

Developing a Culture of Risk Management Throughout Your Higher Education Institution

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PROBLEM

Legal exposure due to variance in risk management (RM) practices within and across higher education institutions, as well as lack of formal acknowledgement of RM in some programs (e.g., backcountry field studies in biology, ecology, environmental studies/science, club sports, cultural club groups, etc.)

SCOPE OF PROBLEM

As of 2014, there were more than 191 collegiate outdoor orientation programs offered in the United States and Canada.

These programs tend to not be of concern, and they can serve as resources for (academic) programs operating in the backcountry that lack RM programs and knowledge therein, such as staff training and professional standards of practice, WFRs, understanding of subjective and objective hazards, group management practices, etc.

Brent J. Bell¹, Michael A. Gass¹, Christopher S.

Nafziger¹, and J. David Starbuck². retrieved from: <http://jee.sagepub.com/content/37/1/31.full.pdf+html>

FOCUS OF WORKSHOP

Developing and sharing solutions to the challenges many colleges and universities face in creating a common standard of RM, including values and practices, across ALL departments.

Case Study: Near drowning

Successful litigation (out of court settlement) against a club sports team who rented duckies and ran a class 3 section of the Arkansas river in CO, without the organizer having any commercial river background, qualifications, safety equipment or required staff to student ratio.

<https://fdazar.com/personal-injury-auto-accident-lawyer-commercials/>

A large component of the settlement was based on the fact that the school they came from, had a outdoor pursuits program that could have provided guides, permits, etc. and that they refused to utilise those assets.

Case Study: Van Rollover



POSSIBLE IMPEDIMENTS TO CHANGE

- ▶ We can't drink at night if we follow all of those safety rules.
- ▶ We would have to spend \$\$ and days doing a WFR or paying for students/staff with a WFR to accompany groups into the field.
- ▶ Those are your standards, not ours.
- ▶ No major injuries, so we must be doing something right.
- ▶ We're not doing high-risk activities, like mountaineering or rock climbing, or rafting.
- ▶ Other – actual or perceived?

CHANGE STRATEGIES...just to get you started!

- ▶ Find Support Champions (above your pay grade). Change from top – down is much more effective and less frustrating than trying to create change without a power base behind you.
- ▶ Demonstrate how the institution will save money in insurance premiums, potential litigation, etc., as well as protect faculty, staff and students (from themselves).

The risk of litigation, negative press, decreased enrollment and parental/student backlash would more than wipe out any 'savings' made by the institution by not implementing even basic RM standards.

- ▶ Lay-out a plan for change that allows all interested parties to have a voice in the decisions that are made.

What other strategies can we leverage?

WITH IMPEDIMENTS AND STRATEGIES IN MIND...

There are 4 scenarios for you to use.

Either draw from your collective knowledge and experience to propose a solution to these problems, or address a pre-existing issue facing a member of your group and her/his institution.

(If your group is willing, please identify a spokesperson who will share the issue and potential solution.)

Scenario 1

Transport and 15 passenger vans

Your college/university/school sees no reason to update and replace its 15 passenger van fleet, despite all the evidence and case studies. The thought of removing roof racks and the rear seat is too difficult to manage. The school has had 1 rollover and 2 other serious accidents with vans in 6 years, luckily no one has been seriously injured and you keep getting pushback from administrators that there is just not enough money in the budget to replace the vans or even begin phasing them out. However, the school has built numerous buildings and spent vast sums on marketing and vehicles for administrative staff.

Scenario 2

Swimmers without PFD's

- ▶ Your college/university/school football team has a tradition of swimming the white water features at the local river as part of their initiation for freshman players. Despite the fact that you have offered to run safety for them, they have refused any type of support and refuse to rent PFDs from the program, or even sign waivers or do swimmer checks.
- ▶ Last summer a student was pulled from the river (after being under for more than 10 seconds) by a kayaker. Despite this near miss, they have politely refused to put any safety measures into effect for next summer.

Scenario 3

Excessive alcohol consumption as a culture in the backcountry

An academic department on campus has a culture of excessive drinking on their backcountry field trips. They had a serious incident a few years ago, when a student broke his foot, falling off the roof of a van, trying to retrieve his bag, after having consumed 5-6 beers. The Prof was not able to drive, they had no FA kit, no communication device that had service and were 3 hours from the nearest town.

Despite a number of other programs that run field trips enacting a no alcohol policy, this department refuses to comply with even a moderate alcohol policy or at least a DD.

Scenario 4

Un prepared, understaffed and no permits backpacking trip

An academic program on campus decided to run a field based expedition (7 days) to examine historical and cultural sites in the backcountry. The staff member has no professional background (except having walked the PCT for a week), no FA training, recruits 16 students, does no pre-trip meeting, sends out no equipment list, does no waivers or medicals, does not carry a suitable FA kit, has no communication device, has 1 set of old maps, decides to have student drive their own vehicles to the trailhead and has no permit to operate in the chosen area.

SHARING

If you feel comfortable, it would be great to have your group share their RM issue and solution.

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Thanks' for sharing your experiences and thoughts!

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