

*Office of Financial Management - Risk Management Division***UW Takes Steps to Enhance Workplace Violence Prevention Strategies**

The murder at the University of Washington (UW) and the shootings at Virginia Tech this spring were shocking reminders of the pervasiveness of violence in our society, including at our educational institutions. These events immediately launched all organization's thinking towards questioning whether current policy, practices, and efforts were adequate to prevent or substantially mitigate the consequences of workplace violence—with UW leading the way.

Since those tragic incidents, UW put in motion several new processes to help deal with violence-related issues. These are strategies that the Office of Financial Management, Risk Management Division believes other educational institutions—and indeed all state agencies—should consider as they assess workplace violence prevention efforts.

The UW's strategies for enhancing their workplace violence prevention practices are summarized below.

- ▶ In April, UW Provost Phyllis Wise and President Mark A. Emmert appointed a broadly representative advisory committee on violence prevention, chaired by Vice President for Human Resources Mindy Kornberg, to examine the University's policies and practices for dealing with violence and threats to violence at the University. The committee also called for developing better training and education programs so that people will know what to do and where to go for help when any type of violence is threatened or actually occurs. In addition, the UW asked this group to make sure UW policies are as responsive and effective as possible, and to examine the way the organization is equipped to respond to threats, as well as responding to the needs for counseling and advice.
- ▶ One of the first steps UW determined was important to safety and security was reinstating an evening campus escort program. The new service is making available trained security personnel to walk people to and from destinations after dark.
- ▶ Although UW has many excellent resources for counseling and other assistance, accessing them is not as easy as it should be. Therefore, UW is establishing a new Violence Prevention and Response Program, headed by a professional skilled at triaging calls, making referrals, and following up to ensure that people's needs are being met. This office will provide a single point of contact and a single phone number for faculty, staff, and students who may be uncertain where and how to seek help and support.

- ▶ While having good policies and practices is critically important, equally important is informing people about them and ensuring that members of our community are aware of what exists if they need help. Over the summer, UW will work to develop a comprehensive public awareness and education effort to make sure that as many people as possible—including incoming students, new faculty and anyone with supervisory responsibilities—know about UW policies and also know how to access resources for help. The first step in this awareness campaign is a poster with key contact information and the message: *“Preventing violence is everyone’s responsibility, if you’re concerned, tell someone.”*
- ▶ President Emmert also asked a group of the University’s communications professionals to review the University’s plans for communicating rapidly and broadly to the community when emergencies occur, including threats to campus safety. This group was charged to review procedures for generating messages as well as to look into various technologies available to enhance their ability to communicate. The crisis communications committee will be writing a new crisis communications plan for the University. It will outline clear steps for communicating to members of the community in the event of any type of major emergency, including an eruption of violence. The committee, with the assistance of staff from Computing and Communications, is also examining technologies that will make it easier and faster to communicate. This includes the use of cell phone technology and other existing infrastructure such as fire alarm systems, as well as emerging technologies that could be appropriate.
- ▶ The University Police Department has undertaken a thorough review of its practices. The UWPD has put in place a number of changes to improve its handling of cases and for referring cases to the workplace violence assessment team, as well as adding training for officers.
- ▶ The UW’s Center for Instructional Development and Research web site contains a link to their newest resource, *“Threatening Classroom Situations: Planning Guide for Faculty and TAs.”* A description of the guide is as follows:

This web guide identifies resources and strategies for dealing with difficult and threatening situations you may encounter through your teaching. It also identifies considerations for discussing these types of situations with your students. <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/index.html>

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*The Risk Management Division wishes to acknowledge and thank the University of Washington for sharing their “best practice” loss prevention strategies for addressing such a critical risk management issue as violence in the workplace.*