

Joint Statement on Campus Safety

May 2011

In keeping with educational mission and historical expectation, American universities and colleges have provided, and continue to provide, safe and well-ordered campuses. However, a small number of violent events in academe—in particular, a handful of horrific rampage killings--remind of the need to safeguard carefully against tragic exceptions to the rule.

Safety on American campuses continues to be a priority for faculty and staff, who recognize that postsecondary education is a privilege and do all they can to support the educational mission of colleges and universities. Safety education and preventing, responding, and recovering from crisis situations are fundamental responsibilities of faculty, staff, and college administrators providing safe environments for our students. The members of the undersigned organizations reflect the commitment of student affairs professionals on campuses nationwide to provide the best possible living and learning environments for students in our nation's colleges and universities.

To protect against violence, we affirm two traditional principles. First, we emphasize the utility of civil and nonviolent expression and conduct. In an environment that is supposed to facilitate the peaceful reconciliation of conflict and create a marketplace of ideas, resolution of differences should be achieved by the power of reason and persuasion, not by the force of arms.

Second, cognizant that criminally motivated or criminally insane persons may reject reason in favor of violence, we acknowledge the utility of a university or college police or public safety department, which will carefully recruit, expertly train, and appropriately arm personnel that it closely supervises.

Our fundamental purpose in keeping our students, faculty, staff, and visitors safe in an environment where learning occurs is common to all of us; the challenges we face and the ways we address those challenges vary greatly. Legislative mandates, no matter how well intentioned, rarely match the needs of all possible institutions in the most efficient and effective way.

Additionally, the intensity and breadth of media coverage of incidents that are actually rare on campuses can lead to erroneous conclusions and demands for legislation that may strain the resources of institutions, divert attention from other pressing concerns, and fail to address the issues effectively. Institutional administration and their concomitant governing boards are best suited for making policy determining the best ways in which to keep our students safe. When legislative discussions do ensue, it is

critical that institutions of higher education be included in order to bring forward all information that should advise legislation.

Due to our roles on campus, we are often on the front line educating about safety and preventing, responding to, and recovering from crisis situations. There is no single easy solution to keeping our campuses safe. We must continue to work collaboratively in order to promulgate policy and practice that supports rather than impedes the work of those serving on our campuses so that the threats to learning environments are minimized.

The realities of the world are present on our campuses. The experts on these campuses do outstanding work keeping the members of our campus communities safe. Through our continued work and with the support of those with whom we collaborate, we will continue to provide for students, employees, and visitors, the freedom to learn, engage, and discover on our nation's campuses.

ACPA – College Student Educators International

Association for Student Conduct Administration

Association of College & University Housing Officers – International

Association of College Unions International

NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

National Association for Campus Activities

National Orientation Directors Association

Guiding Principles (adapted from “*In Search of Safer Communities: Emerging Practices for Student Affairs in Addressing Campus Violence,*” published by NASPA)

- (1) We recognize that all situations are unique and all campuses are unique.
- (2) There is no single best answer to a problem or emergency; there are various possibilities. Decision making at the local level will come with practice, based on guidance from professional associations, best practice, and state and federal agencies.
- (3) We can work hard to take care of each other, but we cannot prevent every act of violent behavior on our campuses.
- (4) We know there is a link between alcohol and campus violence. Therefore, any consideration about best practices for managing violence must also address the issue of alcohol use.
- (5) We know there is a link between guns and campus violence and concur with IACLEA’s (International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators, Incorporated) conclusion in a 2008 paper that allowing guns on campus is likely to have unintended negative consequences. (see also *2011 Statement Against Concealed Weapon Carry in University Residences*, issued by the Association for Student Conduct Administration (ASCA), the Association of College and University Housing Officers—International (ACUHO-I), and the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA))
- (6) The work around violence must start long before students reach our campuses. We need to partner with K-12 educators to understand research and practice around issues such as bullying and peer mediation and to design and implement broad-based interventions.
- (7) The vast majority of people with mental health issues are not violent. The ADA has enabled more students to be successful on campus. We have expanded our support services for students with disabilities and welcome their full participation in all aspects of the academic community.