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Features

155701 **Violence on Campus** **1** *Crime prevention programs and collaborative efforts with local law enforcement are strategies that help to create a safe campus environment.*
By W. David Nichols

155703 **Home Invasion Robbery** **9** *A new breed of violent criminals targets homeowners and poses a serious challenge to law enforcement.*
By James T. Hurley

155704 **Dispatcher Training** **17** *Civilianization, civil liability concerns, and increasingly complex technology have prompted advances in dispatcher training.*
By Kathy M. Sheehan

155705 **Police Ethics Training** **22** *The Huntsville, Alabama, Police Department demonstrates that police ethics can and should be taught to all police officers, regardless of rank or experience level.*
By Tim R. Jones, Compton Owens, and Melissa A. Smith

155706 **Freedom of Religion and Law Enforcement Employment** **28** *Recent court decisions have examined conflicts between legitimate law enforcement interests and employee religious conduct in the workplace.*
By Daniel L. Schofield

Departments

155702 **6 Focus on Cooperation**
Fugitive Apprehension Task Force

8 Bulletin Alert
Shifty Suspect

14 Research Forum
IADLEST Sourcebook

20 Bulletin ts
Gang Prevention
Gang Suppression
Criminal Justice Videotapes

27 Book Review
Policing Transportation Facilities

155701-
155702

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Violence on Campus The Intruded Sanctuary

By
W. DAVID NICHOLS, Ed.D.

As institutions dedicated to a higher order of human endeavor, colleges and universities once were presumed to be immune from the violence that permeates virtually every aspect of American life. One author characterized colleges and universities as "sedate ivory towers, sanctuaries apart from the larger society and places where crime and criminal justice do not intrude."¹ He was referring, however, to pre-1960s institutions of higher learning. Decades later, this characterization no longer holds true.

Recent media accounts illuminate the extent to which crime and violence have found their way onto college and university campuses. Rarely does the topic of campus crime escape the nightly news, talk shows, or newsmagazine shows on television. Newspapers, magazines, and even books cover this hot topic extensively. A leading national newspaper recently presented a week-long series of articles devoted to campus crime and depicted many campuses as danger zones where



students are murdered, raped, and robbed.²

Certainly, few campuses escape some type of criminal activity, in part due to the influences that have transformed institutions of higher education during the past 30 years. Sweeping economic, social, and political factors that reflected the climate of the times forever changed the collegiate environment.

The Changing Climate

To have a proper perspective about campus crime, it is necessary to understand today's college and university campus communities. Several unique characteristics distinguish campuses from other communities and provide a better understanding of the environment of today's campuses and why crime and violence may flourish.

First, the campus population consists primarily of young adults or postadolescents in pursuit of higher education. Nowhere else can be found such a concentrated population of individuals ages 18 to 22 with an educational background higher than society at large. The vast majority of these "student-citizens" are single and are experiencing freedom from home and parental control for the first time.

Another characteristic, especially of residential campuses, is the predominant social life. Fraternity and sorority functions, parties, athletic events, rock concerts, and other activities create a unique social atmosphere, often resulting in problems related to alcohol abuse, misconduct, and criminal activity.

The open campus concept also fosters criminal activity. Traditionally, the campus was a closed community, immune to the outside influences of crime, environmental hazards, and "locals." Today, most campus boundaries are barely

distinguishable from the surrounding community. With no gates, no curfews, and little, if any, restrictions on students, few barriers control the outside influences that contribute to campus crime.

The Intrusion of Crime

The illusion of tranquility prevailing on college campuses has been shattered forever by the rising crime rate. Murders on campuses have continued to increase. In a survey conducted shortly after the enactment of the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990, 2,400 colleges and universities reported 30 murders.³ While the ratio of 30 murders reported by 2,400 institutions appears extremely low, the very occurrence of homicidal behavior on college campuses sends a frightening signal that society's ills have spilled onto campuses.

Equally disturbing is the number of rapes/sexual assaults occurring on college and university campuses. One study indicated that nearly 25

percent of 2,016 college women surveyed had been raped, according to strict legal standards.⁴ Another survey revealed that 1,000 rapes were reported on college campuses during the 1991-92 academic year.⁵

Other crimes also take place with relative frequency. Approximately 7,500 violent crimes occurred on 2,400 campuses within the 1991-92 academic year.⁶ *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* featured a report that described a series of violent crimes, including murder, rape, robbery, and assault, at 13 Southern colleges and universities.⁷

Of course, criminal activity occurred on campuses prior to the 1960s. Even dating back to the 1800s, there were riots, brawls, and an occasional arson. But clearly, within the past 30 years, crime and violence have escalated on the once-safe and secure bastions of higher learning, not only in frequency but also in severity.

Influences on Campus Crime

Several influences distinguish the two eras. Primarily, the prevalence of alcohol and firearms on and around college campuses has had deadly effects.

The excessive consumption of alcohol influences the majority of violent crimes. The findings released by Congress with the passage of the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act report that 95 percent of the violent crimes on campus involved alcohol and/or drugs.⁸ Even though Federal and State statutes prohibit the possession and consumption of alcohol by those under 21 years of age, college students continue to abuse alcohol at social and



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athletic events, as well as in their private residences.

One survey found that 86 percent of college students under the legal drinking age consumed alcohol. Nearly 18 percent of this group reported experiencing alcohol-related trouble with the police.⁹ It is estimated that about one-half of the assailants in courtship violence on campus were under the influence of alcohol.¹⁰ In case after case where violence occurred on campus, one or both parties were intoxicated.

The other major influence on campus violence is firearms. Some may argue that guns do not represent an influence, only a method of violence. Others, however, contend that the proliferation of weapons, as well as their availability and use, influences both the frequency and seriousness of campus crime.

The campus simply reflects the greater problem in society, where firearms are used in 60 percent of homicides, 41 percent of robberies, 23 percent of aggravated assaults, and 10 percent of rapes.¹¹ Administrators of a small Massachusetts college for gifted music students closed the institution after a student went on a shooting rampage, killing two people and wounding four others.¹² Each year, campus violence with injuries increasingly involves firearms.

Responses to Campus Crime and Violence

The escalation of crime and violence on college campuses has precipitated significant responses by government and higher education officials. Congress enacted the Campus Security Act of 1990, which

mandates postsecondary institutions receiving Federal aid to report specific crime statistics on an annual basis. The act also requires these institutions to develop educational programs for safety and security and to establish policies and procedures for notifying the proper authorities when a crime occurs.

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...the prevalence of alcohol and firearms on and around college campuses has had deadly effects.

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More recently, an addendum to the act requires colleges and universities to develop programs aimed at reducing sexual assault. Apparently, media attention and concerns over campus violence moved Congress to pass legislation that forces college officials to report crime, not to cover it up as some may have done in the past.

Even without legislation, university and college officials responded to the rising crime rate by establishing campus police agencies. Steadily, these agencies have developed into very effective police organizations with a service orientation and crime prevention focus. Many possess the ability to respond to almost any type of incident or emergency.

In a more subtle fashion, administrators reinstated some campus

security measures that had been discarded long ago. Security controls now limit access to campus buildings, and residence halls restrict visitation hours. A significant increase in lawsuits against institutions alleging negligence in security has led administrators to enhance safety procedures and increase police patrols.

Assiduous campus police administrators recognized their strategic role and implemented community-based policing techniques compatible with the campus environment. On many campuses, this strategy turned the tide of crime and violence.

Campus Crime Prevention

First and foremost, campus police administrators must recognize that crime prevention is not solely their job. Rather, students, college and university administrators, faculty members, maintenance personnel, housing officials, counselors, and local law enforcement authorities all share the responsibility.

According to an African proverb, "It takes an entire village to raise a child." Nowhere is this more true than in a college community. Dealing with student misconduct and criminal behavior both on and off campus requires a collaborative effort.

Perhaps the most important component of this collaborative approach is the relationship between campus police and local law enforcement. This is especially true where no clear boundaries or jurisdictions involving students exist.

College students who live off campus present campus law enforcement and municipal police

departments with unique challenges. Incidents of crime and misconduct often result in "town-gown" tensions and require the cooperation, communication, and mutual assistance of both departments to respond effectively.

Jacksonville State's Response

Responding to a rise in campus crime, Jacksonville State University (JSU) in Alabama conducted a careful analysis that indicated 65 percent of the criminal incidents occurring on campus took place in and around residence halls. Special events, such as concerts or sporting events, contributed significantly to the disorder. Also, neighbors of the six fraternity houses located off campus complained of the noise emanating from the houses and notified the local police department of several disorderly incidents.

In response, research and a literature review conducted by campus police administrators revealed that several other universities encountering similar problems had implemented a variety of responses to campus crime. Using this information, JSU administrators developed strategies to address the problem of crime and violence on their campus and initiated a community-based crime prevention program in 1992.

Strategies

To begin, the university's police department enhanced the existing nighttime security escort service for female students and implemented a residence hall foot patrol to be conducted by officers. The department also used the bike patrol to increase its crime prevention



"Campus police, university officials, and local law enforcement worked together to create a threat-free environment...."

efforts and to establish better public relations with students.

The university restricted access to residence halls to only one entrance with monitored access. Another strategy established nighttime security monitors in all residence halls.

Several other groups became involved in making the campus more safe. Counselors, health care officials, and campus police officers increased the number of crime prevention presentations to students. Students became more involved in security issues related to housing, special events, and cultural diversity programs. Activities officials, housing officials, and the campus judicial officer worked closely with the university's police department in discipline cases involving students who presented a threat to campus safety and security. And, coupled with heightened awareness/education activities on alcohol abuse, both the campus judicial officer and the

university's police department increased enforcement of alcohol violations.

The university's police department also worked with the local police department to resolve neighborhood complaints. The two agencies established a mutual reporting and first responder procedure for off-campus fraternity disturbances.

Underlying these particular strategies was the adoption of a zero-tolerance philosophy toward weapons violations and violent behavior. Campus police, university officials, and local law enforcement worked together to create a threat-free environment in which students could feel comfortable while pursuing their academic and social goals.

Alternatives

Administrators of colleges and universities with no police force or those with nonsworn security officers need to develop collaborative relationships with local law enforcement. In such instances, the local department assumes a leadership role.

The local police chief should establish formal procedures with campus officials for reporting criminal incidents on campus. Further, local police personnel should develop crime prevention programs directed at the student population and present these programs on campus. A campus liaison officer could be appointed to work cooperatively with local police on such issues as crime prevention, student misconduct, special event security, and drug and alcohol abuse. Whatever steps are taken, both the campus administration and the local police department should give special attention

to collaborative efforts that will help to create a safe campus.

Conclusion

Violence has intruded college and university campuses. While it may be difficult to extinguish all crime and violence on campuses nationwide, crime prevention programs and collaboration with local law enforcement agencies can make it somewhat easier to restrict and to control the behavior of those who commit crimes.

Assiduous campus law enforcement leaders and local police officials can develop a variety of strategies to deal with violence on campus. It is incumbent on all involved to recognize the reality of campus crime and provide the needed resources to reduce its impact. ♦

Endnotes

¹ Michael Clay Smith, *Coping with Crime on Campus* (New York City: American Council on Education/MacMillan Publishing Co., 1988), 1.

² *USA Today*, October 4, 1988, 1.

³ Douglas Lederman, "Colleges Report 7,500 Violent Crimes on their Campuses," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, vol. 39, No. 20, July 14, 1993, A32.

⁴ *Supra* note 1, 120.

⁵ *Supra* note 3.

⁶ *Supra* note 3.

⁷ Tina Saunders, "Rising Tide of Crime Brings Fear to South's College Campuses," *The Atlanta Journal/Constitution*, September 28, 1992, A8.

⁸ Pub. L. No. 101-542, 104 Stat. 2384 and 104 Stat. 2385 (1990); Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990, 20 U.S.C. 1092.

⁹ *Campus Crime* (newsletter), vol. 3, No. 6, June 1993, 51.

¹⁰ Michael Clay Smith and Margaret D. Smith, *Wide Awake* (Princeton, N.J.: Peterson's Guides, 1990), 21.

¹¹ Gerald D. Robin, *Violent Crime and Gun Control* (Cincinnati, OH: Anderson Publishing/ACJS, 1991), 35.

¹² *Campus Crime* (newsletter), vol. 2, No. 1, January 1992, 1.

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