

Vandals

Damage costs reflected in tuition and fee hikes

(CPS) — Students blame it on outsiders who sneak through lax dorm security systems. University administrators blame it on mischievous students who may have had too much to drink. But regardless of who is responsible for increasing vandalism and theft on the nation's campuses, the bill goes to all students in the form of higher tuition and fees.

Campuses are easy marks for "transients," who are often indistinguishable from the students, many campus security guards agree. "We look like hors d'oeuvres on a tray to the criminal element, especially under today's economic condition," explained Jack Brick, director of public safety at California State University, Long Beach.

One problem is that many students are lulled into a false sense of security while they are on campus. Students, especially freshmen away from home for the first time, may feel too secure in their dorm rooms, said a member of the Kent State University police. At home you wouldn't lock your door if you went to a room down the hall. Here it isn't a bad idea to lock everything up.

But bolts and locks and stricter security at dorm entrances won't protect students against a bigger problem than dorm thefts — student vandalism. Last year 44 students at the University of West Virginia went on a two-day vandalism spree which resulted in \$48,000 worth of damages to University-owned dormitories. The students ripped out toilet and sink fixtures, burned furniture and tore drinking fountains apart.

The administration at West Virginia later released a statement to students that property damages resulting from student vandalism would be "reflected in higher tuition."

Broken windows and furniture have also become a headache for administrators at Western Illinois University where cases of vandalism have increased significantly over the past couple of years. Randy Lingle, director of the office of public safety, said more students are reporting such incidents, which accounts for part of the increase. But an increase in the number of people drinking may also be the cause, he added.

Students will eventually pay for damages with an increase in fees, Lingle continued. This is a time when replacements of equipment and facilities are becoming increasingly expensive.

Vandalism is a major problem at East Carolina University where administrators agree that the overall cost is eventually paid by the entire student body. Fees for living in the dorms there have risen by some 46 per cent since last year, partially due to carelessness and vandalism.

Administrators are baffled by the problem of catching vandals in the act or prosecuting them later. "Students are reluctant to 'rat' on one another," the director of housing at East Carolina University said. "I wish individuals would understand it is not the administration, but the students who suffer when vandals go uncaught."

The housing director at the University of South Carolina agrees that students are the key to preventing theft and vandalism in dorms. Last year a security system was set up in two dorms at South Carolina to keep outsiders out, but apparently dorm residents felt the new locks kept insiders out as well. Of the 21 locks installed, 20 were damaged a few weeks later. "You can't protect students if they don't want to be protected," he complained.

Vandalism at King's College in Wilkes Barre, Penn. has affected smoke detectors and exit signs in the dormitories. The college business manager warned students there that because of inflation, repair costs have increased and because the college can only afford a certain amount, the remainder must be borne by students. The entire dormitory population will ultimately pay for repairs, he explained.

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