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Safety, security vital on university campuses

The *New Vision* last week published the University Guide. It was commendable, but in addition, a parent wishes to know which campus is the safest for his/her child.

Campus safety and security should be a vital consideration when parents and students are choosing post-secondary or higher education institutions given the new found freedom that the young adults find on campus as opposed to the tightly controlled secondary school environment. Higher education institutions are witnessing a spate of security and safety concerns. And yet campus law enforcement and safety agencies are often too small and ill-equipped compared with urban Police departments and yet they often deal with large active communities of students.

Although colleges and universities are perceived as sanctuaries of learning, they are not always safe places, particularly for female students. Studies by the Carnegie foundation for Higher

Education and other researchers on violence against women confirm that sexual harassment and dating violence are significant barriers to women's education achievements thus the need to implement measures that deter the would-be perpetrators.

Ernest Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation, envisioned the university campus as a community of learners where civility is affirmed, diversity is pursued, group obligations guide behaviour, individuals are supported, service is encouraged and traditions are celebrated and shared.

The changing face of insecurity and violence on universities around the world is being facilitated by technology developments. Unfortunately, much of the current literature concerning campus violence is from developed countries and focuses on the elementary and high school levels thus campus safety officials often have to rely on data and research related to a younger age demographic, operating in less diverse physical environments compared to university campuses.



Threats on campus come from many different sources, that is, the large university populations, sophisticated research facilities, students' failure to cope with academic pressure, relationship challenges, economic constraints, peer pressure, high political involvement, presence of high profile people, troubled students and academics, expulsion of students, if deemed unfair, traditional crime, high profile and large scale events held on university campuses, which draw large crowds from the campus and neighbourhood communities along

with the increased media attention. University campuses are vulnerable to various crimes that undermine the safety and security of those who live and work on these campuses. Recent shootings in schools and university campuses in the USA have raised concerns that the measures in place may be insufficient to ensure safety and security of the campuses. Thus the need for all university administrators to rethink their strategies for ensuring safety and security on campuses.

Since the passage of the Clery Act in 1990, colleges and universities in the United States of America (USA) have been required to provide annual statistics on campus crimes that occur in residence halls, non-campus buildings and facilities owned independently but used primarily by campus faculty, staff and students or for the institutional purposes and in nearby public property.

The aftermath of the April 2007 shooting at Virginia Polytechnic and State University (Virginia Tech) renewed attention on how colleges and

universities deal with campus safety and security issues.

Beyond traditional measures to protect students, employees and property, safety and security efforts undertaken by higher education institutions must address the possibility of terrorist and threats of physical violence against campus students, research facilities, individual academic staff and administrators.

Furthermore, other threats such as natural disasters and cyber incidents and crimes should be considered. Given the unique circumstances that international students face, measures to ensure their safety and security ought to be customised. Analysing previous campus incidents is necessary for understanding the ulterior motives of the offenders. Campus administrators must take the lead to fight crime on university campuses.

Read the full version on www.newvision.co.ug

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