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# KEEPING OUTDOOR SPACES SAFE

WITH LAYERS OF SECURITY

by David Vinson

Not only do college campuses span hundreds or even thousands of acres, but the variety of spaces contained by each—those ranging from parking lots to nature trails—require careful consideration in terms of outdoor security. After all, many of the standard indoor security solutions such as locks, access control, and intrusion alarms have considerably less impact outdoors.

The development of security strategies is informed by certain key differences in the objectives of indoor versus outdoor security. Indoor security is primarily oriented around the protection of assets (for instance, the materials inside a research lab) whereas outdoor security is centered around the protection of people. The most pressing challenge of outdoor security is that most university campuses are porous. Compare this to K-12 campuses, which offer minimal public entry points and therefore can be fenced. University campuses typically contain multiple entry points, and this is very much intentional, so as to welcome the public to entertainment and sporting events, or to serve the public with campus-based health clinics.





Of course, students are entitled to their security as they walk from the library to the dorm late at night, or as they embark on the long walk to a remote parking lot—but this can hardly be managed by campus patrol alone. Fortunately, there are proven security solutions that aid in the protection of all campus occupants—students, faculty, and staff alike. Best practices call for layers of security, each working to protect campus occupants as they navigate outdoor spaces.

### Implementing Layers of Security

There are a number of ways to ensure a safe outdoor environment on campus. Video surveillance is one such measure, a layer of security in which video cameras provide real-time and forensic views of campus. These can act as a deterrent to criminals, reminding them that they are under surveillance by police. Placement is key, and cameras should be mounted near entrances and exits, at parking lots, in at-risk areas such as poorly lit walking paths, or where occupants might find themselves alone.

Emergency stations are another effective layer of security. These stations, which come as stand-alone towers or wall-mounted boxes, are easily recognizable since they are typically topped with a bright blue light. Their function is to put students and visitors into immediate contact with campus police. Built-in audio intercoms provide two-way communication without the additional expense of telephone lines. The stations can also be equipped with video intercoms, providing police with real-time video that could prove helpful in assessing potential criminal acts. The units can be integrated with exiting campus surveillance cameras for a broader view of the area. It is worth noting, too, that emergency stations are always available, day and night, and that police dispatchers can immediately locate the precise location of calls.

Smartphones, which are carried by practically all students, work as another layer of outdoor security. Smartphones allow campuses to employ one of the dozens of commercial and campus-initiated apps capable of accessing campus police. Many allow users to submit

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voice and video, and they likewise allow other users to track a friend's progress as he or she walks to a destination. The apps do have some limitations—for instance, they require a student to enroll in the program and download the app itself; likewise, full enrollment is uncommon. The apps are useless, of course, if the phone battery has died or if the phone was the object stolen in an encounter.

Many of the principals of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) also make outdoor security possible. Trimming bushes and trees to deny criminals hiding places certainly helps, as does adding lighting wherever possible. Fences and gates help keep potential threats at a distance, as well.

Another successful layer of outdoor security is the use of a safety escort. This may involve campus police or student volunteers who have been both screened and trained. At Ithaca College (Ithaca, NY), for instance, students may request escorts from any campus location by either security officers, patrol officers, or the Student Auxiliary Safety Patrol (SASP) members—the latter of which consists of 35 to

40 students who patrol the campus nightly. The SASP not only assist with the campus escort program, but they also perform blue-light phone checks, emergency phone checks, staff the Public Safety Satellite Office, and assist with special events such as commencement and move-in day. SASP members are trained to be alert to the safety needs of the Ithaca College community as they patrol residence halls, academic buildings, parking lots, and other areas of campus.

### Assessing Risk

While there exists no single technology, device, or service capable of handling all outdoor campus emergencies, the layering of security solutions assures that our campuses are safer than ever thanks to the cumulative impact of video surveillance, emergency towers and stations, CPTED, smartphone apps, and safety escorts.

How much of each layer is required varies on the size, location, number of students, and other factors on each campus. A risk assessment, one conducted by an experi-

enced security professional, can help any campus determine its security strengths and weaknesses. An assessment should lead to a plan that helps administrators determine how and where limited budgets should be spent.

The implementation of a thorough security plan, both indoors and outdoors, can certainly go a long way towards alleviating any concern that parents may have as they help their children select a college or university. Moreover, campus occupants will be more inclined to use campus facilities at all hours, day or night, if they regularly engage with multiple layers of security.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** PUPN staff writer

Dr. David Vinson has a PhD in English with specializations in transatlantic literature and cultural studies. He is a committed scholar, teacher, husband, and dad. If you ever meet David, avoid the subject of soccer. His fandom borders on the truly obnoxious.

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