Radicalization Risk Rubric:
An Exploration of the Risk Factors, Protective Factors & Mobilization Related to College Student Radicalization and Extremism

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Introduction
Campus Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment Teams have become increasingly concerned with how to identify the potential for radicalization of students, faculty, and staff. Radicalism and extremism should be viewed on a continuum, from critical or counterculture thinking to seeing violence as a reasonable pathway to bring about a desired change. The Radicalization Risk Rubric seeks to provide campus teams with an understanding of what to look for to identify and intervene with at-risk individuals who have radical thoughts and behaviors that are escalating to extremist violence and terrorism.

Defining Risk Factors (RF), Protective Factors (PF) & Mobilization Factors (MF)

Risk Factors (RF)
Some combination of these concerning thoughts or behaviors have been shown by research to be present in past attacks. The 10 Risk Factors listed below can help us to better understand the escalation from radicalization to extremist and violent behavior:

1. Hardened point of view and injustice collecting — Includes filtering out information that doesn’t line up with personal beliefs, and keeping track of past wrongs against them.
2. Marginalization and perceived discrimination — Feelings of marginalization and discrimination lead to moral outrage.
3. Connection to extremists — Involves seeking out contact with extreme subcultures.
4. Affiliation seeking — Is motivated by a desire for solidarity.
5. Expressions of polarized thinking and ideology — Refers to teachings and doctrines that glorify violence and exploit followers’ frustration, anger, and desire to blame something tangible for their misfortune.
6. Cognitive bleakness — Results in disconnection, isolation, and rejection of the values and society.
7. Personal failures — Individuals’ environment and everything around them is in free-fall.
8. Societal disengagement — Involves separation from the larger societal values and experiencing social or political frustration.
9. Justification to violent action — Prior to committing to violence, there is peace and larger justification for violent actions.
10. Predisposing characteristics — Include being easily manipulated, having low self-esteem, religious naivety, depressive symptoms, exposure to violence, military or paramilitary training, criminal past, and thrill-seeking.

Protective Factors (PF)
These are those stabilizing, social, or environmental supports that balance and gird the Risk Factors. These Protective Factors reduce and mitigate the impact of Risk Factors. As with the Risk Factors, these Protective Factors are supported by research in radicalization, extremism, and terrorism, as well as lessons from previous attacks. The key Protective Factors are as follow:

1. Social connection — Includes positive experiences with social support and attachment to others who have positive attachments to the community and a sense of social bonds.
2. Pluralistic inclusivity — Refers to balancing various opposing viewpoints simultaneously.
3. Non-violent outlets — Involves access to democratic means for negotiating how to meet individual needs, improve situations (social mobility), or change impactful decisions.
4. Social safety — Individuals feel connected and able to have their voices heard.
5. Emotional stability — Refers to psychological steadiness, wellbeing, and constancy, as well as a sense of empathy.
6. Professional/academic engagement — Individuals are engaged or have achieved professional, career, or academic success.
7. Global competence — Implies an empathic acceptance and tolerance to diverse viewpoints, religions, and philosophies.
8. Empathy — Promotes understanding and acceptance.
10. Consequences of actions — Involves avoiding negative actions to steer clear of negative consequences.
Mobilization Factors (MF)

Mobilization captures the factors present when an individual transitions from planning toward implementation. If the Risk Factors are the gas and the Protective Factors are dampening rain, the Mobilization Factors could be the match to the gasoline.

1. Direct threat — Has there been a direct threat made by the individual to move forward to an attack?
2. Reactivity — Does the individual engage in reactive and harmful interactions with others flowing from a hardened perspective? Does the person seem to be on edge?
3. Escalation to Action — Is there an intensifying or escalating pattern of behaviors moving towards violent action and a readiness to act?
4. Catalyst event(s) — Has the individual experienced a tragic or overwhelming event that serves as a potential trigger or springboard for action or change?
5. Suicide — Is the individual currently suicidal, with thoughts of hopelessness and desperation?
6. Increased group pressure — Does participation within a group include a crystallization of ideas and a movement toward strengthening a viewpoint with an implied action?
7. Access to lethal means — Does the individual have access to weapons? Is the individual researching plans of attack, and/or building capability and the training that provides a readiness to act?
8. Narrowing on target — Is there a narrowing fixation and focus on a target such as a person, group, or system?
9. Evaporating protective inhibitors — Is there a loss, gradual or sudden, of the social, financial, emotional, cognitive, spiritual, or psychological support that previously kept the individual from unstable or violent action?
10. Leakage — Has there been leakage around an attack plan or research, and/or sharing of last-act behaviors or the creation of a legacy token?

For more information on the R³, including how to bring Brian Van Brunt and Amy Murphy to your campus to train your Behavioral Intervention Team on the use of this tool, please contact Ryan McDavis, Vice President for Client and Member Services, at Ryan@ncherm.org or (610) 993-0229, ext. 1009.

About the Authors

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Brian Van Brunt serves as the Senior Executive Vice President for Professional Program Development at The NCHERM Group, and as Executive Director of NaBITA, the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association. He is also a Past-President of the American College Counseling Association.

Dr. Van Brunt has trained hundreds of thousands of higher education professionals. He has also authored books, manuals, and assessment instruments. He has a doctoral degree in Counseling Supervision and Education from the University of Sarasota/Argosy and a master’s degree in Counseling and Psychological Services from Salem State University.

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Amy Murphy, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at Angelo State University, where she teaches in the Student Development & Leadership in Higher Education master’s program. She previously served as the Dean of Students at Texas Tech. During this time, her role included Deputy Title IX Coordinator for Students, Chairperson for the Behavioral Intervention Team, and Director of the Center for Campus Life.

With broad experiences in student affairs, Dr. Murphy writes and presents on strategic prevention of sexual violence, guidance for Title IX administrators, at-risk student processes, Behavioral Intervention Teams, and innovations in addressing organization misconduct. She has a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from TTU.