



USING A SYSTEMS APPROACH FOR THREAT ASSESSMENT INVESTIGATIONS

A CASE STUDY ON JARED LEE LOUGHNER¹

When someone comes to the attention of law enforcement for engaging in threatening or concerning behavior, a threat assessment investigation may be initiated to assess the individual's risk for engaging in targeted violence. When conducting a comprehensive assessment of the risk a person may pose, it is essential to gather detailed information from multiple sources to enhance your understanding of the individual's life circumstances and why the individual engaged in the behavior that brought him or her to the attention of law enforcement. This investigative process is supported through the use of a *systems approach*, which serves as a vital tool for law enforcement to uncover information that may prevent an act of violence from occurring. Using examples from the case of Jared Lee Loughner, who opened fire at a "Congress on Your Corner" event in January 2011, this document offers some key considerations in applying a systems approach to threat assessment investigations and management. A case summary about Loughner's life also follows.

On January 8, 2011, Jared Lee Loughner, 22, shot and injured U.S. Representative Gabrielle Dee Giffords at a "Congress on Your Corner" event in a shopping center parking lot in Tucson, AZ. Loughner killed six people in the attack, and in addition to Rep. Giffords, he injured 12 others. Loughner had been exhibiting symptoms of mental illness and engaging in bizarre behavior in the year leading up to the incident. He made numerous delusional and anti-government statements online, and reportedly disliked Rep. Giffords because he felt she had snubbed him at a prior event. Communications discovered after the attack indicated that Loughner may also have been seeking fame as an assassin.

The Systems Approach to Threat Assessment Investigations: Who Has Information and What Do They Know?

One of the first steps in assessing an individual's risk for violence is to identify sources that may have information on the individual's actions, stressors or recent changes in his or her life, and behaviors that may have concerned others. An effective way to accomplish this step is to identify the systems, that is, *persons* with whom the individual has a relationship or frequently comes into contact, and *organizations* that may be familiar with or have information on the individual. Some examples of systems that may hold key information for an investigation include family members, social networks, employers, teachers, spiritual advisors, mental health professionals, social services, law enforcement, and the court system.

A recent U.S. Secret Service study that examined attacks on federal government targets found that all of the perpetrators of these attacks had contact with, or had come to the attention of, one or more community systems (or community-level resources) in the years prior to their attacks.² The systems examined in the report included the judicial system, educational institutions, employers, law enforcement, mental health professionals, social services, and spiritual centers.

¹ While permission to reprint is not necessary, when quoting, paraphrasing, or otherwise referring to this case study, the citation should be: National Threat Assessment Center. (2015). *Using a systems approach for threat assessment investigations. A case study on Jared Lee Loughner*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security.

² National Threat Assessment Center. (2015). *Attacks on federal government 2001-2013: Threat assessment considerations*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security.



Approximately three-quarters or more of the offenders had contact with at least one of the following systems:

- ★ the judicial system for actions related to the adjudication of criminal charges the perpetrators faced and/or civil actions filed by or against them;
- ★ an educational institution, specifically secondary schools and/or colleges and universities;
- ★ one or more employers, including when seeking employment;
- ★ law enforcement for a variety of reasons, ranging from rather minor infractions (e.g., traffic or fishing citations) to arrests for violent crimes.

While these are examples of the most prevalent systems with which the offenders came in contact, all of the systems may hold key information for investigators in identifying and assessing those who may engage in targeted violence. As part of your investigation, focus on:

★ ***Being creative in identifying other sources of information***

At times, an individual who comes to the attention of law enforcement may not appear to have any relationships or contacts with a system. This requires an investigator to consider other, possibly less traditional, investigative avenues from which information can be gathered, such as identifying places in the community that the individual frequents. For example, the person may have a membership at a local gym which he attends often. While the individual might not have established close friendships within these venues, staff or other patrons who have observed, or had interactions with, this individual may notice if he or she exhibits any concerning or unusual behavior. They may also notice changes in the individual over time, which can allow an investigator to assess the individual's state of mind and his or her risk for violence.

★ ***Identifying contradictions and gaps in the sources and information***

In addition to identifying any concerning behavior, the investigator can also compare the person's behavior across the various systems looking for themes and contradictions. We know that people do not always act the same in every setting. For example, an individual may engage in violent rhetoric or discuss grievances about the government with coworkers, but not in the presence of family members. If only the family members are interviewed during the investigation, this information regarding the individual's behavior will be missed. In addition, touching base with these various systems often provides an investigator with leads for further investigation and other sources of information that may not have been identified at the outset of an investigation.

★ ***Considering risk management options***

Each system has a piece of the puzzle that can be put together to create a complete picture of the individual and allow an investigator to make an informed assessment of the person's risk for engaging in violence. If that individual is deemed a risk, then the systems approach can be used as an effective tool for managing this risk. For example, an investigator can establish rapport with the individual's family, coworkers, or friends, and encourage them to contact the investigator if there are any changes in the individual's life that may increase the risk for violence, such as acquiring a weapon or being fired from a job. Other identifiable changes in the individual's life may decrease the risk for violence, such as acquiring stable employment or entering into a supportive relationship. In addition, investigators can explore other resources that can assist with managing the risk an individual poses, for example, requesting a mental health hold or evaluation or obtaining a stay away order from a judge.



Applying the Systems Approach to the Case of Jared Lee Loughner

The systems approach is illustrated in this section using information related to Loughner's actions and life circumstances that are described in greater detail in the case summary that follows. All of the information provided in the case summary was derived from open source materials.³ The content contained in this overview is designed to provide considerations for future threat assessment investigations. It is not an evaluation of any investigation or actions that occurred prior to the events of January 8, 2011.

Loughner had contact with multiple systems, and within each system, there were indications of erratic behavior, threatening communications, and mental instability. Here we identify the types of information held by those who had varying levels of contact with Loughner.

- ★ **Education:** Loughner's erratic behavior concerned faculty and students at the community college where he was enrolled. He often acted in an odd manner by laughing to himself or making comments that were unrelated to the class discussions. Administrators, faculty, and students voiced concern about him. One instructor feared that Loughner would become physically aggressive following an argument about his grade. Meanwhile, a classmate wrote an email to a friend saying that Loughner scared her and she was worried he would bring a weapon to class. He was seen by an academic counselor for his classroom behavior and performance, and came to the attention of campus police on at least five occasions for disruptive behavior. Loughner ultimately was suspended from the college after school administrators became aware of a disturbing video he made while on campus. He was informed that he could not return to the college unless a mental health professional deemed him not to be a danger to himself or others.
- ★ **Employment:** Loughner worked at a series of entry-level jobs in restaurants and retail stores. He walked out on one job after telling coworkers that he could not take it anymore, later describing that he had a nervous breakdown. Loughner also tried to enlist in the military, and felt dejected when he was deemed unqualified due to his habitual use of marijuana. He was fired from a retail store and let go as a volunteer dog walker at an animal shelter. Although he submitted numerous job applications in the year before the incident, he was unsuccessful in gaining employment.
- ★ **Law Enforcement:** Loughner had several encounters with law enforcement and was arrested on three occasions. His arrests stemmed from misdemeanor charges related to drinking alcohol as a minor, possession of drug paraphernalia, and vandalism. He also came to law enforcement attention after reporting that his identity had been stolen. In addition, a detective with the community college public safety department emailed an agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) and asked for any information about Loughner.
- ★ **Community:** Loughner's odd behavior was noticed by others in the community. At the YMCA, where he was a member, he asked strange questions, and during one visit, sat in the men's locker room for 30 minutes. When he eventually left the locker room, he asked the front desk staff what year it was. Employees at a local bank were also disturbed by his behavior. They felt uneasy with him, and kept their fingers close to the alarm button when they saw him arrive.
- ★ **Online Community:** Loughner participated in online games, forums, and chat rooms. He posted bizarre and disturbing statements on these sites in written as well as video format. For instance, he posted a video on YouTube related to grammar and education, creating his own currency, and discussing his distrust of the U.S. government. His posts grew more disorganized, and at times

³ Open source materials used in the preparation of this case summary included court records, investigative interviews, news media accounts, emails from the community college Loughner attended, and personal communications by Loughner.



included violent undertones. Some of his online peers voiced concern for him, with one suggesting that he seek mental health treatment before he hurt himself or others.

- ★ **Social Network:** Although Loughner appeared to have drifted away from his close friends, at some point, he tried to connect with a few of them by calling them frequently and showing up uninvited at their homes. A few weeks prior to the attack, Loughner visited two friends and showed them a gun and a 32-round clip. One of the friends was so disturbed by him bringing a gun that he asked Loughner to leave.
- ★ **Family:** Loughner's parents were concerned about their son's well-being based on some of the behaviors he exhibited, such as talking or laughing to himself, and the problems he was having at the community college he attended. Following his suspension from the college, Loughner's parents hid a shotgun that he owned and disabled his car at night so that he would not be able to drive it without their permission.



CASE SUMMARY

Early Signs of Concerning Behavior: 2005 - 2008

Jared Lee Loughner attended high school in Tucson, AZ. A friend described him as intense and intelligent, and very good at math. Loughner was interested in literature and hoped to become a writer. While in high school, he became involved in his first romantic relationship. In the summer of 2005, however, his girlfriend ended the relationship, and Loughner reportedly became despondent and began to drink and use drugs. His grades fell and he became distant, isolating himself from his friends.

In addition to his substance use, Loughner reportedly exhibited some odd behavior while in high school. He disrupted class, was rude to the teachers, and often became argumentative with those who disagreed with him. He frequently spoke about his dislike of the government and his belief that government officials were trying to cover up an unspecified conspiracy. On May 12, 2006, during his junior year, he was taken to the hospital for alcohol poisoning after Pima County Sheriff's Department personnel responded to his high school. Loughner reported that between 1:30 a.m. and 9:00 a.m., he drank approximately eight shots (350 milliliters) of vodka, which he took from his father's liquor cabinet. The deputies arrested him on a charge of a minor in possession of alcohol. Loughner was evaluated and diagnosed with depression following this episode; however, he never took the prescribed medication.

Shortly after his arrest, Loughner dropped out of high school following the end of his junior year. He took classes at Aztec Middle College, a program through the Tucson Unified School District that allows students who drop out of high school to earn their diplomas and transition to Pima Community College (PCC).⁴ The Aztec Middle College program was located on PCC's Northwest Campus. Around this time, a friend from school, who worked with Loughner at a local restaurant, was surprised to hear him talk about his use of marijuana, mushrooms, and a hallucinogenic herb, *Salvia divinorum*. The friend thought the drug use was a dramatic change in his behavior. Loughner subsequently switched jobs several times in the latter half of the year, and in November 2006, he began working at a Red Robin restaurant as a busboy.

In August 2007, Loughner attended a "Congress on Your Corner" event hosted by Rep. Giffords at the Foothills Mall in Tucson, AZ.⁵ During the event, he submitted a question for the congresswoman similar to, "What is government if words have no meaning?"⁶ Others reported that he asked his question to Rep. Giffords aloud saying, "If words could not be understood, then what does government mean?"⁷ Sources differ as to how Rep. Giffords responded; some state that she did not answer, while others report that Loughner stated that she answered his question in Spanish. Regardless of her response, Loughner believed her reply was unsatisfactory and came to dislike her. He referred to her as fake and unintelligent to friends. Following the event, he received a form letter on Rep. Giffords' congressional stationery thanking him for his attendance at the event.

On September 10, 2007, a Pima County sheriff's deputy pulled over a van in which Loughner was a passenger. The deputy searched the van and its occupants, finding a burnt marijuana cigarette in the vehicle and a marijuana pipe in Loughner's pants pocket. Loughner was arrested and charged with misdemeanor possession of drug paraphernalia. The charge was dismissed in November 2007 after he completed a diversion program that included drug counseling.

⁴ Records from PCC indicate that Loughner began taking classes at the college as early as the summer of 2005. It is unclear, however, whether he began attending courses at PCC before leaving high school.

⁵ One of Loughner's high school friends reported that this event occurred at their high school while they were students, and not at the Foothills Mall. Serrano (2014, July 27).

⁶ Pritchard (2011, January 10).

⁷ Serrano (2014, July 27).



According to sources, Loughner started to show signs of mental illness in early 2008. He began acting strangely and reportedly started hearing voices. He told friends that the world as they saw it did not exist. He further claimed that words had no meaning unless one was sleeping, and he developed a fascination with dreams and lucid dreaming, which is the idea that one can consciously control his or her sleeping world. Around this time, Loughner also appeared to shun or drift away from his close friends from middle and high school. In February 2008, he quit his job at Red Robin and found another position at a Quiznos in April 2008. He was fired from that job, however, in September 2008. In an online posting two years later, Loughner implied that he had a mental breakdown at the time he left the Red Robin job.

On September 7, 2008, Loughner bought a Heckler & Koch 12-gauge shotgun from Sportsman's Warehouse, a hunting and fishing supply store in Tucson, AZ.

In the fall of 2008, Loughner had some additional interactions with law enforcement. On October 3, 2008, he walked into the Pima County Sheriff Department's Foothills District Office and reported that his identity had been stolen. He claimed that his name and photo were being used on the Internet without his permission and was concerned that this would affect his ability to find employment. Although he stated that this may be a practical joke being played on him by a former friend, he asked for a police report so he could give it to potential employers who might see his name and photo on the Internet. Then, on October 13, 2008, Loughner was arrested by an officer with the Marana Police Department on a vandalism charge for defacing a stop sign with graffiti. He told the officer that he wrote the letters "c" and "x" and both meant Christian. The vandalism case was ultimately dismissed on December 9, 2008, after he completed a diversion program and paid a \$500 fine.

Throughout 2008, Loughner also experienced problems with obtaining meaningful employment. Although he attained a position at an Eddie Bauer clothing store in late 2008, he decided that joining the military would help him learn important job skills. Loughner started working out and stopped smoking, drinking, and using drugs. He told a friend that he was working to improve his health and physical fitness so that he would be able to join the U.S. Army. He also tried to improve his image by cutting his hair and dressing more conservatively. In December 2008, Loughner tried to enlist in the Army through a recruiting station in Tucson, AZ. He passed the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery and was sent to the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) in Phoenix, AZ for a test and a physical to determine whether he qualified for service. During his interview, however, he was disqualified when, as part of the questions on medical history, he admitted to being a habitual marijuana user. This rejection reportedly was a devastating blow for Loughner.

Other Reports of Concerning Behavior: 2009 - 2010

Throughout 2009, Loughner was taking several classes at PCC. Around this time, he began to verbalize beliefs about persecution by the government. He believed the government was using grammar and currency to control its citizens. He also went through a "tagging" phase, where he would paint graffiti using phrases from literature. Then in November 2009, he was fired from Eddie Bauer. His parents noticed that his condition deteriorated after being fired and they found it increasingly difficult to communicate with him. According to Loughner's mother, he acted in an odd manner, often talking or laughing to himself, and exhibited anger towards the government. Because Loughner had previously admitted to his parents that he tried several drugs in the past, including marijuana and cocaine, they had him take a drug test, which came back negative. In addition, although Loughner had lost touch with many of his friends from middle and high school, in 2009 and 2010, those he maintained contact with reported that he seemed desperate to be around people. He called his friends frequently, showed up at their homes uninvited, and offered to pay when they went out so that he could spend time with them.

In January 2010, Loughner began volunteering to walk dogs at a local animal shelter. While volunteering, staff at the shelter asked him to keep the dogs away from a restricted area that was being disinfected, but Loughner was unable or unwilling to follow their directions and repeatedly walked the dogs near the restricted area. In March 2010, the staff asked Loughner to leave the shelter because he was not



following instructions. Also in March, Loughner voiced an interest in weapons and learning how to shoot when a friend told him he was going for target practice. He went with this friend to the desert and practiced shooting with a firearm. Further, although the date is unknown, a man later reported seeing Loughner near a shooting range driving dangerously and at a high rate of speed, then stopping quickly, and appearing odd while sitting in his car.

During the spring of 2010, Loughner continued to engage in bizarre behavior. At the YMCA where he was a member, Loughner asked strange questions, such as, how often the doors were disinfected and how a staff member would feel about the government taking over. During another visit, he spent a half hour sitting in the men's locker room. When he eventually left the locker room, he asked the staff at the front desk what year it was.

Throughout 2010, Loughner's behavior and performance at PCC also declined and he came to the attention of the PCC Department of Public Safety on several occasions. In January 2010, classmates in his advanced poetry class noticed that he exhibited odd behaviors, such as laughing to himself, grinning at inappropriate times, and making comments that were not related to class discussions. In February 2010, Loughner made an inappropriate remark regarding a classmate's poem about abortion, saying something similar to "strapping a bomb to the fetus and making a baby bomb."⁸ The instructor was disturbed by the comment and reported him to campus police. After the incident, Loughner and his mother attended a meeting with a school administrator, during which Loughner stated that he would stop speaking in class in order to stay enrolled. His behavior, however, continued to concern the instructor and other students.

During the spring semester, Loughner also was enrolled in a logic class. Although he had an excellent attendance rate, he often spoke out of turn with comments that were unrelated to the class discussion and asked questions that did not make sense to his classmates. On one of the tests, he drew geometric scribbles rather than write answers to the questions. The instructor spoke to the department chair about Loughner, but they were unable to intervene because the college required that students disclose that they were having problems in order to receive assistance.

On April 6, 2010, Loughner was working at a computer in the PCC library, listening to music through ear phones, and making loud noises. The director of the library called campus police, and an officer arrived and informed Loughner that his behavior was not appropriate for a public setting. Loughner replied that he would not engage in that behavior again. Another report noted that one individual observed Loughner regularly at the library "repeatedly talk[ing] loudly to the computer."⁹ This individual also noticed that Loughner appeared to be watching Rep. Giffords's speeches online.

On May 17, 2010, Loughner was again reported to campus police after he became upset over a grade he received. His instructor told him he received a "B" and Loughner became agitated, threw his work on the ground, and told the instructor that the grade was unacceptable. The instructor feared that Loughner would become physically aggressive so she called campus police and asked them to come to the class. Campus police monitored her evening class in case Loughner returned.

About two weeks later, on June 1, 2010, Loughner caused another disturbance when he repeatedly disrupted a math class that he was taking for the second time, having failed on his previous try. He called the class a "scam" and referred to the instructor as a "fraud."¹⁰ When the instructor asked a math question, Loughner blurted out a random number then asked, "How can you deny math instead of accept it?"¹¹ The instructor asked Loughner to stop disrupting the class and when he did not, the instructor asked him to leave the classroom. Loughner refused and the instructor notified school administrators. Loughner was seen by an educational support faculty counselor the next day. The counselor told

⁸ Quinones, Hennessy-Fiske, & Powers (2011, January 11).

⁹ Serrano (2014, July 27).

¹⁰ Gardner, Fahrenthold, & Fisher (2011, January 13).

¹¹ Gardner et al. (2011, January 13).



Loughner that other students were complaining that he was negatively impacting their educational experience. Loughner stated that he wanted to continue taking the class and that he would not ask any further questions; however, he voiced his fears that his freedom of speech was being stifled. Following the meeting, the counselor wrote a report in which she noted that Loughner had extreme opinions and had trouble focusing and staying on one topic. She also noted that he had problems with understanding how his behavior affected others, but was aware that his way of thinking was not common. Since Loughner said that he would not disrupt the class anymore, he was allowed to return. The counselor did recommend, however, that he be instructed on proper classroom conduct.

Despite Loughner's conversation with the counselor, students and the math instructor were still concerned about his behavior. On June 3, 2010, Loughner scribbled the words "MAYHEM FEST!!!" and the word "Imagination" on a math quiz.¹² He also continued to laugh at inappropriate times and stare at his classmates and his instructor in an intimidating manner. The instructor contacted the counselor who had met with Loughner the previous day, and requested that Loughner not return to the class again. Loughner was allowed to return to class, however, because he had not made a threat and had complied with the counselor's directive not to cause disruptions. Campus police were notified and took a report on the incident.

On June 5, 2010, the math instructor sent an email to the counselor urging that someone assess Loughner's behaviors and stated that he was concerned about the safety of the class. The next day, campus police sent the Vice President for Student Development an email providing information she requested regarding their contact with Loughner. They also informed the administrator that Loughner had come to their attention as a suspicious person, but was never reported for threatening behavior.

Loughner's disruptive and bizarre behavior continued for several weeks. On another math test, he reportedly wrote down odd equations like, "Eat + Sleep + Brush Teeth = Math."¹³ Others in the class were concerned about Loughner and were worried that he might bring a weapon to class. In an email to a friend on June 14, 2010, one of his classmates wrote that he scared her. She described him as the type of person whose picture you see on the news. She wrote, "Hopefully he will be out of class very soon, and not come back with an automatic weapon."¹⁴ Loughner's behavior eventually led to his removal from the class after he accused the instructor of violating his First Amendment rights.

During the summer of 2010, Loughner's online friends also voiced their concern for him. A fellow participant in an online forum responded to one of Loughner's bizarre posts suggesting that he seek mental health treatment, "I think you're frankly schizophrenic, and no that's not an amateur opinion and not intended as an uninformed or insulting remark. I really do care. Seek help before you hurt yourself or others or start taking your medications again, please."¹⁵ Loughner wrote back, "Thank you for the concern."¹⁶

On September 23, 2010, Loughner turned in an assignment for his biology class late and was told he would earn half-credit for it. He reacted aggressively and told the instructor his "freedom of speech was being taken away."¹⁷ The instructor was so concerned with Loughner's reaction that he called campus police. Loughner left the class, but officers found him and asked him about the incident. Loughner tried to explain to the officers that his freedom of speech also extended to his freedom of thought, which meant that his instructor should acknowledge his written thoughts with a passing grade.

That night, September 23, 2010, Loughner returned to the campus to make a video about PCC titled *Jared Lee Loughner Pima Community College – School Genocide Scam Free Education Broken United*

¹² Quinones et al. (2011, January 11).

¹³ Quinones et al. (2011, January 11).

¹⁴ Johnson, Kovaleski, Frosch, & Lipton (2011).

¹⁵ Gardner et al. (2011, January 13).

¹⁶ Gardner et al. (2011, January 13).

¹⁷ Abcarian, Reston, & Hennessy-Fiske (2011, January 16).



States Constitution. He uploaded the video to YouTube later that night. In the video, Loughner walks around filming the college campus. At one point, he complains to an unknown person he passed about a grade he received. He also stated, “We’re examining the torture of students.”¹⁸ Speaking about the school, Loughner said, “I’m in a terrible place. This is the school that I go to. This is my genocide school where I’m gonna be homeless because of this school.”¹⁹ He also claimed that the school was “illegal according to the U.S. Constitution,” and “one of the biggest scams in America.”²⁰ During the video, Loughner panned the camera to a campus police sign and said, “This is the police station. This is where the whole shabuuzie goes down with illegal activity.”²¹ He ended the video with “All the teachers you have are being paid illegally. And have illegal authority over the Constitution of the United States under the 1st Amendment, this is genocide in America, thank you this is Jared from Pima College.”²²

A few days later, on September 27, 2010, Loughner met with a college administrator about his recent behaviors. During the meeting, he stated that he had paid for his classes illegally because he did not pay with gold and silver. He told the administrator that his parents told him not to say anymore, and he abruptly stopped talking. The administrator set up a meeting with Loughner and his parents for the following day to create a behavioral contract that would guide his behavior on campus.

The next evening, September 28, 2010, Loughner and his mother met with the college administrator and the counselor to discuss his behavior. Loughner did not speak much during the meeting, but he did give some rote responses to the administrator’s questions such as, “I know I have to follow Pima processes and write what the teacher wants.”²³ In her notes about the meeting, the administrator remarked that Loughner “held himself very rigidly and smiled overtly at inappropriate times.”²⁴ They agreed that Loughner would meet with her again the following week to sign the agreed-upon behavioral contract.

On September 29, 2010, the day after his meeting with the college administrator and school counselor, Loughner went to the Pima County OneStop employment center. He had been to the center on five previous occasions in August and September 2010 to obtain assistance in finding employment. During this visit, however, Loughner took a video camera with him and attempted to record the facility and staff inside. He was asked twice to stop videotaping, but refused and then pulled a copy of the U.S. Constitution from his pocket and ranted about his rights. Staff at the employment center tried to calm him down, but he eventually was asked to leave.

That same day, PCC campus police and other college administrators became aware of Loughner’s YouTube video that referred to PCC as a “genocide school.” After reviewing the video, administrators decided to suspend Loughner. Campus police notified him later that day that he was suspended for numerous Code of Conduct violations. The college also cited the video as a reason for his suspension. Campus police read the letter of suspension to Loughner and his father in their home and then briefly spoke to his father. The letter of suspension instructed Loughner to contact the school and set up a meeting to discuss his suspension and the process he would need to follow to re-enroll. The letter also informed him that he was barred from the campus except for an appointment to discuss his suspension. Loughner stared at the officers during the reading of the letter, and then said that the whole situation was a scam.

That afternoon, a student services analyst wrote an email summarizing Loughner’s campus police contacts and behavioral problems. The email included a section that recommended that the school suspend Loughner immediately, conduct a welfare check, and refer his case to the Behavior Assessment Committee to provide conditions for his return to school. As a result, the committee determined that

¹⁸ Loughner (2010, September 23).

¹⁹ Loughner (2010, September 23).

²⁰ Loughner (2010, September 23).

²¹ Loughner (2010, September 23).

²² Loughner (2010, September 23).

²³ Abcarian et al. (2011, January 16).

²⁴ Abcarian et al. (2011, January 16).



Loughner would not be allowed back at the school unless he received a mental health evaluation that showed he was not a danger to himself or others.

Also on September 29, 2010, a detective with the PCC Department of Public Safety emailed an agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) and provided Loughner's name and other identifiers and requested any information or lack thereof related to Loughner. The ATF agent responded with an email stating "I did not come up with any gun info on this guy. Let me know if you need anything else."²⁵ The following day, September 30, 2010, the college distributed a flyer to some of the school staff. The flyer included a photo of Loughner, noted that he was not allowed on campus, and stated that staff were to contact campus police if he was seen on PCC property.

After receiving the suspension letter from campus police, Loughner and his parents met with PCC administrators on October 4, 2010. At the meeting, Loughner told administrators that he would voluntarily withdraw from the college. On October 7, 2010, PCC sent Loughner a second letter explaining that to re-enroll in the college, he would have to settle his conduct violations and receive clearance from a mental health professional indicating that he was not a danger to himself or others.

Following his suspension from school, Loughner became distraught and told his parents that he felt that he was being harassed by campus police. Loughner's parents grew more concerned, and based on a recommendation from PCC administrators to remove any firearms in the home, hid Loughner's 12-gauge shotgun that Loughner owned in the trunk of the family car along with another family-owned firearm. They disabled his car every night so that he would not be able to drive it without their permission, and took away his video camera to prevent him from making videos. He was permitted to drive during the day as he continued to seek employment. Despite their son's apparent mental health issues, however, they were unable to persuade Loughner to see a mental health professional.

About a month later, on November 14, 2010, Loughner went to a tattoo parlor with a 9mm bullet and had a picture of the bullet tattooed on his right shoulder blade. He expressed his enjoyment for shooting and target practice to the tattoo artist. The next week, on or about November 21, 2010, Loughner returned to the tattoo parlor and asked for another tattoo of a bullet. The artist asked Loughner about the significance of his tattoos, but Loughner only smiled in response to his question.

On November 30, 2010, a little more than a week after getting his tattoos, Loughner bought a Glock 19 semiautomatic 9mm gun at Sportsman's Warehouse, the same store where he bought the shotgun that his parents confiscated. While there, he told the employee who waited on him that he wanted to deal with a younger staff member. A younger employee assisted him with the purchase, but thought that this was a strange request. Loughner bought the gun, a 15-round magazine, and a box of ammunition. About a month later, on December 24, 2010, he purchased a 6-inch bladed knife and a holster.

Loughner continued to exhibit concerning behaviors in the community. Employees at a local bank branch were disturbed by his bizarre behavior. They felt uneasy when he was there, and kept their fingers close to the alarm button when they saw him arrive. During one visit, Loughner became involved in a heated argument with a female employee when she could not accommodate one of his requests because it was against the bank's policy. In the course of their argument, he told her that she should not have any power. After the bank installed bulletproof glass, Loughner tried to put his finger through a small space on the top of the glass and laughed to himself.

Concerns in Loughner's Online Activity Mirrored Those in Other Areas of His Life: 2010

Loughner's interest in online gaming began in middle school. In 2010, he began reaching out to others who participated in the online games, forums, and chat rooms that he frequented, discussing various issues and asking questions. He discussed his unemployment issues and asked for advice on employment and relationships. His posts also contained recurrent themes involving grammar, education,

²⁵ Stellar (2011, May 19).



his distrust of the U.S. government, creating his own currency, lucid dreaming, and the idea that he was being persecuted. These posts concerned many of the other individuals who participated in these online forums.

Throughout the spring of 2010, the anger in Loughner's online postings escalated as he vented his disappointment at not being able to obtain and maintain employment. On May 14, 2010, he began a discussion about employment and asked his online community what they considered to be a large number of job applications. The post included a list of 21 retail places to which he had applied, but failed to acquire a job. He wondered if his work history and previous criminal charges impacted his ability to gain employment. In another post, he wrote that he had been fired from five jobs and had not received a paycheck for six months. A few days later, someone responded to his post by stating that he thought Loughner may be drunk or high.

On June 3, 2010, Loughner posted about the argument he had earlier that day with his math instructor at PCC. He wrote that he asked the instructor, "Are you just getting a pay check for brainwashing?"²⁶ He also wrote that he told the instructor that the class was a scam, and asked "how to Deny math?"²⁷ On this same date, Loughner also commented in an online post about his meeting with the school counselor, writing that he "told her about a logical argument, but didn't mention attending the logic class, that the logical argument was relevant. Told her about brainwashing a child and how that can change the view of mathematics."²⁸

Loughner also had a MySpace account that he created on January 13, 2010, on which he made numerous concerning, threatening, and unusual statements. For example, in the early morning hours of July 11, 2010, he posted "I keep hearing VOICES IN MY HEAD!"²⁹ He also made numerous posts about contemplating suicide. On September 15, 2010, he posted "I thought about attempting suicide again.....notice the again..."³⁰

Loughner's online postings and videos became more disorganized and disturbing. On October 2, 2010, he posted a video on YouTube titled, *America: Your Last Memory In A Terrorist Country!* The video showed someone dressed as the Grim Reaper with a smiley-face mask setting fire to an American flag. Some sources note the person in the video is Loughner. He also posted other videos that contained themes of persecution and demonstrated his belief that the government was controlling him. In one video he posted text that stated, "I know who's listening: Government Officials, and the People. Nearly all the people, who don't know this accurate information of a new currency, aren't aware of mind control and brainwash methods."³¹

Loughner also made videos and postings about literacy. One of these postings may have alluded to Rep. Giffords's congressional district: "My hope – is for you to be literate! If you're literate in English grammar, then you comprehend English grammar. The majority of people, who reside in District 8 are illiterate – hilarious."³² Rep. Giffords represented Arizona's 8th Congressional District.

In addition to his concerning posts and videos, Loughner's MySpace page contained disturbing photos and comments in the days and weeks leading up to the incident. One concerning photo was of a Glock firearm lying on top of a U.S. history textbook with an image that portrayed the White House in the center, and pictures of U.S. presidents around the edge. In addition, on an unknown date, most likely following his tattoo parlor visit in November 2010, Loughner posted a comment online, writing "I have a new tattoo

²⁶ Berzon, Emshwiller, & Guth (2011, January 12).

²⁷ Berzon et al. (2011, January 12).

²⁸ Myers (2011, March 22).

²⁹ FBI files on the Jared Lee Loughner investigation (2014, April 10).

³⁰ FBI files on the Jared Lee Loughner investigation (2014, April 10).

³¹ Steller (2011, January 8).

³² Karni (2011, January 9).



on my back: 2 9mm bullets,” following that with “There are important figures in my dreams that accomplished political aspirations: Hitler, Hilary Clinton [sic] and Giffords to name a few.”³³

On December 13, 2010, Loughner made threatening statements towards law enforcement on his MySpace page writing, “I don’t feel good: I’m ready to kill a police officer! I can say it.”³⁴ Later that same day, Loughner posted a comment to his MySpace page that suggested he may have been contemplating suicide: “WOW! I’m glad i didn’t kill myself. I’ll see you on National T.v.! This is foreshadow why doesn’t anyone talk to me?”³⁵

On December 15, 2010, Loughner uploaded a video to YouTube titled, *Introduction: Jared Loughner*. The video contained only written words that appeared on the screen. In the video, he made reference to his attempt to join the military and his visit to the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) in Phoenix. Loughner wrote that, “Every United States military recruit at MEPS in Phoenix is receiving one mini bible before the tests. Jared Loughner is a United States military recruit at MEPS in Phoenix. Therefore, Jared Loughner is receiving one mini bible before the tests. Loughner is in need of sleep.”³⁶ He went on to discuss terrorism in this video, saying “If I define terrorist then a terrorist is a person who employs terror or terrorism, especially as a political weapon. I define terrorist. If you call me a terrorist then the argument to call me a terrorist is ad hominem. You call me a terrorist.”³⁷ Loughner closed this video with a concluding statement in which he summed up his thoughts: “In conclusion, my ambition – is for informing literate dreamers about a new currency; in a few days, you know I’m conscience dreaming!”³⁸

Final Preparations in the Days Leading up to the Incident

At the end of December 2010, Loughner went to visit two friends. While at their home, he took out the Glock handgun and a 32-round clip and showed them to one friend, who was taken aback. The friend asked Loughner several times why he had the weapon. Loughner answered that he purchased it for “home protection.”³⁹ The friend handled the gun for a bit, took the bullets out, and then gave the gun and bullets back to Loughner. Loughner gave him one of the bullets to keep. Loughner then showed another friend at the home the handgun and his tattoo of the two bullets. The friend was disturbed by the gun and asked him to leave.

Around this same time, Loughner was reportedly practicing with his handgun. A witness stated that at some point after Christmas 2010, he encountered Loughner in an area of the Arizona desert that was often used for target practice. Loughner told the unnamed witness that he was trying out a recently purchased 9 mm handgun.

In January 2011, Loughner researched political assassins as well as information on the likely punishment for committing such an act. He researched solitary confinement and lethal injection in an effort to understand what lethal injection would feel like. In addition, Loughner built a shrine inside a camouflage tent in the family’s backyard. The shrine included a replica of a skull placed on top of a pot filled with shriveled oranges, which were placed next to several candles.

On January 7, 2011, at 11:35 p.m., Loughner visited the Walgreens next to the Safeway where Rep. Giffords’s “Congress on Your Corner” event was slated to occur the following morning. While at the Walgreens, Loughner submitted a roll of film to be developed. The pictures included images of Loughner

³³ FBI files on the Jared Lee Loughner investigation (2014, April 10); Serrano (2014, July 27).

³⁴ Steller (2011, January 8).

³⁵ Steller (2011, January 8).

³⁶ Steller (2011, January 8).

³⁷ Karni (2011, January 9).

³⁸ Steller (2011, January 8).

³⁹ Serrano (2014, July 27).



posing with his Glock firearm, some with him holding the weapon in front of him, while others show him holding the weapon next to his backside.

On January 8, 2011, just after midnight, Loughner made a purchase at a convenience store and then checked into a Motel 6 a few miles from his home. According to the motel's records, it did not appear as if he spent much time sleeping because the door repeatedly opened and closed. At about 2:00 a.m., Loughner called an old friend, leaving him a voicemail saying, "Hey, it's Jared. We had some good times and peace out."⁴⁰ About 20 minutes later, Loughner picked up his developed photos and bought ear plugs from the Walgreens.

At 4:12 a.m., Loughner wrote a final message on his MySpace page that read, "Goodbye... Dear friends... Please don't be mad at me. The literacy rate is below 5%. I haven't talked to one person who is literate. I want to make it out alive. The longest war in the history of the United States. Goodbye. I'm saddened with the current currency and job employment. I had a bully at school. Thank you. P.S. Please the fifth!"⁴¹

Loughner returned to his parents' house around 6:00 a.m., and then left again. He made purchases at several stores, and just after 7:00 a.m. he returned to a Walmart to purchase ammunition. The clerk was taken aback by how rushed Loughner seemed and his erratic behavior, so he lied and told him the ammunition he wanted was out of stock. About 20 minutes later, Loughner went to a Super Walmart and inquired whether they had a limit on how much ammunition he could buy. The employee who assisted him sold him eight boxes of ammunition and a black backpack diaper bag.

Around 7:30 a.m., Loughner was stopped by an officer from the Arizona Game and Fish Department for failing to stop at a red light. He told the officer that he was just driving around. A check by the officer did not reveal any outstanding warrants, so he informed Loughner that he was only going to issue him a citation. Loughner began crying and then started laughing; finding it strange, the officer asked Loughner if he was okay. He responded that he was okay but that he had been having a hard time lately and was worried about getting a ticket. The officer inquired again if Loughner was okay. He responded yes and stated that he was going home. He then shook the officer's hand.

Later that morning around 8:00 a.m., Loughner returned home. He exited the car and took the black backpack out of the trunk. When he entered the house, his father asked him what was in the backpack. Loughner mumbled something, and ran out of the house. His father tried to follow him, but was unable to locate him.

At 9:00 a.m., Loughner went to a convenience store near his home and asked the clerk to call him a taxi. While he was waiting, he paced and repeatedly used the restroom. Around 9:25 a.m., he glanced at the clock and said that he still had some time. Then he walked to the clerk who called him the cab and shook her hand and thanked her. The taxi came and took him to the Safeway grocery store at the La Toscana Village strip mall in Tucson, AZ, where Rep. Giffords was holding her "Congress on Your Corner" event. The ride to the strip mall was mostly silent, except at one point Loughner blurted out that he drank too much. The taxi arrived at the strip mall at 9:54 a.m., and both the taxi driver and Loughner entered the Safeway so Loughner could get change to pay his taxi fare. After paying the taxi driver, Loughner went into the Safeway's restroom and put in earplugs.

The Incident

About 10:00 a.m., Rep. Giffords arrived for the "Congress on Your Corner" event and began speaking with constituents who had gathered there. A few minutes after her arrival, Loughner approached her District Director, Ron Barber, and asked, "Where is the congresswoman?...Is that the congresswoman?"⁴²

⁴⁰ Abcarian et al. (2011, January 16).

⁴¹ Leonard (2011, January 10); FBI FILES (2011, February 22).

⁴² Serrano (2014, July 27).



He was told to wait his turn and he walked to the back of the line of about 20 people. At approximately 10:12 a.m., Loughner walked quickly back to the front where Rep. Giffords was standing, and shot her. He then turned and began firing at the crowd near her and those waiting in line. People in the crowd attempted to flee the scene, and witnesses called 9-1-1. Bystanders were able to subdue Loughner when his firearm malfunctioned. The attack lasted about 15 seconds and emergency personnel and law enforcement officers arrived on the scene around 10:15 a.m. Six people were killed and 13 wounded, including Rep. Giffords.

Investigators were concerned that Loughner also planned to set off explosives in his home, or that he may have been planning to conduct a larger attack, so they executed a search warrant at the house using bomb technicians and bomb-sniffing dogs. In a small safe in Loughner's bedroom, technicians discovered batteries, a circuit board, wires, and a keyboard. While news reports described these as materials that could be used to construct an explosive device, FBI files explicitly state that these items were components of "the safe's numeric keyboard system," and that "there were no explosive hazards found in the dwelling."⁴³

In the safe, investigators also found the form letter from Rep. Giffords's office thanking Loughner for his attendance at the 2007 "Congress on Your Corner Event." On the letter, he had written "Die Cops" and "Die Bitch,"⁴⁴ which investigators determined was a reference to Rep. Giffords. Additionally, they discovered an envelope in the safe containing two shell casings, on which he had written "I planned ahead," "My assassination," and "Giffords," and words to the effect of "these are the first two shells of my gun."⁴⁵ The note on the envelope was dated December 6, 2010. The serial number for a Glock handgun was written on the outside of the envelope. The safe also contained a gun lock with a paper inside that said something similar to "you have a piece of a historic gun...2010, Jared Lee Loughner."⁴⁶ Finally, investigators found additional bullets of various caliber above the safe on a shelf. These items seem to imply that in addition to Loughner's dislike for Rep. Giffords stemming from the 2007 event, another possible motive for his attack may have been his desire to achieve fame as an assassin.

Judicial Outcome

Initially, Loughner was deemed incompetent to stand trial following a court-ordered mental health evaluation. While awaiting trial, he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, and at first, he refused to acknowledge that Rep. Giffords was still alive. When probed about what it meant to him if she was still alive, he replied that it would make him a failure. Loughner was forcibly medicated and restored to competency. He pleaded guilty, and on November 8, 2012, he was sentenced to 7 life sentences plus 140 years in prison.

⁴³ FBI files on the Jared Lee Loughner investigation (2014, April 10).

⁴⁴ Myers & Pritchard (2011, January 12b).

⁴⁵ Becker, Kovaleski, Luo, & Barry (2011, January 16).

⁴⁶ Tucson shooting: Last hours before rampage show Loughner unraveling (2010, March 28).



ABBREVIATED TIMELINE OF EVENTS IN THE YEARS

PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

Summer 2005	Before the start of his junior year in high school, Loughner begins drinking and using drugs
May 12, 2006	Police called to his high school after he showed up intoxicated; he is taken to the hospital and reports drinking approximately eight shots of vodka
Summer 2006	Drops out of high school
August 2007	Attends “Congress on Your Corner” event in Tucson, AZ with Rep. Giffords
September 10, 2007	Cited for possession of drug paraphernalia; charge dismissed after he completes a drug diversion program
2008 (unknown date)	Buys a 12-gauge shotgun from Sportsman’s Warehouse in Tucson, AZ
Early 2008	Begins to exhibit signs of mental illness such as hearing voices and communicating bizarre ideas
October 3, 2008	Registers a complaint with law enforcement that someone stole his identity
October 13, 2008	Arrested on a vandalism charge for defacing a stop sign; charge dismissed after he pays a fine and completes a second diversion program
December 2008	Applies to enlist in the U.S. Army, but disqualified to serve because of drug use
November 2009	Fired from position at Eddie Bauer
January 2010	Volunteers as a dog-walker at a local animal shelter
March 2010	Asked to leave the animal shelter after failing to follow instructions; voices interest in weapons, shooting, and target practice
January - September 2010	Engages in disruptive and bizarre behaviors at Pima Community College (PCC), which led to meetings with a school counselor and five contacts with campus police



August - October 2010	Posts statements on his MySpace page that indicate he may have been contemplating suicide
September 23, 2010	Records a disturbing video about PCC while on campus, which he uploads on YouTube
September 29, 2010	Engages in disruptive behavior at the Pima County OneStop employment center and is asked to leave; PCC suspends him
October 4, 2010	He and his parents meet with campus officials to discuss his suspension; he withdraws from PCC
October 7, 2010	PCC sends him a letter indicating that he needs to obtain clearance from a mental health professional to re-enroll
November 30, 2010	Purchases 9mm Glock semiautomatic handgun from Sportsman's Warehouse in Tucson, AZ
December 13, 2010	Posts statements on his MySpace page that threatens law enforcement and suggest he may have been contemplating suicide
December 24, 2010	Purchases a 6-inch bladed knife and holster
Late December 2010	Visits friends and shows them gun and bullets
January 2011	Conducts online research on political assassins and punishment for committing such an act



ABBREVIATED TIMELINE OF EVENTS: JANUARY 7-8, 2011

January 7

11:35 p.m. Arrives at a Walgreens and drops off film to be developed

January 8

12:24 a.m. Makes a purchase at a convenience store

12:30 a.m. Checks into a Motel 6

2:00 a.m. Calls and leaves a voice message for a high school classmate

2:19 a.m. Returns to Walgreens to retrieve photos and buys ear plugs

4:12 a.m. Posts "Goodbye... Dear friends" message to his MySpace page

6:00 - 7:00 a.m. Makes purchases at several stores

7:04 a.m. Arrives at a Walmart store and attempts to purchase ammunition, but is turned away due to his erratic behavior

7:27 a.m. Purchases ammunition and a backpack style diaper bag at a Super Walmart

7:30 a.m. Stopped by an Arizona Game and Fish Department officer for running a red light

8:00 a.m. Returns home, but leaves when his father asks about the backpack he had

9:04 a.m. Enters a convenience store and asks the clerk to call him a taxi

9:39 a.m. Leaves convenience store in a taxi

9:54 a.m. Arrives by taxi at the La Toscana Village strip mall, site of "Congress on Your Corner" event with Rep. Giffords, enters the Safeway with the taxi driver to get change to pay the fare, then enters the restroom and puts in ear plugs

10:00 a.m. Rep. Giffords arrives for the event

Just after 10 a.m. Approaches a volunteer and asks to speak with Rep. Giffords and is directed to the back of the line

10:10 a.m. Walks back to the front of the line and shoots and injures Rep. Giffords, then turns and fires at the crowd around her

10:11 a.m. His gun malfunctions and bystanders tackle and hold him until law enforcement officers arrive



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