



Students Feel Less Safe on Campus

A Recent Spate of Killings Has College Students Worried About Safety

By **RUSSELL GOLDMAN**

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Fear has permeated the ivy covered walls of America's seemingly serene campuses, following a recent string of campus shootings and the seemingly random murders of two college students this week.

Reported crime on college campuses has increased in recent years and despite improved security measures since last April's massacre at Virginia Tech, students and experts say the illusion of colleges being safe havens is eroding.

"College campuses are not oases where students are protected from all harm," said Jonathan Kassa, executive director of Security on Campus, a college security watchdog group. "Wonderful as campuses feel, students need to be aware of their surroundings and schools need to implement better procedures."

There were about 42,000 burglaries, 3,700 forcible sex offenses, 7,000 aggravated assaults and 48 murders reported on college campuses in 2003, the most recent year for which data are available, according to U.S. Department of Education statistics. But in the past few weeks there has been a marked increase in fear among students, Kassa said.

"Over the past few months, it has been overwhelming how unsafe students say they feel," he said. "Parents and students feel they don't have much control in keeping themselves safe or protecting themselves from these tragic, senseless crimes."

In the past month, headlines around the country have reported instances of campuses being locked down as a result of real or perceived threats, an indication that school officials may be feeling the same concerns as students.

Kassa said it was too early to tell if there was an increase in crime on campuses, but that there was certainly an increase in crimes being reported.

This week, two young women were killed in seemingly random attacks near their universities.

Tuesday, police found Lauren Burk, an 18-year-old freshman at Auburn University in Alabama, alone at 9 p.m. on the side of the highway near campus, with a gunshot wound.

Burk was last seen by friends two hours earlier and died later that night at the hospital. Police found her black Honda Civic engulfed in flames in the parking lot of a school dormitory nearby.

On Friday, police arrested Courtney Lockhart in Phenix City, about 30 miles from the campus, and charged him with three capital counts accusing him of murder along with kidnapping, robbery and attempted rape. Police did not say, however, what led them to charge the 23-year-old in the killings.

At 5 a.m. Wednesday, police in North Carolina found Eve Carson, 22, dead in the street near campus,

having been shot several times, including in the head.

Neighbors had heard shots and called 911. The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill student body president was last seen at 1:30 that morning, and her blue Toyota Highlander was found parked a few miles away Thursday.

On Saturday, police released two surveillance photos of a man using Carson's bank card at a drive-up ATM machine in Chapel Hill, and asked the public for help finding the man, who they called a suspect in the case.

"For a university that touts its exceptional security rating, students are feeling a little bit numb right now and they're afraid," said David Ingram, 21, a senior at Auburn University and editor of the school newspaper, *The Auburn Plainsman*.

"People didn't see this coming, and there are, all of a sudden, a lot of questions people want answered. Why don't we have security cameras in parking lots and in all of the residence halls? There are poles with emergency call boxes so when you press a button the police come, but no one knows if it will take them 15 seconds or 15 minutes," Ingram said.

Ingram said Auburn had a voluntary emergency warning system that was first used one month ago after the university's pharmacy school was threatened by an applicant who was denied admission. The building, which sits in the middle of campus, was locked down but the rest of the campus was not.

"The university sent out an alert and locked down the school," Ingram said. "But if something was going to happen, closing one building doesn't quarantine the problem."

An increase in school lockdowns may reflect fears on the part of law enforcement similar to those among students.

Since the Feb. 14 shooting at Northern Illinois University that left six people dead, including gunman Steven Kazmierczak, 27, several colleges across the country have gone on lockdown.

Friday, students at the University of Tennessee at Martin were told to stay inside with their doors locked as police searched for a robbery suspect. March 5, a student at Appalachian State University was charged with filing a false report after he caused a campus lockdown by telling police a masked gunman had broken into his apartment.

March 3, a man suspected of carrying a gun on Middle Georgia College's campus was taken into custody and the school locked down.

Officials at the University of Kansas recently banned a campuswide game of "Assassins," an elaborate game of tag requiring toy guns because of safety concerns.

"It might appear that schools are getting too jittery, but it is always better to be safe than sorry," said Kassa of Security on Campus. "I don't want to second guess the decision of officials."

Kassa said many schools had implemented new systems to alert students of danger on campus, but students had to take responsibility themselves.

"When you go to go college, you're no longer living at home," he said. "Colleges and universities need to make sure students have a plan, that they are trained and they are practiced to make sure they do everything to keep themselves safe."

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