Campus Safety and Security: Critical Issues

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Introduction

Campus security and student safety issues have increased in priority for the Florida Board of Governors in response to an increasing number of serious, violent incidents and harmful student behaviors on campuses in the past decade, both in the State University System and nationally.

Following the tragic Virginia Tech campus shootings in 2007, the Board of Governors responded to a Gubernatorial Task Force for University Campus Safety by establishing an Emergency Preparedness and Campus Safety Task Force, a Mental Health Issues Subcommittee, and a Law Enforcement Subcommittee. As a result of this work, recommendations were made on additional enforcement and new emergency management positions, equipment, technology, and training. The Mental Health Issues Subcommittee produced a comprehensive set of recommendations and promising practices regarding education and training, prevention, intervention, and treatment.

Following two serious and highly-publicized incidents at state universities that occurred in 2013 and 2014, the Board's Academic and Student Affairs Committee engaged with campus administrative and student affairs leadership to assess whether state universities have sufficient resources to provide for and sustain student safety and campus security. University leaders identified a number of campus security challenges and focused on two issues: (1) law enforcement staffing needs in an expanding State University System, and (2) the increasing need for well-trained, professional counseling services to address the mental and behavioral health of university students.

University Law Enforcement

In response to an increasingly complex society that has seen crime spreading to every facet of daily living, colleges and universities nationally have been more directly charged with the responsibility of providing a safe learning, working, and living environment for students, faculty, staff, and visitors. The roles and responsibilities of university law enforcement agencies have continued to evolve in response to the increase in amount and severity of campus crime that may include drug and alcohol abuse, sexual assaults, thefts, vandalism, computer crime, and domestic violence. In regard to serious incidents of crime and violent behavior, it is clear that college and university campuses are microcosms of their surrounding communities.

University law enforcement is perhaps the most intensive community-oriented policing environment, primarily due to the large presence of young adults who are living on their own for the first time in a community that is governed by federal and state laws, as well as institutional policies and procedures. In response to the growing numbers of violent crimes on campuses and increased media attention, most large universities have professionalized their police departments to include formal law enforcement standards and training and the granting of full arrest powers. Further, many police departments have expanded their jurisdiction beyond the campus and into surrounding neighborhoods via mutual aid agreements with local police agencies. Typically, these agreements govern the relationships between the enforcement entities and lay out the geographic boundaries of their authority and the circumstances under which they can pursue and arrest students in the community.

To provide an update on the status of U.S. campus law enforcement agencies, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics recently released findings from its 2012 survey, the Bureau's first national survey since 2005. Among the findings for four-year institutions enrolling 2,500 or more students:

- 92% of the campuses were using sworn police officers;
- 75% of the campuses were using armed officers;
- Most sworn officers had arrest (86%) and patrol (81%) jurisdictions that extended beyond campus boundaries;
- Most campus agencies serving 5,000 or more students had personnel designated to address general crime prevention (91%), rape prevention (86%), drug education (79%), alcohol education (78%), stalking (75%), victim assistance (72%), and intimate partner violence (69%);
- Nearly all campuses had a mass notification system that used email, text messages, and other methods to alert and instruct students, faculty, and staff in emergency situations.

The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1990 (Campus Security Act) and the SAVe Act of 2012 require all colleges and universities that participate in federal financial aid programs to maintain information about crime on and near their campus. Institutions must publish an annual security report and submit the report to the U.S. Department of Education that documents three years of specified campus crime statistics, including incidents of criminal homicide, sex offenses, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, arson, and new categories such as domestic violence and stalking.

The minimum number of police officers needed for a university is often viewed as the coverage that is sufficient for the security of the campus community, including students, staff, and the resources of the physical plant. Nationally, the sworn officer to student ratio is a method to measure the adequacy of police presence on a campus and can provide a consistent measure for comparative purposes, although it fails to account for campus clientele or physical facilities. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) has long utilized a national standard for community-oriented policing of two officers per 1,000 population but the IACP cautions against

using the police to population ratios as a basis for agency staffing decisions, as factors such as university mission, campus location, student clientele, additional off-site facilities, and administrative enforcement expectations may increase or decrease the need for police officers.

State University System
Each state university police department functions with a fully sworn staff of professional law enforcement officers. The State University System (SUS), like many state systems, includes many large, complex campuses that operate like small cities and a few smaller campuses that require law enforcement support from local, municipal agencies. Currently, seven SUS police agencies are accredited by the Commission on Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation and 10 SUS agencies are accredited by the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators. The University of Florida is also accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies.

While serving as security guards, policy enforcers, and public relations officers, university police officers as first responders bear the responsibility for the investigation of all campus-related criminal activities, including public disturbances, domestic arguments, suspicious and stolen vehicles, sexual assaults, substance abuse issues, fraud, harassment, hazing, computer crimes, and weapons offenses. The larger campus police departments also must provide security for large sporting venues, hospitals, high-rise buildings, research facilities, and regional campuses and instructional sites which may be miles away from the main campus. Students, staff, and visitors, however, expect and demand the same level of service and responsiveness from campus police departments as they do from municipal law enforcement agencies.

Staffing
SUS law enforcement agency data provided by the SUS Police Chiefs show that state university police departments range from a high of 89 sworn officers at the University of Florida to a low of 10 sworn officers at USF St. Pete campus (excluding the newly established Florida Polytechnic University with 2 sworn officers). Utilizing a police officer to student enrollment ratio, SUS police departments range from a high ratio of 5.21 officers per 1,000 enrollments (New College/USF Sarasota-Manatee joint agency) to a low ratio of 1.06 officers per 1,000 enrollments (UCF). The officer-to-student enrollment ratios at nine of the 13 SUS institutions (including USF St. Pete) fall below the IACP standard of two officers per 1,000 population. In addition to New College/USF Manatee and Florida Polytechnic, FAMU has a ratio above the IACP standard.

The low officer-to-student enrollment ratios at a majority of SUS institutions may be attributed to the steady enrollment increases at most state universities in recent years, with little increase in staffing. While additional sworn officers have been employed, the size of the police force at most universities has not kept pace with enrollment increases and has caused a decrease in the officer-to-enrollment ratio at eight universities since 2008. An equally important variable is the growth in the overall size, scope, and complexity of most state universities, which has seen a 15 percent increase in gross square footage in the SUS since 2008 due to the construction of new facilities on existing and newly established off-site campuses and instructional sites.

The SUS Police Chiefs report that efforts to recruit and employ sworn officers for university agencies remain a challenge due to the small pool of qualified officers who have the skills and can pass the intensive background investigation required for these sworn positions. Recruitment is further hampered by university salaries which are typically lower than municipal, county, and state agencies, particularly in the metropolitan areas of Florida.

The critical importance of the need for adequate law enforcement staffing was realized during the major incidents of the past two years at state universities in which police were called to respond to active shooters on campus, requiring immediate action by all available officers. While the prompt, professional response averted the escalation of each incident and prevented wide-scale tragedy, the police chiefs report that the impact of these events was felt by each campus force for many weeks due to the requirements of the administrative and legal processing of the incidents that affected shift coverage and total staff workload.

The Mental & Behavioral Health of Students

During the past decade, many U.S. colleges and universities have reported a dramatic increase in the number of students who are experiencing serious mental health problems and who are seeking treatment from campus counseling centers. While all students must experience the traditional college stresses of living on their own, assimilating into a campus population that is increasingly diverse, and dealing with pressures to succeed academically, there has been a noticeable shift in the needs of students seeking counseling services, with a move from more informational and developmental needs to more severe psychological problems.

In a 2014 national survey of counseling center directors, respondents reported that 52 percent of their clients had severe psychological problems, a sharp increase from 16 percent in 2000. The most common of these disorders are anxiety disorders, pressing crises, psychiatric medication issues, clinical depression, and learning disabilities. A majority of the directors (86%) reported a steady increase in the number of students arriving on campus that are already on psychiatric medication. The American College Health Association recently reported that over 50 percent of college students say that they have experienced "overwhelming anxiety" in the last year and 32 percent say they have felt so depressed that "it was difficult to function." Further, the national American Freshman Survey for 2014 collected information from over 150,000 first-year students and found that students' ratings of their emotional health were the lowest in over three decades.

A broad range of explanations for the shift of the incidence and severity of psychological problems on campuses is being proffered by mental health professionals, including the view that it is part of larger societal trends toward greater levels of anxiety and depression brought on by information and technology overload, increased financial pressures, and an ineffective mental health care system. University counselors are finding that the current generation of students lacks the coping and resiliency skills that previous generations demonstrated and more students are coming to campus with pre-existing emotional and behavioral health issues than ever before.

State University System

SUS institutions maintain counseling centers with licensed and highly trained professional counselors that provide comprehensive services for students who are either experiencing or have been identified with symptoms of mental illness. Services include the evaluation of student concerns and behaviors and individualized treatment plans that promote mental and behavioral health and academic success. Center personnel are also involved in the education and training of students in leadership positions in mental health issues, particularly the recognition of student behaviors that may signal a need for professional intervention. Many universities now maintain campus-wide *Students of Concern Committees* and *Threat Assessment Teams* to identify and monitor students with serious mental or behavioral problems. Counseling centers also provide mental health outreach and prevention programs to departments and offices throughout the campus.

Eight SUS counseling centers are accredited by the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS), the accreditation association for over 200 university and college counseling centers worldwide. Regarding the level of counseling center staffing, IACS standards state that minimum staffing ratios should strive to be "in the range of one FTE professional staff member to every 1,000 to 1,500 students, depending on services offered and other campus mental health agencies." Currently, ten of the 12 SUS counseling centers (not New College and Florida Polytechnic) are operating above the IACS standard for minimum staffing of one professional staff member per 1,000 students, and eight of the 12 centers are operating above the high end of the range recommended by IACS of one staff member per 1,500 students.

Counseling Center Activity

In early 2015, the SUS Counseling Center Directors were surveyed to identify counseling center activity and trends in center professional staffing, student client visits, and reasons for visits. In the SUS, all counseling centers continue to strive to respond to the mental and behavioral health needs of their student clientele that is evidenced both by the increased demand for services and by the range of increasingly serious psychological problems that are being brought to the centers.

While the State University System has seen steady enrollment growth in recent years (13% increase since 2008), there have been significant increases in SUS counseling center activity during this period. System data for the 2013-14 academic year reveal the following:

- Number of student clients – 20,435 student clients, a 48% increase since the 2008-09 year, with eight universities over 1,000 clients.
- Number of student client sessions – 162,915 client sessions, a 67% increase since the 2008-09 year, with seven universities over 10,000 sessions.
- Top reasons for student visits – anxiety, depression, relationship issues, academic stress.

There has also been a significant increase in the severity of student problems as evidenced by an increase in emergency or crisis visits to the counseling centers. System data for 2013-14 reveal nearly 4,200 visits to SUS counseling centers classified as emergency or crisis visits. Top reasons cited for these emergency visits were severe depression, acute anxiety, and suicidal ideation. The

counseling centers have also recorded an alarming increase in Baker Act hospitalizations, with over 300 student hospitalizations in 2013-14.

Summary

State university police officers are responsible for a full range of public safety services, including the enforcement of criminal statutes, municipal ordinances, and university policies, criminal and motor vehicle accident investigations, traffic and parking enforcement, emergency management, the security of the university's physical assets, and the collection of data for required statistical crime reports. The SUS Police Chiefs report that both the volume and scope of campus security activity has increased in recent years and their police agencies have had to provide more security coverage and services with fewer resources. While the police staffing needs at each university are unique to that campus and each institution must evaluate its own needs and develop its own emergency plans, the SUS Chiefs report that there is an ongoing challenge of adequate funding to maintain standard levels of operation and to purchase needed equipment, supplies, training programs, and technology. There is a growing need for recurring funding mechanisms that will forestall the deterioration of services that would include emergency response times, officer training, and the required level of compliance for CFLA accreditation.

The SUS counseling centers are busy operations and their professional services are critical to a university's well-being and, more importantly, to student retention and success. The counseling centers continue to respond to significant increases in student visits and more of these students are exhibiting serious psychological problems. As a result of the increased demand for services and the complexity of problems that students are bringing to the centers, professional staff must provide immediate, short term assistance to attempt to respond to the increased workload and, as a result, have less time for outreach and preventive mental health programs for the campus community. There are now SUS counseling centers that must maintain wait lists for students to obtain appointments with professional staff.   In the new realities of a university campus community, it is increasingly critical that counseling center professionals be trained and well versed in the evaluation and treatment of serious mental and behavioral disorders, many of which are deep-seeded and chronic conditions for university students.

Universities have a proud history of openness, intellectual freedom, and public accessibility to their campus communities.   Although this openness enhances the teaching and learning environment, it also presents student safety and campus security challenges that must be addressed by law enforcement agencies and counseling centers that are well-staffed, well-trained, and adequately funded. Each state university recognizes that its reputation for academic quality and student success is dependent on its ability to provide a safe and secure environment for those learning, working, and living on its campus.