

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Campus Dormitory Security:
Is There Really a Solution?**

**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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September 2007**

ABSTRACT

Campus security is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because the lives and personal security of students is entrusted to law enforcement officers. Students attend college to receive an education and depend on law enforcement to give them a sense of security. The purpose of this research is to give a realistic view of the campus environment as it pertains to relevant security processes and demonstrate that most security measures can be breached. Therefore, it takes the campus populace to make security measures work.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 100 survey participants, and randomly selected personal interviews. The researcher discovered that one of the campuses surveyed has safeguards in place that are set up to stop or curtail unauthorized access in dormitory areas. Another campus is an open campus that does not have dormitories and is easily accessible by anyone. The researcher will show that no matter what safeguards are in use, people are able to infiltrate the campus, interior buildings, dormitories, and offices with little or no resistance. Moreover, students have a false sense of security regarding most dormitory and overall campus security systems.

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INTRODUCTION

The problem or issue to be examined considers whether students are vigilant in their watchful eye to keep infiltrators out of the dormitories. The students and staff at both of the campuses examined in this research are instrumental in aiding their own safety and the safety of others. The problems at the entrance controlled dormitories are to act as a deterrent and do not always keep unwanted visitors out.

The relevance of campus security to law enforcement is a growing need and a problem that must be addressed. Campus violence such as: the Virginia Tech massacre, shootings at UT Austin, and the Columbine shootings, confirms that anyone at anytime can create a violent episode on a campus and draw national coverage. People who create this type of scene could use mass destruction, terrorist activity, or the killing of innocent people as a vessel for their way of thinking.

The purpose of this research is to discover what measures are being taken to protect students on college campuses, examine, and identify the obvious flaws. The purpose of the author's research and investigation is to demonstrate that schools, especially higher education institutions, are vulnerable to all types of terrorist activities and domestic violence.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Campus violence has been around for some time. Students attending colleges around America are in danger of domestic violence and ultimately terrorist attacks. From drawing swastikas on dormitory walls to rapes, shootings and the kidnapping of students from college grounds, violent acts on campus are now, more than ever, a frontier for law enforcement. Violent crimes on campus grounds can be traced to the

beginning of higher education. However, in the last 15 years, campus security and violent acts on campuses are taking the front page news and top stories in national media.

In 1998, in a secluded, yet thought to be safe campus, students at the St. Mary's University in Moraga California were shocked to learn about a rape on campus. The outrage caused a march against the administration to display their concerns (Schevitz,1998). Another tragedy reported by the local press at the University of New York concerned the disappearance of a 19 year old student returning to her dormitory. The student, Suzanne Lyalls, was never found (Hu, 2000). This is just two examples of campus related crimes that happen throughout the country. No one knows when or where the next crime will be committed.

Certainly the students on the campus of Virginia Tech never imagined that a day would come when their campus would join the ranks of one of the worst campus incidents in college history and the United States. When the shooting at Virginia Tech took place the author was reminded of the massacre at the University of Texas (UT) in Austin on August 1, 1966. On this day, a sniper took the lives of 13 people, wounding 33. This attack on innocent lives was seen as a senseless attack. Afterwards, college officials considered security measures with some being implemented. However, since that attack was viewed a rare event, the focus on security was soon relaxed. However, other attacks on students in the following years lead to other security measures being considered.

These events and others like them have made campus security an issue with the government, media, and the forefront to parents. In the passing of the following years, attention to these matters by parents has resulted in the Campus Security Act of 1990.

This Act makes it mandatory for colleges to report certain violent crimes and, make them available to the public.

The Virginia Tech incident has brought campus security to the forefront once again. Parents and students are again wondering how secure campus grounds are and questioning what measures are being taken to keep the campus safe. The researcher too often wonders if safety is legitimate, or do people simply have a false sense of security. Violent acts against students and other crimes that seem to easily committed, encouraged the researcher to conduct a survey and review some of the campus security measures in place at two colleges.

One college was a state supported university that housed students in a dormitory. The other college examined by the author was a community college. The state university had some security measures in place. For instance, faculty and staff were required to have identification. Although required, if the employee was known, no one challenged him/her for identification. This was the norm throughout the campus, which resulted in very few employees being challenged.

As a visitor, and not known throughout the campus community, the researcher was not challenged in any building visited. The researcher then visited the dormitories (visitor access had already been obtained) to see what the campus security measures were. This was done by asking students what is required to visit the dormitories. They stated that all visitors must be allowed in by the person(s) monitoring the entrance doors and all visitors must be accompanied by their sponsors. Actual residents of the dormitories were issued electronic swipe cards for access. After gathering this information, procedures that were designed to protect the residents, were being violated by the very same people they were meant to protect.

During the author's five days of observation, it was discovered that several people would just wait outside the entrance door for someone to exit. The person waiting would just simply walk into the dormitory and not be challenged by the front desk monitor. Others just followed authorized residents into the building and roamed freely throughout the building. Thus, the security measures that are in place only work when everyone gets involved and enforces established procedures. If a violent crime were committed, the first question a parent would have is how did the perpetrator get in?

However, it is much easier for an unknown person to gain access to a community college. Unknown persons are the norm for most campuses and roaming the halls by a non-student would go undetected for quite some time. With this type of open campus, what would be the best security measure? Are the students safe or do they depend on the adults to carry this burden? Some randomly selected interviews with students were given the problem and asked if they believed security cameras would help curtail or stop unauthorized access into campus buildings and stop violent crimes. The results concluded that of the 90% of the students asked, they stated that cameras would curtail unauthorized access. However, about 60% added that the crime would curtail unauthorized access only after the cameras were noticed. Only half of the students stated that it would stop violent crimes and the other 50% were split on the question stating that if the person committing the crime cared if the cameras were there or not.

Although cameras cannot stop violent crimes, they are believed to be a deterrent. Countless articles are written to prove and disprove this theory. All a person has to do is "Google" this question and thousands of hits would testify for and against the use of cameras to stop violent crimes. An article, which was credited to the Department of

Justice (DOJ), refers to a video camera watching a large populated area and removing the human watchful eye. This article states, "If cameras are covering a large patio area where students congregate during breaks, adults who normally would be assigned to oversee that area can instead be made available to monitor other areas of concern".

To prove this point of view, the researcher read another article that reports that three college students were lined up and executed in a school yard located in Newark, New Jersey (Fox News, 2001). It was learned that a camera system was installed to monitor that part of the school yard. However, they learned that the camera system had been tampered with (destroyed) and did not record the killings. This incident and countless others suggest that camera systems are a deterrent that will not stop someone determined to commit a violent crime. The use of cameras at campuses like Virginia Tech or The University of Texas in Austin may not have stopped the criminal act and no one will know if cameras could have been an actual deterrent.

Campus security is a high profile topic with many opinions of how to deter crime. Immediately after the shootings at Virginia Tech, the Governor of Missouri named a task force to "evaluate Missouri campus emergency response" (State News Service, 2007). The Governor also met with the students at Harris-Stowe State University to discuss security issues. Again, security measures only work when everyone enforces the rule.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not law enforcement officers can utilize specialized training to effectively manage and stop violent crimes from happening on college campuses. Additionally, the research proposes to discover whether there are any solutions that can eradicate the threat of violent crimes from college campuses. The intended method of inquiry will include: a

review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 100 survey participants, and randomly selected personal interviews.

The intended outcome or anticipated findings of the research will show that students are given a false sense of security and are not aware of the true vulnerabilities of their everyday life on campus. The author hopes to show that most students do not think about their safety on campus until a high profile case is shown in the media or a significant event takes place locally.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because, ideally, vulnerabilities will be openly discussed and identified. Law enforcement officers will be reminded that the first line of defense for the security of college campuses and students must be given realistic views to help deter violent acts. The author hopes to show that students are willing to help if given usable information that relates to personal security.

FINDINGS

The author's investigative research at the first university examined revealed many deficiencies with the enforcement of rules and procedures in place. The violations prompted the researcher to conduct a survey to find out the mind-set of the students attending this college. Out of the one hundred students surveyed, there was a 70% return rate, with about 60% answering all of the questions.

The author assessed the results and was astonished to find that 80% of the students stated they felt safe on camps. Of those students, 50% were white, 35% were Hispanic, 10% were black, and the remaining 5% were Asian. The other question was, how safe do you feel on campus? All respondents replied that they all felt safe and only 20% stated that they feel safer when walking with someone. The other focal point of the

survey asked, “If your campus has a swipe cards for entry, does the swipe card system on the door locks make you feel secure?” This question also had a follow-up question which caused a contradiction to 80% of the respondents. The respondents overwhelmingly stated yes regarding the safety of the swipe card system. However, students contradicted themselves with the follow-up question by stating that people are followed in and other students open the doors for anyone.

It is obvious that campus security is and will be a topic for resolution for some time and protection will only be established by following the proper guidelines of an in place security measure. Although the author's feelings going in to this research were that the students did not feel safe, the surveys suggest that they actually do feel secure on their college campuses. However, students continue to put themselves in harms way and do not think about the dangers at bay. It is only when a tragic incident is reported that students are awakened to the dangers. The researcher feels that each campus should continue to embark on crime prevention and educate students, staff, and parents regarding their responsibility to help with the safety of college campuses now and in the future.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether students felt safe in the campus environment. The problems anticipated were objectively investigated and students were given a chance to express their view point. Are we safe on campus? Will campus policing project a strong deterrent to stop or curtail violent crimes or do we depend on modern technology?

The purpose of this research was to expose safety flaws in the security systems in place and give a reasonable solution to hinder and curtail criminal activity. If the

system was breached, would an intruder be detected and reported or would he or she go un-noticed. The research suggests that most of the safety procedures are ignored and an intruder would easily gain access to populated areas.

The research question that was examined focused on the reaction of the students and staff regarding their feeling of being safe on their college campuses. Additionally, if the students felt safe, could their trust be used to defeat the system and prove that they are not safe?

The researcher hypothesized that any campus safety system could be breached with little or no effort from the perpetrator. Security systems and procedures are only as effective as the people they are meant to protect.

The researcher concluded from the findings that people (in general) are trusting. This trust is a learned behavior from parenting and social groups. We as a nation are willing to trust people beyond our own natural defensive feeling. We have that sixth sense that tells us that something is wrong. But most of us have also learned to ignore this safety sign. Although we trust one another, the researcher found that people are subconscious about their safety. This subconscious is recalled only when the mind goes in to fight or flight mode. The author also found that people are fully aware of safety, but rely on their own poor judgment.

The findings of the research did not support the hypothesis. The reason why the findings did not support the hypothesis is probably due to learned behavior of the world today. Students are too trusting when in their own environment and do not foresee danger signs. Although the author could use research to validate the hypothesis, the overall findings suggest that most people trust others regarding their personal safety.

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because of the limited resources and fewer available participants due to the colleges being surveyed during a summer session; to include that a major tragedy such as the Virginia Tech event had not occurred during the time the surveys were distributed to the students. The researcher feels that if this same research was conducted immediately after a violent campus crime, with more participants, the results would have suggested that college students do not feel completely safe on their campus.

The study of campus security is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it reveals the mind set of the students today. Law enforcement must be more vigilant in their efforts to educate and remind the students of any potential dangers and stress the fact that they too are responsible for their own safety. Campus law enforcement personnel, students, and their families stand to be benefited by the results of this research.

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