

at-risk for University and College Faculty

Gatekeeper Training Simulation

Follow Up Study of Online Gatekeeper Training Simulation at 68 Universities

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“Realistic conversations, very informative, yet was fun to take the course. This will stick with me.”

– User

BACKGROUND

Each year, over 1,350 college students die by suicide and, according to the American College Health Association, almost 6% of all students say they have seriously considered suicide during the past year. Unfortunately, most of these students go unseen by counselors, leaving them, and others, at risk. Gatekeeper training - teaching people within a community to recognize and refer a person at risk - has been shown to be a valuable strategy in increasing early intervention efforts and has been widely adopted by higher education institutions as a tool to engage their faculty and staff in identifying, approaching, and referring students at-risk for psychological distress.

This report summarizes the findings of a follow up study conducted at 68 universities and colleges around the U.S. to assess *At-Risk for University and College Faculty*, an online gatekeeper training simulation released by Kognito in 2009.



WHAT IS AT-RISK?

At-Risk for University and College Faculty is a 45-minute, online interactive gatekeeper training simulation designed to prepare faculty and staff to identify, approach, and refer students exhibiting signs of psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide. A demo of this course can be viewed at www.kognito.com/atrisk.

In the simulation, users assume the role of a professor and engage in simulated conversations with five emotionally responsive student avatars. Several of the avatars exhibit signs of psychological distress and the user's role is to effectively identify those students and refer them to the counseling center. In these virtual role-plays, users practice using conversational tactics and motivational interviewing techniques to effectively broach the topic of psychological distress with an at-risk student and motivate the student to seek help, while avoiding common pitfalls such as attempting to diagnose the problem or giving unwarranted advice. The student avatars express emotions both visually and verbally in reaction to users' decisions during the conversations, thus replicating real life interactions with at-risk individuals.



Snapshot of a simulated conversation in *At-Risk*

At-Risk for University and College Faculty has been adopted by over 95 institutions since its introduction in 2009 and is listed in the Suicide Prevention Resource Center/American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Best Practices Registry for Suicide Prevention. *At-Risk* is the first simulation-based training program to be included in this prestigious national registry.

At Risk for University and College Faculty is part of a suite of gatekeeper training simulations developed by Kognito Interactive and tailored to the needs of specific groups of learners, including college students, high school educators, families of returning veterans, health providers, and emergency department personnel.

ABOUT KOGNITO

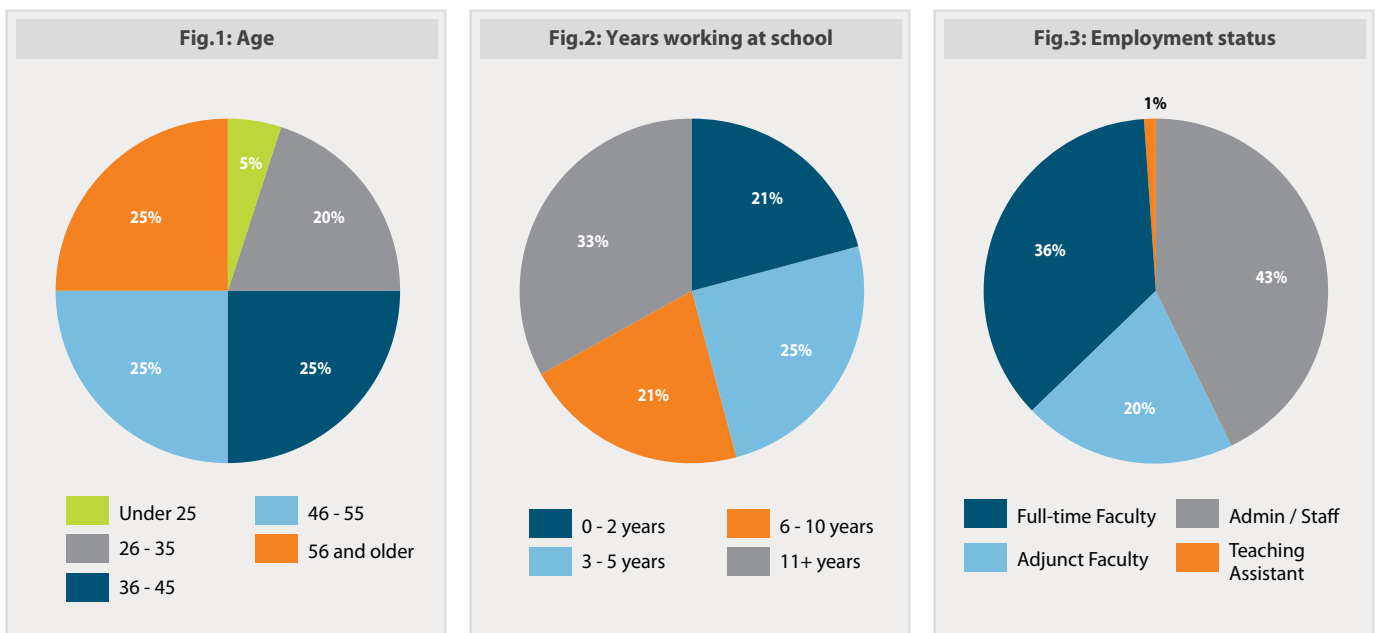
Kognito Interactive is an award-winning developer of online role-playing games and simulations in which users build interpersonal skills and learn to manage challenging conversations in the areas of health and behavioral health. Kognito's simulations are built using its proprietary Human Interaction Game Engine™ which is based on research in social cognition, neuroscience, and motivational interviewing. This platform enables Kognito to author and deliver virtual practice environments where learners must achieve specific objectives by engaging in simulated conversations with emotionally responsive avatars that possess their own personality and memory. Through the simulation, learners become more confident, motivated, and capable of managing similar conversations in real-life. More information about Kognito is available at www.kognito.com.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS AND METHOD

The study included 420 faculty and staff members employed at 68 U.S. universities and colleges. Two hundred and eight two of the participants (67.1%) were women, 137 were men (32.6%), and one was transgender (.2%). The majority of participants were full-time faculty (41%) and adjunct faculty (20%). The remaining were administrators/staff members (38%) and teacher assistants (1%). (Fig. 3)

After taking the course, participants in the 68 schools were asked to respond to a post-training survey about their experience. They were contacted again, on average, 3-4 months later and asked to fill out a follow-up survey. Out of a total of 1,624 users who took the training, four hundred and twenty (26%) completed the post-training survey and one hundred and thirty one of them (31%) completed the follow-up survey. Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants who reported previous experience with gatekeeper training were eliminated from the samples.

There were no significant differences in demographics between those who completed the post-training survey and the follow-up survey. The demographics below provide additional information about the 420 participants.

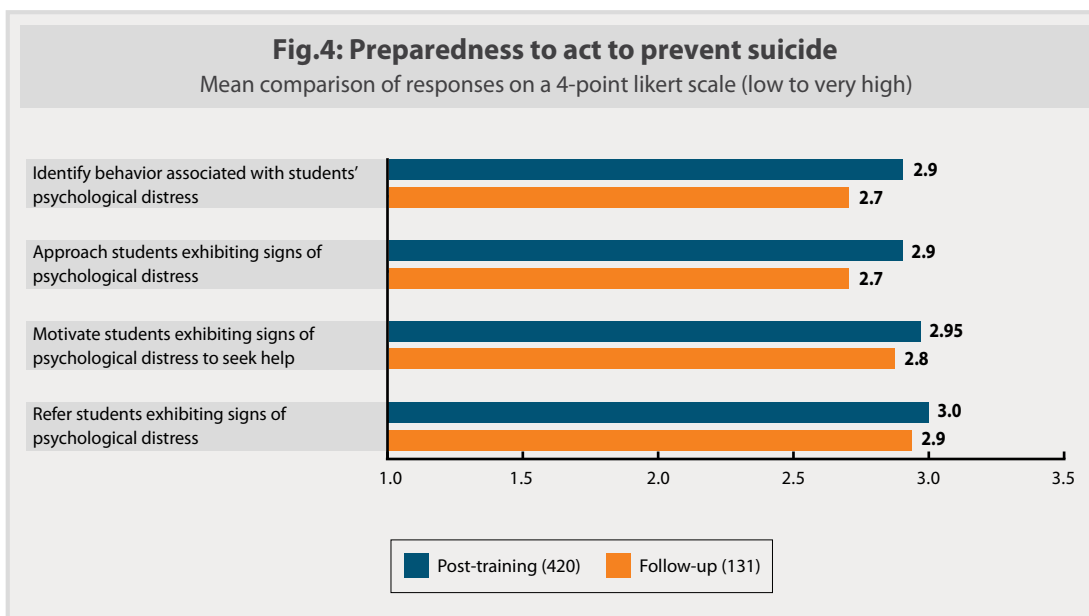


1. SKILLS AND ATTITUDES

The study first analyzed participants' self-reported preparedness to carry out the skills of a gatekeeper, including: (Fig. 4)

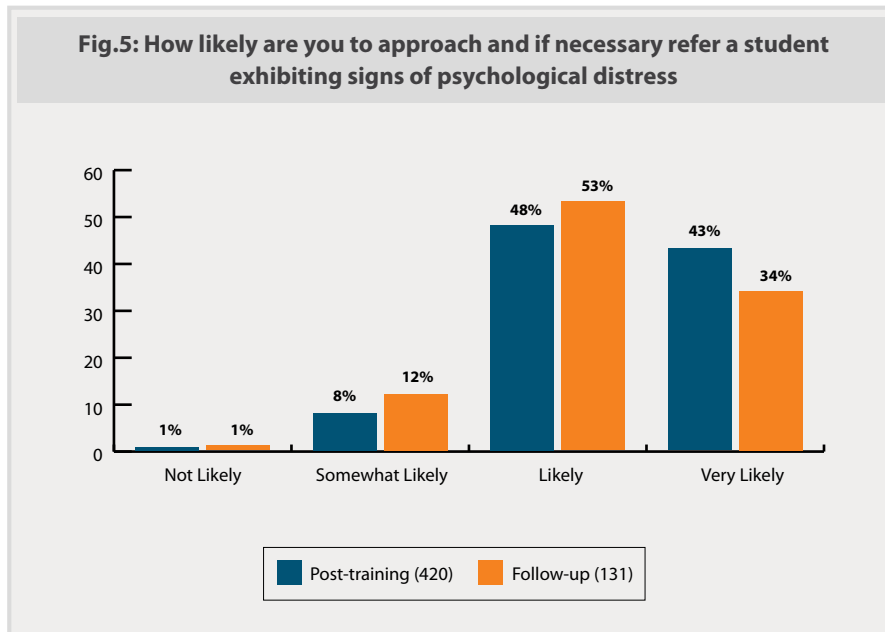
1. Identifying behaviors associated with students' psychological distress
2. Approaching students exhibiting signs of psychological distress
3. Motivating students exhibiting signs of psychological distress to seek help
4. Referring students exhibiting signs of psychological distress

The study found that these levels remained high across samples and almost unchanged over time. For example, 82% of participants in the post-training survey rated their preparedness to refer students at-risk as high or very high, compared to 79% in the follow-up survey.



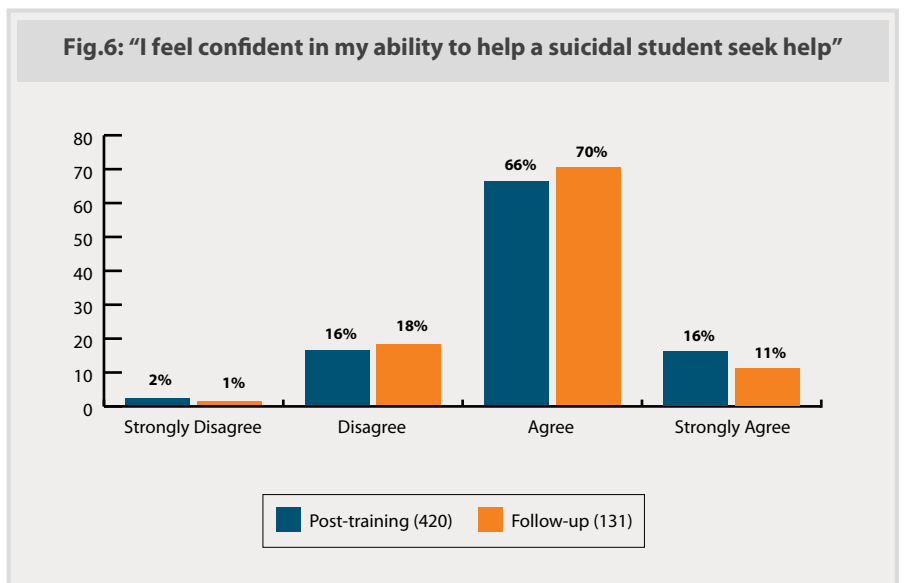
The study also found that the likelihood that participants would approach and, if necessary, refer a student exhibiting signs of psychological distress remained high across samples and almost unchanged over time.

In fact, 91% of participants in the post-training survey and 87% of participants in the follow-up survey reported that, as result of this course, they were likely or very likely to approach and, if necessary, refer such a student. (Fig. 5)



About 90% of participants in both groups reported that, as result of this course, they were likely to approach and refer at-risk students.

The level of respondents' confidence in their ability to help a suicidal student seek help remained high across samples and almost unchanged over time. Eighty-one percent of participants in both surveys either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I feel confident in my ability to help a suicidal student seek help". (Fig. 6)



2. BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

One of the goals of this follow up study was to analyze the impact of the training on participants’ actual behaviors with regards to the number of students they identified, approached, and referred to support services. One hundred and eight of the study participants (26%) provided information about their actions as gatekeepers.

The study found that, after completing the training, the number of students that participants approached to discuss their concern increased by 7% and the number of students they decided to refer increased by 109%. This means that, on average, participants who completed the At-Risk training doubled the number of students they referred to their counseling center within the four months following the training.

Further analysis of this data revealed that the source of this change is an increase in the percentage of students whom participants reported being concerned about and whom they decided to approach and refer. Participants in the follow-up survey approached 83% of the students they were concerned about, while participants in the post-training survey approached only 75%. Participants in the follow-up survey referred 81% of the students they approached to discuss their concern, while participants in the post-training survey referred only 42%. (Fig. 7)

It is important to note that the majority of participants in the post-training survey completed the training in October – December of 2010 (fall semester) and participants in the follow-up group completed the survey during January – April 2011 (spring semester). The next phase of this longitudinal study will aim to analyze the quality of the referrals and the actual number of those referred that ended up going to the counseling center.

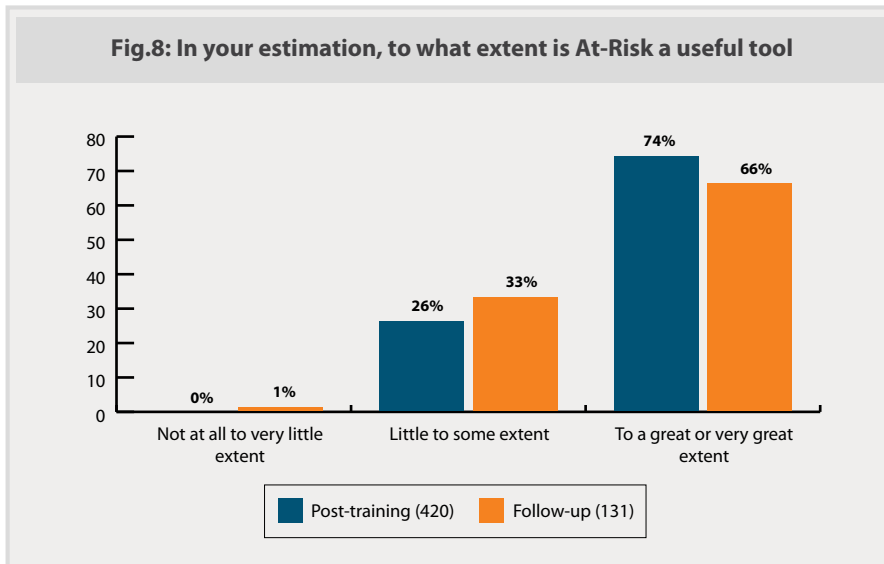
Fig. 7: In the past two months, how many students have you...	Been concerned about (A)	Approached to discuss your concerns (B)	Percentage (B of A)	Referred them to support services (C)	Percentage (C of B)
Post-training	1.85	1.39	75%	0.58	42%
Follow-up	1.79	1.49	83%	1.21	81%
Percentage Change	-3%	7%	8%	109%	39%

Participants in follow-up survey approached a higher % of students who concerned them

Participants in follow-up survey doubled the number of students they referred.

3. LEARNING EXPERIENCE

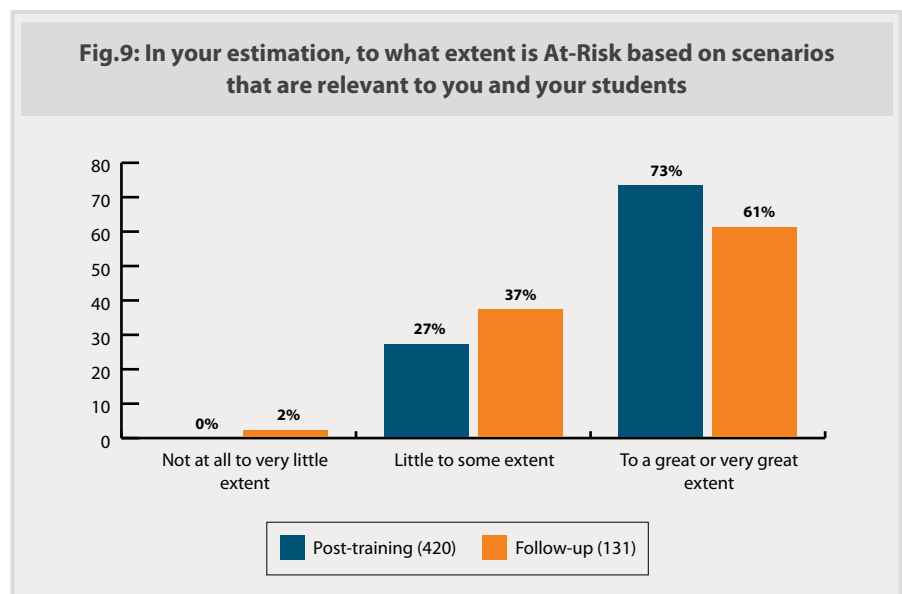
The study analyzed whether participants perceived the course to be a useful tool and its simulated scenarios to be relevant and realistic. Findings show that these levels remained high across samples and almost unchanged over time. Sixty-six percent of participants in the follow-up survey indicated that the course was a useful tool either to a “great extent” or “very great extent” compared to 74% in the post-training group. (Fig. 8)



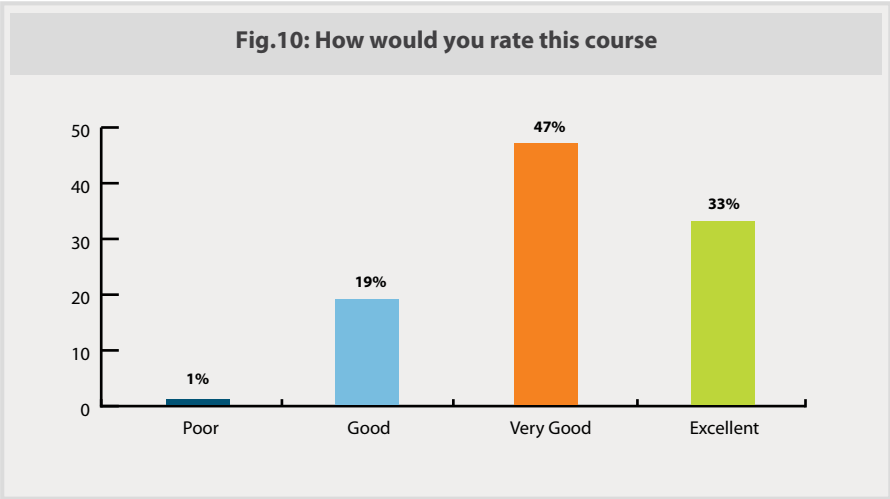
74% of participants in the post-training survey and 66% in the follow-up survey rated the course a useful tool to a great or very great extent”.

In addition, 61% of participants in the follow-up survey reported the scenarios in the course were relevant for them and their students to a “great extent” or “very great extent” compared to 73% in the post-training survey. (Fig. 9)

73% of participants in the post-training survey reported the simulated course scenarios to be highly relevant and realistic.

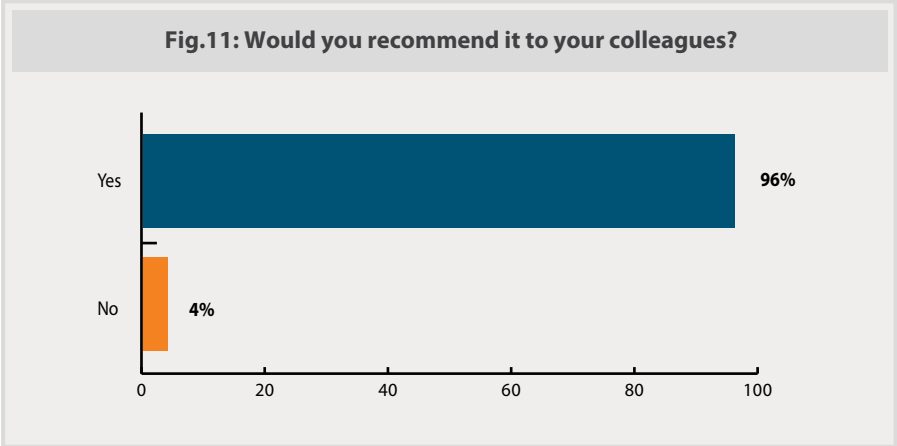


The study also found that 99% of participants in the post-training survey rated the course as good, very good, or excellent (Fig. 10) and 96% said they would recommend it to their colleagues (Fig. 11), which is a strong indication to their positive perception of the course and its value. These last two measurements were not collected from participants in the follow-up survey.



99% of participants rated the course as good, very good, or excellent.

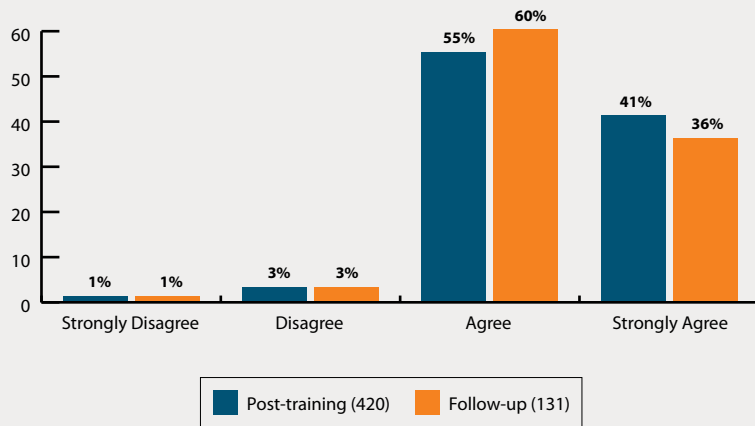
96% of participants said they would recommend the course to their colleagues.



4. RESPONSIBILITY TO ACT AS GATEKEEPERS

Ninety-six percent of participants in both groups acknowledged (agreed or strongly agreed) that it is part of their role as a faculty, administrator, or staff member to identify and refer students exhibiting signs of psychological distress. (Fig. 12) In addition, 96% of participants in the post-training survey said that all faculty, administrators, and staff in their school should take this course.

Fig.12: Part of the role of faculty, administrators and staff is to identify and refer students in psychological distress



96% of teachers recognize that part of their role is to identify and refer at-risk students.

Images from Training Simulation

In *At-Risk*, learners assume the role of a professor and engage in virtual conversations with student avatars who exhibit signs of psychological distress including depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide.



5. COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Participants appreciated many aspects of the course - the interactivity, convenience and self-directed nature, advice and coaching, and the realism of characters and conversations - as revealed through open-ended responses on the questionnaires. A sampling of their responses is represented below:

“Realistic conversations, very informative, yet was fun to take the course. This will stick with me.”

“The realistic students, realistic conversations, choices during conversation were good. Any university teacher will “recognize” these students! Very well developed program and easy to use. I learned a lot.”

“I feel more confident now, I had a student with a serious problem last term.”

“[I liked that] I could complete it at home and at my ‘leisure’.”

“Excellent tool, was very helpful to me. Eased some anxiety of how to correctly approach various students and recommend counseling services.”

“Thank you, I appreciate this course. I have a student that I am concerned about and feel more prepared to deal with the situation.”

“This was beyond my expectation. I thoroughly enjoyed it and certainly gained important insights.”

“I like the way it is set up. Easy to take the training. Everyone working in a school should take the course to provide better assistance to students at risk.”

CONCLUSION

The results of the study strongly suggest that:

1. *At-Risk* increases and sustains over time the likelihood that learners will approach a student who exhibits signs of psychological distress and, if necessary, refer them to campus support services.
2. *At-Risk* increases and sustains over time learners' ability to identify, approach, and refer students exhibiting signs of psychological distress.
3. *At-Risk* increases and sustains over time learners' confidence in their ability to help a suicidal student.
4. After completing *At-Risk*, learners, on average, increase the number of students, exhibiting signs of psychological distress, they approach and refer to the counseling center (average increase of referrals 109%).
5. After completing *At-Risk*, learners, on average, approach a larger percentage of those students whom they are concern about and refer a higher percentage of those they approach.
6. *At-Risk* is a highly engaging learning experience and includes simulated scenarios that learners find useful and relevant to real life situations.
7. *At-Risk* is helpful in increasing faculty and staff's recognition that assuming the role of a gatekeeper is part of their role.

This study is the second phase of a comprehensive assessment being conducted by Kognito about the At-Risk series of gatekeeper training simulations. Future phases will include a comparison of At-Risk to other gatekeeper training programs, a longitudinal component to analyze the quality of referrals initiated by learners, and an examination of responses to a situational judgment task to further measure skill acquisition.

For more information about this study, please contact us at 212-675-9234 or info@kognito.com

Kognito would like to thank the schools, faculty, and staff that participated in the study.



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