

Vandalism on College Campuses: The Need for More Security May 2010

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When a student takes their first steps as a freshman on a college campus there is usually an expectance that they will need to buy books, set up a dorm room, make friends, find buildings, eat their first meal in a dining hall, party a little, and study a lot. What a new student does not expect is that a flaw in the college's security will result in hefty personal repair costs to their own property. Students receive personal keys to their dorm rooms to ensure their security and safety of themselves and their property. Although a college may not be responsible for the damage of personal property within a dorm room, in area's open to other students and the public a certain form of monitoring must take place. Many schools require students sign a waiver or have a policy that absolves the school of liability in the event of property damage or a peril in public areas; however this lack of responsibility can be fought if an extreme event takes place. Some schools actually have a policy linked with stalking that places the liability back in the school's hands if vandalism is a crime caused by stalking and requires the institution to handle the situation.

Larger institutions may have their own police force to deal with incidents directly on campus, other institutions have security staff and residence life staff who assume the duty of incident reports and potentially discipline. Although there is a difference between the sizes of security enforcement between campuses, similar policies are usually put in place to ensure safety of students and their property. Colleges such as Salem State College in Massachusetts, Carthage College in Wisconsin, Eckerd College in Florida, and Green Mountain College in Vermont all have policies accessible online in regards to security, safety, reporting crimes, and

the college's responsibility to those crimes. In Salem State College's policy for the common area of parking lots there is a clause that states in all capitals and bold font,

“SALEM STATE COLLEGE ASSUMES NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR DAMAGES TO ANY VEHICLE OR ITS CONTENTS BY REASON OF FIRE, THEFT, VANDALISM, ACCIDENT, OR OTHER CAUSE. ALL PARKING IS AT THE OWNER'S RISK. REPORT MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS ON CAMPUS TO CAMPUS POLICE DEPARTMENT,” (Salem State College).

This statement allows the college to defer liability, while reducing the ability for a student's property to remain safe while it is on college grounds in these common areas. In contrast, at Carthage College while this same clause exists, the policy for security allows students to report crimes anonymously through a form that includes an option for vandalism reports among other serious or minor crimes (Security).

Many institutions such as Salem State College, Green Mountain College and others described divide the cost of vandalism between all people associated with the area damaged if the offender of the crime is not caught (Salem State College) (Green Mountain College Student Handbook). However, this allows the parties responsible the freedom to cause destruction without being held responsible. If the vandals are not caught in the act or captured by some form of monitoring, they are rewarded while the people affected by the vandalism or property fines are suffering. While institutions all form safety or crime policies in their student handbooks, there is a lack of attention to the issue and victims of vandalism. Not only does vandalism need to be addressed as a serious issue but there are options for colleges to be able to enhance their own security to help reduce these harmful acts of vandalism. Using surveillance to combat this problem will help reduce the crime and allow colleges to give the

responsibility for damage to the vandals as described by an article about security and life safety, “cameras are a key deterrent; a criminal is more likely to get caught if someone is watching,” (Kennedy). Implementing surveillance systems will continue to allow schools to waive liability but also allow the correct people involved in vandalism of school or personal property to uphold codes of conduct by claiming responsibility for those acts. Some schools even associate vandalism with stalking which is a more serious crime that places such as Eckerd College have created a serious policy to handle the issue. Eckerd makes it clear that stalking and the results of stalking such as vandalism to the victim’s property are not tolerated (Eckerd College: Campus Safety and Security). This type of seriousness towards vandalism should be a regular attitude displayed by all institutions; instead vandalism is not managed by many security methods.

A lack of vandalism management stems from a variety of issues. One is the inefficient and unreliable reporting procedures. Security staffing in many cases is not sufficient enough to be able to monitor every area that is at a high risk of vandalism. Underreporting is also a key issue that many campuses deal with in terms of any type of crime. The Clery Act has forced institutions to report many crimes and allow access to anyone needing the information. However, through the implementation of the Act confusion by the institutions remains as to what needs to be reported. This is confirmed by Steven M. Janosik and Dennis E. Gregory’s article about Clery Act Perceptions in which,

“Researchers have studied institutional responses to the Act. For example, Gehring and Callaway (1997) concluded that college administrators were still unsure of the Act’s

reporting requirements and many were not including the right material in admission packets, despite considerable efforts to comply with the Act,” (Janosik and Gregory).

What schools can do to reduce vandalism and the effects of vandalism on students can range from making building more secure through different methods, increasing security forces, additional lighting in areas of low light, promoting student reporting of vandalism whether they see the result or the act happen, and security camera’s to supplement current methods. In addition, basic reporting methods are likely to be modified with the changes made to a Campus Security Act. This may force colleges to update their methods of current crime reporting which would include better reporting of vandalism in specific cases in relation to hate crimes.

Most colleges and universities must uphold the Clery Act which enforces certain Security Crime Statistics to be logged throughout the year and reported to one specific website open to the general public in addition to making that statistic information available at the school or to whomever asks. The Act was created as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965 which also forces these institutions to report their security policies and statistics in a timely fashion. Previously this was known as the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990 but changed when Jeanne Clery’s parents fought to have more information included in the act due to their daughter’s death in 1987 as a result of lack of knowledge about serious crimes in her residence hall. The Act was revised and named after the murdered 19 year old while the parents created the non-profit Security On Campus, Inc which has direct links to crime statistics, logs from colleges and universities, has an advocacy program, and overall gives anyone searching for the Clery Act the only direct information available.

Recently the Clery Act was updated in many aspects which go into effect October of 2010. These updates relate partially to acts of vandalism, however there seems to be a consistent lack of attention towards vandalism as a major security issue. The Clery Act considers,

“All public and private institutions of postsecondary education participating in federal student aid programs are subject to it. Violators can be "fined" up to \$27,500 by the U.S. Department of Education, the agency charged with enforcement of the Act and where complaints of alleged violations should be made, or face other enforcement action” (Security On Campus, Inc.).

What this relates to is the act of recording and giving students the information in a timely manner as well as making sure to log this information accurately. Previously the only crimes required to be recorded through the crime statistics “for the three most recent calendar years concerning the occurrence on campus, in or on noncampus buildings or property, and on public property of the following that are reported to local police agencies or to a campus security authority,” were criminal homicide, murder and non negligent manslaughter, negligent manslaughter, sex offenses, forcible sex offenses, non forcible sex offenses, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, arson, arrests for liquor law violations, drug law violations, and illegal weapons possession,” (34 CFR 668.46). These crimes are major crimes, but vandalism is not a major leap from these crimes. Acts of arson might in fact be considered vandalism, or vandalism might occur as a result of some of the crimes in the list which one researcher found out,

“Vandalism is another common form of criminality in college settings tied to alcohol use and abuse. More than one out of every ten students who drink admits to damaging property while intoxicated” (Flowers).

This research showed that not only was vandalism a crime that is not logged in an efficient way, but that the frequency of this problem is linked with another problem. While the Clery Act only addresses vandalism as it relates to Hate Crimes in which the revised version now states,

“An institution must report, by category of prejudice, the following crimes reported to local police agencies or to a campus security authority that manifest evidence that the victim was intentionally selected because of the victim's actual or perceived race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or disability: The crimes of larceny-theft, simple assault, intimidation, and destruction/damage/vandalism of property, or any other crime involving bodily injury,” (34 CFR 668.46).

This is the only part of the Act in which vandalism is stated as needing to be reported or logged and how. Unfortunately the section required schools necessity to record purely based upon the incidents considered Hate Crimes in the categories listed. It could be argued that any act of vandalism is also an act of hate, there would be no pride in the property being damaged; therefore the lack of reporting any incident that does not fit the guidelines is ridiculous.

Without recording every act of vandalism, how can an institution be certain that these crimes are not in fact hate crimes unless the person or group targeted is a victim of this property damage multiple times? This underreporting may lead to more serious crimes if the vandalism is an act of harassment from an ex-girlfriend or boy-friend in a college setting, or if someone has a lot of hate for an individual and it becomes an act of stalking or larger issue of

harassment. It is the institutions job to ensure that students are aware of ongoing threats posed by crimes on campus, however, vandalism lies outside of this Clery Act requirement. Because vandalism and many non violent crimes are reported the issue can be overlooked when in reality these crimes are prevalent as revealed by one article that found,

“In its first Annual Report on School Safety, released in October 1998, the U.S.

Department of Education reported that 90 percent of schools are free of serious, violent crime. The report indicated that theft, and non violent acts, account for most crime in schools,” (Woodcock).

In parking lots acts of vandalism can occur more easily, yet these crimes do not require proper logs to be made available to the public. It could be argued that vandalism poses a threat to students as well since repeated acts upon one person may threaten the mental health of the person involved if it becomes emotionally distressing, in addition to being a physical threat if the damage to their property may harm them, and their safety could be compromised in the event that it is a car that is needed. In addition to not being required to log all vandalism instances in reports, the vandalism issue highlights another major problem, the security staffing.

The Clery Act alone cannot force institutions to report vandalism if this issue had been included in the Act, security and the parties involved in crime reporting must also aid in the process of vandalism reporting in order to raise awareness of this issue. The staffing for implementing campus safety may include campus police forces in larger institutions, while other institutions try to create a healthy relationship with surrounding police forces who would supplement their own security forces such as, public safety officers, campus security, and

residence life staff. In many cases these people are not available at every area in need of monitoring that is at a high risk of vandalism or crime in general. This problem can be attributed to the fact that people cannot be in all places at once. Even with a large security force, there cannot be staffing everywhere that the public or students could potentially be at risk or have personal property at risk.

Because of this lack of eyes to monitor risky areas, making building more secure through different methods can aid in this process. Some colleges use swipe cards to enter buildings as an added form of security such as Merrimack College or University of New Hampshire. Swipe cards act as a student or staff members key into a building, usually everyone's card will allow access to every building throughout the day until it becomes later. During nights, at a certain time in which risk of crimes may occur or safety may be compromised, student's swipe cards only allow access to their own building which helps to regulate visitors (University of New Hampshire). Another added measure of building security that is currently used by some schools is the idea of desk attendants or front entrance cameras (Merrimack College). This is another way to monitor who enters a building, and to make sure it is a community member or someone who is carrying a guest pass. These methods do not necessarily stop the building from being susceptible to crimes such as vandalism, or from threatening people gaining access to dorms; however it creates more awareness that someone is paying some attention. If the people entering a building are also being monitored, acts of vandalism inside of buildings might be pinpointed to those who were inside when the act occurred. Unfortunately, this cannot as easily be monitored in the areas that are not as secure such as outside areas.

Parking areas, and other areas open to the general public are more difficult to monitor through attendants. Some of these areas are also not well lit. Even in parking areas, adding light does not always reduce or eliminate threats to people or to property. Especially at night when these areas are not heavy with walking traffic, the risks are increased. Some schools have put up cameras or blue lights to increase the security in these areas. Security forces as well as residential assistants, usually have to monitor buildings and may walk in between buildings, however parking areas are not usually priority. Due to the nature of parking areas being separated from the main parts of campus or from direct visibility, security or anyone monitoring may not readily be able to monitor. In addition, going to these remote areas may pose a threat if the security officers are alone, or resident assistants are alone.

Increasing security forces and residential assistants may aid in the lack of security for these areas in addition to giving victims of vandalism and other crimes additional people to report to without taking too many people away from their monitoring duties which might increase the threat of crimes in areas unable to be monitored. Some schools have created bike police that is staffed by the school who are called to help when there are an added number of complaints during specific hours such as during parties, nights, weekends, or events (Merrimack College). These people may add security and eyes to monitor when these hours of risk take place. Other schools have increased the general security staffing, while others try to form a relationship with area police who can aid in monitoring when crime risks seem high. Adding more security might also promote student reporting of vandalism. Having two people monitoring an area allows a student to report a crime or vandalism without reducing the ability for the staff to make the area safer.

Additional staffing for monitoring purposes is not the only form of crime reduction and deterrence; security cameras can also be installed to supplement current methods of security enforcement. High schools have already begun the trend of aiding in administration needs for security through video surveillance implementation,

“The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that in the 2003-2004 school year, 60 percent of US high schools used surveillance cameras (Dinkes, Cataldi, Kena, & Baum, 2006) [qtd. in Warnick],” (Warnick).

Statistics for college’s that use surveillance is not yet available but it is evident through the k-12 schools that this technology is an increasing form of security enforcement.

Video surveillance can be real time in which the personnel must be watching events as they happen or events can also be viewed if the surveillance has a recording feature. Due to the amount of time and personal attention that a real time system requires, many schools record the video,

“According to another study of school districts safety personnel in 2001, 90 percent of sampled school districts were using video cameras and 87 percent were using video recording systems (Garcia, 2003) [qtd in Warnick],” (Warnick).

Much like the real time video surveillance issue, monitoring by purely staff in areas can reduce attention to issues that should be addressed. Surveillance cameras allow security or physical monitoring in areas that require immediate attention without reducing the surveillance if another event were to occur while the staff was occupied with the matters at hand. Due to the need for security to maintain other duties,

“Most of the schools that have cameras also make recordings. Real-time camera displays are not usually monitored, since constant monitoring is expensive, time-consuming, and due to the inadequacies of human attention and response, ineffective at preventing crimes or misbehavior (Green, Travis, & Downs, 1999) [qtd in Warnick],” (Warnick).

The cameras themselves may increase criminal awareness that any crime committed could potentially be on video, which would create no need for personnel to watch camera displays at all hours,

“People want schools officials to be alert and attentive to the needs and actions of students. If it is not objectionable to have a human being watching a hallway, indeed, a powerful defense of technological surveillance rests on this analogy between in-person surveillance and surveillance with the help of a camera: An operating camera is simply like an observant school official,”(Warnick).

Security staff, police, and residence life have enough duties that take up a majority of their time and necessary attention, surveillance cameras give those staff members the ability to focus more energy on the duties they have besides monitoring when monitoring is physically impossible in areas that require it.

The Same study also reported that 40 percent of the school districts had spent over \$500,000 on the new surveillance technology, which makes the equipment seem unattainable but with the right budgeting it is still a possibility (Warnick). Colleges should also be aware that surveillance can be afforded through grants to specific organizations or federal preparedness and security related programs that support the use of cameras for safety and crime prevention

such as The U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Justice and other private organizations (Wren and Spicer). Not only would grants help colleges afford this but members of the community might support fees to aid in surveillance costs. Tuition generally supports security in some aspect, surveillance is another tool used by the department that tuition dollars or small fee's can also go towards.

In addition to the cost of surveillance a school should also keep in mind the complexity of a system if it is installed. Basic video surveillance systems and recording mechanisms may not cause much need for attention or training; however programs that can be utilized to recognize faces, details, or motion detection can be a difficult to begin implementation. These systems are usually part of an automated surveillance system movement in which,

“These technical challenges, including object identification, tracking and analysis are compounded by practical consideration such as the physical placement of cameras, and robustness to the unfavorable weather and lighting conditions. However progress is being made ever more rapidly, and the demand for automated surveillance continues to increase in areas ranging from crime prevention, public safety and home security to industrial quality control and military intelligence gathering,” (Dick and Brooks).

Other issues that should be considered when implementing cameras include policy issues related to the cameras and system issues such as,

“Making sure the local area network has enough bandwidth to support the cameras. Installing backup power sources, those are critical in the event of a blackout. Purchasing enough storage to record at least 30 days of video and keep it on site. Invest in an insurance policy that covers damage to cameras. Inform teachers that they are going to

be recorded. Notify parents that their children will be recorded. Establish a liaison with the local police department so you know whom to contact in the event of an incident.

Set up a real-time interface with sex-offender databases to keep track of predators who might enter the school," (Villano)

Many of these issues or concerns are suggested to be dealt with, depending upon the type of institution some of the suggested attention to issues is not necessary. Having an interface with a sex-offender database would be more important for schools that are k-12 rather than those of higher education.

Identifying areas where vandalism is a high risk or crime in general is a high risk is the beneficial place to put surveillance to reduce or aid in security. This information is confirmed by various security system companies who have done studies such as those evaluated by Peter Martin, president of Martin Security Systems, a security consulting firm in Peekskill, NY, in which the companies assessments over the years, show,

"If you're putting in a video surveillance system just to have security cameras, sure your campus will be safer, but you're not getting everything you could," he says. "If you do some research and put the cameras into areas that you've identified as trouble spots, the investment will pay dividends you can appreciate much more directly," (Villano).

Parking lots are a reoccurring area for example that continuously comes up as an area of risk that campuses do not necessarily monitor all the time. Because parking is usually away from main areas, crimes can more readily occur, this is one of the reasons blue light boxes were established to aid in campus safety. In many cases, cameras coexist with these boxes to increase the security in parking areas or public areas that are not regularly monitored.

In addition to all of the suggested methods of increasing security to deal with underreporting, and understaffing, the option of implementing some of these systems together can also be done. Surveillance is an example of a system that can be implemented with other systems,

“At many colleges, the cameras are just one part of a system that includes electronic locks on building and room doors. Electronic locks are activated by cards with magnetic strips or radio antennas rather than traditional keys. Such electronic keys are thought to be more secure than metal keys because they are more difficult to copy, and because a central computer can revoke access to any user's card if the card is lost or stolen. It is relatively cheap and easy for a college that is installing such a system to add cameras at entryways as well, since the cameras can piggyback on the same computer networks to communicate with central monitoring stations. The key systems record every person who activates the locks, but the cameras offer a way to find out if tailgaters entered as well,” (Young).

Security cameras cannot stand alone as a method of security, as well as the other forms of security aid such as blue lights and additional lighting in low lit areas. By adding swipe cards without additional monitoring of the system at the least won't do much more than a key system already does. Blue lights can also be put in areas that are not near formal security facilities, but in the event that vandalism or a crime occurs, responding personnel could miss the incident without proper documentation that a camera can provide. Added lighting also has the same effect, although an area may have more lighting, safety is not assured and vandalism may continue to occur if the area cannot also be monitored.

In conclusion, it is evident that college campuses and higher education institutions are lacking in certain aspects of security and reporting. While specifications require these institutions to record crimes, an instance in which activity must be logged is not clearly defined. Vandalism specifically is a crime that is undefined by crime statistic logs that these institutions are required to keep. Currently these logs allow the issue to be overlooked when in actuality it can be prevalent among many colleges. Not only should colleges begin more rigorous reporting methods that include all acts or complaints on campuses but a crime such as vandalism can actually be a gateway for more serious issues. Because vandalism is one of the outcomes of stalking behavior towards a victim, vandalism needs to be addressed. Although some colleges have begun to address vandalism related to stalking, other precautions and safety measures should be taken to allow campus community members other resources with which they can rely on in the event that the crime occurs. Parking lot areas on many campuses waive the school's liability in these places, but this opens the door for vandals to harass victims continuously creating a costly, hostile, emotionally distressing and unsafe place for campus community members to learn. In order to increase safety and decrease the amount of vandalism or lack of trust in the system for aiding vandalism victims, other forms of security must supplement current methods. Security cameras, swipe cards, blue lights, and other systems can aid in security measures and allow students to pursue the right corrective measures in the event, witnessing, or result of vandalism. Added security measures will not only prevent future crimes of vandalism, they will also apprehend the correct criminals to reduce the further damage of school or student property which can intrinsically lower damage costs for the school and students.

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