible and that individuals, directly and indirectly, impacted by the crisis benefit when communication is efficient or suffer when it is flawed (Coombs & Holladay, 2011). A portion of the development of the active shooter procedures is how a threat is communicated during the potential threat. Risk communication refers to messages sent and received, which explain events, causes, and possible outcomes and overall provide harm-reducing information for those who could be harmed during the crisis (Palttala & Vos, 2012). As these messages are communicated, it is equally important that the message corresponds with the crisis. Risk communication must accommodate the required response needed to be performed if people are to be protected from harmful consequences (Patton, 2013).

When emergency plans are created in higher education, staff and faculty contribute to the outcome of the crisis. Faculty's and staff's experiences with criticism of academic quality and safety are of significant importance to policy makers (Dill &

Beerens, 2010, p. 10). Lozano et al. (2013) stated that students should be engaged in the emergency planning for campus crises. When creating emergency plans, it is important that those involved in the development be cognizant of the purpose of the procedure, or policy, as well as those who the procedure or policy is intended to protect. The procedures or policy should focus on the complete system: the human characteristic in addition to the systemic components (i.e., active shooter procedures, aftermath of crisis) that delivers a balance to the system in a method that is implemented and understood by those in need of the emergency plan for a crisis (John, Hu, & Fisher, 2011). John et al.'s (2011) approach to procedures or policy could offer guidance for implementation. Although Southern Tech does not have an active shooter policy, if it is created and implemented, the approach suggested by John et al. for procedure or policy development could offer guidance for implementation. The success of the implementation and how stakeholders understand the emergency procedures would be critical for students, faculty, and staff during an active shooter crisis.

The active shooter procedures are not immune to failure (Schell, 2012). Implementing educational procedures and policies is significantly contingent upon aligning the safety strategy's objectives and ideas and how those involved perceive and interpret the implementation (Runhaar & Runhaar, 2012). Therefore, the success of the implementation was visible in the outcome of this study.

Implementation is not certain; but, support from stakeholders can have an influence on putting it into practice. Support from significant stakeholders is imperative to a successful crisis management plan implementation after it has been planned and the

development has been accepted. Success is relevant to how well the needs and the response of those stakeholders requesting the safety procedures have been anticipated and met (Brown, 2014). The training that stakeholders (i.e., students, instructors, staff) would undergo for crisis preparation is key for accessing their level of awareness and understanding. People who are well trained, in the midst of crisis, are more likely to default to their training (Tuttle, 2015). Each stakeholder's perceived knowledge regarding an active shooter emergency plan is a fundamental aspect to the campus crisis emergency plan development and implementation.

Firearms at Colleges and Universities

Among the multiple problems that colleges and universities are dealing with is the problem of the college sustaining a gun-free campus (Price et al., 2014). Irrespective of a campus's restrictive gun policy, students and faculty have been bringing firearms to college campuses, causing unpredictable shootings. Mass casual attacks involving active shooters in the United States captured the attention of the nation (Frazzano & Snyder, 2010). These tragic events have altered the once safe barriers associated with education. The environment of higher education has changed regarding firearms on campuses. Pasqetten, Thomas, and Wada (2012) reported that after the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, many states reconsidered their perspective on allowing those on campus to carry handguns. The events at Virginia Tech amplified exposure for groups such as Students for Concealed Carry on Campus, who claimed that if the students and faculty were permitted to carry firearms on campus, crises of this nature could be diminished or prevented (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008).

Nevertheless, Georgia remained one of the several states, unlike Utah, that does not allow firearms on campus in higher education. Lipka (2008) stated that Utah's concealed firearm policy allowing handguns on campus came by way of a court decision rather than the traditional legislature. Other colleges are anticipating similar changes across the country and may experience the legislative action. Cavanaugh, Bouffard, Wells, and Nobles (2012) reported that a bill in Texas would have allowed handguns on college campuses; but, it was struck down in a procedural move in the house. If Georgia permits students to carry guns, it could present a serious issue. Drinking alcohol and using drugs at various student events may encourage the misuse of firearms by students (Cavanaugh et al., 2012). The potential mixture of students, alcohol, or additional drugs can impact the overall learning environment.

Safe Learning Environment in the Higher Education Environment

Ensuring there is a safe campus and an atmosphere promoting academic and personal growth has been a priority of colleges and universities (Drysdale, 2010). If students are expected to be completely engaged in the fulfillment of their higher education, a feeling of safety must be present (Thompson & Wheeler, 2010). Within education, it is understood that school authority owes a duty of care, and this duty does not have the option of being delegated. The responsibility of making sure a safe learning environment exists eventually relies on the authority of the school (Campbell, Butler, & Kift, 2008). Therefore, a safe learning environment is the responsibility of the institution and all of those who contribute to its daily operations.

However, the learning environment could be jeopardized if students and faculty were permitted to carry firearms because individuals could feel intimidated and inhibit their ability to learn (Miller, 2011). From Miller, the fears of handguns on campus implicate the instruction environment. The prevalence of firearms on campus might make students less likely to challenge controversial ideas of their peers; professors may be afraid to hand out failing grades or criticize students, and university administrators may be frightened to discipline employees (Lewis, 2011).

Administrators and staff have a significant responsibility in determining students' graduation requirements, policies, and procedures accessible on the institution's website (Vogel, Holt, Sligar, & Leak, 2008). Administrators' responsibilities include detecting opportunities and potential barriers related to original safety plans and initiatives for creating policy, and enforcing compliance with established college policies, as well as highlighting needs for change (Kaplin & Lee, 2011). Administrators, faculty, and staff might be expected to have a role at the college of study ensuring that learning occurs in a safe learning environment just as employees have been at Western Washington University. Emergency planning at Western Washington University is directed by a 25-member Emergency Management Committee of specific stakeholders (Green, 2013). A similar committee, for example, could be structured to assist enforcing a safe learning environment.

If established, a committee may not have to be this large in numbers to be effective. Regardless of the committee size, certain elements of the preparedness on any campus could be discussed: emergency preparedness, threat assessment, and crisis

response (Osburn & Pons, 2011). Threat assessment can prevent violence, if done prior to the gunman entering the campus parking lot (Cornell, 2010). Virginia Tech's Threat Assessment Team, which has achieved national model status, consists of various stakeholders including; dean of students, director of counseling, a university lawyer, and the campus deputy police chief (Sulzberger & Gabriel, 2010). When it comes to emergency preparedness, emergency procedures development and implementation can be essential for a threat assessment and crisis response. The active shooter procedures, as stated previously, instructed how individuals should respond to a gunman on campus. These steps were developed to inform how individuals should respond to an active shooter crisis. Emergencies are typically difficult and have multiple challenges that impact the preparation for a crisis (Hyvärinen & Vos, 2015). The active shooter procedures for the college of the study were developed as a form of preparation for active shooter crisis. Therefore, a crisis management plan model is ideal for understanding and assessing Southern Tech's active shooter procedures implementation.

Implications

Southern Tech, a 2-year college in southern Georgia selected for this research study, developed and implemented an active shooter emergency plan and procedure. I conducted a research study of how procedures for an active shooter were implemented and understood by stakeholders at Southern Tech. However, this study revealed some issues associated with how the procedures were dispersed, which possibly impacts college stakeholders' perception of the emergency plan. Data were instrumental in linking these ideas by revealing the stakeholders' perception and knowledge of the active

shooter procedures. Data highlighted the connection between how the procedures were implemented and perceived by students and employees. This case study may also affect the college of study by yielding results that influence active shooter protocol changes. Therefore, an implication is that a product of this study included active shooter safety recommendations that would help stakeholders have more clarity of how they should respond to an active shooter crisis. The active shooter safety recommendations could influence the college to reexamine how safety procedures and policy are created.

An emergency protocol process in higher education transitions to development by teams of experts, as opposed to individuals. Each team member may possess a greater or lesser knowledge in certain areas (i.e., legal, economic), which collectively contribute to the safety plan or policy development (Brown, 2014). The development stage consists of a transition from procedures and policy (i.e., idea stage) to the implementation stage that will eventually allow the emergency plan to be assessable and used (Schell, 2012).

An outcome of this project study could be an active shooter policy supported by project Safety On recommendations. Safety On would offer improvements for Southern Tech's active shooter plan in specific areas. Southern Tech does have a physical exercise for fire emergency that requires everyone to exit the building. Developing a similar exercise for an active shooter could also be implemented into the project. However, it would need to be designed, not replicated, specifically for an active shooter crisis. Unlike the trained response to a fire alarm resulting of everyone reporting outside, leaving the building could expose individuals to a greater threat regarding an active shooter on campus.

Summary

Section 1 included the steps that individuals should take in response to an active shooter on campus, active shooter seminar for faculty and staff, shared local active shooter events, and resources (i.e., evacuation chairs) that were added to various buildings to assist individuals in the time of an active shooter crises. It also established a history of the progression of the gun violence in higher education and the importance of raising awareness about gun violence. Researching the history of the institutions that have experienced campus shootings was essential to establishing the foundation of gun violence in higher education. The Virginia Tech shooting massacre placed a target on the issue of security and safety at post-secondary institutions. The massacre served as an important reason for Southern Tech, along with other colleges and universities across the country, to re-evaluate or implement a crisis management plan strategically designed for an active shooter. Section 1 also included the conceptual framework, crisis management model. Imperative research questions were also established that assisted with guiding the case study as each question indicated what I intended to learn regarding the topic. Section 2 included the methodology used for the research.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Methodology Approach

Qualitative Research

In this study, I used a qualitative approach. Qualitative researchers identify concepts not yet known about a phenomenon and welcome the readers to investigate several methods of becoming engaged in the practice of research (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative research consists of a strategy that includes the usage of words rather than numbers as it pertains to collecting and analyzing data (Hammersley, 2012). Interviews are the primary source of data collection for qualitative research, in addition to document reviews and observations (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Document reviews such as Southern Tech's handbook and current active shooter procedures served as a second method of data collection. In the qualitative approach, a scholar focuses on collecting descriptive data by way of individual's own words and recording of people's behavior during interviews (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). I used qualitative research to allow the participants to share their responses and experiences by using words, gestures, and body language that were indicative of their awareness, or the lack of, and understanding of Southern Tech's active shooter procedures.

Case Study

A case study was appropriate for the purposes of this research. The purpose of a qualitative case study is to investigate the conditions of real situations (Stake, 2013). This study involved the experiences and real situations about the preparation for the potential threat of an active shooter on campus. A case study does not pertain to studying an entire

organization or institution, but targets a problem, characteristic, or an element of analysis (Noor, 2008).

The focus of the study was on the development, implementation, and issues associated with the perception of the active shooter crisis plan. The case study can be a person, a classroom, an institution, a program, or policy (Simons, 2014). A case study can also cover a variety of subjects, such as public health, business, industry, public administration, education, and policy (Yin, 2011). In this case study, I focused on how Southern Tech disseminated information regarding an active shooter procedure to students and employees. Case studies have also been used to document and analyze an implementation process (Yin, 2011). In this case study, the concern surrounded stakeholders in the form of the students, faculty, and staff at a 2-year community college. The findings of this study were also bounded to the case study. Therefore, the results of the study were not applicable or exceeded the boundaries to another institution or other stakeholders. Studying a case consists of examining functioning and activities; but, the first objective of the case study is to understand the case (Stake, 2013). Understanding the case depends not only on the supporting literature but also participants.

Other qualitative research designs were considered, such as phenomenology and ethnography, but these were not applicable to my project study. Ethnography refers to the research of people in a culture in their native environment over an extended period of time (Creswell, 2009). Ethnography's reliance on direct observation and an insider perspective creates a high standard of research for many researchers (Padget, 2008). Phenomenological researchers focus on an individual's interpretation of his or her

experiences over an extended period (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010). Neither of these research designs were applicable for the purpose of this particular study. The research study consisted of individuals' experiences over an extended period of time.

Face-to-face interviews, consisting of predetermined questions or prompts, were used to collect the data. A document review of the existing safety plan was also conducted to analyze what Southern Tech had recorded regarding an active shooter. Acknowledging existing material is important in understanding the development and implementation of the emergency plan. Outcomes and findings regarding the overall level of awareness of how to respond to an active shooter was influential in revealing how well the institution was equipped for an active shooter and also in revealing additional recommendations for improving and implementing the procedures and policy.

Participants

Process of Selecting Participants

Creswell (2012) specified that the first step in collecting data is to identify the people and places where a person plans to conduct the study. A local, Southern, coastal community college was the study site. The institution consisted of nearly 450 employees and served approximately 4,000 students. The participant pool that supplied data had a target of each group yielding six students and 10 employees (i.e., faculty, staff, administrators, campus threat assessment team) for a total of 16 participants. In qualitative research, the number of research participants is low; but, the depth of inquiry is significant (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Selecting participants consisted of two phases. Phase 1 began by contacting the groups of participants for their participation. Contacting students was done by personally issuing participant forms to students at student popular areas (i.e., student center, student yard). I contacted employees personally (i.e., phone call, email, in person), as well as campus security, and presented them with participation forms. Once participant forms were issued, the participants were able to privately communicate their voluntary participation as instructed on the participant form. After the first 16 applicants (six students and 10 employees) confirmed their participation, the participant pool was completed. All participants who exceeded the required number were transferred to a reserve pool. The variety of participants not only represented stakeholders of the college, but those who were involved in the development of the active shooter procedures or those most likely to be knowledgeable of active shooter crises and the institution's level of preparedness for such an event. The 16 participants who were selected had to adhere to certain criteria. Patton (1990) stated that qualitative designs draw upon smaller, purposefully selected sample sizes to explore the phenomenon in greater depths. I selected participants who could positively contribute to the research with their perspectives regarding the problem of the study. Those participants met, at minimum, one of the following criteria:

- Be at least 18 years of age
- Instructor
- Staff member
- Faculty member

- Campus security
- Student participants must be registered for classes for the semester in session during the time of data collection for the project study
- Students can be any classification (i.e., freshman, junior, transfer, transient, returning)

Purposeful sampling was used for participant selection. Creswell (2012) referred to purposeful sampling as intentionally selecting individuals who meet the criteria to learn and to understand more about the central phenomenon under study. Purposeful sampling refers to selecting participants who serve a particular purpose that aligns with the study's objective (Coolingridge & Gantt, 2008). All participants served the significant purpose of supplying critical data to the study. Patton (2003) referred to purposeful sampling as selecting a case for study (i.e., program participants, staff, cultures, organizations) that yields rich data for the research's purposes.

Considering the various backgrounds of the participants, I also implemented maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation provides a purposeful selection for a variety of participants to gain a balanced perspective (Harris et al., 2009). I remained conscious of saturation, which assisted with guiding the research, by those individuals who informed me of their participation via email. Saturation can validate that sufficient and quality data were gathered to support the study (Walker, 2011). Selecting six participants from each group (students and employees) provided sufficient representation of quality data and potential responses. Qualitative researchers should be aware that excessive interviews can be counterproductive, and studies containing over 20 interviews

have shown no significant impact on the outcome of the study (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Therefore, 16 participants offered a significant impact and were not counterproductive. Additional participants can be an option when case saturation is not reached. Saturation is achieved when no new conceptual insights are derived or new data are being produced (Marshall et al., 2013). Therefore, interviewing continues until no new ideas are found. Although other factors affect the sample size, researchers typically strive to reach data saturation, which is an indicator of the collection of a sufficient amount of data (Mason, 2010).

I began Phase 2 by creating an electronic document and numerically coding each participant. This document was kept on a password-locked laptop in my personal office at home. After each participant was numbered, I referred to participants by number and not by name, thus reassuring confidentiality of the participants. Anonymity was obtained as I was the only one who was aware of each participant's identity. I completed Phase 2 when I emailed the participants the time and location for interviews. In Phases 1 and 2, I created the organization for implementing the research and protecting the participants' information.

Each email consisted of two documents. The first document included a letter of consent. Consent forms, and the method of confirming consent, was the same for all participants. All participants adhered to the same request and criteria to participate irrespective of their position or role at the college. Confirming participation was completed when each participant emailed me stating "I accept to be a participant in this study" in the subject area of their email, along with their offering available times for

interviews indicated in the body of the email. The second document was the participant form with instructions for students and employees, respectively. The attachment explained what my project study consisted of and the expectations I had of the participants. This document stated possible locations for the interview, such as in a library conference room on campus. Once I received a sufficient number of participants of each profile, Phase 1 was completed. Although there was a 16 participant cap, I kept the window of accepting participants until I obtained at least 25 participants. The overflow of participants contributed to the reserve pool. If any profile did not yield the necessary six participants, I contacted the reserve pool of participants. The new participants were required to complete the same process as all the initial members of the study. A participant was only granted participation after consent was given for participation.

Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

As a researcher, I had to be cognizant of my relationship with my participants who were identified and recruited to answer crafted questions (Robards, 2013). Therefore, making the participants comfortable to exchange dialogue was essential for collecting data. During the interview, the researcher should show empathy and, aside from writing notes, keep eye contact (Doody & Noonan, 2013). These behaviors are important for making certain that the participant is aware that the researcher is focused on his or her presence and feedback. It was important to build trust and rapport with participants to promote continuous conversation and honest responses (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Creating a sense of trust and confidentiality was of importance for retrieving

descriptive data for the study. An atmosphere had to be created that was conducive to acquiring the information that I, the researcher, needed from the participants.

Establishing a sense of purpose and need for participants' participation can begin prior to the actual interview. The opportunity for the partnership between researcher and participant can form when participants are first contacted. Therefore, a state of mutual respect and equality needs to be established between the researcher and the participant before the interviews (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Informed consent, student participant, and employee participant forms were the first methods of contact prior to personally meeting participants. Therefore, the informed consent and participant forms were instrumental in establishing a foundation of partnership, purpose of the study, and how participants' participation in the study played a role in ensuring their safety if an active shooter crisis occurred on campus. Ensuring that participants and their privacy (i.e., identity and responses) were protected from being accessed by anyone other than me also helped craft an atmosphere for open and transparent dialogue.

Measures for Ethical Protection of Participants

Participants communicated their participation, via email, as they were instructed to on the participant form. I placed emails of consent in an electronic participant folder, placing participants in their respective groups (i.e., student council, faculty senate, campus security, campus threat assessment team). Once the window of selecting students for participation closed, I took all names of participants, folder by folder, and placed each name in a plastic sealed capsule. A random number generator was used to increase randomization and decrease any predictable sequence of participants. Protecting the

identity of the participants was an additional priority. Researchers' responsibilities vary from safeguarding their participants, establishing trust, and striving to maintain credibility and trustworthiness as well as being cognizant of extenuating issues and discrepancies (Israel & Hay, 2006). Protecting participants also included protecting their identity and ensuring confidentiality. Therefore, confidentiality, to the fullest degree possible, was the approach taken to ensure that the identities were kept hidden by assigning a number to each participant instead of using an actual name in the data collection and analysis processes.

The number assignments were only known by the participant and me to ensure confidentiality. This precaution assisted with gaining candid answers during data collection. Equally important as confidentiality was acquiring informed consent from the participants before their participation. It is through informed consent that potential participants are made aware that their participation is voluntary. If participants believed any aspects of the research may affect their well-being at any point in the study, the participants reserved the right to stop participating in the study without negative consequences (Glesne, 2011).

Data Collection

Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were the primary method of collecting data. Creswell (2012) stated that interviews deliver essential information when the researcher is unable to observe participants. Interviews did not occur in my office; however, they did take place in the campus library in a study room and online via Skype. Interview questions

(Appendix B) were strategically created, and interviews were recorded with two digital recorders with the participant's permission. Digital recordings assisted in transcribing, coding, and creating themes for the data analysis. It helped with reviewing responses for understanding and analyzing data. Although interviews were recorded, I arranged an interview time and place with participants via email. Face-to-face and Skype interviews were 40 to 50 minutes.

I intended for the interviewee to respond in depth and detail to questions. Prompts and probes were used to obtain descriptive and rich data. Designing and implementing prompts and probes assisted with stimulating and developing various dimensions of qualitative data (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). Prompts and probes were also important for being prepared for the interview. I created prompts that helped keep me on track and prepared for any unexpected responses (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012).

Immediately after each interview, I began transcribing in a Word document. I also added notes in my research log as efforts to write any occurrences from participants, or particular thoughts, or comments. Comments from interviews were transcribed by noting what the participants said in responses directly related to answering aspects of each research question. Transcribed documentation helped with finding similarities and distinct differences in replies amongst the participants.

Review of Documents

I also collected and reviewed documents regarding the existing safety procedures. These documents were obtained via an accessible employee website and the department of operations. Researchers often use document reviews to supplement data collecting

methods, such as participant observations and interviews, as it assists with better understanding the participants, logs, statements, or formal policies related to the study (Bowen, 2009). Items for the document review of the current safety plan were also a part of the data gathered and they served as a foundation to compare and contrast data collected from participants. Steps that were taken in the document review included, but were not limited to collecting all literature and documentation regarding the college safety plan and active shooter procedures, and confirming the origin or publisher.

Role of the Researcher

In addition to providing an overview of my research in the participant form, I also verbally provided this information to participants at the beginning of the interview. I was cognizant of my role as an interviewer, as well as a former faculty member of the college. I attempted to remain as unbiased as possible by being conscious of my responsibility to only document data from participants. I was aware of personal biases that responses could provoke. Despite what laws may exist, I believed firearms should not be legally allowed on campus. Therefore, knowing that participants may have had beliefs that contradicted my own beliefs, I prepared myself to control my biases. I was conscious of refraining from exhibiting facial and verbal expressions or body language that might influence or make the participants feel uncomfortable with sharing their candid responses.

These researcher attributes of remaining as unbiased as possible and being a former faculty member were necessary for establishing trust and creating dialogue between each participant and me. In interviewing, the researcher's integrity is magnified

and this attribute is imperative because the interviewer is the most significant instrument for obtaining data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I also approached the research as a learner, anticipating the participant responses might correspond with beliefs and opinions from the literature. As a researcher, I was a curious student eager to learn from multiple research participants (Glesne, 2011). Most importantly, as a researcher I investigated the gap in practice.

The role of a researcher can be seen as a detective who intends to discover what participants know, do not know, or may yet come to understand (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009). I did not have the responsibility of teaching or evaluating the students, nor did I have any supervisory role of faculty and staff who might be participating in this study. Therefore, my role as a researcher did not negatively or ethically interfere with individuals participating in the study. I also requested to join the Southern Tech Threat Assessment Committee in October 2015. However, in January 2016 I took a position at another college. Although I relocated, I received permission from the campus police and president to continue to use the college as a study site regarding my case study.

Considering that I no longer worked at the institution, I was not in any supervisory or authority role as it pertained to any participant at the study site.

Data Analysis

Coding

Analyzing data was instrumental in determining the findings of my research. I used open coding to identify, separate, and code each respondent's reply. Open coding occurs when the researcher breaks down the data into specific concepts, which allows

data to be placed into simple components. In efforts to simplify the origin of data, participants were given categories of either students or employees. Developing these components or categories of participants allowed me to note from which participant the response was derived. Axial coding also allowed relationships to be made among categories, which were then further explained and classified into supporting concepts and broader categories (Ponterotto, 2010; Saldana, 2013).

After transcribing the data from digital recordings of participants, I copied and pasted the data into matrices using a word processor. As stated by Creswell (2012), coding helps with understanding the data by categorizing and organizing findings that in turn yield themes and highlight redundancy. Therefore, I continued analyzing data with coding and themes shown in the matrix headings and categories for the matrix rows related to each research question to analyze each subset of participants. Coding is the vital part of text analysis such that the researcher can create a matrix by assigning a collection of codes to qualitative data (Ryan & Bernard, 2009). In efforts for a clearer understanding of how participants' responses were associated with the research questions and other key indicators, I created headings for part of the matrix from the wording in the research questions. By using axial coding, the wording from research questions, conceptual framework phrases, and other key phrases as headings, I organized the column headings of the matrices for my data analysis. I placed each participant's interview responses underneath the most relatable column heading for creating supportive codes.

Themes

Themes are patterns that develop through data analysis that yield relationships among the various categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Themes and relationships were further derived from participant responses (i.e. students, college security, and staff). Themes for this research study were developed after completing the collection of the data. I looked for commonalities among participants. A shared theme that emerged for students, faculty, and staff pertained to the various levels of awareness of how to respond to an active shooter on campus. Interviews showed that students and employees did not have equal awareness of how to respond to an active shooter crisis. Another theme that surfaced among students, faculty, and staff was variations in the confidence in campus security. Some participants were not as confident as others regarding campus security's ability to adequately respond to a gunman on campus. Matrices also assisted with displaying and organizing qualitative data and allowed me to recognize certain kinds of findings.

Tracking

Tracking was also significant with analyzing data. Initially, tracking was used as a method for scheduling and managing appointed participants' interviews. Tracking also allowed for accurately connecting the participant with the data he or she shared. Coding and themes also assisted with data tracking. Researchers, in most cases, will create a database to track and access data at any time (Bernard & Bernard, 2012). A database was used to track data and help with remaining cognizant of what data were obtained or were outstanding. As findings of the research were obtained, coded and associated with

themes, the database enabled me to manage and track the data. Keeping track of results through a matrix played a vital role in archiving data.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Establishing the trustworthiness and validity of my research was important. Validity can be seen as the question of the quality of a craftsman or of the researcher (Maxwell, 2012). Creswell (2012) stated that validation refers to the researcher by methods such as triangulation, member checking, and determining the accuracy or credibility of the results. Guion, Diehl, and McDonald (2011) stated that triangulation is a technique used to verify and determine the validity by examining research questions from various standpoints. Triangulation was determined by using data from interviews from various participants and examining existing documents. Data derived from each group of participants contributed to triangulation and their responses captured different dimensions of data.

Additionally, member checking was implemented to allow each participant the opportunity to confirm that I had accurately captured their responses. Member checking grants the researcher the opportunity to restate the information given during the interview and then allowing the participant to review it for accuracy (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I emailed each participant their specific responses to review for accuracy. I asked the participants to give me additional feedback regarding their individual responses, within 48 hours, if they did not agree or wanted to clarify anything pertaining to their feedback. These outcomes were written in my research journal.

Common results were also essential to establishing validity. As I mentioned above, determining trustworthiness was important, and validity is critical to achieving trustworthiness. Trustworthiness refers to the level of confidence the researcher has that the established qualitative data are credible, transferable, and dependable (Giddings & Grant, 2009). Triangulation and validation contributed to data analysis.

Storage of Data

Storing the data carefully is imperative. Each participant trusted me to handle and store the responses and information in a safe manner. The written data files and auditory files from the interviews were stored on a password secured flash-drive. As a secondary storage procedure, data were saved in a personal file storage. The storage file allowed retrieval of the data from any accessible internet source and was also password protected. Storing the data electronically allowed the data to be readily available for tracking and record keeping for at least 5 years.

Data Analysis Results

I began by contacting potential employee participants immediately after receiving approval (approval #08-09-16-0256144) from the Walden IRB to collect data. I arrived at the study site on August 19, 2016. I also, on that day, dispersed student participant forms to students of Southern Tech on campus. Multiple students received the forms and naturally inquired about the research. I answered their questions and informed them how their feedback would be helpful to the research study. I immediately began to receive emails of interested participants and they gave their availability for interviews. I then emailed their consent form and begin placing participants into a tracking log. Once

participants confirmed their participation, they were added to the tracking log with their participant name (i.e. Participant 1, Participant 2). The tracking log was very helpful because it assisted with organizing participants, the time, and location of their interview.

Aside from one or two interviews needing to be rescheduled, all interviews were conducted as planned. Although it was stated that interviews would be recorded, I reminded participants prior to beginning the interview. All participants agreed to recording the interviews. After all interviews were conducted, I then begin transcribing the collected data. It was content analysis that offered an understanding and comprehension of the phenomenon regarding the research study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The phenomenon regarding this study pertains to an active shooter crisis occurring at college campuses and how information regarding the crisis was given to students and employees. Content analysis would serve as a foundation for finding relations among the data. Once data were collected, content analysis allowed for the data to be transcribed, understood, and developed by way of coding, themes, and patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The collected data would serve as a cohesive among the findings that would be essential to answering the research questions for this study.

I was cognizant that the awareness and understanding of active shooter crisis policies and procedures could have been improved among students, faculty, and staff. Contacting participants aligned with the procedures described in the methodology of this research study. The majority of participants, with the exception of five, participated in face-to-face interviews. The other participants, who were students, participated in Skype interviews. As it pertains to all 10 employee participants, only one interview was

conducted off the college campus. My first and second interviews, a student and an employee, respectively, indicated that improvements had occurred at the college.

However, there were indeed discrepancies in the awareness and understanding regarding how to respond to an active shooter on campus among students, faculty, and staff.

Findings of Faculty and Staff Interviews

All participants were willing to give information as opposed to individuals being reluctant to share their opinions and thoughts. My first employee interview, Participant 2, was held with an instructor who had been with the college for more than 4 years. The interview was held at a local coffee shop on the outside patio. Her responses painted an overall picture that the college had made many improvements (i.e. installation of intercom system, active shooter drill). Participant 2 stated “I have been informed of active shooter procedures. You need to stay out of sight and if possible, go to a designated safe location, and try not to be a hero.” When asked how she expected to be informed of an active shooter crisis she stated “I would expect to get a text message, a message that comes across my office phone, or message through the new intercom system.”

However, receiving a message on the office phone and the implementation of the intercom system were new additions regarding a crisis alert. Despite the improvements that the college was able to implement, Participant 2 replied, “the college is not fully prepared but with the steps they are taking, maybe another year or so they would be fully prepared.” Participant 3, an instructor for more than 5 years, was aware of the intercom system; however, from her understanding it was not yet ready to be used. When asked if

she believed that the college was prepared for an active shooter crisis, she convincingly replied, “the college has not prepared me”, however she had informed her students to not look for her and to not call until they feel safe.

Participant 3 had informed her students in the case of an active shooter crisis to only be concerned with ensuring their own safety. Participants 3 and 6, just as Participant 2, also believed that creating a safe environment and culture at the college was the responsibility of everyone as opposed to just campus security. Participant 3 stated “I instructed the campus police to speak to my students regarding various emergencies to ensure they could participate in their safety and understand how to respond to a gunman on campus. Participant 6, an administrator in the student affairs department, stated “I participate in my own safety.” Participant 3 also recalled an active shooter practice drill being held on campus, stating, “there has been an active shooter drill on campus, but due to teaching class I just was not able to make it.”

When Participant 7, an automotive instructor, was asked how Southern Tech could improve safety, the instructor said “limit access to the campus by adding a security gate or barrier around the campus.” Participant 8, an academic dean, added supportive measures by stating “the college should add keycard access doors.” Participant 8 also mentioned “that an active shooter drill had been executed at least once at every campus. Both participants shared that too many people could casually come on to the campus. Participants 9, an administrative assistant and 15, also an instructor, had been at the college more than 25 years. Participant 9 stated “the college needs to prioritize safety as a must do now and not a when we can and things would be much better.” Participant 15, an

administrative assistant, said “I pray nothing happens before I retire, and if it does I will most likely barricade myself in the office and wait for help.” These findings demonstrate that the employees were acting in accordance with Coombs’ precrisis and crisis preparation phase. The participants’ responses illustrated what steps should occur prior to or during an active shooter crisis.

Faculty and staff were aware of what improvements and changes had occurred, and yet others were completely oblivious. For example, Participant 4 was completely unaware of any drill or training for employees regarding an active shooter ever being held on campus. Participant 4, an instructor, replied with his arms folded when asked how he saw an active shooter crisis playing out. He boldly stated “we would be decimated.” The delivery of his response was given with a tone of having accepted not surviving the crisis and not having confidence in the campus security. This discrepancy helped provide a broader picture regarding the thoughts and awareness of the participant population. Coombs’ (2014) precrisis phase included that those in the local setting needed to take an active role to maintain campus safety through being aware and understanding how to respond to a crisis. Additionally, participants such as Participant 4 were unsure of the capability of Southern Tech’s campus security.

When Participant 4 was asked how confident he was in the college’s security responding to an active shooter crisis, he responded “I am not confident in security, with the exception of one or two officers, I am not confident at all.” Participant 5, a campus police officer, was unsurprisingly the most knowledgeable about locating the procedures of how to respond to an active shooter, and what the college had implemented to provide

more awareness and understanding. His response to how he would see an active shooter crisis playing out was completely different from Participant 4's reply. The officer stated, "the campus police department would respond along with local police, state patrol, and even possibly GBI." The various agents of law enforcement, including the Georgia Bureau would assist with quickly suppressing the suspect and gaining control of the situation. However, there was a gap of awareness between Participant 5 and Participant 4 regarding how to react once first responders arrived. Participant 5 also shared "although we here at the college are familiar with the staff and faculty, when local authorities arrive everyone should remain stationary until instructed otherwise, for their safety and the safety of the first responder."

Participant 5 shared the importance of students and employees, despite their natural instinct, of not approaching responding officers. The responding external officer could indeed mistake the person for the suspect and respond as if the college employee was a threat. Participant 11, an administrator, provided insight about how the college should prepare for an active shooter crisis. Participant 11, who reported to a satellite campus, stated "I received little information of how to respond an active shooter and this campus has never had an active shooter drill." Being at a smaller satellite campus, he believed the training should be specific to each campus. His campus was very rural, unlike the main campus, and planning for an emergency response could follow a different protocol because of where the campus was geographically located. When asked how students and employees could be given a safer learning and working environment, he stated, "by making the classroom conducive to individuals being able to be safe would be

a start, and because how the classes are designed now it limits people being able to protect themselves.” Each classroom had either a full wall of glass or glass portion directly beside the door, allowing the shooter to see if anyone was in the class.

Responses collected from faculty and staff were rich data that supported that although the college has made improvements, more work was needed to increase awareness and a safer working environment. The largest discrepancy among participants was between Participant 5 (a campus police officer) and Participant 4 (an instructor). Participant 5 knew exactly where to locate the active shooter safety procedures and how campus and local police officers would respond to the scene. However, Participant 4 was not prepared and expressed that he was not confident at all that he would survive such a crisis. The findings from students were more evident of the variance in awareness compared to faculty and staff. Students’ responses were also indicative of the improvements the college needed to make to ensure students knew how to respond to an active shooter.

Overall, based on the data collected via interviews, faculty and staff were considerably more knowledgeable than students regarding having understanding and awareness of an active shooter crisis at Southern Tech. It was also apparent that some employees had more knowledge of what the college had implemented regarding safety procedures for an active shooter than other faculty and staff. Faculty and staff were not aware that an intercom system was installed at the main campus. This was a discrepancy that was made evident when other employees stated installing an intercom system would make them feel that they were in a safer learning environment.

Findings of Student Interviews

Interviews with students offered an entirely different perspective to the research. A total of six students were interviewed, however after the third interview I noticed a common theme, which was that students were oblivious of how to locate any college protocol or safety plans regarding how to respond to an active shooter crisis. When I asked Participant 1 where she would find the procedures of how to respond to an active shooter on campus her response was, “I have not been informed of how to find the procedures of how to respond to a situation such as an active shooter crisis.” Her lack of awareness remained evident in her response to other interview questions. Participant 1’s reply to how she saw an active shooter crisis playing out was “because of my law enforcement background, I would actually engage the active shooter.” Her responses were similar to the concerns shared by other students and employees regarding awareness and understanding of an active shooter crisis.

The student participants who followed Participant 1 gave very similar responses. However, some replies were unique and added a different lens to the research. When I inquired how the college had prepared her for an active shooter crisis, Participant 10, stated “the college has not prepared me and I believe my son, who is in high school, has received more preparation of how to respond to a man on campus shooting people than my college has prepared me for such an event.” She seemed grateful that her son was prepared for a terrifying occurrence, but she was also upset that her college had not done a better job of making sure she was equally aware and prepared as her son for the same crisis. Her response to how she would expect to be notified of an active shooter on

campus was similar to prior participant responses. Previous participants, both students and employees, had shared they would expect to be sent a text message, notified via office phone, or hear the gunshots and chaos.

Participant 10's response was very similar. However, she stated, "my instructor does not allow phones to be visible in her class and this is understood and agreed upon the first day of class." Students also were not completely confident in the campus police department, which was also indicated in some of the employee interviews. Nevertheless, Participant 12 stated that "I am not confident, with the exception of maybe two officers that the security could adequately respond to an active shooter on our campus. I would feel better asking for their gun to defend myself." His response initially came across as somewhat facetious. However, I quickly understood he was serious as he repeated his statement for confirmation. When Participant 13 was asked how more awareness could be brought to students, she stated "I would like have physical drills and informative orientations for students." Participant 14 also agreed with Participant 13's suggestions. Participant 14 shared "I would have appreciated more information of how to react to an active shooter during the admission process." A response from the last student participant added to previous student participants' lack of awareness and understanding for surviving an active shooter crisis. Participant 16 said "I have no idea where to find an active shooter protocol." Although this particular comment was not surprising at that point, he also stated "I am not waiting on the college to tell me what to do in a life or death situation, I will just follow my instincts."

Of course, the other issue related to the intercom system was that those who were aware of it were also certain it was not functioning. The implementation of the safety instrument was supportive; however, the inability of it functioning would not benefit anyone in the midst of an active shooter crisis. Students and employees need to be educated on how to react to an active shooter if for no other reason than the increased crises in the United States regarding school shootings (Gubiotti, 2015). Data revealed that all of the students interviewed did not know where to find the procedures of how to respond to an active shooter crisis. However, students conveyed that they wanted to know where to locate active shooter procedures.

Document Analysis Findings

Regardless of participants' awareness and understanding portrayed in the interviews, Southern Tech had revised and uploaded emergency planning procedures for an active shooter on their website. I was able to compare and contrast responses of participants regarding their knowledge of the safety procedures to the documents. The safety plans stated the same steps that were mentioned by some participants such as if a person saw something, that individual should report the suspicious activity. Southern Tech's Plan-Prepare-React (2012) online safety procedures included the following steps:

- Individuals should remain inside a secure room until informed to exit
- If you are located outside of a building, find cover immediately
- If evacuation is not an option, locate a safe location to hide
- Lock or barricade the door
- Silence cell phones and keep quiet

- Do not provoke shooter if he is still shooting
- Fighting back is the last option
- Throw items and improvise with weapons
- When police arrive, remain calm and follow instructions
- Avoid quick movements toward officers

These steps were intended for students, faculty, and staff to survive an active shooter crisis. Procedures covered how individuals should run, hide, attack, and react during the aftermath.

Theme of Awareness

An important factor to this research was investigating the level of awareness that students, faculty, and staff had pertaining to responding to an active shooter crisis. A pattern of awareness, or the lack thereof, quickly surfaced during the interviews.

Participant 12, a student, replied “I had no idea the college had safety procedures for an active shooter.” Another participant had the similar response when she was asked her understanding of the active shooter crisis plan. Participant 13, also a student, stated “I have never been informed there were procedures for a gunman. I have only been given information for a fire and weather emergencies, but no active shooter.” Participant 4, a faculty member of more than 20 years, stated “I have never been informed of how to respond to active shooter.” Additional participants gave similar responses that expressed their lack of awareness of the active shooter procedures.

The participants’ awareness was based upon them being informed of any preparation by the college regarding an active shooter. Participants who knew how to

respond to an active shooter crisis and whose plan of responding was that of the college were classified as “*High awareness.*” Participants who were not aware of where to find procedures, but whose plan of responding was still that of the college were classified as “*Medium awareness.*” Participants who knew procedures existed but were not aware of where to find procedures and whose plan of responding was not that of the college were classified with “*Low awareness.*”

Lastly, participants who were not aware of any existing safety procedures regarding how to respond to an active shooter crisis and whose plan of responding was not that of the college were classified as “*Lacking awareness.*” Although there was similarity in their responses, which assisted with analyzing the data, there were salient data as well that registered far outside of the majority of participants’ responses. Participant 1’s plan of instantly engaging the active shooter was not remotely similar to other participants’ responses of how to respond to an active shooter crisis at Southern Tech. Data included several participants who were oblivious of Southern Tech’s active shooter procedures and had a plan of response that did not align with the college’s plan. However, it was only Participant 4 who expressed both a lack of awareness and an understanding that he and others would be “decimated” in the event of an active shooter crisis.

Table 2 pertains to the first research question and it exhibits comparison and contrast among students and employees regarding awareness.

Table 2

Aware of How to Respond to an Active Shooter

Type of participant	High Awareness	Medium Awareness	Low Awareness	Lacking Awareness
Students				*Participant 1 Participant 10 Participant 12 Participant 13 Participant 14 Participant 16
Faculty	Participant 15 Participant 3	Participant 2 Participant 9	Participant 7	*Participant 4
Administrators	Participant 6	Participant 8	Participant 11	
Police office	Participant 5			

Note. Due to their interviews yielding such uncommon responses, an * was added to their profile in Table 2.

As revealed above, there were participants who were more aware than others of what the college had implemented regarding how to respond to the active shooter. Most stakeholders displayed *unawareness* and were not aware of any active shooter procedures offered by the college nor did their response plan align with that of Southern Tech. The data also yielded that all students were *unaware* as compared to faculty and staff who, with the exception of one, had some level of awareness. However, another variation that did surface was associated with the level of confidence that participants had in campus security.

Theme of Confidence

As interviews were conducted, the focus began to shift toward participants' perceptions and their level of confidence in campus security. All participants were asked

how confident they were in Southern Tech security's ability to quickly disarm and suppress an active shooter. Most participants had not received the training that security officers were given regarding their job. Just as civilians rely on law enforcement for protection in their community, stakeholders of Southern Tech expected the same from their campus police officers. Participants offered their opinion of campus security prior to answering the specific question. When participants were asked their thoughts about what could be implemented to promote a safer learning and working environment, their responses included improving security. Participant 7 suggested a stronger presence would give him a better feeling about being safe at work.

When participants were asked if there were any concerns regarding an active shooter crisis occurring on campus, responses reverted to concerns about campus security. Participant 11 stated that more armed security would make him believe campus was promoting a safer learning environment for the student body. These responses, and others, came prior to specifically asking participants about their confidence in campus security. Therefore, it was apparent that it was a concern for stakeholders. Participants were classified with three levels of confidence in Southern Tech's ability to adequately respond to an active shooter crisis: "*Lack of confidence*," "*Medium confidence*" (i.e. confident in one or two police officers), or "*High confidence*."

Table 3 portrays comparisons and contrasts among students, faculty, administrators, and security in their levels of confidence in Southern Tech's security. Coombs's (2014) second crisis management stage, crisis, consists of two substages: crisis

recognition and crisis containment. Participant 10 stated “a significant task of security was containing the shooter and minimizing serious injury to students, faculty, and staff.”

Table 3

Confidence in Security

Type of participant	Lack confidence	Medium Confidence	High confidence
Student	*Participant 1 Participant 10 Participant 12 Participant 13 Participant 14 Participant 16		
Faculty	Participant 4	Participant 3 Participant 9 Participant 7	Participant 2
Administrators	Participant 11	Participant 6	Participant 8
Police officer			Participant 5

Note. Due to their interviews yielding such uncommon responses, an * was added to their profile in Table 3.

Half of the participants did not feel confident that security could adequately respond to an active shooter crisis at Southern Tech. All six student participants and two faculty members expressed they did not believe campus security could properly respond to a gunman on campus. Coombs’s (2014) last stage, post-crisis, refers to the aftermath of the crisis and having a plan for dealing with those who are emotionally and physically wounded. The findings from the participants offered perspectives, concerns, and new understandings that were not anticipated. Prior to other local law enforcement arriving in the case of an emergency, the college campus security would be the first line of defense.

Students, instructors, and administrators desired to see more of a security presence and reassurance that they could protect people in the midst of an active shooter crisis.

Conclusions

Student participants expressed that they did not have any knowledge of active shooter safety plans, and therefore did not have a perception or understand how the college expected them to react to the crisis. Additionally, instructors and administrators shared the same challenge of lacking awareness and understanding. The dissemination of information was a key factor. How students and employees were made aware and understood the active shooter procedures was directly impacted by how information was shared. Additionally, how information was dispersed also influenced how students and employees perceived Southern Tech's active shooter plans. It is a challenge for individuals to be aware of, perceive, and understand what they have little to no knowledge of, such as how to respond to an active shooter crisis. The following will illustrate inconsistencies of awareness, understanding, and perceptions among students and employees regarding an active shooter crisis.

Dissemination of Information

The level of awareness and understanding for students, faculty, and staff at Southern Tech was influenced by how information was disseminated. Participants' awareness of an active shooter procedure and the understanding regarding how to respond to an active shooter crisis were varied according to their role on campus. Coombs (2014) stated that the precrisis stage of crisis management focused on the importance of individuals being prepared for a crisis. Once a person accepts the

possibility of an active shooter crisis occurring at the workplace, that person can then work towards being prepared for the emergency (Kautzman & Little, 2011). The students were the least aware of the campus' active shooter procedures and lacked confidence in the campus security.

The active shooter procedures for the campus need to be better disseminated throughout the student body to increase their awareness of the procedures as well as their understanding of how to respond. For the most part, faculty and staff had an awareness of the campus' active shooter procedures and stated that they had some confidence in campus security to address an active shooter on campus. However, there were variations in faculty and staff understanding of their respective active procedural roles. One participant, being a campus security official, had full awareness and understanding of the campus' active shooter procedures. Doss and Shepherd (2015) argued that the preparation for a crisis situation begins prior to the unpredictable attack and requires the joint efforts of security, law enforcement, and other internal departments within the institution.

The data captured from 10 Southern Tech employees revealed there were some who could attest that the college had informed them about how to respond to an active shooter crisis. However, there were six students and one employee who had not received any information from the college about how to respond to such an emergency, who had developed a plan on their own, or who gave responses that differed from their colleagues. Collectively, six student and three employee participants stated that Southern Tech had not informed them of how to respond to an active shooter crisis. Therefore, the majority of the participants lacked awareness of how Southern Tech expected them to react to a

gunman on campus. What was just as important was that the participants believed that their lack of awareness was due to Southern Tech not adequately providing or disseminating the information to students, faculty, and staff.

Inconsistencies also were an issue, as not all who had a plan mirrored the procedures the college had developed for a gunman on campus. The knowledge of the few employees who were aware of how to respond to an active shooter on campus rested upon the initiative they had taken to be ready for the emergency. The failure to be prepared for such a crisis may in turn cause panic to arise and poor decisions to be made (Johnson et al., 2016). Despite the origin of their plan, all employees had a plan for responding to an active shooter. However, out of 10 Southern Tech employees, there was only one person who distinctly described where to find the active shooter emergency plan on the college's website. If an active shooter crisis were to occur, individuals who developed their own plans or were not aware of the protocol in place could make bad decisions with life-threatening consequences.

Perception of Active Shooter Procedures

How information is perceived or understood is uniquely linked to an individual first being aware of the existence of the information. Stakeholders must first know that procedures exist, before they can begin to understand the emergency protocol. Students, faculty, and staff were unaware of existing active shooting procedures. Therefore, these stakeholders could not explain their "understanding" and "perception" of how they should respond.

Identifying the triggers and actors regarding an active shooter crisis is important for understanding the threat and procedures needed for minimizing the event (Doss & Shepherd, 2015). Participants' understanding of how Southern Tech had informed stakeholders of how to respond to an active shooter would be directly influenced by their initial awareness. Interviews yielded evidence that some participants, especially students, were not aware that Southern Tech had procedures for an active shooter crisis. Therefore, their lack of awareness would indeed affect how stakeholders perceived procedures.

Significant inconsistencies surfaced among participants who were aware and understood how to respond to an active shooter crisis. The participant who expressed that he was aware of where to find procedures for responding to the crisis also articulated that he understood how to respond to an active shooter crisis. Hence, all six students, and one of the faculty members, expressed that they did not understand the safety procedures regarding an active shooter crisis that Southern Tech had implemented because they were not aware of the procedures. Response to active shootings on college campuses, as stated earlier in this study, is a serious issue, and colleges should prepare the campus community and should provide information about how to respond to such a crisis.

Conclusion and Further Research

Although the research questions were answered, the outcomes might have been challenged if there had been multiple research sites, such as each satellite campus of Southern Tech. Each campus could have yielded participants with various experiences that were unique to the campus. For example, Participant 11 was located at a satellite campus and he was oblivious to some of the changes that had occurred at the main

campus. Phases 1 and 2 could be conducted at each campus and the outcomes compared, which could lead to additional recommendations regarding the project. The study could also be expanded by including other local colleges.

Additional institutions would offer another perspective of how other colleges and universities have prepared their students, faculty, and staff for an active shooter crisis. Allowing the study to further develop could bring awareness and understanding to other colleges and universities of how to respond to an active shooter crisis. In order to provide suggestions to Southern Tech for changes based on this research, a project was developed. After discussion with my doctoral study committee, it was concluded that the best genre for the project was a safety procedure recommendation in the form of a detailed position paper. However, embedded in the project is the recommendation that an active shooter policy be developed for Southern Tech. The project includes a background of the existing procedures/problem, supporting evidence from the literature review, and recommendations. Section 3 will include description and implementation of the project and a supporting review of literature.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The primary objective of this doctoral study was to investigate a local, Southern college's stakeholders' awareness and understanding of an active shooter crisis. As a former staff member of the study site for nearly a decade, I was present when Southern Tech began to inform faculty and staff on how to respond to a gunman on campus. Witnessing reports of repeated college shootings around the country had caught my attention. Therefore, it was reassuring to see Southern Tech be proactive by beginning the conversation of how people should respond to an active shooter on campus. I could not predict if an individual would begin shooting on campus, but I would be aware of how to react in such an emergency. However, I noticed that students were not being issued the same information as that dispersed to faculty and staff. A gap existed between the awareness of students compared to employees. The discrepancy was enough to warrant an investigation and served as a foundation for this research study.

In interviews, the participants gave insightful descriptions of what students, faculty, and staff were willing to offer regarding their awareness and understanding of an active shooter crisis. In addition to the participants' solicited replies, they were asked what outcomes they would want out of the study. The participants, especially students, wanted more clarity of awareness and understanding of how to respond to an active shooter. Recommendations such as mandatory training being implemented in student orientation were suggestions shared among students. Collected data, along with suggestions by participants, served as a guide for the project (Appendix A).

Rationale

A white paper can be applicable to multiple situations and studies (Willerton, 2012). Additionally, a white paper with recommendations could bridge the gap of awareness between the students and employees. The intended audience is the students, faculty, and staff at Southern Tech. The white paper could be placed on Southern Tech's website for public viewing. The project required for this research study provides a platform for recommendations and solutions to the problem. A white paper will typically give a description of a problem as well as a solution to the problem being studied (Stelzner, 2007). The problem in this research pertained to the active shooter crisis occurring at colleges and universities. The participants, by way of interviews, offered solutions that would assist with making all stakeholders equally aware of how to respond to an active shooter crisis.

Although there were some inconsistencies among faculty and staff, the most significant differences pertained to the students. Students wanted more clarity on how to remain safe and survive an active shooter crisis. A white paper would be an instrument to portray the information that had been given to me by the students. Stelzner (2007) stated that a white paper is primarily guided by factual information. Interviews yielded information that produced recommendations. Therefore, a white paper allowed me to address the concerns and issues that were gathered from the data collection and present a project or recommendations for improvements.

Review of the Literature

When conducting the literature review, I used the following databases: ERIC, Education Research Center, SAGE, and Google Scholar. Search terms used included *white paper*, *college safety assessment in higher education*, *safety at colleges*, *safety culture*, *safe learning environment*, and *safety in higher education*. The following review of the literature will provide a background of a white paper and why it is appropriate for the research study. Additionally, I will address the resolution to the problem and include a supporting theory to lead the development of the project.

Project Genre

The findings from the collected data were instrumental when determining a white paper as the project genre. White papers typically have findings that rest upon surveys and other forms of authentic research (Juricek, 2009). The report would serve as a platform to share the testimonies from the participants. Powell (2012) shared that white are often similar to research papers, but are written more strategically to gather support for research. They have also historically been used by the United States for classified government research regarding national security (Willerton, 2012).

A white paper also belongs to a distinctive literature group referred to as grey literature. Additionally, when white papers are implemented in research, this form of grey literature serves as a foundation that yields information at multiple levels including government, businesses, and academia (Juricek, 2009). A goal of the project is to help with a solution. The white paper can play a role with assisting people with making decisions (Juricek, 2009). Based on findings from the study, recommendations would

offer solutions to the research problem. However, it will ultimately be the decision of Southern Tech's administration of whether or not to implement the suggestions. The purpose of the white paper is for students, faculty, and staff to gain a better awareness and understanding of how to respond to an active shooter crisis. Equally important as the white paper was the guiding theory that helped in developing the project.

Creating a safety culture was an important factor pertaining to the purpose of this doctoral study. Whether an active shooter crisis ever occurs at Southern Tech, students, faculty, and staff want to feel that they are safe. This feeling resonated during participant interviews. When I interviewed those who were aware and understood how to respond to a gunman on campus, their response was given with a sense of pride. It was the pride of "I know how to stay safe and survive if an active shooter came on campus," and they were glad to tell me their plan. However, those who were not certain of how to survive gave their response with a sense of "help me because I am not quite sure of how to respond, survive, or be safe." Collectively, participants wanted to know they would be safe in case of the crisis, and all of their suggestions of improvements pointed towards making the campus safer.

The participants gave numerous suggestions, such as intercom system, access key cards, a campus emergency siren, more experienced campus police officers, and some kind of mandatory active shooter training for students and employees. Participants wanted to be confident that in the case of an active shooter crisis they would be safe and that meant surviving. Students, faculty, and staff wanted a safe learning and working

environment. Therefore, the guiding theory selected for this doctoral study project was Antonsen's (2012) safety culture.

Culture

Safe environments in educational institutions are important to arriving students. When students arrive at college, they seek a sense of belonging and safety that is significant to their overall adjustment (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2012). A safe learning culture consists of a welcoming atmosphere that is not in favor of violence (Hull, 2011). Furthermore, an academic institution should be a safe and secure environment that ensures that students achieve their full potential (Modzeleski et al., 2012). However, changing the learning and safety environment of colleges has become an objective in higher education. Colleges and universities are being held accountable for how the campus and students are being kept safe (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013).

When stakeholders arrive at a college campus, it is normal for them to feel that they are in a safe environment and open to the exchange of thoughts and beliefs. Southern Tech is not any different in regards to students and faculty sharing their opinions. A college campus is perceived as an academic atmosphere where ideas and opinions can be discussed between faculty and students and not a place for crisis events, such as an active shooter (Baker & Boland, 2012). Antonsen (2012) argued that organizational conditions are a precipitant when exploring and describing a safety culture. As Baker and Boland (2011) stated, higher education campuses are viewed as a safe space for academic exchanges and an active shooter may not be given appropriate consideration. A safety culture is a concept that illustrates an environment or atmosphere in relation to the

objective safety (Reiman & Rollenhagen, 2014). Antonsen's notion of a safety culture provides an understanding of how an organization models safety practices, and this guiding theory places importance on having a safe atmosphere for colleges and universities.

Students, faculty, and staff also desire a safe learning and working culture. When people do not feel safe, it can have a negative impact on their daily routine. A safe culture cannot be occasional or random, but consistent and predictable. Safety should not be a priority when it is convenient based on the situation; every situation should be a priority that warrants safety (Geller, 2016). Feelings of being unsafe can influence individuals' mental health, school or work attendance, and academic achievement (Hughes, Gaines, & Pryor, 2015). Furthermore, the risk that could jeopardize the individual's wellbeing could impact a person's feeling of being safe. Multiple types of hazards and variables can have various influences on a student's reaction and trust in an institution's ability to uphold safety (Mooij & Fettelaar, 2013).

Various participants indicated that those who should be enforcing safety are all stakeholders, not just security. Faculty and staff, collaboratively, have the ability to act as a cultural change agent and bridge the gap between them and students (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012, p. 179). All stakeholders must have a stake in the responsibility of ensuring the campus is safe. Safety culture refers to the safety being given priority, and those who have the ability to enforce it realize that safety must be managed (Kongsvik, Storkensen, & Antonsen, 2014). However, enforcing safety also involves individuals knowing how to conduct themselves in the midst of an active shooter on campus. A

significant factor with individuals knowing how to react to the crisis is their attitude. Therefore, students, faculty, and staff need to be prepared. Adequate training is also imperative to promoting and implementing a safe culture (Stuart, 2014). The training must be done in a timely manner with intent and purpose. A strong and efficient safety culture must be proactive as it pertains to promoting a safe atmosphere that involves a high level of support and sharing of information (Kongsvik et al., 2014).

Sharing of the information is a conundrum as it pertained to this research study. Student participants did not believe that information regarding how to respond to an active shooter was being dispersed equally. Students were not aware, or did not understand their responsibilities, if a gunman suddenly came onto the campus. A safe culture implemented at Southern Tech would support students being knowledgeable and confident that stakeholders could learn, remain safe, and survive an active shooter crisis. Effective learning and instruction can only occur within a safe and secure environment (Masitsa, 2011). Creating a safe culture requires highlighting the potential threat and acting in unison to reduce the potential threat (Edwards, Davey, & Armstrong, 2013). If suggestions and recommendations from this research study are implemented, then it could yield a safer culture at Southern Tech.

Safety

A person is safe when he or she is protected from harm, danger, or hazard (Masitsa, 2011). If this is to be achieved school safety should take precedence at institutions. Establishing an academic environment that promotes safety should be a priority for educational administrators (Bachman, Gunter, & Bakken, 2011). Students

desire safety to promote learning. It is important for institutions of education to establish a safe learning environment to engage their students. However, this environment must first be created, which involves various stakeholders.

Administrators of higher academia face the challenge of simultaneously ensuring a positive and limitless learning environment, while providing a safe atmosphere for students, faculty, and staff (Patton & Gregory, 2014). Administrators at Southern Tech include directors, academic deans, campus deans, department chairs, and vice presidents for various departments. Additionally, administrators understood the role of the parents of students and reacted by giving more attention to overall campus security to students (Zugazaga, Werner, Clifford, Weaver, & Ware, 2016). Parents are equally concerned about campus safety for their students. Gregory and Janosik (2013) stated that students and parents believe that college administrators are being honest with revealing campus concerns and issues regarding campus safety.

If employees are going to be given trust by students and parents, then individuals of other departments should contribute to a safe learning culture. A safe culture established by leaders of an organization or institution gives a sense of trust and empowerment to its stakeholders (Griffin & Talati, 2014). If students, faculty, and staff at Southern Tech are to have equal awareness and understanding of how to respond to an active shooter crisis, then remaining safe will be easier to achieve in a crisis. Essentially, an institution's implemented safety strategies can influence a student's feeling of being safe (Booren, Handy, & Power, 2011). However, to be safe, there must first be some

form of risk or danger. Safety is understood and is relevant to the potential or existing danger or hazard (Antonsen, 2012).

Risk can also be perceived in various ways based upon the area of activity (Meyer, 2012). The potential hazard or risk, as it related to this study, pertained to the unpredictable shooting by a gunman on campus. Equally important as the risk is how the risk or threat is communicated. Communication cannot be effective if information is only moving in one direction. Risk communication includes a two-way process that should consist of elements of trustworthiness and information exchange (Covello, McCallum, & Pavlova, 2012). Individuals who could be at risk need to be a part of the risk communication for possible feedback or interpretation pertaining how to react to the approaching threat (Lundgren & McMakin, 2013).

Regarding this study, faculty and staff would play a significant role in determining what is a potential risk or threat. School officials need to have the ability to differentiate between a student expressing freedom of speech and what could be an actual threat or danger (Surface, 2011). Faculty or staff participants never stated they were trained on how to recognize and report a potentially threatening student. All potential risks and threats should be taken seriously and given much consideration (Taft, 2011). Nevertheless, one of the most frustrating factors about ensuring safety is that it is less challenging to lessen risk than to initially recognize it (Ericson, 2015). The same theory applies to this research study. It would be easier to mitigate the risk by ensuring that individuals know how to stay safe than it would be to recognize who could be an active shooter. Just as participants stated, gunfire could be the signal that alerts students and

employees of an active shooter on campus. However, at that point harm to students, faculty, and staff could have begun at Southern Tech.

The level of safety, as compared to the level of risk, is also a factor. If the level of risk is considered to be low, then the reciprocated level of safety is likely to be high (Antonsen, 2012). Based on stakeholders', especially students', level of awareness and understanding, the risk was rather high for them not knowing how to respond to an active shooter crisis. Therefore, their level of safety was low, and it was possible that students, faculty, and/or staff would be harmed during the emergency. The danger itself, when it comes to safety, can also be diverse in its origin. Risk can be either derived from nature or humans (Antonsen, 2012). A risk, an active shooter harming or killing people, associated with this research study pertains to one created by humans.

Whether it is students, faculty, staff, or someone from the local community, dangerous individuals are becoming active shooters. School safety is an evolving field, which is needed to keep current with school safety changes (Trump, 2011). Perhaps implementing more mandatory training would in turn influence stakeholders to be more cognizant of how to respond to an active shooter crisis and Southern Tech to be more relevant regarding campus safety. Students who are pressured to behave in a certain manner, or given safety expectations, often behave in safe ways and are more inclined to follow more safety instructions (Ponnet, Reniers, & Kempeneers, 2015). Additional training would also prepare students and employees for the unpredictable shooting crisis. Trump (2011) stated when well-trained, that faculty, staff, and student body are the best defense to ensuring school safety. Additionally, administrators have a significant role

regarding campus safety. Trump shared that administrators should realize threats that could breach their institution's safety could be internal as well as external.

Collectively, students, faculty, administrators, and staff all have a responsibility in ensuring campus safety. College campuses have become a common location for horrific assaults such as mass murder (Allen & Lengfellner, 2016). Therefore, safeguarding safety at all times needs to be a shared responsibility. As it pertains to Southern Tech, awareness and understanding of how to respond to an active shooter is equally important. Individuals do not intend for an active shooter crisis to occur, however being prepared has been a key factor in surviving the event (Johnson et al., 2016). Colleges and universities need to be cognizant of the importance of providing a safe culture for their students, faculty, and staff.

Project Description

After data were collected and analyzed, developing a white paper as the project seemed most applicable to this research study. Project Safety On includes three recommendations:

1. Recommendation 1 refers to having a mandatory completion of online active shooter assessment.
2. Recommendation 2 refers to once per semester having an active shooter campus evacuation exercise.
3. Recommendation 3 refers to once per academic year inviting a guest speaker to address the college about overall safety and awareness.

Although each recommendation addresses a separate matter, collectively they reflect the voices of the participants who contributed important data. If the recommendations are received and implemented by Southern Tech, additional resources will be required. Recommendation 1 would require Southern Tech to create an online active shooter assessment or adopt existing software for the college. Nevertheless, funding will be needed for implementation. Additionally, the student affairs department would play a significant role. Student affairs would be instrumental in monitoring the completion of the assessment.

If there are individuals who do not complete the assessment or make a sufficient score, student affairs could enforce an academic hold prohibiting students to progress (i.e. register for proceeding classes) or obtain certain documents (i.e. transcripts, final grades). Also, to ensure the assessment is taken promptly students will have 5 business days to complete the assessment. Afterwards, they would receive weekly email reminders to the school email, personal email, and text message. Communicating with students in this method would be identical to how students are informed of a campus emergency. Although suggested to improve awareness and understanding for students, Recommendation 1 also pertains to faculty and staff. Daily emails will be sent until the online assessment has been successfully taken by faculty and staff.

Recommendation 2 would require a collaborative effort by not just a Southern Tech police department, but also the local authority. As Participant 5 stated, if an active shooter crisis occurred, several local authorities (i.e. county sheriff, metro police, state patrol, GBI) would arrive on campus in response to the threat. Therefore, in efforts to

ensure that individuals know how to respond to the crisis, they will need to fully experience the full scope of what would occur. However, orchestrating such an evacuation will take in-depth planning, scheduling, and communication with all involved parties. Southern Tech campus police department would take the lead in cooperating with local law enforcement to remove all potential conflict to make certain everyone is in accord. Recommendation 3 would require research for locating a credible safety and awareness expert. In addition to locating the speaker, confirming the fee for the engagement would be equally important.

Acquiring this speaker could be the responsibility of Southern Tech's threat assessment team. The speaking engagement should be scheduled when planning the annual academic calendar. It would not be mandatory for students to attend. However, faculty should encourage them to attend, perhaps even offering some form of academic incentive. When scheduling the seminars, faculty and students' various schedules should be kept in mind. Interviews did include responses that indicated that, although active shooter events were held, some faculty and students were not able to attend due to a conflict in their schedules. Therefore, planning should be methodical and flexible as it pertains to when and where the seminars will be held on campus. The most accommodating location on campus would be the auditorium. Facility and technology departments would need to also be a part of the planning to ensure the location is reserved and someone is quickly accessible for any technical matters.

Potential barriers vary regarding each recommendation. For Recommendation 1, aside from the monetary barrier, there could be technical issues such as a server overload.

Depending on how many individuals are accessing the assessment at a particular time, the server could be overloaded and momentarily crash. Also, failure to have dependable and accurate tracking could present issues. Accountability will be imperative to ensure that all stakeholders participate in the assessment. As it pertains to Recommendation 2, planning will be instrumental to avoid stakeholders missing the opportunity to participate in at least one active shooter evacuation. An obstacle that Southern Tech needs to avoid is planning evacuation exercises that do not offer stakeholders an opportunity to attend. Recommendation 3 could potentially face budgetary barriers depending on the speaker's request and demands. If planned in advance, location of the event can be decided. Collectively, potential roadblocks can be avoided if adequate planning is incorporated for possible implementation of all recommendations.

Project Evaluation Plan

A recommendation is not synonymous with implementation. Therefore, all three recommendations mentioned previously do not warrant Southern Tech to put them into practice at the college. Irrespective of whether the Project Safety On is implemented, the recommendations should be evaluated. Evaluating the recommendations is important because there must be clarity to understand if the recommendations meet their purpose. Therefore, a formative and summative evaluation will be conducted. A formative evaluation focus is directed toward improvement (Nieveen & Folmer, 2013).

All three recommendations, if implemented, must be measured to determine what each of their influences or impacts is on the college. A formative evaluation consists of gathering data related to an issue and offers feedback that informs the necessary people of

ways to improve the project (Nieveen & Folmer, 2013). If Southern Tech decides to employ the recommendations, a formative evaluation will be essential to assessing their effectiveness. A formative evaluation will provide recommendations unique to the anticipated improvements (Nieveen & Folmer, 2013). Although a formative evaluation could be instrumental to improving safety for Southern Tech, evidence must demonstrate improvements are even deemed necessary.

Therefore, I suggested also implementing a summative evaluation. Researchers must be able to provide evidence, regarding a summative evaluation, that recommendations are worthy of implementation (Nieveen & Folmer, 2013). The evidence regarding this research study are the collected data. Southern Tech's stakeholders have shared their awareness and understanding of an active shooter crisis. Interviews and pre-existing documents illuminated what Southern Tech had implemented as well as potential areas for improvement. The recommendations are a product of the collected data. The suggestions are specific and therefore would warrant specific assessments regarding the summative evaluation.

Measuring the effectiveness of Recommendation 1 would have a quantitative outcome. However, the measuring would be needed in learning how many individuals completed the online assessment by midterm and at the end of each term. A challenge could be students simply not completing the online assessment for various reasons (i.e. procrastination, forgetful, life challenges). However, parameters or restrictions, such as not being able register or obtain final grades, would be helpful with reaching the desired outcome.

Evaluating Recommendation 2 can consist of not only holding the actual evacuation, but also taking account for all individuals who participated. Data implied that stakeholders did not participate in previous active shooter drills because it was a conflict either in their teaching schedule or class. A potential challenge would be people not being present on the days of evacuation. Therefore, placing an emphasis on how many students, faculty, and staff were present for the active shooter drill would be equally as important as having the exercise. Achieving 100% participation, or as close as possible, would be the goal.

As it pertains to Recommendation 3, Southern Tech hosting a guest speaker regarding safety and awareness would only be a portion of evaluating the implemented recommendation. Tracking how many people attend would be equally important. However, similar to Recommendation 2, a challenge could be ensuring that all attend. Data revealed that Southern Tech had made improvements; however, people simply were not aware of the implementation. The interviews made it apparent that what one does not know, one cannot put into practice, and there were clearly participants who were oblivious of how to remain safe in the midst of an active shooter crisis. Needless to say, summative evaluation would be essential for Southern Tech to have measurable implemented recommendations for awareness and understanding of an active shooter crisis.

If these recommendations are implemented, evaluating their overall effectiveness will be important as well. Gathering stakeholders' thoughts and opinions could be accomplished by a campus wide electronic survey. Recommendation 3 suggested an

annual guest speaker regarding awareness and safety. It included, of all three recommendations, the largest time frame because it referenced a “yearly” implementation as compared to once a semester (Recommendation 2). Therefore, time will be needed for Recommendation 3 to be put into action and experienced by students, faculty, and staff. Hence, the survey should be conducted perhaps a semester after the implementation of Recommendation 3.

The objective of the survey will be to gather data specific to each recommendation. The data will give Southern Tech feedback regarding stakeholders’ thoughts about each recommendation. Southern Tech will need to know: (a) Were stakeholders more aware of how to respond to an active shooter after the online training?; (b) Did students and employees know where to physically go and how to respond during an active shooter crisis and the aftermath after they experienced an active shooter evacuation?; and (c) Were students, faculty, and staff given a more heightened sense of awareness and safety for all potential campus emergencies after the annual presentation by the guest speaker? If accepted, each of these recommendations can positively contribute to a social change for Southern Tech.

Project Implications

The overall outcome of this project was to yield an improved safety culture for the designated population. The intended population for the safety procedure recommendation white paper included various stakeholders at a local community college. At the local level, particularly at the study site, the anticipated change would involve improved awareness and understanding of how to respond to an active shooter crisis. The aftermath

of an active shooter crisis is final and becomes a part of that institutions' history. Individuals who arrive at the college that day for their normal routine may not necessarily go home. Others who survive may experience long-term emotional and psychological trauma. Therefore, preparation is imperative for a day that would be life changing. Hence, the importance of Project Safety On and the social change it could have at Southern Tech.

A safer learning and working environment was the unanimous desire of participants. Regardless of their level of awareness and understanding, all agreed that there was room for improvement. Project Safety On would offer three specific recommendations to put into practice that would counter the concerns that participants expressed throughout the interviews. Southern Tech adopting the recommendations of this project would in turn be an investment in all stakeholders' well-being. If the day occurred that a gunman began to recklessly shoot innocent people, and students and employees survived because of adequate preparation, then the return of Southern Tech's investment would be immeasurable. Locally, the implemented recommendations would yield confidence in students, faculty, and staff that they would remain safe in the case of an active shooter crisis.

However, on a broader scale Southern Tech could be seen as an institution with a model safety-conscious atmosphere. As mentioned earlier in this research study, institutions have received national recognition for their level of awareness and safety. As other institutions seek to improve their safety infrastructure, Southern Tech could assist with recommendations and implementations. If a positive change that promotes a better

student and employee awareness and understanding is first achieved at the local level, then the change achieves credibility, which can possibly lead to an active shooter prepared campus being replicated by other institutions. The active shooter safety protocol recommendations that could occur at Southern Tech regarding Project Safety On could have a ripple effect that may ultimately save lives, and would directly align with the core purpose of this study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In the last section of this doctoral study, I reflect on this unprecedented journey. Initially, I began this venture for self-improvement as an advocate of education. As a lifelong learner, I gravitated towards the challenge of pursuing such a prestigious credential. However, when I began to focus on my doctoral research, this expedition gradually, and without any ambiguity, became larger than my personal goals. The focus evolved to the purpose of improving the awareness and understanding of surviving an active shooter crisis for hundreds of stakeholders. The ultimate goal was to produce an effective outcome. Effectiveness is achieved when the learning mirrors the objectives (Brown, Bull, & Pendlebury, 2013). I learned of stakeholders' concerns through interviews, which offered the platform for the objectives embedded in the prescriptive recommendations.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The white paper written allowed the problem to be addressed along with recommendations of solutions. The problem pertained to equal awareness for students and employees for responding to an active shooter crisis. Hence, the objective was developing a project that would offer resolutions for a better awareness and understanding for students, faculty, and staff. Project Safety On, pending implemented recommendations, would be useful for Southern Tech, beginning with the institution's stakeholders. Students, faculty, and staff expressed some degree of concern for their safety regarding an active shooter crisis.

If implemented, the recommendations would have a positive impact on the stakeholder's belief that safety was certain. Participant 10 mentioned that she was glad to hear that the school her teenage son attended was preparing him for an active shooter crisis. However, she was disappointed that her college, Southern Tech, had not provided her with equivalent information for a similar crisis. The recommendations would ensure that Participant 10, and all students, have better awareness and understanding of how to respond to a gunman on campus. Recommendation 1 would allow the stakeholders, especially students, to become familiar with how to respond to an active shooter crisis. It would allow the students, faculty, and staff to self-assess their awareness and understanding.

Self-assessment, when the objective is contributing to student learning, has the potential to engage learners (Boud, 2013). Also, making the task mandatory removes the option of individuals forgetting or deciding not to participate. The reminders and consequences (i.e., academic holds) reinforce the importance of completing the objective. The objective for the online assessment is for students, faculty, and staff to learn or confirm how they should react during an active shooter crisis. It is in learning that individuals realize various strategies or responses that may be useful in multiple situations or scenarios (Entwistle & Ramsden, 2015).

Although Recommendation 1's strength would include educating students and employees, a limitation could also exist. A limitation refers to a possible weakness that the researcher cannot control (Simon, 2011). Limitations could be students' familiarity with using a computer. Southern Tech has a diverse student population. Students include

those who graduated a year ago to those who graduated over 4 decades ago from high school. Every student will not be as computer literate or familiar with using a computer as the next student and may struggle with completing the online training. Therefore, the timing that the online training is completed could be limited by students' computer skills.

Implementation of Recommendation 2 would strengthen awareness and understanding because it would allow an opportunity for current and new students, faculty, and staff to physically participate in an active shooter drill. It would ideally be offered the later portion of the semester. Conducting the exercise then would grant stakeholders enough time to complete the online training linked to Recommendation 1. Therefore, when conducting the evacuation drill, students, faculty, and staff would be able to use what they learned from the online training. The goal is for stakeholders to become familiar with the theory (online training) and application (active shooter drill) in the hopes that they will remain safe and survive the potential threat. Stakeholders will have the chance to learn through experience, by applying what was learned through self-assessment. It is through listening to explanations and engaging in experiences that a concept can be understood (Fosnot, 2013). Because Southern Tech needs to collaborate with other law enforcement departments, the frequency of the drill could also face limitations. Considering that there are day and night students, all students would need to have the opportunity to participate. However, how often the drill is held could be limited if all local law enforcement agencies cannot provide officers.

Lastly, Recommendation 3 will confirm the importance of awareness and safety. The content that the annual guest speaker would share, to a certain degree, would overlap

what Recommendations 1 and 2 would offer to students and employees. It will inform people how they should respond to an active shooter crisis and other prevalent threats that institutions may not have on their radar. A limitation regarding Recommendation 3 could be having limited access to guest speakers. A restriction or limitation can be due to money and people (Davies & Hughes, 2014). Considering that the study site is a college, there are returning students and employees. Therefore, for some individuals, the information may become repetitive. However, for those just enrolling or starting a new occupation at the college, the information connected to each recommendation will be essential. The recommendations offer strengths that Southern Tech would implement for improving awareness and understanding for an active shooter crisis. Contrarily, there are additional limitations that could surface and be problematic.

Delivering and implementing the recommendations takes time and resources. Southern Tech, just as any other institution, has multiple goals and benchmarks it strives to attain for every semester. Whether it is to increase enrollment, retention, or overall revenue for the college, several agendas exist. Therefore, a potential limitation could be related to getting the recommendations reviewed and nominated for implementation. A critical component for this white paper to be effective depends on Southern Tech implementing the recommendation as solutions. As stated earlier in Section 3, budgetary restrictions may be problematic. It is possible that other college projects may supersede Project Safety On. The final decision could rest upon the president or possibly Southern Tech's Board of Trustees.

As it pertains to Recommendation 1, Southern Tech will have to decide to internally develop the online training or offer a contract to an external company to create it. A contributing factor could be monetary based, which could influence the direction Southern Tech takes regarding the online training. Recommendation 2 possibly may be restricted by an emergency that occurs on the planned day of the evacuation. If representatives from other local law enforcement are expected to attend, even with calculated planning an emergency could interfere with organic response for an active shooter crisis. Recommendation 3 could avoid the budget limitations. If the speaker selected is offering a service that falls within his or her job description, budgetary funds that would be allocated for compensation could be avoided. Nevertheless, there will be limitations as there are with any project. It is also possible that the recommendations given could be prohibited from being placed into action.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Southern Tech may contemplate, but not implement, the recommendations. Therefore, alternative approaches need to be considered. The first approach could consist of the college conducting an internal investigation or research. Considering that I no longer work at the institution, it is possible that my research may be seen as questionable by the stakeholders. Therefore, Southern Tech may decide to create a committee especially designed to collect data about stakeholders' awareness and understanding regarding an active shooter crisis. If an internal research is launched, I would be open to working with the designated committee, but would understand if my assistance is not requested.

Another approach, that would be somewhat simplistic, would be to create and disperse a campus-wide safety survey. It is the college's obligation to address the concerns of the students, faculty, and staff regarding potential violent attacks (Baker & Boland, 2012). Creating a survey to gather a sense of stakeholders' level of awareness and understanding would be a start for Southern Tech to address these potential concerns. Using a quantitative survey will yield a quantitative description of attitudes, knowledge, and options of a specific population (Creswell, 2012). Southern Tech could use the numeric data to better understand what approach could be taken to further gather data. Those next steps could align with the recommendations of the white paper regarding this study. However, it could influence the college to take another approach, such as focus groups.

A focus group consists of a group of people gathered to participate in a controlled and guided discussion to collect interpretations and data (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2013). Creating focus groups, regarding the topic of this study, would offer Southern Tech qualitative data. They would allow the college to directly hear the concerns and opinions of students, faculty, and staff regarding knowing how to respond to an active shooter crisis. Southern Tech could also take the approach of collaborating with another institution and conduct virtual focus groups. Virtual focus groups allow individuals to assemble to discuss a specific topic via internet or video conference (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2013). Therefore, if implemented, the partnering institution(s) would not necessarily need to be local. Irrespective, if Project Safety On is implemented or

Southern Tech decides to take action with an alternative approach, the challenge would still remain to increase awareness and understanding for stakeholders.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

The doctoral study has been a daunting challenge. However, I learned a great amount about myself as well as students and employees at Southern Tech. The struggles that I experienced taught me a great deal about research. I remember spending countless hours in the library reviewing articles that would add credibility to my research. At times, several hours of research would only yield three articles causing me to feel defeated. It was also challenging to not impose my own opinion, especially when I found contradicting data. However, it was twice as rewarding when I found research that supported my proposal. It was during my third year of the doctoral program that I changed my perspective of how I would approach this tall task of earning a doctorate in education. I began to see conducting research as if I were a defendant in court. I was going to court to make a case regarding the lack of awareness of how to respond to an active shooter on a local college campus. However, I needed witnesses to support my claim and those witnesses were found through peer reviews, periodicals, books, and existing documents. I have achieved the understanding of various research approaches, designs, and data analyses. I have also experienced the unpredictable when interviewing people while being in the field collecting data. It was undoubtedly the collecting data component that had the most prolific impact.

I realized that attempting to predict the responses from participants in regards to my questions was not practical. Allowing the research to develop independently was

somewhat unnerving. However, allowing this process to occur added authenticity and data to be retrieved organically. Listening to students, faculty, and staff regarding their awareness, and in what areas more awareness was desired, was only a portion of the experience. It was the body language, vocal tone used in response to certain questions, and facial expressions that contributed just as much as the participants' verbal replies. I even remember responses that caused me to adjust my perspective because the answer challenged my preconceived thoughts.

All of the factors that surfaced while collecting data influenced the project development. Participants clearly stated what their concerns were and gave suggestions for improving the active shooter safety procedures. The stakeholders' responses gave clarity that the chosen project needed to address their concerns. Additionally, I wanted solutions for their fears to be included in the project. Hearing directly from students, faculty, and staff offered insight for the project study. Project Safety On would offer a platform for improvements and evaluating what Southern Tech had implemented regarding their active shooter procedures. The recommendations that were included in the project give prescriptive suggestions regarding the active shooter procedures for Southern Tech.

As a practitioner, leadership and scholarship allowed me to interact with and learn from other people. Achieving both scholarship and leadership was a process. The procedure was methodical and was embedded in the development of rapport and trust with participants. After data were collected, I felt more obligated than ever to complete this research. I had been given a guide to develop a project that could lead to an improved

safer learning and working environment for Southern Tech. I became cognizant that the leadership and scholarship regarding the research could not be separated from this doctoral study. However, both objectives were cemented and woven into the holistic experience that will hopefully yield social change. As for becoming a doctor of education, accepting the initial challenge was as important as completing it.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The importance of this project cannot be measured. The purpose of the project is to save lives if an individual decided to begin shooting at people on a college campus. Considering that literally hundreds of individuals enter and exit Southern Tech daily, it is virtually impossible to determine who has ill intent. Therefore, it is imperative for people to be aware of their surroundings. However, being aware of surroundings is just one factor regarding an active shooter crisis. The other variable is knowing how to respond to the crisis if a person were unable to prevent it from occurring.

I vividly remember the beginning of conducting research and receiving multiple mobile CNN alerts regarding college shootings. I thought of the parents who were employees who left home that morning to never return. I thought of the sons and daughters who were students who would not show up for dinner that evening. Those victims became fuel that I often had to use as a catalyst to continue this study. At times I forgot that my career was also in higher education, and I too could become a victim of an active shooter crisis. However, the nature and seriousness of the research had far surpassed my personal involvement or investment. My concern was for my colleague I spoke to in the bookstore, the adjunct history instructor with two children and expecting a

third, and the previously at-risk student who despite all odds had survived harsh living environments and was determined to obtain his associate degree.

I needed to take into account that I knew students, faculty, and staff had not all been given precise information of how to respond to an active shooter. It was reassuring that during the interviews others agreed with my theory. What I learned from the participants were that my thoughts and concerns were shared. I also learned that the college had made improvements for safety since my departure. However, there remained significant gaps between students and employees regarding awareness and understanding for an active shooter crisis. Nevertheless, the participants gave rich descriptions of what needed to occur to make them feel they were in the most secure safe learning and working environment. Considering what stakeholders shared, it is my intent of the white paper and Project Safety On to change the safety culture at Southern Tech.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Although it was rewarding to conduct this research, there is one factor that was of concern regarding Southern Tech. The factor is the college deciding not to put the recommendations into action. The proposed recommendations the college could implement for students, faculty, and staff is vital. The rejection of the recommendation has significant stakes that could be life altering. The implication of the recommendations being implemented is that people could be spared from emotional, psychological, and physical harm. Additionally, based on these recommendations, the college could implement a revised active shooter policy. The empirical implication is directly linked to stakeholders, with an emphasis on students, having an equal awareness and

understanding of how each should respond during active shooter crisis. The theoretical implication is connected to Project Safety On being adopted by Southern Tech, and that stakeholders at a minimum will know how to respond to an active shooter on campus. Theoretically, this may not be confirmed without the crisis occurring. However, Recommendation 2 of scheduling active shooter evacuations each semester would give a vivid portrayal and precise indication of how and where people should retreat.

Failure of the application of Project Safety On could impact not just those who attend Southern Tech, but also their families and the community. Multiple factors are considered in deciding where to attend college or to accept employment. Naturally, safety is a significant factor and was confirmed when conducting interviews. Therefore, an active shooter crisis and the aftermath could have a ripple effect on the college's enrollment and perception by the community. Southern Tech cannot jeopardize either of these possible outcomes.

After becoming so involved and entwined in this research, moving forward I plan on researching the safety culture of other institutions. I believe other institutions are experiencing the same challenges that I have addressed in this research study. Project Safety On could be beneficial to other colleges and universities. An important objective of this research was to promote local social change. It is my goal regarding this research to bring forth social change, both near and afar.

Conclusion

I am unsure what will become of my research. I do understand that the college by no means is obligated to adopt the proposed project. However, it is difficult not to link

the completion and success of this study to the implementation of Project Safety On. I believe it signifies my purpose and determination I have portrayed over six years of my life. Overall, I am pleased with my accomplishment. When considering the purpose of the study, I anticipate it being a significant resource for others who share my passion.

In this study I explored an educational crisis that has affected multiple families, communities, and institutions across the country. Although it started at the local level, the issue extends further than what I see daily. Many literary resources and participants contributed to the development of this research. The results of the research and collected data included writing a white paper with safety procedure recommendations embedded in Project Safety On. The recommendations were a clear reflection of the concerns and ideas participants shared during interviews. Their responses were a significant pillar of this research.

Predicting a crisis may not always be possible, however what can be certain is being prepared. The most significant factor to consider by the college is saving the lives of students, faculty, and staff. Failure for stakeholders not to be adequately prepared has the potential to be life changing for families, the institution, and the community. Southern Tech, just as any other higher education institution, is a place for investment. Students enroll to invest in their education and faculty and staff invest in the students by teaching and making resources available for students to be successful. Southern Tech should also invest in the wellbeing of students, faculty, and staff by ensuring all know how to respond to an active shooter crisis. The research study included 16 participants, which left the majority of Southern Tech's population unquestioned regarding their awareness

and understanding how to respond to active shooter crisis. However, the students, faculty, and staff offered significant testimonies that suggested the need for a change to how the college disperses information to students and employees. If Southern Tech implements Project Safety On, it will be evident that participants' concerns were heard, which will be a key component for improving campus safety.

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Appendix A: Project



Project Safety On

Executive Summary

Survival is not always certain regarding an active shooter crisis. However, preparation should be definite and understood. The purpose of Project Safety On is to ensure that students, faculty, and staff at ██████████ College are aware and understanding how to survive an active shooter crisis. This project will offer findings from the research study and recommendations to assist ██████████ to make decisions regarding the outcomes. A total of 16 participants (six students and 10 employees) were selected to participate in the research study, who were either students, faculty, or staff. The focus of the research was finding out how stakeholders of ██████████ College were informed of how to respond to an active shooter crisis and how were the procedures understood.

Data revealed there were significant discrepancies among participants' knowledge of how the college had instructed them to respond to an active shooter crisis. Project Safety On will present examples of these findings. Additionally, the recommendations included in Project Safety On are aligned with participants' suggestions and concerns regarding improving the awareness and understanding for an active shooter crisis. Each recommendation consists of thorough objectives and explanations. However, the decision to implement the recommendations will be at the discretion of ██████████ College.

The findings, especially responses from the interviews, from the research study resulted in Project Safety On. Students expressed, via interviews, that they had lack of awareness and understanding of how Savannah Technical College had dispersed

information to respond to an active shooter crisis. As it pertains to faculty and staff participants their awareness deviated from interview to interview. An instructor may have been aware of where to find the active shooter plans, but the instructor may have not been aware of how to physically evacuate. Additionally, how the participants perceived the active shooter plans was heavily impacted by if the student, faculty, or staff knew that the safety plans existed. Nevertheless, the participants' response help mold the project study.

Project Safety On included the following recommendations:

- 1) Recommendation of mandatory completion of an online active shooter assessment
- 2) Recommendation of an active shooter campus evacuation exercise that occurs once a semester
- 3) Recommendation of yearly guest speaker to address the college about overall safety and awareness

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graph TD; A[Online Training] --> B[Semesterly Evacuation Drill]; B --> C[Annual Awareness & Safety Speaker];
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Online Training

Semesterly Evacuation
Drill

Annual Awareness &
Safety Speaker

The Problem

██████████ College's mission focuses on creating a learning environment that promotes skill training and lifelong learning regarding higher education. As a two-year school that awards credentials from technical certificates to associate degrees, ██████████ has become an academic pillar in the community. Although the college serves a fundamental role, it is by no means immune to an active shooter crisis. ██████████

██████████ College will need to be prepared for the potential active shooter crisis other institutions have endured across the United States. The local institution has not experienced an active shooter crisis. However, having experienced a gunman on campus is not a prerequisite for a crisis to occur. Prior to a UCLA Ph.D. student killing a professor on campus, the California institution had never experienced a campus shooting.

██████████'s students, faculty, and staff must be prepared for what may or may not occur. However, the problem is that not all stakeholders do not have equal awareness and understanding of how to respond to an active shooter. After conducting interviews, all students and many employees, stated that ██████████ had not prepared for an active shooter crisis. The

CAMPUS SHOOTINGS

- Ohio State University, 2010
- Oikos University, 2010
- Lone Star College, 2013
- Northern Arizona University, 2015
- Umpqua Community College, 2015
- UCLA, 2016

goal of Project Safety On is to share concerns, opinions, and solutions to improve awareness and understanding of an active shooter crisis.

Relevancy

The overall purpose of institutions of higher education is to expand students' thinking, obtain practical skills, and offer personal and professional growth (Green, 2013). However, active shooter crises have jeopardized students' pursuit of higher education. Active shooter crises are highly publicized, as they shock the American public not just for the brutality, but because of the prior belief that schools and colleges are "safe havens" free of horrific crimes (Madfis, 2013). A disturbing element associated with these heinous crimes is that an active shooter crisis cannot be predicted. Therefore, it is important that students are prepared for such an event and aware of the implemented precautions. The problem regarding this study is that students at a local college are not as prepared as faculty and staff for an active shooter crisis.

The active shooter procedures are intended to instruct individuals how to respond in the case of an active shooter crisis on campus. The local southern college of study, [REDACTED], began sharing active shooter information with employees and implementing new tools on campus to use during an active shooter crisis. Contrarily, the problem is embedded in the development of the active shooter safety procedures and more specifically the gap in practice is linked to the implementation and dispersing of the procedures. Implementation refers to methods of how information and awareness, regarding how individuals should respond to an active shooter crisis, was made available to stakeholders. The gap in practice that is being investigated lies between how

procedures were shared with employees compared to students. The goal of this research study was to determine the level of awareness regarding responding to an active shooter that students have, as opposed to employees.

An active shooter crisis is unpredictable. However, what must be certain is how individuals should respond if the crisis occurs. An active shooter crisis can place anyone at risk, and of the nearly 12,000 aggravated assaults in higher educational institutions in the United States since 2007, the crisis has caused more than 149 deaths at public and private colleges (Hoang, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative to [REDACTED] prepare all stakeholders for potentially life threatening emergency. Preventive and responsive measurements were created at [REDACTED] for a comprehensive active shooter emergency procedure plan. How stakeholders perceive the active shooter procedures will be indicative of how well the procedures were implemented. However, collected data made it apparent that many stakeholders perceived the procedures, if they were aware of them to begin with, differently.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to inform [REDACTED] College, by way of a white paper, about the concerns and recommendations that students, faculty, and staff shared regarding an active shooter crisis. The intent of the white paper is to ultimately provide [REDACTED] College with recommendations that would be implemented to bring forth a better awareness and understanding of how individuals should respond to an active shooter crisis. Project Safety On includes three recommendations that could possibly help students, faculty, and staff survive an unexpected gunman on campus.

Results

I was not sure if the [REDACTED] still needed to improve the college's active shooter procedures. However, the first participant interview made it clear that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] College still needed to improve the level of awareness and understanding

★★★★★★★★

regarding an active shooter on campus.

“I have not been informed of how to find the procedures of how to respond to a situation such as an active shooter crisis.”

Participant 1,

who was a student,

made it obvious that

she was not aware of

any existing

procedures, drills, or information being available to her

“I have not been informed of how to find the procedures of how to respond to a situation such as an active shooter crisis.”

★★★★★★★★

pertaining to an active shooter. Participant 1's interview was

memorable because she shared not only that she had never been informed of how to find active shooter procedures, but also that her first reaction to an active shooter would be to

engage. Her statement was bold and also contradicted the procedures [REDACTED]

College placed on their website. Plan-Prepare-React were the steps of [REDACTED]

active shooter procedure and reacting involved engaging the active shooter. However, the procedures designated reacting as the last option and not the first response. Overall,

Participant 1's responses aligned with the other five student participants. When all of the

student interviews were completed, it was undeniable that students were not cognizant of

how [REDACTED] expected for them to respond to an active shooter crisis. It was also

evident that students believed that a form of literature should have been issued or training

developed for them regarding the potential crisis. Students also expressed lack of confidence in campus security.

Unsure if security would be able to adequately respond to an active shooter crisis, students doubted the ability of security for their safety. Participant 9 shared that he would likely ask for the security officer's gun because he did not feel confident he could be protected by the police department. Collectively, all student participants expressed that they had not been adequately prepared. Contrarily the responses of the faculty and staff were not completely synonymous with the replies of the students.

Faculty and staff responses yielded a variety of answers to the interview questions. Considering there were 10 employee participants I expected more of a variance in their answers. I also predicted more employees would have more awareness and understanding of how to respond to an active shooter crisis than the student participants. The faculty and staff responses included one participant having the ability to state where the safety procedures could be found on the [REDACTED] website.

Participant 5 stated the specific steps of how to locate the safety procedures, active shooter drills that had been held, and how stakeholders should respond once first responders arrive on the scene. Faculty and staff presented significant discrepancies, similar to students, in their awareness and understanding of the active shooter procedures

Confidence in STC Security??

“I am not confident, with the exception of maybe two officers that the security could adequately respond to an active shooter on our campus. I would feel better asking for their gun to defend myself.”

*“If an active shooter crisis occurred on our campus, I believe we would be **decimated.**”*

“I am not aware of the main campus having an intercom system and this campus has not had one installed nor had an active shooter drill.”

“We would be safe if the classrooms were more conducive to individuals being able to remain safe would be a start.”

*“Making sure **all** are educated **equally** regarding an active shooter crisis would be a great improvement.”*

“Witnessing colleges shooting around the country has better prepared me than STC. I heard about drills being held, but I couldn’t make it because I was teaching.”

and responses. Three participants responded that the campus had installed an intercom system.

The purpose of the intercom was to relay emergency messages to those on campus. Participants believed this was a great equipment installation because it could instantly alert multiple people at once of a crisis on campus. I agreed with participants and thought the addition of the intercom system could prevent serious harm to students, faculty, and staff.

However, what I found problematic was the remaining seven employee participants were not aware of the intercom system. Awareness and understanding should include stakeholders being knowledgeable of the actions [REDACTED] [REDACTED] has taken to improve campus safety.

However, faculty and staff gave responses that were unforgettable and made it evident that awareness and understanding was an issue among employees. In the event of an active shooter crisis, Participant 4 stated “we would be decimated.” His body language and his tone implied he had even come to accept that due to the lack of not being prepared he would be killed. At a [REDACTED] College satellite campus, Participant 11 was completely

unaware of the safety improvements (i.e. active shooter drill, campus intercom). He informed me there were not any improvements that had been mentioned or implemented at the campus he reported to for [REDACTED] College. When asked how the college could be safer, the replied “by making the class rooms more conducive to individuals being able to remain safe would be a start.” Participant 11’s, along with many other responses, were essential to the development of Project Safety On.

The first major finding pertained to the level of awareness regarding how [REDACTED] had instructed them to respond to an active shooter. When comparing faculty and staff, some knew of [REDACTED] College’s active shooter procedures. However, others were not aware of it, but had devised their own plan for evacuation. However, none of the students knew that [REDACTED] had active shooter procedures. The second theme was varied levels of confidence in the campus security. Not all participants trusted [REDACTED] police department to be able to quickly respond to an active shooter crisis. Each theme was further broken down into categories in efforts to better describe each participant’s level awareness and confidence. The themes played an important role in shaping the development of the recommendations for Project Safety On.

Recommendations

The recommendations are based on the research and collected data. Participants were forthcoming about what they knew, did not know, and what improvements they wanted to see implemented. Project Safety On includes three recommendations, each having the ability to give [REDACTED] College a safer learning and working environment.

Online Active Shooter Training

Recommendation 1 would consist of developing or adopting mandatory online active shooter training for student, faculty, and staff. [REDACTED] currently does not have a “policy”, but more so active shooter response steps. Therefore, the current active shooter procedures would be augmented to include online mandatory online training. Coombs (2014) referred to the importance of preparation. Implementing Recommendation 1 would offer students, faculty, and staff the opportunity to be prepared, online, for an active shooter crisis. Although Savannah Technical College had created active shooter procedures, responses from most participants revealed they were unaware or had no understanding of what exactly the college had developed for an active shooter crisis. However, the mandatory online training would allow participants to become familiar with how to respond to the crisis. The training would have the potential of increasing the awareness and understanding for students and employees from the convenience of a computer or tablet.

Students, new and returning, would have the first 5 business days to complete the online assessment. Failure to complete it or make sufficient score (80% or higher),

student affairs will have the ability to issue an academic hold prohibiting students to progress (i.e. register for proceeding classes) or obtain certain documents (i.e. transcripts, final grades). Until students have successfully passed the training, they will receive weekly emails, and text messages as a reminder. The assessment will only need to be taken once, however if students sit out for a minimum of two consecutive semesters, the assessment will have to be retaken when they return after registration. Students will be informed of the assessment during orientation, email, and mobile text. Faculty and staff will also be required to take the online training. A daily email reminder will be sent to employees until the assessment has been passed. The technology department will be instrumental part of this implementation as well, regarding uploading the training and making it accessible. Also, technology department assistance will be required to install the alert capabilities.

Recommendation 1 Objectives/Outcomes are:

- Students, faculty, and staff to successfully complete an online active shooter training.
 - All stakeholders must complete this training to ensure that everyone is visually aware what occurs during an active shooter crisis.
- Students, faculty, and staff be mentally prepared for an active shooter crisis
 - What students, faculty, and staff will retain will help with their participation in the active shooter evacuation drill.
- Students, faculty, and staff apply learned techniques acquired from the online training to the live evacuation.

- All online training participants must achieve an 80% or higher to successfully complete the training. Although students and employees will have an emergency facilitator assisting, having participated in the online training will help with physical demands of the evacuation. Therefore, it will be important that participants comprehend take their time when completing the online active shooter training. **Learn. Apply. Live**

Active Shooter Evacuation

Recommendation 2 suggests that once a semester a college wide (including satellite campuses) active shooter evacuation is held. [REDACTED] active shooter response procedures did include how individuals should respond if an active shooter crisis occurs. However, it did not include any form of physical evacuation drill. Recommendation 2 would strategically include active shooter evacuate drills that could also incorporate the steps (i.e. Run, Hide, Fight) of [REDACTED] College's active shooter safety procedures. Coombs's (2014) crisis management included the importance of being prepared for the crisis stage. The crisis would be a gunman suddenly entering the campus and shooting at people. Therefore, Recommendation 2 would allow students and employees to be physically prepared for an active shooter crisis at [REDACTED] College.

Planning for Recommendation 2 will heavily depend on working with local law enforcement agencies that would arrive on campus in the case of a real active shooter crisis. Due to students taking not only day classes, but also evening classes it will be important to have the exercise at various times. Trained emergency facilitators should assist with the evacuation. An active shooter is unpredictable and could strike during day or evening.

Recommendation 2 Objectives/Outcomes are:

- Stakeholders to be shown how to strategically respond to an active shooter crisis
 - Students, faculty, and staff need to know how to **physically** respond to an active shooter crisis, just as they would for a fire drill. However, the response may not need to be same as a fire drill. Quickly having students, faculty, and staff abruptly leave a secured classroom and flood the hallways could place them in the line of fire from the active shooter. **An active shooter evacuation drill should be prescriptive and unique to the crisis.**
- Stakeholders to become familiar with how to react in the midst of an active shooter crisis
 - An active shooter crisis is unpredictable and could come without warning. Therefore, students, faculty, and staff must be **quick** to react and instinctively immediately rely on what they have been taught regarding how to respond to an active shooter. **Reaction is paramount to surviving. Hesitation could result in serious harm or death.**

- Stakeholders to become familiar with how to react during the aftermath of an active shooter crisis.
 - Students and employees are not out of clear and present danger until responders (i.e. campus security, local authority) has clearly directed them to a safe zone. Keep in mind that [REDACTED] police or local authority arriving on the scene may not have apprehended the active shooter. Therefore, responders do not know who the active shooter is and could mistake a student, faculty, or staff member as the criminal if their movement it is not warranted or requested. Accountability will be important as well. Attendance and signature of all participants should be obtained and stored. [REDACTED] College should have evidence, if ever requested, of who participated in the training.

Safety and Awareness Speaker

Recommendation 3 suggests that annually the campus invite a guest speaker to talk about campus safety and awareness. When Savannah Technical College's active shooter procedures were developed, it did not include online training or physical evacuation

drills. Therefore, Recommendation 1 and 2 would be instrumental with bringing forth more awareness and understanding for students, faculty, and staff. Additionally, the procedures did not include an annual speaker to address campus safety. Coombs's (2014) crisis stage addressed the crisis recognition. Recommendation 3 would allow a trained professional a platform to inform students, faculty, and staff how to recognize potential threats. Recognizing various threats would also be a significant role Coombs's (2014) pre-crisis stage regarding preparation and prevention. Recommendation 3 would bring forth awareness and understanding to students and employees of how to possibly prevent an active shooter crisis at [REDACTED].

The event should be offered at multiple times during the day or week in efforts to allow as many people as possible to attend. The event should not only address how people should respond to an active shooter, but to other increasing potential threats that the college may not have on the radar. [REDACTED] Threat Assessment Team should take lead on organizing the event. Surveys should be made available as well for feedback.

Recommendation #3 Objectives/Outcomes are:

- Speaker will address prevalent safety and awareness matters in higher education
 - When searching for a speaker, the designated person(s) should remain cognizant that he or she needs to be educated on other emergencies or threats that colleges and universities are encountering. Addressing threats and crises associated with an active shooter crisis is priority, but should not be unaccompanied. The speaker should be prepared to address multiple potential campus threats. Therefore, he or she should have the

ability to conduct a thorough seminar regarding multiple potential post-secondary institutional threats. An emergency or crisis could be addressed that [REDACTED] College does not have on its radar.

- Allow open forum for questions, concerns, answers for students, faculty and staff.
 - Students, faculty, and staff will have questions. Therefore the environment should be created to provoke a conversation or dialogue. Standing mics would promote individuals to go to the microphone to be properly heard. The speaker should avoid people having to repeat their questions because it was not initially heard by the speaker or audience. If standing mics are not an option, assistants should be appointed to patrol the room with mics to quickly reach those who have questions. Considering the topic, all that will be said will be important but it must first be heard. An “anonymous box” should be created for those who may not want to openly ask questions. However, be sure to read the questions before ending the seminar.
- Stakeholders should leave with a better idea of what safety and awareness entails, how to maintain it at [REDACTED], and what other institutions are implementing for safer learning and working environment.
 - Students, faculty, and staff do not need to leave the seminar as a safety and awareness expert. However, stakeholders do need to leave with more knowledge, awareness, and understanding than when they arrived. Each participant should leave with some new “intel” that can be

implemented in their daily activity moving forward at [REDACTED] College. Students, faculty, and staff need to feel empowered and that safety of the college is the responsibility of all.

Implementation and Conclusion

Based on the collected data, these were the most obvious recommendations for [REDACTED] College. Participants were honest, yet concerned about how they should respond if any active shooter crisis ever occurred. Although these recommendations are a product of stakeholders' concerns at [REDACTED], it would be understood if they are not implemented.

However, considering that [REDACTED] College does not have an official active shooter policy, Safety On could add needed to support to their current active shooter procedures. [REDACTED] College's active shooter protocol has given students, faculty, and staff steps (i.e. Run, Hide, and Fight) that could be instrumental in their survival. However, when considering the convincing data that was collected, it is my suggestion that [REDACTED] College makes it a priority to bring better awareness and understanding for this potential crisis. Project Safety On would be ideal to incorporate and expand on [REDACTED] College has established for the overall safety of students, faculty, and staff.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

The following questions will be used in each face-to-face interview. All participants will be asked the same questions. Each participant reserves the right to refuse to respond to any question(s).

Thank you for your time and consent to participate in this study. Please be reminded that you will not be paid for this interview, but your contribution to this is priceless. Before we get into the interview, tell me how was your day? Give me a little background about yourself, personal or career, whichever you feel most comfortable sharing at this time. What made you agree to be a part of this study?

- 1) Describe for me how you have been informed to find procedures of how to respond to an active shooter?
- 2) Describe for me how you see an active shooter situation playing out.
- 3) What is your understanding of how to respond to an active shooter on campus? Tell me more....
- 4) How would you expect to be informed that there is an active shooter on campus? What makes that adequate?
- 5) If needed, how could the college increase awareness of how to respond to an active shooter on campus? You mentioned that....
- 6) What do you consider a safe learning and working environment? Tell me more...
- 7) Are there any changes that the college should implement to promote it as a safe learning or working environment? Give me an example..
- 8) How do you believe the college has adequately prepared you for an active shooter crisis? Explain.
- 9) What are your feelings or concerns regarding the potential crisis of an active shooter crisis on campus? Tell me more....
- 10) How confident are you that this college's security could adequately respond to an active shooter crisis? Explain your answer.

Describe for me any further comments or thoughts you would like to share.

Thank you again for your participation, and I will be in contact with you soon to review your feedback from today's interview.