Campus Conflict HotSpot Mapping

by Bill Warters

College and University campuses are dynamic places. Their internal and external environments change continuously based on shifting social forces, economic conditions, legal constraints and more. A campus is also often geographically dispersed, with many smaller locations for interaction that together make up the whole. It is reasonable to say that we are never fully in touch with what is happening on our campus and that we may miss important patterns related to campus conflict that more systematic evaluation would reveal.

Understanding conflict trends on campus can be useful for planning prevention education efforts, and for developing outreach and case development strategies. One method campus conflict resolvers may wish to consider for this purpose is the use of simple "HotSpot Mapping" exercises.

Basically the approach involves opportunistic sampling of campus community members to get their input on where conflict occurs on campus and what its relative intensity may be. The method can be employed fruitfully in conjunction with information tables or leafleting about campus conflict resolution services set up in student centers, libraries, residence halls, athletic centers and other high traffic locations. Volunteers can also use the HotSpot map as part of their introduction to the topic of campus conflict.

A Small Example

As an example of use of a HotSpot map, a fledgling student conflict resolution project at Wayne State University known as the CPR (Campus Peer Resolution) Team recently gathered more than 100 responses to the conflict mapping instrument pictured below while staffing an information table in the student center. Wayne State University is an urban campus with a mix of graduate students who mainly commute or live in near-campus apartments, and a rapidly growing number of on-campus residents living in our new residence halls, most of whom are undergraduates. The campus has pleasant feeling grounds with a closed-to-traffic mall and quad, a generally positive safety record and a very community-oriented campus police force.

The CPR Team was particularly interested in how the campus community was adapting to the increased on-campus resident student population, and whether there were any emergent patterns of conflict that the CPR Team might want to attend to in their outreach, training and education efforts.

The Team modified the sample campus hotspot mapping tool (http://www.campus-adr.org/CR_Services_Cntr/Evaluation_Tools/mod1_2.html) provided in the free

Campus Mediation Program Evaluation Toolkit (available online or as a downloadable Word doc) to make it refer specifically to the Wayne State University Campus. The resulting hotspot map that was used is pictured below. Participants passing by the CPR information table were asked to put Xs on the map where they thought conflict was occurring on campus, with more Xs indicating a heavier concentration or greater intensity of conflict. They were invited to explain their markup of the map to a Team member if they had time.

CAMPUS CONFLICT HOTSPOTS MAP

XXX = Frequent, Intense Conflict
XX = Medium Conflict
X = Low or No Conflict

Briefly stated, results from the informal data gathering effort indicated that students were most conscious of conflicts occurring at parties and bars, parking lots and garages, the student center, and in the campus residences, in that order. As an example of how mapping may provide new awareness, the CPR Team was intrigued with the findings regarding the parking areas, as this had not been something the Team had considered in their own assessment of campus conflict. Team members have since conjectured that the increased use of the parking structure by on-campus student residents who have their car in the structures on a more or less full-time basis may explain some of this finding. Clearly the garages are a site of much interaction, even if it is often done from behind the wheel of a vehicle. Also of interest to the CPR Team were student comments (gathered by the persons administering the instrument) regarding discomfort and conflict (however they defined it) in student interactions with "homeless" people in the various public spaces on campus.

It is not surprising that "homeless" people would enjoy our campus environment as much as the students do, and that they are a de facto part of the broader campus

community whether we like it or not. However, CPR Team members had not considered the potential lack of experience undergraduates may have had in interacting with this population, nor the impact of a whole new group of student "occupants" of social spaces that may previously have been largely the domain of the "homeless" community members. Given the non-representativeness of an opportunistic sample like the one reported here, it is inappropriate to make any firm conclusions based on this data alone. Instead, these findings should serve as sensitizing concepts. Nevertheless, the information has given the Wayne State CPR Team some new things to think about as they develop their services and educational materials.

Campus conflict resolvers are encouraged to consider the value of HotSpot mapping on your campus. It can help build awareness, engage student volunteers, and generally provide for a more informed approach to conflict management strategies. More information on the HotSpot mapping approach, as well as other research strategies, can be found in the Campus-adr.org Research and Program Evaluation section.