

College presidents claim campus crime is on the rise

Administrators disagree about the effect it may have on enrollment

(CPS) — Students on dozens of campuses during the past school year surprised many observers by trying to make public what had been a dirty little secret: There's a lot of crime on campuses.

Now at least one administrator has said that crime fears may be keeping students from enrolling at certain high-crime colleges.

Fear about crime on and around campus is partly to blame for a drop in the number of students applying, Robert Lowndes, provost at Northeastern University, told a faculty meeting recently.

Lowndes shocked the school by connecting crimes at the Boston campus, where three students died in crime-related incidents during the past year, and an anticipated 19 percent drop in the number of freshmen due to enroll at the school next fall.

If public awareness of campus crimes does keep students away, other schools may also be in trouble.

On June 5, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill to require schools to publish their crime rates, in addition to other statistics such as graduation rates.

Anxious about what such numbers would do to their images, many colleges have been reluctant to make them public. Last year, only 352 of the nation's 3,200—plus two—and four-year colleges assembled crime reports for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which tries to track college crime.

Students at Morgan State and Tennessee State universities, at Paine College in Georgia and Marygrove College in Detroit and at the University of South Carolina staged separate demonstrations during the 1989-90 school year, calling for better campus security.

At an October 1989 University of Iowa conference of Big

Ten student leaders, "campus safety" was cited as students' most pressing concern behind tuition costs and AIDS awareness.

And while administrators at many campuses deny crime is a problem, 43 percent of the country's college presidents believed criminal activity had increased at the schools during the past five years, according to an April poll by the Carnegie Foundation and the American Council on Education.

Northeastern, however, quickly disavowed Lowndes' view of crime's impact on students.

Officials attributed the enrollment decline to other factors.

"The number of 18-year-olds is declining precipitously," said Northeastern spokesman Charles Coffin. "Nationally, the figure is a 4 percent decline over the next four years, but in New England, the figure is more like 20 percent."

"Also," he added, "New England's economy is in a downturn, and that's always had a direct effect on us." He also pointed out that deposits from the Massachusetts area are up compared to deposits from the rest of the country.

Other admissions officers downplayed the effects campus crimes might have on students' decisions about where they attend college.

"To allay those (fears), we have them visit the campus," said Christine Nowacki, admissions director of the University of Illinois at Chicago, which is located on the edge of a high-crime area.

"This is a very safe campus," she said. "We haven't had a serious crime in years."

Mary Gorman at New York University's admissions office says students do not ask about campus safety, and parents are not that concerned, either. "I think one parent has asked

about safety," she said.

Prospective students ask more questions about safety at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., "because they read in the papers that Washington is the murder capital of the United States," said Kitty James in the university's admissions office. "We usually respond by talking about campus security, and parents ask more questions than students do."

Some wish they had asked more.

Lehigh University recently paid a \$2 million out-of-court settlement to the parents of a student who was murdered in her dorm room in 1985. The parents, Howard and Connie Cleary, claimed that because of the school's negligence in not publishing crime statistics, no one knew such a crime was likely or even possible at the campus.

"A few parents have expressed concern about a few

campuses," said Verda Shappell, a college counselor at Thomas Jefferson High School in Los Angeles. "But it seems to be more a fear of the unknown rather than any particular location."

"I don't think we've seen anything to indicate (a concern about safety on urban campuses)," said Gerry Heffernane in the guidance office at Brookline High School in Boston. "It doesn't seem that students are shying away from urban colleges."

Heffernane pointed out that Brookline High is right down the street from Northeastern adding, "We've had a great many students apply to Northeastern. Students don't seem to be bothered by the incidents there."

Students themselves, however, may not know enough to be frightened before they enroll at a campus, some observers maintained.

"Students often have a false

sense of security on college and university campuses," said Rep. Bill Goolding (R-Penn.), who introduced the Crime Awareness and Security Act that became part of the campus disclosure act on the U.S. House passed in early June.

Amy Bell, a University of Wyoming student, agrees.

"Crime (on campus) happens more often than students know," she said. "If they knew more, they would be a lot more careful."

Adria Frederick, junior at the University of Kentucky, said campus safety is not a concern to her or her fellow students.

"I don't think they make that big an issue out of it," she said.

"I think that if safety were a real concern," said Georgetown's James, "they wouldn't apply in the first place. People who are looking at school in cities realize that they need to take precautions."

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