



**Local Response | National Support**

## **Helicopter Parents Circling Colleges with Security Concerns**

By Glenn R. Rosenberg, Vice President of Higher Education, AlliedBarton Security Services

Are you or someone you know a helicopter parent? A helicopter parent is a person who pays extremely close attention to his or her child or children, particularly while away at college. They rush to prevent any harm from befalling them or letting them learn from their own mistakes. They are so designated because, like a helicopter, they hover closely overhead, rarely out of reach whether their children need them or not. Helicopter parents who were already circling college admissions offices with tough questions about campus safety have been in overdrive since the tragedy at Virginia Tech. Does their child's college of choice exceed their safety expectations?

All parents, whether we classify them as "helicopter" or "pedestrian", have a right to be anxious about their children's safety while at college. What questions should parents ask to ensure that the college or university the family selects is doing all they can on the safety front? What are the potential red-flags they should watch for? I lead the Higher Education division of the country's premier contract security services company, and we count many of our country's finest universities and colleges as our clients. Campus safety is something that parents should not fear.

Parents and their children must understand the questions to ask about potential risks and take reasonable steps to eliminate opportunities to be victimized. While there is no zero risk alternative, precautions are healthy and determining the risk profile of a school will help you determine if you're comfortable or uncomfortable with the risk balance.



**Look up Campus Crime Statistics** - Security On Campus was formed in 1987 by Connie and Howard Clery in response to the death of their daughter Jeanne who was robbed, raped and murdered by a student she did not know while she was sleeping in her college dorm. The doors to her dorm, which should have been locked, were propped open by fellow students. Jeanne's parents were instrumental in championing the Clery Act, a Federal law that requires colleges and universities to disclose information about campus crime and security policies.

College and university campus crime data is available from two major sources, the U.S. Department of Education which under the Jeanne Clery Act collects statistics from more than 6,000 schools, and the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting program which includes data for about 400 schools. The most recent statistics from each government agency are available from Security on Campus's Website at: <http://www.securityoncampus.org/crimestats/index.html>

Under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, parents have the right to know the welfare of their son and daughter at college. FERPA allows information from a student's educational records, including notification on a myriad of issues including suicide attempts, depression,

underage drinking, etc. to be provided to parents of any tax dependent student. For more information, visit: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>

**Campus Safety Audit** - Security on Campus provides a comprehensive campus safety audit. Does the residence hall have a card key system, like those used in hotels, for exterior and interior residence hall doors? Are there security patrols in residence halls? Are these patrols conducted by police, professional security officers or students? Visit the site and download this helpful audit and use it as an active checklist to review a school's safety. <http://www.securityoncampus.org/students/audit.pdf>

**Background Checks** – If the college contracts with a security services company, ask if the contract security firm has the ability to engage in comprehensive background screening for employment history and criminal records, and drug tests. Find out if the admissions office requires background checks on matriculated students as well.

**Task Force** - Does the college or university have a campus security task force charged with developing training to help the school prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies? If the school has a contract security firm in place, are the security professionals leading the task force in concert with area police? Local law enforcement and first-responder agencies should participate in formulating the plans, which should be filed with the police department and reviewed annually and updated as needed. The guidelines should include protocols for intrusions, kidnapping and hostage situations. They should also provide strategies for communicating with students and staff, for responding to implied or direct threats, and for the safe evacuation of students and staff.

**Security Expertise** - While tragedy often brings out the best in people, it also brings out the worst. New security companies and consultants are popping up everywhere, many with no real world experience or expertise. Parents seeking to sort through the chaff need to ask probing questions of the admissions officials. See what the company's investment in the industry is specific to the issues encountered on a college campus (Clery Act, FERPA, alcohol abuse, etc.). Does the security company support higher education association thought leadership and do they have industry advisors who can anticipate and adjust security programs based on trends with the ability to leverage vendor relationships?

**Security Training** – It's vital that any security company engaged for campus security programs is committed to enhancing the technical skills and industry knowledge through comprehensive training programs tied to employment goals. The most important resource to any security services company is its people, and it is vital that they are continually engaged, comprehensively trained and provided with incentives to achieve and excel.

No matter which college is selected, campus crime prevention always starts with the individual student. Every student needs to be armed with the information necessary to make safer choices each and every day. Being aware of surroundings, using assertive body language, keeping doors locked and using the buddy system will help students feel safer and may deter an attacker.

When Baby Boomers signed up for college, many of our parents had nary a worry about our physical security on campus. Today's college students are fortunate to have vigilant parents who seek to do all they can to ensure that their children make the best choices possible.

### **Student Safety Tips for Residence Halls and at Home**

- Always lock your door, even if you intend to return shortly or are just going down the hall.
- Lock all doors and windows when you are sleeping or are alone.
- Do not allow strangers to enter the premises.
- If someone asks to use your phone for emergency purposes, offer to make the call for them instead of allowing them access to your residence and possessions.
- Keep emergency numbers by your phone.
- Do not put your address anywhere that a stranger can gain easy access, such as a key chain or hang tag.
- On campus, call public safety to report any suspicious activity. Off-campus, use the emergency number of the city or town. Immediately give the dispatcher your location and any pertinent information. If possible, stay on the line until help arrives or the dispatcher terminates the call.
- Utilize a bank account instead of keeping money in your room.
- Keep ATM cards in a safe place. Never reveal your PIN number to anyone.
- Never loan your ATM card to anyone, no matter who they are.
- When possible, use your ATM card during the day. If you must use the machine at night, go to an indoor or well-lit machine.

**About the author:** Glenn R. Rosenberg is Vice President of AlliedBarton Security Services Higher Education division. AlliedBarton Security Services is the industry's premier provider of highly trained security personnel to many industries including higher education, commercial real estate, healthcare, residential communities, chemical/petrochemical, government, manufacturing and distribution, financial institutions, and shopping centers. Rosenberg has worked in Higher Education for more than thirty years as a senior university administrator, management consultant and business developer. He can be reached at [glenn.rosenberg@alliedbarton.com](mailto:glenn.rosenberg@alliedbarton.com)