

Woolf College Consulting



SAFE AND SOUND ON CAMPUS

Expert Advice about Security at College

Walk any campus on a college tour, and you will probably hear the tour guide talk about "the blue light system," highly visible emergency lights scattered around campus that also contain emergency telephones, and a Safe Ride program in which students can call security any time of day or night for a ride. Campus security is an important concern, whether the school is in a rural, suburban or urban location, but there are more questions to ask beyond finding out whether the school has a safe ride program or blue light emergency call boxes. Your tour guide may not have the information, but campus security should.

** Is there a security and safety plan? Is it published?*

Federal law requires campuses to have plans. It's important that the campus plan is "practiced" and reviewed at least annually.

** Is there an annual security orientation?*

Students need to know about safety improvements on campus, what to look out for and how to report incidents.

** 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?*

It's important for students to feel comfortable about reporting unusual or suspicious behavior, and they tend to feel more comfortable when they regularly see and even know the security personnel.

** 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?*

Hopefully, campus police have a good relationship with local law enforcement and that local police are familiar with the campus so they know the facility, allowing them to respond appropriately if there is a crisis – and they need to practice that event. Some experts recommend 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. Such actions make 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?*

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,” one security expert 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, one expert 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, 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.

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