

## SAFE AND SOUND ON CAMPUS

*Expert advice about security at college*

By Betsy F. Woolf

I asked security expert Vincent Wincelowicz, Ph.D, an associate professor at Johnson & Wales University in Denver, to give me the low-down on what to ask about security and safety on campus. It's more than finding out whether the school has a safe ride program or blue light emergency call boxes.

*\* Do you have a security and safety plan? Is it published?*

Federal law requires campuses to have plans, but Wincelowicz says schools often are in different stages of compliance. It's important that the campus plan is "practiced" and reviewed at least annually.

*\* Is there an annual security orientation?*

"Students have to be oriented as to what the safety issues are," says Wincelowicz. "They need to know about safety improvements on campus, what to look out for and how to report incidents. The information...can be as simple as a card that each student carries – even in the back of the student ID card – that says, 'in case of emergency, do this...'"

*\* What is the proportion of students to administrators and staff?*

The more eyes on campus, the better at spotting problems. It's also important to create an atmosphere where the general welfare of the campus community is paramount.

*\* What is the system for notifying students about incidents on campus?*

It's not a good idea to rely on one mode of notification, like student cell phones, that may not work in particular areas of campus or may be left in dorm rooms. At least one school has considered using a siren system with specific sounds that signal danger and other sounds that signal "all clear."

*\* Is there a professional police or security force on campus? Is security visible?*

"Students can work alongside security," says Wincelowicz, "doing non-threatening things like checking the parking lot to make sure all cars have permits." It's important for students to feel comfortable about reporting unusual or suspicious behavior.

*\* Is there a professional who lives in the dorm who is attuned to residential life and monitors RAs (resident advisors)?*

This person is often the first line of defense for students.

*\* Are local police officers familiar with the campus so they can effectively maneuver when a crisis occurs?*

"Campus police should have a great relationship with local law enforcement," says Wincelowicz. "They need to have local police on campus so they know the facility, allowing them to respond appropriately if there is a crisis – and they need to practice that event." Wincelowicz recommends inviting local officers to campus activities so that students feel comfortable with officers as "insiders" willing to help, rather than "outsiders" who are only there for "problems."

*\* Are staff members encouraged to help with security?*

Administrators and educators should be able to refer people to appropriate services, even through the simple act of accompanying a student to the counseling office. Wincelowicz believes this makes a positive statement that says, "You are important enough for me to stop what I am doing to help you."

*\* How well is the campus lit?*

Wincelowicz recommends that you visit during the day and at night, around 10 PM. Most campuses conduct illumination surveys, but bulbs wear out. The campus community should know how to inform administrators about inadequate lighting.

*\* Is there an evacuation plan with a sheltering place where students and staff can go?*

Administrators should use plain speech in telling the community what to do in case of emergency. “The shooter knows where he is,” Wincelowicz says, “so it’s okay to announce over a public address system, ‘Shooter is at x point; don’t go near Building 103.’ This is not the time to be coy.”

*\* What is the response time in the event that something happens? Are staff members trained in what to do in the event of an emergency?*

In the case of a shooter, Wincelowicz recommends locking doors from the inside and covering windows with black cloth. This makes it more likely that a perpetrator will look elsewhere rather than try to knock down the barriers.

Classrooms should be equipped with instructions in case of emergency that are “clear, concise and simple,” says Wincelowicz, “in plain sight and checked periodically to ensure [they] are in place.” Rooms can be stocked with red and green cards that can be pushed under a door. Green means everyone is okay; red means someone is in need of medical attention. That way first responders know whom to take care of first.