

CSI President Delivers Seminar at CUPA-HR Eastern Region Conference

Alan T. Sklar, CSI President, participated in a panel presentation on the subject of **Background Screening for Colleges and Universities** at the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) Eastern Region Conference held in Atlantic City, NJ on April 29-May 2, 2007. The annual professional development conference was well attended by around 400 higher education HR Professionals from Canada and eastern states from Maine through the District of Columbia. Joining Sklar on the panel were Grace Blunt, Esq., Director of Human Resources for Assumption College, and John Jackson, Director of Public Safety for Babson College/Olin College, providing a well-rounded representation of professionals from various aspects of the topic.

This year's conference theme, "Navigating in a Sea of Change: The Future of HR," was particularly relevant to the Background Screening session, as there was a consensus that higher education institutions have been slower to adopt the screening programs prevalent in most other sectors of society, including elementary education. This is due, in part, to a different philosophical approach on campuses that favors trust, openness and creativity, and in part due to other obstacles such as tenure and privacy issues, unions, recruitment concerns and financial considerations. However, the increasing incidence of faculty and staff misbehavior, campus violence, and liability lawsuits has led to rapid developments in this area. Students in healthcare and education programs are being screened due to future licensing and placement requirements.

Sklar presented a startling number of actual case studies of criminal behavior involving faculty, staff, students and student workers, encompassing everything from credential misrepresentation, fraud and financial misdeeds to child pornography, sex offenses, drug use and homicide, including many instances where a background check would have revealed the acts. This was supplemented by statistics on campus crime, resume fraud and percentages of applicants with negative criminal, credit, motor vehicle and substance use histories. Sklar also outlined steps towards establishing a screening program, identifying high-risk positions, developing adjudication standards, and complying with state and federal laws, accompanied by a survey on current college and university screening policies.

Both Blunt and Jackson described their first-hand experience with the process and challenges of implementing screening programs at their respective institutions. Jackson reported on his colleges' policy of screening new hires for safety sensitive positions and attempts to introduce retroactive screening. Blunt identified how the doctrine of "in loco parentis," charging schools with the responsibility of keeping students safe, resulted in her college's screening new hires. She related how a background check on a leading candidate for a high profile position interacting largely with students revealed previous criminal activity, which if not known at the time of hire, would have left the college in an embarrassing situation and liable for negligent hiring. The session stimulated great audience participation and revealed that only about half of the represented institutions had screening programs.