Husker Innovation – A Collaborative Approach to Promote a Safe University Campus for Visiting Youth

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Executive Summary

Parents want their children, regardless of age, to experience the benefits a university provides. As learning is more productive in a secure and safe environment, safety on campus is paramount. Part of this safety focus is devoted to the special requirements needed to keep youth -- children under 19 -- safe during the many activities and hosted interactions on a college campus. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) pursued the goal of providing a framework of reasonable safety measures so that youth programming could flourish. From this pursuit, UNL's Youth Activity Safety policy came into existence. However, the result was not just the policy, but the willingness of numerous people to work together to focus on the safety of youth while encouraging the experiences higher education has to offer.

This proposal documents the process used to develop the standards, the communication and the input sought to guarantee a workable policy by compiling those items which impact stakeholders most. The document also details the method by which information was disseminated to the campuses, not only for the first draft of the policy, but also for the subsequent review and updates. This policy, while not having specific discernable cost savings, has moved the UNL campus to a safer more unified organization related to safety for all.

Introduction of Organization

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln, chartered by the Legislature in 1869, is part of the University of Nebraska system which serves as both the land-grant and the comprehensive public University for the State of Nebraska. Those responsible for its origins recognized the value of combining the breadth of a comprehensive University with the professional and outreach orientation of the Land Grant University, thus establishing a campus, which has evolved to become the flagship campus of the University of Nebraska.

Through its three primary missions of teaching, research, and service, UNL is the State's primary intellectual center providing leadership throughout the State through quality education and the generation of new knowledge. UNL's graduates and its faculty and staff are major contributors to the economic and cultural development of the State. UNL attracts a high percentage of the most academically talented Nebraskans, and the graduates of the University form a significant portion of the business, cultural, and professional resources of the State.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln has been recognized by the Legislature as the primary research and doctoral degree granting institution in the State for fields outside the health professions. Many of UNL's teaching, research and service activities have an international dimension in order to provide its students and the State a significant global perspective.

UNL's current student enrollment totals approximately 25,000 full and part time students. Students attending UNL originate from all 50 States, as well as the District of Columbia. International students studying at UNL total approximately 1,000 and originate from 126 different countries. This diverse population results in behaviors and cultures. In addition to students, there are approximately 1,500 faculty and 3,700 full and part time staff associated with UNL's City and East campus locations.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

There are approximately 16 million students attending 4,200 colleges and universities in the United States. There was relatively little information on college crime until passage of the Clery Act of 1998, which required colleges to publish annual crime statistics for their campuses. All college students should be able to obtain annual reports on crime rates for their campus, although the Clery Act excludes larceny, theft, vandalism, threats, and harassment.

However, the Clery Act alone cannot keep children safe. Due to the significant number of opportunities to interact with youth (those under the age of 19) on college and University campuses, UNL felt the need to adopt a plan whereby all faculty/staff/students interacting with these youth understood the obligation afforded them to keep youth safe. Youth participate on our campus in a number of ways; from athletic summer camps, to opportunities to shadow faculty/staff, to private music and voice lessons, to campus visits. Furthermore, with the decentralized independence of each college/department on campus, there was no real way to

identify and monitor each interaction. Therefore, UNL Administration brought together stakeholders to discuss the options for monitoring activities and behaviors before it became a problem.

Design

UNL approached this innovative initiative through the synergy of academic units, human resources, student services and operational departments. In 2011, after searching the web for developed policies or data on the topic of ensuring the safety of youth, UNL found that while there were isolated articles discussing the topic, there was sparse documentation throughout the higher education community regarding how to effectively coordinate such an endeavor. By taking a collaborative, thoughtful approach and utilizing a period of review and change, UNL forged a true Youth Activity Safety Policy that fit the needs of a major land-grant research institution. UNL's approach led us to find a way to interface with and meet the needs of a wide variety of youth in all three aspects of our mission (research, outreach and education).

Behavior expectations for all who interact with youth was a primary consideration. This permeates not only UNL events, but also outside organizations utilizing UNL facilities. The campus policy includes requirements for vehicle travel with minors and overnight stays, and provides standards for oversight and supervision as well as consent forms for parents/guardians.

Activity workers are vetted to guarantee that they have no relevant criminal background. In addition, the activity workers are given direction in the areas of managing a health crisis as well as one-on-one contact with youth. While the primary department identifies Youth Activity Workers – those who will have direct interaction with minors while on campus – campus departments also identify Activity Support Staff. Activity Support Staff are defined as anyone who has the potential of contact with youth while on campus. UNL outlined requirements and expectations of both groups.

UNL encourages independence and decentralized decision making, the implementation of this process was required to be as varied as the departments themselves. For example, UNL is the home of robust Cooperative Extension and 4-H departments. These departments touch the lives of tens of thousands of youth across the state, some as far as 400 miles away from the Lincoln campus. UNL had to develop a model that would work in a range of locations yet retain enough flexibility to accommodate unique situations.

Implementation Process

UNL developed an initial working model and vetted it by using the departments who regularly interact with large numbers of youth, such as athletics, housing, campus recreation, and admissions. Leaders in human resources and the UNL Police Department worked with these stakeholders to draft an initial policy. Through these campus discussions, UNL sought to find a balance between educating the campus

community regarding its responsibilities, providing guidance regarding "best practices," being attentive to the myriad of youth activities that range from UNL sponsored day camps and activities, monitoring programs sponsored by others but held on our campus, student recruitment activities, musical and theatre performances, etc., and providing appropriate campus review and exceptions. Rather than curtail youth activities to minimize the risk, UNL embraced these activities in a way that encouraged safer campus programs while continuing to educate our campus.

A registration form was added to the process to ensure a central point of information related to all youth activities across UNL's decentralized campus. The new form allows departments to detail information such as location and length of programs. It also allows auxiliary departments such as housing and parking to be aware of upcoming events and have a department point of contact for their use. While there has been little need so far, in the interest of being thorough UNL added a Youth Safety Incident Form to the packet of information provided. This process guarantees any incident or negative outcome is communicated in a timely and efficient manner to UNL Risk Management along with those responsible within specific departments. In addition to in-person training classes, UNL provides online training to detail the policy and procedures in depth. UNL also offers individualized support to end users in colleges and departments to guarantee understanding and adherence to the policy, thus ensuring that all "fact and circumstance" questions are answered.

Benefits

In 2014, approximately eighteen months after implementation, UNL revisited the policy and reviewed the lessons learned during that time. UNL sought input into stakeholders' issues and concerns and found that having a designated "point person" for each activity was critical to the process so information could be shared consistently. The campus found that while stakeholders wanted to follow the policy, there were instances where adhering to the policy made the activity unworkable. Therefore, permitting pre-approved policy exemptions can be granted if discussed in advance of the event, and determined to still assure the safety of youth. UNL found that allowing latitude to departments in the format and distribution method of forms and communication provided the flexibility needed without compromising the desire of all to keep the campus safe.

These lessons, as well as legal considerations, necessitated further policy updates to promote increased communication and cooperation. Additional meetings between academic leaders, auxiliary department staff, legal counsel and student services provided clarification and insight into specific language needed within the policy. These meetings guaranteed that the needs of the campus and those who implement the policy were met.

Retrospect

UNL established a youth policy that provides monitoring and detailed instructions for keeping Youth safe. This policy can be adopted by other campuses and

universities. In addition to the policy, UNL spent many hours collaborating with stakeholders to guarantee the policy would meet the needs of the campus and reach the desired end goal. By taking a collaborative approach to the implementation and revision of the policy, UNL has secured campus buy-in and successful compliance to the policy. UNL's policy and forms are posted on our website and available for public use. Best practices of policy development require the policy to be able to change over time.

UNL expects this policy to continue to grow and improve. While this discussion speaks to the policy as written, the broader impetus of this effort as outlined by our chancellor was to drive the conduct of all UNL staff, students and faculty and outside organizations, and to increase awareness of our role and responsibilities in providing opportunities for youth in a safe and educational environment.