UNCW's Case Management Database

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Case management at the University of North Carolina Wilmington is an emerging practice that supports the University's primary goal of creating the most powerful learning experience possible for students. The case manager works with functioning and at-risk student populations to help create learning environments and experiences that promote and support the cognitive, affective, physical, and social development of the student learner.

Through the Office of the Dean of Students the case management system supports interdisciplinary communication among University constituents to help create an environment for students and the UNCW community which is conducive to living and learning, and where safety is held as a primary value. Such an environment provides students access to resources designed to optimize their success at college, balancing the safety and security of the campus community as a foundation for which learning may optimally occur. The case manager leads the identification, investigation, assessment, and monitoring of high-risk behaviors exhibited by UNCW students.

Created in response to the State of North Carolina's mandate for its sixteen constituent institutions of higher learning, the case manager position began at UNCW in July 2009. Unique to the position description was the charge to create a database that would be housed on a university server in collaboration with the University's Information Technology Systems Division (ITSD). Similar to various student conduct databases, the case management database needed to be on a secure site; accessible to a pre-determined user base (in this case faculty and staff only) and be easily navigable for administrative use. Through the case management database the student behavioral referral form captures student behavior concerns and sends an automatic email alert to the Case Manager, the Dean of Students, and a Captain with University Police.

Prior to the new case management database, the student behavioral referral form was accessible on the University's Safety & Emergency Info website via a word document that had to be emailed to the Office of the Dean of Students staff or a Student Behavioral Intervention Team member (SBIT). This fragmented approach meant that there were several persons responsible for collecting and sharing sensitive and pertinent information about students in crisis. Faculty and staff now have an opportunity to submit a student behavioral referral form via the faculty/staff university portal, a secure location where the data are backed up daily. Using the faculty staff university portal, the login data are cross-referenced with Banner giving faculty and staff access to the referral form only. Access to the database's submitted referral forms and sensitive student data is reserved for the Case Manager, the Dean of Students and a Captain with the University Police Department.

The collaboration with ITSD began with early conversations about the feasibility of an in-house university maintained database application. ITSD uses a project request database to evaluate potential university projects for the following criteria: support of the university's mission and goals; positive impact on electronic accessibility in the current fiscal climate; and reduction of non electronic resources, namely time, people and physical resources. Given the perceived importance of this tool relative to the well-being of the campus community, collaboration began immediately upon receipt and evaluation of the case management project request.

The project began at the midpoint of the summer with a target "live" date of August 14th. In part, at 85% completion, the collaboration included 72.4 project hours by the project lead and various members of ITSD, approximately twelve hours of collaborative meeting time, and countless test cases to identify and repair any kinks

in the database and referral form application. As a result the project was launched before the target date of August 14th and several days before the start of the fall semester.

To create the case management database, an Asp.net application was used on an Oracle backend database. A Microsoft web platform, Asp.net allows web pages and databases to be configured to a client's specifications. For the case management project this allowed ITSD staff and the case manager to create a wish list for functionality and reporting purposes. The list of essentials included categories for specific types of behavior, an incident narrative, the student's identifying data, the reporting staff member's identifying data, incident date, witnesses, and a work log for the case manager to include case updates.

Once submitted, the student behavioral referral forms are loaded into the case management database for the case manager's review. The student behavioral referral forms are also used to present student cases to the Student Behavioral Intervention Team at the standing biweekly meetings. Similar to the previous paper files the database allows the case manager to create work logs for each student interaction, including meetings, phone calls, emails and crisis response. A separate entry field in the referral form allows new data to be added to each referral form.

In an effort to be more conscious of the drawbacks associated with the previous practices, the database will replace a records management framework that supported files in various locations with a more intentional, consistent and streamlined way to track referral forms submitted by faculty and staff. The web-based application allows student affairs leadership to view the referral forms simultaneously, increasing the efficiency of communication and enabling administrators to be versed in the components of the crisis as needed.

Fulfilling an objective of the University's Strategic Plan, the web-based case management system benefits University of North Carolina Wilmington students, faculty and staff by improving processes and procedures that ensure safety and security on campus, increasing the speed of communication amongst various constituents, further developing the mosaic of resources available to students in crisis, and decreasing the dependency on renewable resources.