

Shooting at UI yet to prompt changes

By JOEL MILLS of the Tribune The Lewiston Tribune | [3 comments](#)

The murder of a University of Idaho graduate student quickly spurred security reviews at other local and regional campuses this fall, but little change has been instituted.

To date, only Boise State University has signaled a policy shift, emphasizing security and safety over the privacy of its employees and students.

"(The) tragic set of events at the University of Idaho provides many lessons for us and we are carefully reviewing our policies, procedures and communication methods to ensure our system is as effective as it can be," a BSU official said in an email. "Safety and the proper assessment of concerning behavior are of the utmost importance and in the best interest of security for all."

All the schools said they have existing policies that adequately address campus security. BSU and Lewis-Clark State College cited the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007 as a point where security policies and procedures were thoroughly examined and augmented, if necessary.

The UI and Moscow communities were stunned in August when a psychology professor gunned down one of his former students, 22-year-old Katy Benoit, then killed himself several hours later. Benoit had been one of Ernesto Bustamante's students, and had dated him briefly before their relationship deteriorated last spring.

Bustamante, 31, suffered from severe mental illness, including bipolar disorder. He disclosed his condition to the psychology department chairman in 2007.

The UI has been criticized for not doing more to notify Bustamante's colleagues of his condition, and not ordering psychological evaluations after several students complained about his favoritism and flirtatious behavior in 2007. And there were no evaluations after he was reprimanded in 2010 for having inappropriate sexual relationships with students.

The university also took no action after a fall 2010 student evaluation of Bustamante claimed the professor spoke of shooting students in class and encouraged alcohol and drug abuse.

The handling of Benoit's sexual harassment complaint against Bustamante has been another source of criticism. In the complaint, Benoit accused Bustamante of assaulting her with a handgun on three separate occasions. But the UI said Benoit didn't want police to investigate those accusations.

The university urged her to take safety precautions and go to police if she felt threatened. But it never overruled Benoit's wishes that it not explicitly tell law enforcement the details of the alleged assaults.

LCSC officials said the college follows federal student privacy law - the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act - on all matters concerning the disclosure of information regarding students. But FERPA allows institutions to relate information to third parties without student consent "When an institution determines there is an articulable and significant threat to the health or safety of a student or other individuals."

Federal authorities emphasized that leeway after Virginia Tech, but it was already "well understood" at LCSC, said Chet Herbst, vice president for Finance and Administration.

"I'd have to say that this clarification was not a major departure from our existing philosophy here at LCSC," Herbst said in an email. "Our primary rule of engagement (protecting lives/ensuring personal safety) trumps bureaucratic considerations in the event of an emergency (or, in good faith efforts to avert an emergency)."

Washington State University officials said it would be inappropriate to comment on hypothetical situations, like how it would respond to a situation similar to what unfolded eight miles away in Moscow. Instead, it cited a half-dozen policy areas that address things like faculty-student relationships, workplace violence, termination for mental health issues, and education about safety and security.

It also listed several offices that provide counseling for students, faculty and staff members, and resources to promote security, safety and accountability.

Idaho State University officials also pointed to existing policies on campus and workplace violence. One policy has a sliding scale of potential and actual threats, and designated responses that include calling 911.

BSU officials said it is standard protocol for Boise police "to be involved with and privy to any calls to campus security or reports of concern to physical safety." The Boise Police Department is the main provider of on-campus security.

After Virginia Tech, BSU created a committee to monitor and review concerns about students, faculty, staff and frequent visitors. The group meets once each week to serve as a clearinghouse and referral source for such situations.

Officials said BSU is reviewing the effectiveness of the committee in the wake of the UI murder-suicide.

"This assessment includes how student evaluations of faculty may be used to raise red flags or issues of concern," the university said in an email. "It is fair to say that we still have work to do in this regard, but we have placed a high priority on continual improvement."

For its part, the UI is expected to release the results of an independent review of its security policies in the coming days. University President Duane Nellis has said he believes the policies are adequate, but wants to be sure.

Mills may be contacted at jmills@lmtribune.com or (208) 883-0564.