



# CU policy on violence may require mental screenings

By Brittany Anas

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If University of Colorado students or employees make violent threats, they may be required to go through a mental-health screening, according to a newly approved school policy.

CU officials on Tuesday notified students by e-mail of new rules to prevent campus violence. The rules come in the aftermath of the Virginia Tech massacre, as well as a subsequent series of crimes and a threat on the Boulder campus.

"The administration felt that there were enough incidents to visit the issues of student violence and really get ahead of this," CU spokesman Bronson Hilliard said.

The April 16 Virginia Tech massacre—the nation's deadliest shooting rampage—left 33 people dead, including the student gunman, Seung-Hui Cho.

The next day, CU officials suspended student Max Karson from class and arrested him after he said as part of a heated classroom discussion that he was "angry enough to kill." A ruling from the school's judicial affairs division allows Karson to return to the campus, recognizing that he tried to diffuse the situation when he realized his peers were uncomfortable because of what he said.

Also in the days following the shootings, police made an arrest in CU's ATLAS technology hub after someone made a threat and pulled out scissors. Another student, Daniel Charles Otero, was arrested for barging into a Buckingham Hall dorm room and threatening residents with a knife, then leading officers on a chase across the campus.

The new policy—authored by Police Chief Joe Roy and approved by Chancellor Bud Peterson—spells out rules and consequences for intimidation, violence, harassment and other disruptive behavior.

"UCB may refer individuals accused of making threats of violence for an assessment of the likelihood that they will act on a threat of violence," the policy says.

A national watchdog group for free speech on college campuses says requiring students to go through such screenings solely because of an accusation may be extreme, and it raised concern about some of the implications the new policy could have.

Samantha Harris, director of legal and public advocacy for the Philadelphia-based Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, reviewed the policy Tuesday.

"It very well may be intended to protect the First Amendment," she said. "But some of the language is broad, and that might hold people back from engaging in constitutionally protected speech."

Hilliard, though, said university officials have looked at the policy from a legal standpoint and that the rules are meant to keep the campus safe while protecting free-speech rights.

"It really addresses conduct more than speech," Hilliard said.

The watchdog group in December issued a report saying colleges across the country are squelching students' free-speech rights with policies that would likely fail constitutional challenges.

CU, however, fared better than the majority of campuses, receiving a moderate yellow-light rating from FIRE. Only a half-dozen of the 334 universities and colleges that the group analyzed received its best green-light rating.

Ryan Biehle, a CU junior and chief of staff for the school's student government, said there is concern among students that an act of violence on the same scale as the Virginia Tech shootings could happen on the Boulder campus.

"That would be a good way to start attacking the problem," Biehle said of CU's new policy and screening referrals. "I don't really think that you can be too cautious."

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