**The Clery Act:**
**Student Awareness and Perceptions of Effectiveness at a Public University and a Private College in East Tennessee**

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**ABSTRACT**

The U.S. Congress has recognized that safety is essential on our college and university campuses. Incidents such as the Virginia Tech massacre and the death of Jeanne Clery have emphasized the need for legislation that assists students in selecting a safe college and improves their safety by reducing the incidence of crimes and fires. The Clery Act is a federal law that requires colleges and universities to provide annual information on the number and type of crimes on campus as well as the number and cause of fires occurring in the residence halls. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived effectiveness of the Clery Act by students at two higher educational institutions in East Tennessee.

This study determined that students are not aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the crime and fire statistics to a significant extent. However, students are aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution. Students do not tend to use the Clery Act crime and fire statistics in their decisions as to what college to attend, indicating the limited effectiveness of the Clery Act. Lack of use of the Clery Act crime and fire statistics may be related to a lack of awareness of their existence. Students perceive to a significant extent that the reporting of the Clery Act crime and fire statistics as well as the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings, improved their safety and security while on campus. The Clery Act mandated use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings issued by the institution results in students changing their behavior to protect themselves and their property. Students perceive that the reporting of crime and fire statistics as well as the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings, has reduced crime and fires on campus.

**INTRODUCTION**

Jeanne Clery, a student at Lehigh University located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was beaten, raped, and murdered in her dormitory room on April 5, 1986 (Fine & Gross, 1990). An investigation by local authorities culminated in the arrest of another Lehigh University student who was eventually convicted of murder and sentenced to death. As a result of intense lobbying by her parents, Connie and Howard Clery, and the media scrutiny that followed, the U.S. Congress passed the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act of 1990. This piece of legislation would later become known as the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, requiring all public and private higher education institutions that receive federal Title IV funding to report their crime data to the Department of Education and publish an annual crime report for the purpose of advancing campus safety and security (McNeal, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived effectiveness of the Clery Act by students at two higher educational institutions in East Tennessee. The following research questions were addressed by this study:

1. Are student’s scores significantly different from the test value of 4 as it relates to awareness of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report), fire statistics (fire safety report), and the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution?
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The Clery Act, passed by Congress in 1990, requires colleges and universities to report their crime statistics and security policies for the main purpose of (1) providing information to potential students so they can factor campus security into their decision as to what college or university to attend, (2) providing safety notices, crime alerts, and timely warnings to students so they can alter their behavior to protect themselves and their property, and (3) reducing the incidence of campus crime (Janosik, 2004). Colleges and universities must also report various crime occurrences and disciplinary offenses such as murder, robbery, forcible sex offenses, non-forcible sex offenses, burglary, aggravated assault, maulings, motor vehicle theft, weapons possession, drug related violations, and liquor law violations (Mann & Ward, 2011). In 2008 the Clery Act was amended by requiring colleges and universities to issue emergency notifications, in addition to timely warnings already required since the law was first enacted, by notifying campus occupants of any emergency situation that constitutes a threat to the safety of faculty, staff, and students. Additionally, the 2008 amendment required reporting of fire statistics through the use of a fire incident logbook, documenting every fire occurrence in the residential facilities for a period of three years. This amendment also required the publication of an annual fire safety report that described the fire protection systems that have been installed in the residence halls, such as sprinklers, standpipes, and fire alarm systems. The annual fire safety report must also include the university’s fire safety programs such as the use of fire drills, fire evacuation training in choosing their college and choosing their college and changing their behavior to protect themselves and their property from fire. Several studies (e.g. Gregory & Janosik, 2002b, 2009b; Janosik & Plummer, 2005) have been conducted to determine if the Clery Act requirements have decreased the incidence of crimes or changed student behavior on campus, yet none were found that determined if the Clery Act has reduced campus fires.

If students and their parents were unaware of the Clery Act and its provisions, which clearly was the case as shown in numerous aforementioned studies, then students are unable to use this information in their college selection decisions or to change their behavior in protecting themselves or their property since they are unaware of the incidence of crime or fires on their campus (Janosik, 2004). Considering most students and their parents were unaware of the act and do not use the information to change the college they attend or their campus security policy, future research must be conducted to determine if the Clery Act has reduced crime or fires would decrease as a result of the act. Studies have shown that only a small percentage of respondents perceive that crime or fires on their campus are reduced due to the Clery Act. As such, the analysis of the relevant research indicates that the purposes of the act have not been realized, other than the mandatory reporting of crime and fire statistics, and therefore researchers, college administrators and the United States Department of Education need to make changes in implementation to improve the effectiveness of the Clery Act (Gregory & Janosik(2002a).

METHODOLOGY

This researcher employed the nonexperimental quantitative research design, based on the premise that the research did not manipulate any conditions that were experienced. The population used in this study was composed of 16,280 students attending two higher education institutions in East Tennessee and included undergraduate, graduate, campus residents, and commuters, including specialty college students such as medical and pharmacy residents. One of the institutions was a public university attended by approximately 15,000 students, composed of 12,500 undergraduates, 2,500 graduate students. The other institution was a private Christian College attended by approximately 1,200 students, composed of 950 undergraduate and 250 graduate students. The total sample was comprised of 1,361 students who voluntarily agreed to complete and submit the survey.

The first 11 items of the 28 item survey were demographic in nature, enabling cross-tabulation and comparison of subgroups to ascertain the variance of responses between these groups. The next two items asked respondents whether they had read their institution’s campus security report and fire safety report. The next 13 items consisted of Likert-type statements to measure degree of awareness, confidence, decision, improvement, and perception. Each item had seven possible responses: Strongly Disagree -1, Disagree 2, Somewhat Disagree 3, Neither Agree or Disagree 4, Somewhat Agree 5, Agree 6, and Strongly Agree -7. The last two items asked respondents to identify where they observed their institution’s crime and fire statistics.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1

A directional, upper tail critical, single sample t test was conducted to evaluate whether responding students were aware of crime statistics, fire statistics, and the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings issued by their institution to a significant extent. This variable was entitled “overall awareness” (Mean = 4.37, SD = 1.34) and was composed of the average scores resulting from three separate Likert-type scale survey statements as follows: 1) I am aware of the Clery Act centers for the purpose of offering crime statistics (Campus Security Report) for the college I am attending, 2) I am aware of the Clery Act centers for the purpose of offering crime statistics (Campus Security Report) for the college I am attending, and 3) I read safety notices, crime alerts, emergency notifications, or timely

Jeffrey Mark Jee & Donald W. Good
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The survey used two separate items to collect data concerning notification, one for crime statistics and the other for fire statistics. The types of notification methods and the corresponding percentage of students who were notified by these methods are listed in the following tables:

### Table 1: Methods by Which Respondents Were Made Aware of the Clery Act Crime Statistics (N = 1,361)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notification Method</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observed notification of crime statistics on college website</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>28.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notified of crime statistics in orientation session</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>20.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notified of crime statistics by a Residence Life Official</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>14.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notified of crime statistics by a Student Affairs Official</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>14.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed notification of crime statistics in catalog</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>12.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed notification of crime statistics on student application</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>11.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed notification of crime statistics in Parent Handbook</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>7.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other notification method</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Approximately 550 respondents, or 43.79% of survey participants, did not see any notifications of crime statistics.

### Table 2: Methods by Which Respondents Were Made Aware of the Clery Act Fire Statistics (N = 1,361)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notification Method</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observed notification of fire statistics on college website</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>13.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed notification of fire statistics in catalog</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>12.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notified of fire statistics in orientation session</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>10.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notified of fire statistics by a Residence Life Official</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>9.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notified of fire statistics by a Student Affairs Official</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed notification of fire statistics on student application</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>5.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed notification of fire statistics in Parent Handbook</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>5.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other notification method</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Approximately 863 respondents, or 69.21% of survey participants, did not see any notifications of fire statistics.
Research Question 7
A directional, upper tail critical, single sample t test was conducted to evaluate whether responding students perceive that the reporting of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report) and fire statistics (fire safety report) improves their safety from crimes and fires while on campus to a significant extent. The test was significant, t(1,293) = 18.11, p < .001. Therefore, students do perceive that the reporting of the Clery Act crime and fire statistics improves their safety while on campus to a significant extent.

Research Question 8
A directional, upper tail critical, single sample t test was conducted to evaluate whether responding students perceive that the reporting of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report) and fire statistics (fire safety report) affects students in making their selection as to what college to attend. The test was significant, t(1,309) = -33.36, p < .001. Therefore, students do perceive that the Clery Act crime and fire statistics to a significant extent in their decisions as to what college to attend.

Research Question 9
A directional, upper tail critical, single sample t test was conducted to evaluate whether responding students perceive that the reporting of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report) and fire statistics (fire safety report) has improved their security while on campus to a significant extent. The variable was student perception of reduced crime due to timely warnings (Mean = 5.26, SD = 1.44), and a test value of 4, which indicated neutrality on the Likert scale, was used for this analysis. The analysis indicated that the mean is significantly higher than the test value t(1,300) = 31.52, p < .001. Therefore, students do perceive that the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution has improved their security while on campus to a significant extent.

Research Question 10
A directional, upper tail critical, single sample t test was conducted to evaluate whether responding students perceive that the reporting of crime statistics (Campus Security Report) and fire statistics (Fire Safety Report) has improved their property or personal well-being due to the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings issued by their institution to a significant extent. The test was significant, t(1,309) = 6.60, p < .001. Therefore, students do change their behavior to protect their property or personal well-being due to the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings issued by their institution to a significant extent.

Research Question 11
A directional, upper tail critical, single sample t test was conducted to evaluate whether responding students perceive that the reporting of crime statistics (Campus Security Report) and fire statistics (Fire Safety Report) reduces crime and fires on their campus to a significant extent. The variable was entitled “Reducing Crime and Fires” (Mean = 4.15, SD = 1.20) and was composed of the average scores resulting from the Clery Act crime statistics (Campus Security Report) and fire statistics (Fire Safety Report) on their website by posting hyperlinks to Clery Act information.

Research Question 12
A directional, upper tail critical, single sample t test was conducted to evaluate whether responding students perceive that the reporting of the Clery Act crime and fire statistics to a significant extent. The test was significant, t(1,309) = -33.36, p < .001. Therefore, students do change their behavior to protect their property or personal well-being due to the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings issued by their institution to a significant extent.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Overall, the findings of this study indicate that students perceive that the Clery Act is effective. Students are aware of timely warnings and change their behavior due to these warnings. Students perceive that the Clery Act has improved their safety and security. Additionally, students perceive that the Clery Act has reduced the incidence of crime and fires. There are, however, two areas in which the Clery Act has very limited effectiveness: awareness of the crime and fire statistics and use of the crime and fire statistics in making their selection as to what college to attend.

This study reveals that website postings, student applications, parent handbooks, catalogs, orientation sessions, student affairs personnel, and residence life officials are making students aware of the Clery Act crime and fire statistics, but not to a significant extent. Students should be aware of the existence of Clery Act statistics prior to attending college so that they can use them in making their college selection decisions. The Department of Education should devote resources to advertise the Clery Act and its importance to the general public, increasing awareness of the Clery Act mandates and the usefulness of the information provided by these mandates. College students should be aware of the Clery Act requirements prior to their decision as to what college to attend, making their high school years an appropriate target for disseminating Clery Act information.

Text messages and emails should be used to notify students of the Clery Act crime and fire statistics as well as policies regarding crime reporting, crime prevention, and fire safety. Use of text messages and emails should improve student awareness of the Clery Act as this form of communication has been effective in notifying students of the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution.

Due to the frequent use of the college or university website by students in obtaining Clery Act crime and fire statistics, university administrators should continue to post the Campus Security Report and Fire Safety Report on the school website. University administrators may want to focus on improving the accessibility of the Campus Security Report on their website by posting hyperlinks at various website pages not greater than two clicks from the home page. Accessibility to the Campus Security Report and Fire Safety Report via website searches should be regularly tested and maintained. Operability of hyperlinks should be periodically tested both on and off campus to ensure functionality.

The use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings is effective in changing student behavior to protect themselves and their property, having the potential to increase safety and security. Therefore, colleges and universities should continue to advertise and promote the use of an emergency alert system that uses text messaging and email to reach students by cell phone.

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