



# Staying Safe on Campus

A Guide for Families

*Presented by:*





Photo credit: Princeton University by Geoff Livingston

## WHAT IS CAMPUS SAFETY?

Sending your child to college is both exciting and nerve-wracking. You probably feel a mix of emotions, and this might include fear about them being away from home for the first time. Luckily, while they may be “on their own”, they’re definitely not alone. There are many people and resources on college and university campuses dedicated to keeping your student safe. This guide provides a comprehensive overview of campus safety, including: [how to stay informed](#), [common concerns](#), [where to find statistics specific to your campus](#), [laws affecting campus safety](#), [safety tips for students](#), [questions to ask](#), [where to seek support](#), and [additional resources](#).

### Staying Informed

By engaging in open communication, you can promote a safe and secure college experience for your child. While it is important to stay connected to your child, encourage their independence and allow them to build skills to navigate day-to-day safety matters responsibly. Ways you can effectively engage include:

- Attend orientation sessions
- Read your child's institution's [annual security report](#)
- [Talk to your child about their safety concerns](#)
- Connect with other parents and families
- Sign up for alerts and notifications from your child's institution and its local municipality
- Obtain contact information for key resources

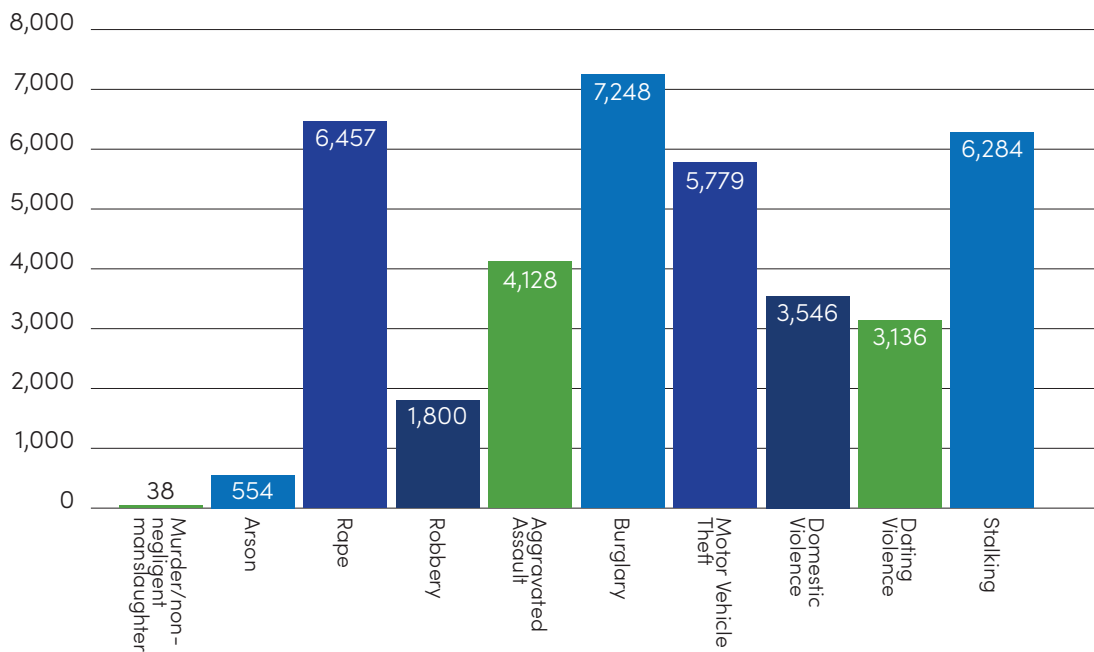
*82% of college students are concerned about their personal safety and 97% consider their personal safety while on campus, yet only 70% have talked to their family about ways to be safe while attending school.*

—  
[2021 Campus Safety Survey](#)  
by ADT and Clery Center

# COMMON CONCERNS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

In recent years, concerns regarding safety on college campuses have evolved. Contrary to popular belief, most criminal offenses on college campuses have been steadily decreasing over the past two decades and align closely with general crime statistics. While this evolution sheds light on the strides made in campus safety, it also emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of the statistical landscape. Furthermore, not all safety issues are criminal; in fact, accidents are the leading cause of death for college students. As the overview below will highlight, there are critical safety issues, including sexual assault, mental health, hate crimes, and hazing, that continue to have a significant impact on college campuses but are often underreported and overlooked.

REPORTED CRIMINAL OFFENSES BY TYPE OF CRIME (2021)<sup>1</sup>



## GUN VIOLENCE

[Everytown for Gun Safety](#) documented 323 instances of gunfire on college campuses, occurring in 42 states and Washington, D.C., from 2013–2023. These incidents include individual attacks, unintentional gunfire, legal interventions, self-harm, and other instances. [Since 1966, there have been 13 shootings at colleges where more than three people were killed.](#)

## HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

Harassment is any unwanted behavior, comments, or actions that create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment for an individual or group based on factors such as race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Examples include offensive or derogatory jokes, racial or ethnic slurs, pressure for dates or sexual favors, unwelcome comments about a person's religion or religious garments, or offensive graffiti, cartoons or pictures.

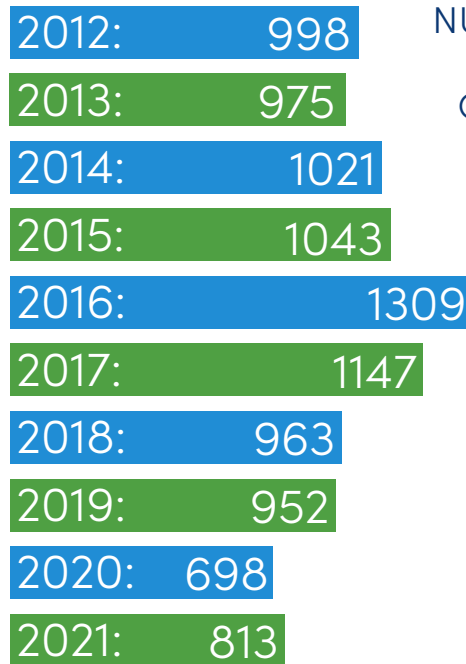
Discrimination involves treating someone unfairly or unfavorably due to characteristics such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation. [Nearly 1 in 3 \(31%\) of students have felt discriminated against on their campus.](#)

## HATE CRIMES

A hate crime is defined as a criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity.

Nationally, hate crimes increased nearly 12% in 2021 from the previous year, [according to data from the FBI.](#)

Learn more with our free resource, [Explaining Hate Crimes Under the Clery Act.](#)

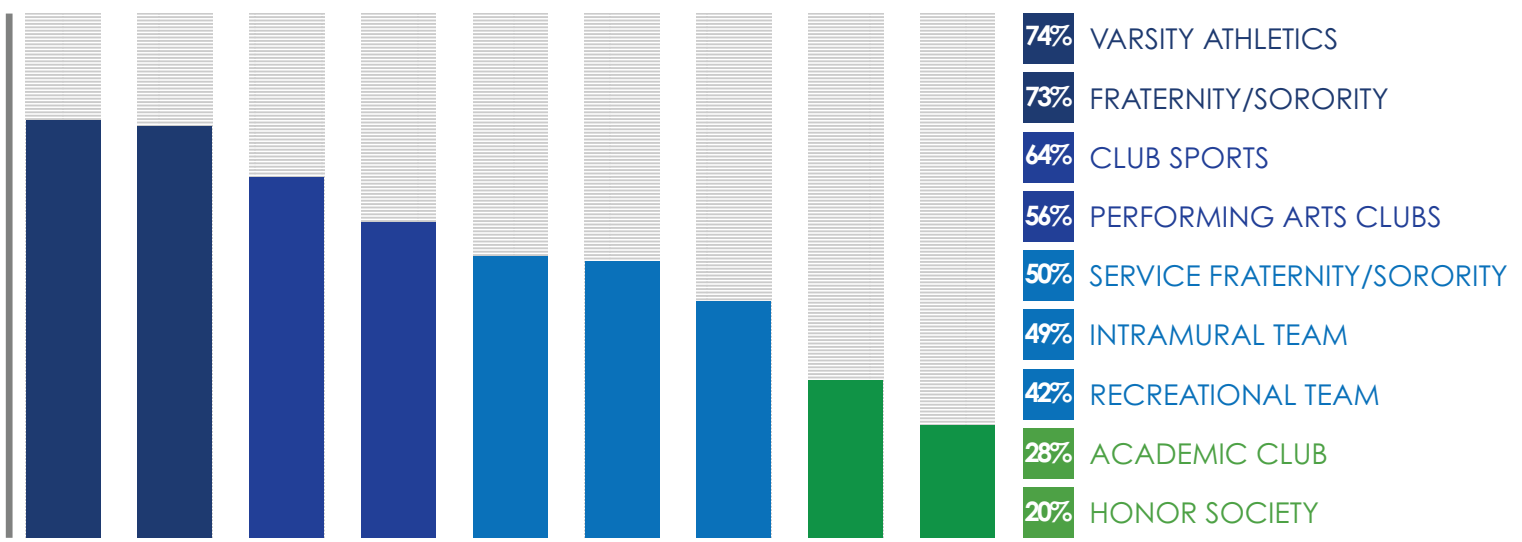


NUMBER OF REPORTED HATE CRIMES ON CAMPUSES 2012 –2021<sup>1</sup>

## HAZING

Hazing is any activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers them, regardless of a person’s willingness to participate. Hazing behaviors exist on a continuum and can include isolation, sleep deprivation, alcohol consumption, and sexual assault. As of the publication of this guide, 44 states have anti-hazing laws, the strength and breadth of which vary greatly. While there is currently no federal law that requires the tracking of hazing statistics, research indicates that **55% of college students involved in clubs, teams, and organizations experience hazing.** [Learn more about hazing on our website.](#)

### PERCENT OF STUDENTS THAT EXPERIENCE HAZING BY GROUP



Allan & Madden 2008. Chart from [We Don't Haze Companion Guide \(2022\).](#)



## MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health challenges are a significant problem among college students. In a 2019 national survey, three out of five college students reported “overwhelming anxiety” in the past year, and two out of five “felt so depressed that it was difficult to function.”

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students. [Approximately 1,100 students die from suicide each year.](#)

[Over 60% of college students meet the criteria for at least one mental health disorder, which is a nearly 50% increase since 2013.](#) Among college students, [29.1% have been diagnosed with anxiety and 23.6% have been diagnosed with depression.](#)

## PROPERTY CRIMES

These include offenses such as burglary, robbery, and motor vehicle theft. Property crimes are among the most frequently reported types of crime on college campuses. **In 2021 there was a total of 14,827 reported incidents of burglary, robbery, and motor vehicle theft.**<sup>1</sup>

## SUBSTANCE USE

While recent studies show that college students today are drinking significantly less than previous generations, alcohol and other drug use still remains a safety concern. About 27.4% of college students engage in binge drinking.<sup>2</sup>

The consequences of harmful and underage drinking affect students whether they drink or not. Researchers estimate that each year:

- **1,519 college students die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including motor vehicle crashes.**<sup>2</sup>
- **696,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking.**<sup>2</sup>

Marijuana and hallucinogen use reported by young adults 19 to 30 years old increased significantly in 2021, reaching historic highs in this age group since 1988, according to the [Monitoring the Future \(MTF\) panel study.](#)

<sup>1</sup>Collected from the U.S. Department of Education’s [Campus Safety and Security Data Analysis Cutting Tool.](#) See “[Where Can I Find Crime Statistics for an Institution?](#)” on the following page for more information about this tool.

<sup>2</sup>[2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#)

# INTERPERSONAL CRIMES

## DATING VIOLENCE

Dating violence, also known as interpersonal violence (IPV) or domestic violence, is defined as an act or a pattern of abuse committed by a person involved in a social, sexual or romantic relationship, past or present, with the victim. Relationship violence can encompass a broad range of behaviors that may include physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence and economic violence. **10.1% of all undergraduate students report experiencing IPV**, with rates of 14.1% of women and 21.5% of transgender, genderqueer, nonbinary, or otherwise gender nonconforming students reporting.<sup>1</sup> [Learn more about IPV from One Love.](#)

## SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault includes a range of behaviors and refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Sexual assault (including but not limited to rape) is defined as:

- Any physical sexual contact that involves the use or threat of force or violence or any other form of coercion or intimidation;
- Any physical sexual contact with a person who is unable to consent due to incapacity or impairment, mental or physical. This includes, but is not limited to, being incapacitated by use of alcohol or drugs, or being too young to consent.

Among all undergraduate students, 26% of women, 23% of college students who identified as transgender, genderqueer, nonbinary, or otherwise gender nonconforming, and 7% of men experienced non-consensual sexual contact. In other words, **over 750,000 full-time undergraduate women will be sexually assaulted in one year.**<sup>1</sup> [Learn more about sexual assault from RAINN.](#)

### The Red Zone

College students, and especially freshman, are more likely to be sexually assaulted between late August and Thanksgiving break – the “Red Zone”. [Learn more from the ‘me too’ Movement.](#)

*While 74% of students said they trust their institution to provide a supportive response if they experience a harmful or dangerous situation, they also reported that they are most likely to call family or a friend if they feel unsafe.*

—  
[2021 Campus Safety Survey](#) by ADT and Clery Center

## STALKING & CYBERSTALKING

Stalking means engaging in a course of conduct directed at specific person(s) that would cause a reasonable person to (a) fear for their safety or the safety of others, or (b) suffer substantial emotional distress.

Examples of stalking behaviors can include:

- following or spying on someone
- repeatedly making unwanted contact via email, phone, text messages, social media, letters, etc.
- threatening someone or their friends & family
- leaving unwanted gifts or items
- destroying someone's property

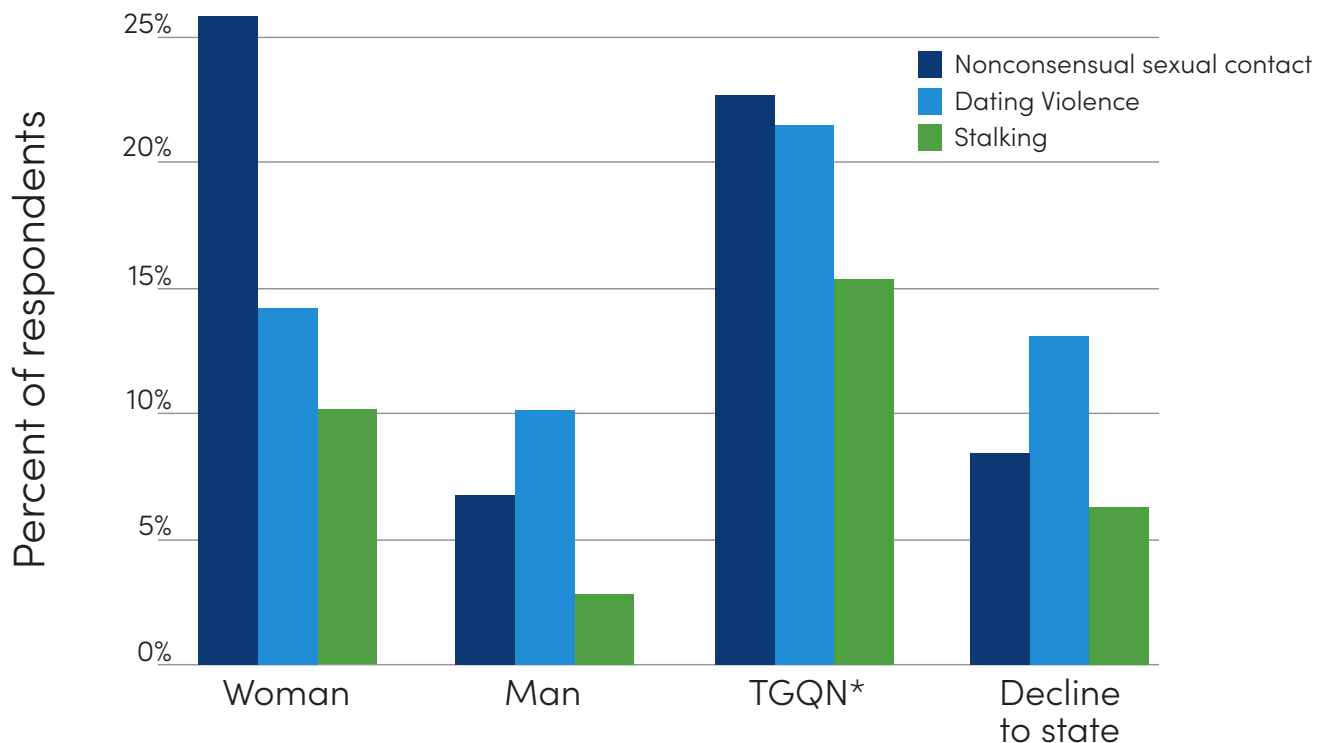
Cyberstalking perpetrators use technology, including photos, videos, social media, and dating apps, as a means to engage in harassing, unsolicited, or non-consensual sexual interactions.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, stalking incidents were on an upward trend on college campuses and we are seeing that rise occur again after the drop in 2020. According to AAU, **5.8% of students experienced stalking, including 15.2% of TGQN and 10% women undergraduate students.**<sup>1</sup> [Learn more about stalking & cyberstalking from RAINN.](#)

<sup>1</sup>[AAU Campus Climate Survey \(2019\)](#)

<sup>2</sup>[National Study of Student Hazing \(2008\)](#)

### PERCENT OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS REPORTING NONCONSENSUAL SEXUAL CONTACT, DATING VIOLENCE, AND STALKING<sup>1</sup>



\*transgender, genderqueer, nonbinary, or otherwise gender nonconforming

## Where Can I Find Crime Statistics for an Institution?

The [Clery Act](#) requires colleges and universities that receive federal funding to disseminate a public annual security report (ASR) to employees and students every October 1. Most institutions make it available through their website. This ASR must include statistics of campus crime for the preceding three calendar years, plus details about efforts taken to improve campus safety. The crime statistics collected from ASRs can also be found on the [Department of Education's Campus Safety and Security Data Analysis Cutting Tool](#), which provides detailed information about crime statistics and includes options to see data for a single school, compare schools, or view trend data.

## A Note About Crime Statistics

Remember that crime statistics alone do not give a complete picture of campus safety. When an institution reports higher crime statistics year-to-year, or more than another institution, it is not necessarily indicative of higher rates of crime. Higher reporting rates often indicate that a school has established efficient and accessible reporting systems and that students are encouraged to report and seek support. Additionally, interpersonal crimes are historically under-reported by those that experience them because of systemic barriers and fear of negative consequences, resulting in them being underrepresented in statistics.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**CSS** Campus Safety and Security

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# The tools you need for Campus Safety and Security analysis

- Get Data for One School**  
Search for a school to view general information and the past three years of safety- and security-related statistical data for the entire school or by campus.
- Compare Data for Multiple Schools**  
Select up to four schools to see a side-by-side comparison of aggregated data for the most recent year, along with an option to view the number per 1000 students.
- Download Custom Data**  
Select the safety- and security-related statistical data you are interested in for one or more years and download data for a customized group of schools.
- Generate Trend Data**  
Select a subject area and a question that you are interested in, and then see the answer for a selected year, build a table, and see a graph that shows the trend over time. You can customize your results by various institutional characteristics such as public or private, 2-year or 4-year, or state.
- Download Data**  
Download the complete data file for all institutions from a single data collection. Files will include all data submitted by all institutions in the

The U.S. Department of Education's Campus Safety and Security Data Analysis Cutting Tool



# SAFETY TIPS FOR STUDENTS

This is not an exhaustive list of tips, but some important steps students can take to feel safer and minimize their risk.

1. Become familiar with the campus community and the surrounding area.
2. Lock your door and secure any personal items, even for short periods of time (e.g. using the restroom in the library).
3. Save emergency contacts and resources in your phone.
4. Carry your ID & medical insurance card.
5. Sign up for your school's emergency notifications and safety app, if they have one.
6. Have a plan when going out, including knowing where you're going, how you'll get there and back home again, and sharing your plans and location with a trusted friend or family member.
7. Utilize campus security escorts and ride services that are provided by the institution.
8. Proactively connect with campus resources and seek support for your mental and emotional health.
9. Avoid groups or organizations with a reputation for harmful and high-risk behaviors like hazing and binge drinking.
10. Attend prevention and awareness program to learn warning signs of dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking and to build skills as an active bystander.

It's important to note that following these tips does not guarantee safety and if a student is assaulted or harmed, it's not their fault. [Learn more about how to avoid victim blaming from One Love.](#)

*Only 17% of college students utilize campus security escorts, and only 13% of college students participate in campus prevention programs to feel safer.*

—  
[2021 Campus Safety Survey](#) by ADT and Clery Center

## Transportation Safety

One of the leading causes of death on college campuses is vehicular accidents, and rideshare safety is also of concern. Uber received 3,824 reports of sexual assault in 2019 and 2020 and Lyft disclosed 4,158 reports of sexual assault from 2017 to 2019. Students can follow these tips to stay safe while using transportation on campus:

- Use campus transportation services, such as shuttles or buses, especially if you're traveling at night or to remote areas of campus.
- Use rideshare app safety features such as verifying your driver's identity and vehicle details, sharing your location, and scheduling a destination arrival check-in.
- Stick together with a group of trusted friends, whether walking, using public transportation, or a rideshare app; there's safety in numbers.



## Questions To Ask

Use this list of questions as a foundation for discussions with college administrators to gain a clear understanding of the safety measures in place and the level of commitment to safety:

1. Who is responsible for security and safety on campus, and how do they interact with students?
2. How are emergencies and safety incidents communicated to students and families?
3. How does the institution address reports of harassment, assault, or discrimination?
4. What are the safety procedures for residence halls, including access control and visitor policies?
5. How does the institution address mental health issues and provide support to students in need?
6. Are there campus safety escorts or transportation options available for students?
7. Who should I contact if I am concerned about my student's safety or well-being?
8. Is there a campus safety hotline or anonymous reporting system?
9. Where is the closest hospital? Does it have a level 1 trauma center?
10. What rights do I have to information about my child's safety and well-being? Under what circumstances would I be notified?

## Where To Seek Support

It's important for students to familiarize themselves with their institution's specific resources and reporting procedures. Colleges often provide information about reporting procedures in their student handbooks and on their websites. Each school is unique in the structure and breadth of resources, but the below departments are commonly available for support:

**Campus Safety/Police Department:** The campus police or safety department is a primary point of contact for all safety-related concerns. They can provide information about reporting to law enforcement, safety procedures, emergency response protocols, and crime prevention tips.

**Student Conduct/Community Standards:** This office is responsible for responding to reports of violations of the institution's code of conduct and overseeing the disciplinary process. The student code of conduct includes policies related to academic integrity and behavioral expectations.

**Counseling Center/Mental Health Services:** The counseling center or mental health services on campus can offer support and guidance for students dealing with safety-related stress or emotional challenges.

**Title IX Coordinator:** The Title IX coordinator is responsible for addressing institution-wide response to gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic violence. They coordinate the investigation process and ensure compliance with federal Title IX regulations.

**Student Affairs/Student Support Services:** Student support services and their structure will differ across institutions. These services range from support for students with disabilities to the operations of multicultural student centers to crisis intervention and response. They will often be housed within the Dean of Students office or the University Life department.

**Campus Ombudsperson:** Many colleges have an ombudsperson who can provide confidential, impartial assistance in resolving conflicts and addressing concerns, including those related to incidents or disputes.

## Support & Confidentiality

Students should be aware of individuals on campus who have an obligation to report alleged crimes. Health services providers and professional counselors are typically exempt from reporting due to confidentiality laws, however it is important to check with the institution about their reporting policies.

# CAMPUS SAFETY LAWS

## Clery Act

The [Clery Act](#) is a consumer protection law that aims to provide transparency around campus crime policy and statistics. It requires colleges and universities to:

- Record campus crimes and fires in daily logs;
- Publicize crime and fire logs in an annual security report;
- Issue timely warnings and emergency notifications when there are known risks to public safety on campus;
- Disclose campus safety and crime prevention policies and procedures;
- Conduct prompt, fair, and impartial disciplinary proceedings for sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking cases;
- Give written explanations to victims of sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking of their rights and options;
- Identify Campus Security Authorities (CSAs), individuals designated to receive and report information about certain crimes; and
- Offer prevention and awareness programs on dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking to new and current students and employees on an introductory and ongoing basis.

### What are timely warnings & emergency notifications?

When a crime occurs and is reported, campus officials are required to evaluate if there is a serious or ongoing threat to the campus community to determine if a **timely warning** needs to be issued to all staff and students.

In the event of an immediate, significant danger to the health or safety campus community (e.g. weather, disease outbreak), campus officials must issue an **emergency notification**. This notification can include the entire campus, or be limited to a specific area deemed to be at risk.

## Title IX

[Title IX](#) is a federal law that has removed many barriers that once prevented people, on the basis of sex, from participating in educational opportunities and careers of their choice.

Many people think of Title IX in connection to athletics, but the law applies to students participating in any program or activity on a campus, including clubs and classes. It has important implications for gender-based violence policies and procedures on campus.

## Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) is a 1974 federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. In simple terms, FERPA gives students, or their parents if the student is a minor, the right to control who has access to their educational information.

## Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (DFSCA)

The [Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act](#) requires colleges and universities that receive federal funding to establish and report on drug and alcohol abuse prevention programs for students and employees. Specifically, these institutions must implement initiatives “to prevent the unlawful possession, use, or distribution of illicit drugs and alcohol by students and employees,” both on the institution’s premises and as part of any of its off-campus activities.

## MORE INFORMATION

This guide was developed with input from Clery Center's [National Advisory Council](#), a group of experienced campus-based professionals from institutions of higher education across the country. It is sponsored by [Grad Guard](#), enabling us to provide it at no cost.

### About Clery Center

Founded by Connie and Howard Clery after the rape and murder of their daughter, Jeanne, in her college dormitory, Clery Center was the first nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention of criminal violence at colleges and universities nationwide and continues to be the national leader today. With over 35 years of experience, Clery Center empowers institutions to create safer campuses via in-depth training, resources, and strategies to understand and implement the Clery Act.

Support more free resources like this and education for students and families. Please consider making a donation at [clerycenter.org/donate](https://clerycenter.org/donate). Thank you!

Visit our website to learn more about:

- [The Clery Act](#)
- [Hazing Prevention & Education](#)
- [Dating Violence Prevention](#)
- [Resources for Students & Families](#)

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