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Making Campuses Safer

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By Maia Farris

Rebecca Bolante: Director of Threat Assessment When trying to prevent a tragedy, OSU alumna and Director of Threat Assessment, Rebecca Bolante, says threat assessment is “not about finding someone who would do something bad, it is the opposite — it is about creating a supportive plan so their situation changes.”

Rebecca Bolante is a stellar graduate from the Oregon State University College of Education who was studying in the PhD in Counseling program when the Virginia Tech shooting occurred. This event sparked her interest in threat assessment, and she changed her research focus to answer the question, “How can we prevent something like this happening in Higher Education?”

In 2014, Bolante graduated from Oregon State University with a Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision. Bolante continues her work as the Director of Threat Assessment Management programs at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon. Along with her Ph.D., her education background includes a Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and a Bachelor’s in Psychology with a minor in Criminal Justice from Western Oregon University.

Bolante was first introduced to the counseling program here at OSU when one of her professors spoke highly of the program. The flexible, hybrid program including both online and on-campus classes was perfect for her needs. Working full time and as a mother made finishing a degree more challenging, but her passion of caring for others, education, and research propelled her to earn her degree.

With her research on threat assessment, she learned the best tactics to prevent violence and continues to share these techniques with various professionals like counselors, law enforcement, human resources, and legal counsels . “The key to threat assessment”, she says, “is a team approach”. Overall her research created the Threat Management Resources program at Chemeketa. This program focuses on three parts: prevention (threat assessment), what to do during an event, and disaster behavioral health recovery, and can result in a certificate.

Currently, Bolante’s work at CCC is filling the need to provide the support, education, and training in Threat Management for working professionals. The program has even expanded to places outside of the state to provide the training where it is needed. Bolante’s work doesn’t just engage with the national conversation about mental health and safety nationwide, she contributes to it.

At the beginning of her research she thought that all campuses had threat assessment teams, given they are highly recommended by the Secret Service, FBI, and the U.S. Department of Education. In reality, most colleges and communities do not have someone like Bolante to help facilitate the aftermath of traumatizing events; however, she hopes that her workshops on how to set up a response room, to-go box, and other trainings will help see an increase. She believes campuses should all have threat assessment teams because “there is a need and it continues to grow”. Fortunately, here at Oregon State we have our own Threat Assessment Team with Oregon State Police lieutenant, Eric Judah, co-founder of the team, who also assists Bolante with various training.

After learning about the College of Education’s new Master of Counseling in Clinical Mental Health program, Bolante expressed interest in the online aspect. She shared that her last part of her academics was online and although she originally questioned how it would work out, she stated that “the online experience went very well...[because] it is very efficient to handle the details. I can see how it would benefit counselors in training”.

Some improvements that Bolante hopes for the future is more work in counselor education involving threat assessment and disaster behavioral health. Bolante admits that she “made an assumption that counselors have training [in disaster response], and although there is more now, it is a different skill set with emphasis on psychological aid.” She also emphasizes the importance in education about spirituality and belief systems because they play a significant part of responding to disasters since “people’s belief systems oftentimes get confused and unsure during these times”.

One thing she loves about her job is seeing people “get off the pathway to violence and receiving positive support”. Bolante shares that “if we could learn more about the warning signs and report them prior to an incident we could reduce mass violence.” With work keeping her busy

and oftentimes dealing with dark topics, she knows how important self care is and enjoys gardening, music and family time.

Bolante is fortunate to have her hard work and determination supported by her family, husband, and children. Another person who is a continuing supporter of Bolante's education and work is Dr. Cass Dykeman, a faculty member in OSU's Counselor Education program. Bolante says that he has "been a champion for these initiatives" and together, they have created recent publications; including one this year.

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