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### Reevaluating Security at the University of Northern Iowa

On April 16, 2007 thirty-two innocent students and faculty members were shot dead on the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University by a deranged student who eventually turned the gun on himself. The spree killings took place between dormitories and academic buildings on the campus ([www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com)). In light of this recent tragedy, one aspect of college living has been brought to the forefront of every student's mind: campus security. Having grown up in small-town Iowa I know that I take my safety for granted and always believe that nothing could happen, at home or at school. The University of Northern Iowa comprises a relatively small community itself and I was inspired to evaluate how our own Department of Public Safety operates. The information I found concerning UNI's crime history and comparable situations at other universities lead me to believe that the University of Northern Iowa should take steps to improve the security of its campus.

First I will look at the measures UNI currently takes to insure the safety of all students within the residence halls. In most cases, crime prevention is the responsibility of each individual. The Department of Public Safety's website offers some common-sense guidelines to protect yourself in various situations you may find yourself in, including not propping locked doors open and keeping your dorm-room door locked most of the time (Annual Security Report).

In accordance with federal law, UNI has posted all reported crimes, which are available online, where I came across a frightening story from earlier this school year. On August 25, 2006 a female student, residing in Shull Hall, awoke in the night to an unknown man inside her room who was touching her body. She fled her room without further harm and saw no more sign of the stranger (Crime Alert). It was revealed that her room had been unlocked. But that doesn't explain how he had gotten inside the building in the middle of the night. Is the student to blame because she didn't lock her door or could this situation have been prevented beginning with the man's access to the building?

Of all the methods to control access to a building, the residence halls use a very traditional lock and key (only necessary between the hours of 9:00 PM and 7:00 AM). As for the four dormitories located in the Quad, there are multiple entrances to each building, none of which are monitored by camera or any other form of watch. What frequently happens to allow non-residents access to a building is piggy-backing, or waiting for someone who does have a key to that building who will let you in. There are no questions and no restrictions once inside a building.

There are a variety of ways to improve the control of access to a building. One possible method is by remote control of entry points. This consists of someone electronically controlling the locks, which remain locked until proper student identification is shown. Another way is by a card-key system, which can be utilized on a variety of secure levels. A card-key is essentially using what we have now for student identification cards with a magnetic strip as the key to either swipe or, with newer proximity card-keys, to pass by a mechanism to unlock the door. Both methods would lose some effectiveness if not adding some sort of central access entrance that can still be monitored. The proximity card-key method is used successfully at Yale University

and due to the closed-off nature of its Old Campus where the freshman residence halls are located, there has also been a decline in vandalism from outside sources (Powell).

It is easier to find a solution to residence hall access because of the smaller population of students who live there and need to concern themselves with access at all. When it comes to academic buildings, universities run into vulnerability issues because of the very nature of a university. A strategy to generate appeal to prospective students is by allowing them access to everything they can experience on campus, whether that is an academic classroom or a workout facility. A university promotes involvement with the surrounding community through guest lectures and fine art events. The University of Northern Iowa is also a state school, therefore it is owned by the people. All of these things create traffic through campus of unknown people in unknown numbers because ultimately this university is here for people, not just students, to enjoy and find use in it (Hoffman). There is no way to limit access to academic buildings exclusively to students because of the occurrence of meetings of a town-related event in the same building. There isn't a good way to track everyone who comes and goes through campus and that has led to tragedy in the past. On August 1, 1966 a gunman, Charles Whitman, went on a killing spree from the heights of the observation deck of the tower at University of Texas at Austin. This resulted in sixteen deaths and left thirty-one individuals wounded (List of Deadly Campus Shootings). That's not to say that every person you don't know on campus is a deranged homicidal maniac, the example is a rare case, but it does make a statement about the uncertainty of safety in an open campus setting.

An obvious risk, particularly for females, is walking unaccompanied at night around campus. Referring back to the Public Safety website there are tips about walking alone and safety services listed. Public Safety has an escort service if there is no one to walk with. This

could be provided by either a police officer or one of twenty UNI students hired to patrol at night. Should anything happen, if there is a threat of attack or if someone is stalking, there are ten emergency phone stations around campus (Annual Security Report). This is where I feel there are shortcomings in safety. If you are truly threatened, although the poles are lit, they may be too far away to be of any use, or after pushing the emergency call button it may not be suitable to remain by the post until help arrives. There should be more emergency phone stations installed around campus. I, myself, end up frequently walking alone at night when I am returning to my dorm from the library and I only pass one emergency phone station. There are dangers and risks when I pass by the parking lot and yet there is nothing to assist for quite some distance were anything to happen.

Aside from daily issues our campus security may face, I also wanted to understand how the police officers were prepared for in times of crisis. I discovered that there have been some limiting regulations concerning what campus police are able to carry on their person. The UNI Police Officers are fully trained and have the power of arresting people but do not carry lethal weapons. Police officers are allowed to carry a club, pepper spray, and only since 2002 are able to carry a taser weapon, also known as a stun gun. The club has obvious usage. The pepper spray is used to temporarily disable the attacker by forcing the eyes closed out of pain (Pepper Spray, Tear Gas, Mace and The Law). The taser is able to shoot electrodes up to twenty feet and thereby shock the attacker into a disabling position.

I believe the taser was a very suitable addition to the officer's belt because it is one step closer to disabling an attacker without the severity a situation can have when a gun is involved. UNI police officers are not allowed to use guns. No state university in Iowa includes guns in its typical Public Safety tools. All of the guns owned by Public Safety are locked up and would have

to be retrieved from storage, should a situation arise where a gun is needed for defense.

Essentially, if an officer would need a gun in a very desperate situation, he would not have one.

Officers should be able to carry concealed guns in their patrol cars so they may be able to be truly useful in a crisis. The thought of officers always carrying guns is daunting and there is a quote by Robert C. Nielsen which I feel captures the sentiment, “A firearm is no less dangerous in the hands of careless or poorly trained police officer than it is in the hands of a criminal” (Powell 93). The stakes become so much higher in a conflict when such a weapon is used. A fatal example of this was in May, 1970 when four students were killed and another nine wounded by National Guard troops who were there solely to settle anti-war protests at Kent State University. Ironically and tragically, of the students killed, two of them had innocently been walking to class and were in no way related to the protest. The troops felt threatened by the riots and overreacted without explanation by simply turning and firing back into the students (List of Deadly Campus Shootings). This is exactly the situation that makes anyone nervous about having small-time officers overreact with their own weapons.

Ultimately due to examples of past and recent history, the University of Northern Iowa needs to take measures to increase campus security and promote the individual safety of students on campus. Security needs to increase at entrance points to all residence halls, methods need to be developed to filter academic building access when possible, emergency features utilized at night need updated and expanded and the police officers need to be better prepared and equipped for crisis. Because we're never as safe as we think we are.

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