

An Interview with Glenn Albright: Preventing College Suicide

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Published by EducationNews.org on July 07, 2009



1. First of all, tell us about your education, experience and clinical concerns relative to college students and suicide?

My name is Dr. Glenn Albright and I am a clinical psychologist who received my masters from Southern Illinois University and Ph.D. from the City College of the City University of New York (CUNY). In addition to being a cofounder and Director

of Applied Research at Kognito Interactive, I am a psychology professor at a local college and teach the large lectures in introduction to psychology. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to refer dozens of students to the college's counseling center and have approached many others concerned about their well being. More so than ever, students are experiencing tremendous stress leading to mental distress including depression and suicide ideology. Clearly, as faculty we can make an important impact in helping many of the students who are experiencing the debilitating effects of mental distress.

2. How well prepared should all faculties be in terms of recognizing the signs of suicidal ideation?

Before I talk about preparation, one should realize that faculty are in an excellent position to identify and approach students in mental distress. They are one of a few groups of people that get to see students in a standardized setting (i.e. classroom) over a period of time. How prepared are they to identify and refer students without gatekeeper training? For the most part, very unprepared. Not only that, most faculty do not see their role as teachers to identify and approach students in mental distress, yet we all remember having students that we have been concerned about. Survey data shows that when faculty are properly trained, they will embrace the role of a gatekeeper to help their students. Thus, it is the responsibility of college administrators to provide training and support services for their students.

3. How long does the training last and what does it involve?

The At-Risk training simulation takes about 45 minutes to complete. The user is placed in a virtual classroom and assumes the role of a faculty member that has the opportunity to engage six different students that are having problems in class, with three needing referral to the counseling center. The students are avatars that possess emotional intelligence and memory thus react realistically. After reviewing student profiles, which includes performance, classroom behaviors and physical appearance, the faculty selects those students they feel are at risk and has conversations with them in his office. It is through these conversations that faculty members gain valuable practice opportunities leading to the proficiency and self confidence to embrace the role as a gatekeeper.

4. Now, let's talk about those sticky issues of FERPA and the Buckley Amendments and right to privacy. How do you address these issues?

Not relevant. [our simulation doesn't go into details about these laws as different universities have different regulations]

5. Do you have any data as to the efficacy of this program?

Yes, we have conducted a national survey study involving 42 universities that supports the efficacy of the At-Risk gatekeeper training simulation. You can access the survey results at <http://www.kognito.com/atrisk/research.html>. Also, an empirically-based study is being conducted at a local university comparing At-Risk to a control condition. Faculty responded to a situational judgment task to ascertain learning and measures of general self efficacy, specific self efficacy and means efficacy were recorded. Thus far preliminary results support survey data conclusions.

6. Who developed it? Does it have a theoretical base?

At-Risk was developed by Kognito Interactive in partnership with the Mental Health Association of New York City. Kognito is an interactive learning company that integrates empirically-based learning theories into a proprietary Human Interaction Simulation Platform resulting in the efficacious transfer of conversation dynamics into virtual environments. The MHA of NYC is one of the nation's leading mental health non-profits and operates the 1-800-LifeNet crisis intervention hotline. Also, many psychologist from university counseling centers provided input as well as faculty who participated in focus groups. Lastly, over 25 best practices identified by MHA of NYC were integrated into the conversations to train faculty in identification, approaching and referring students in mental distress.

7. Do you have a web site where people can get more information?

Yes. Please go to www.kognito.com/atrisk