TAPSHIELD

Leveraging the Power of Information Sharing to Prevent Crime

Information-led and results-oriented practices lie at the heart of effective public safety operations. Campus communities face ever-changing threats, and greater amounts of intelligence are the most effective possible vehicle for addressing crime proactively – before incidents occur. To achieve this, efficient and effective information sharing between relevant partners is essential. Information sharing involves the transfer of information from the individual to safety officials and other relevant authorities.

Today, campus safety officials and college administrators face a new breed of campus safety threats such as sexual assault, mental health issues, and potential on-campus violence. The role and function of college counseling centers continues to evolve and change in response to a variety of social, political, and economic factors[1], and due to the momentous changes in the demographic of today's college student population, perhaps the greatest change in higher education in years.[2] Today's college students are increasingly diverse: 30% are minorities; 20% are foreign born or first generation; 55% are female; and 44% of all undergraduates are over the age of 25.[3]

As the near-ubiquitous presence of the Internet has increased our capacity for exchanging information, it has greatly improved opportunities in everyday safety. Furthermore, smartphone proliferation has dramatically increased among students on college campuses and is expected to surpass 85% in 2014. Thus, personal safety applications leverage our digitally connected future to satisfy the greater need for collaboration among students and safety officials to prevent incidents before they happen. This research paper discusses the new challenges campuses face in providing safety to students, and offers some strategies for leveraging pervasive mobile technology to proactively prevent and deter serious crime.

THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S COLLEGE STUDENTS HAVE CHANGED

Just as the demographics of the current generation of college students have changed considerably from the past, so have their needs, including their mental health needs. The need to provide counseling for such a broad range of students and issues – including multicultural and gender issues, career and developmental needs, challenges that come from sexual identification, life transitions, stress, violence, and serious psychological problems – is one of the major challenges

facing college counseling centers, campus safety officials, and administrators. In addition to that, there has been a significant increase in both the students seeking campus counseling services and the number of students with serious psychological problems on campus. According to the National Survey of Counseling Center Directors at 274 institutions, 85% of center directors have reported an increase in "severe" psychological problems amongst students over the last 5 years.[4]

STUDENTS ARE MORE DIGITIALLY-CONNECTED AND SOCIAL THAN EVER BEFORE

A new study found that more than three-quarters of college students – 77%, in fact – use SnapChat at least once per day. Social photo sharing has skyrocketed among mobile users. In 2014, there are over 1.8 billion photos uploaded and shared per day. Students today are re-imagining experiences with mobile technology in ways never before possible.

Inside and outside of the classroom, mobile applications are becoming a part of the young population's lifestyle. For example, instead of attending a live lecture in person, they have the option to watch it right from their smartphone on the bus. When determining what to bring with them when walking out of their dorm room, their smartphone can be viable as a sole-companion, easily being used to purchase coffee, book flights, and communicate with friends. Student's today are less likely to call their parents, but they will text. It's easy, and it's fast. The multi-purpose functionality of the smartphone contributes to a habit-forming lifestyle, where people use apps for just about everything. Personal safety is paramount to society and is innate to us as proven in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Today's young population utilizes mobile technology and social media on their own terms.

A personal safety application is a great compliment to the already existing mobile lifestyle of young people today. However, the app must be one that resonates with today's college demographic. An app will only be used if it is intuitive, clean, and modern in design. To become top-of-mind, and frequently used, an app must offer value to the end user on a consistent basis. We define top-of-mind use as using an app one or more times per week. Schools report low adoption-rates when the primary use of an app is for emergency scenarios only ("duress" or "panic button") due to the rare nature in which they would actually be used. In cases where a student has downloaded one of these apps, in the event of an actual emergency

situation, because the app is not top-of-mind it is rarely used to actually call for help.

INFORMATION SHARING CAN SERVE AS A 'FORCE MULTIPLIER' FOR SAFETY TEAMS

Information sharing is the cornerstone of delivering shared understanding of the issues and arriving at shared solutions. The right information enables safety officials to carry out evidence-based, targeted public safety interventions in a proactive manner. The improved outcome of an intelligence-led, problem-solving approach to community safety can only be achieved when all individuals have access to relevant, real-time, and helpful information.

On a college campus, it is typical for a public safety team of 25 or 30 officers to have the responsibility to provide security to 50 or 60 thousand students, staff, and faculty members on any given day. This number can increase substantially during homecoming or a home football game. A highly adopted and frequently used mobile application, like TapShield, serves as a 'force multiplier' to the University of Florida Police Department. TapShield empowers the University's 50,000 students to be the eyes, ears and cameras for campus safety officials.

TapShield is a student-centered safety solution built with the latest in smartphone and cloud technology. It facilitates discreet and risk-free communication by community members through information sharing with campus safety officials.

Through an easy to use personal safety app, students can report GPS-tagged information with added pictures, video, and audio clips. Safety officials are able to respond to students via a cloud-based dashboard. TapShield also allows users to make GPS-tagged calls for help or message authorities in distress situations. With TapShield, safety officials can better identify threats, prevent crimes, and save lives – improving safety to individuals and the community.

Benefits:
- Empowers students to take responsibility for campus safety by turning smartphones into social safety tools

- Encourages students to become the eyes, ears and cameras for public safety officials
- Facilitates frequent, easy and risk-free communication between students and safety officials
- Makes students more aware of safety issues every day
- Helps the University fight campus sexual assault reporting challenges and improves Title IX compliance

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3. Choy, S. (2002). *Access and persistence: Findings from 10 years of longitudinal research on students.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education
4. Gallagher, R., Sysko H., & Zhang, B. (2001). *National survey of counseling center directors*. Alexandria, VA: International Association of Counseling Services.

About TapShield

TapShield provides a student-centered mobile safety solution that encourages information sharing to prevent and deter crimes. Through a safety app connected to a cloud-based dashboard, TapShield creates a new two-way channel of communication that empowers students and safety officials to identify potential threats quickly. TapShield also provides users the ability to make GPS-tagged calls for help to dispatchers in distress situations. With TapShield, safety officials are able to identify and assess threats, prevent crimes and save lives. For more information visit www.tapshield.com.

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