

Comprehensive Security Solutions for Multi-Location Campuses

Increasingly, U.S. colleges and universities are stepping up security measures to protect their students, staff and visitors. While the challenges for keeping a single campus safe are formidable, the trials and tribulations for security across multiple locations are dramatically magnified.

Colleges campuses are often stereotyped as contiguous with defined boundaries. However, it is rare indeed to find a college or university that is totally self-contained. Most institutions have buildings that are located away from the campus core. These off campus facilities typically include places to house professional schools, evening programs, research centers or economic development engines such as a research and development lab or business incubator facilities. Many larger urban universities are pressed for square footage and will acquire or rent space for academic or administrative functions. With parking spaces always a premium, some must provide capacity for students, employees, contractors and visitors to park at remote locations with shuttles running to the core of campus operating 16 hours or more each day. Some multi-location colleges, especially the entrepreneurial for-profit institutions have a business model based on maintaining satellite locations throughout the country. What are the challenges for an educational institution that needs to best protect multiple campuses?

College administrators understand that a campus with a poor reputation for keeping its students and staff safe will not score high with retention, future admissions, fund-raising initiatives and employment attractiveness to faculty and staff. I lead the Higher Education division of the country's premier contract security services company and we count many of the country's finest universities and colleges as our clients. Serving those clients – many of whom maintain multiple campus facilities - brings me into contact with a wide range of educational institutions in every segment and geography of our industry.

Contracting Security Professionals

Most larger higher educational institutions supplement their internal police or security workforce with privatized security. The adjunct services are often found when facilities managers and campus law enforcement departments search for a solution to their multi-campus safety and security-budget challenges.

What should a multi-campus college and university look for when hiring contract security? Consistency of security service across multiple locations is of paramount importance and colleges and universities are best served by a single point of contact. Hence, universities often look for a national contract security services company with a single point of contact with the capability to scale up or down in services across multiple, diverse geographic locations.

The questions to ask when making this important contracting decision are significant. Can this national security provider deliver consistent service across multiple locations? A company that has presence in New York, Boston and Los Angeles may not have the same capacity to manage and staff an account in Topeka or Baton Rouge. A security company must be able to demonstrate that it can deliver in each region, providing great local service tied to the national support team.

The security officer labor pool differs widely from market to market in level of experience, volume of qualified officers and salary levels. Often pressures to negotiate for a lower, national fee as a consideration for a volume discount are counterproductive as the cost of experienced officers in Manhattan, New York differs dramatically from salaries paid in Manhattan, Kansas, for example.

All-hazards support is increasingly factored into a security decision. Is the contract security firm able to handle emergency response situations emanating from natural or manmade disasters? These emergency scenarios could range from a chemical leak in a research facility to on-campus violence and acts of nature including earthquakes and tornadoes.

Engaging a national contract security company that specializes in Higher Education, trains their staff on the specific challenges and reporting regulations of campus security, and who has the staffing resources across the required geography is the best choice. Companies with a lot of experience in this arena understand how

their staff can work in conjunction with campus police and know how to create a strategy for the best possible security solution.

Contracting Considerations for Multi-campus Locations

A major issue for colleges and universities is finding a security provider who has experience in protecting many different kinds of off-campus facilities. A downtown location for a public affairs program is likely to take place in an office setting. Research facilities may present challenges similar to manufacturing facilities. Universities are increasingly investing in mixed use properties so the challenges of retail and mall security must be understood. Campuses are increasingly turning to private developers to build and manage campus residence halls – and the pedigree needed to protect young adult living spaces, especially during weekend and overnight hours create a whole set of different challenges requiring knowledge of campus and national regulatory environments.

A qualified security officer can be the eyes and ears for campus police on their posts at residence halls, academic buildings and elsewhere. On college campuses, the majority of problems happen on weekends, and after 11 p.m. and before 3 a.m. With off-site commuter and continuing education colleges, students need special security care from 7 to 10 or 11 p.m. as they navigate their way to mass transit hubs or darkly lit parking lots.

Another challenge for the off-campus location is the cold start. Where a campus security force may assemble for roll call and disperse to their posts after receiving instruction, the multi-campus security officer typically reports and checks in to their assignment without supervisory oversight. What does your security company provide to ensure the accountability that a post is filled? What is the supervisory oversight that is provided to the officer for instruction and relief? Is the security company able to ensure that your officer is getting the support s/he needs.

Student Guards?

Historically, student workers have been a ready source of relatively low-cost part-time security workers. Expecting students to monitor other students can be a slippery slope as student officers wrestle with peer pressure issues and being called upon to enforce policy in a manner that is outside their comfort zone. While many students perform diligently in this role, there are numerous challenges to scheduling, training, background checking, and managing a student security work force that add significantly to the perceived hourly cost and expose those protected to additional risk.

In recent years, a growing practice is the contracting of residence hall monitoring functions to professional security companies whose core competency is recruiting, vetting, training, providing uniforms for, and managing officers who are accountable for the personal and property safety of the buildings they protect. Critical to the success of such arrangements is a program that ensures that security officers master the fundamentals of protection as practiced, and regulated, in an institutional environment including understanding of the legal framework as well as the as well as the culture of a college or university.

The key is defining a specific role for the contract security officers who can perform many of the routine tasks (e.g., personal safety escort services, foot patrols, parking details, vehicle assists, etc.) and also supplement building safety and maintenance systems. Well-trained and experienced contract security providers are able to monitor and patrol student residence halls and maintain a higher degree of safety, security and impartiality, without incurring the heavy costs associated with employing law enforcement personnel or additional residence hall staff.

Safety Awareness on Campus

Security On Campus, Inc. was formed twenty years ago by Connie and Howard Clery in response to the death of their daughter Jeanne who was robbed, raped and murdered by a student she did not know while she was sleeping in her college dorm. The doors to her dorm, which should have been locked, were propped open by

fellow students. Jeanne's parents were instrumental in championing the Clery Act, the Federal law that requires colleges and universities to disclose information about campus crime and security policies.

The Clery Act requires that certain information about a campus' safety program and major crime statistics are reported annually. The multi-campus institution must maintain daily crime logs and provide these reports for each campus separately. Ensuring that the Clery regulations are understood and executed is a challenge that an experienced security provider can help overcome.

Background Checks

One of the first questions to arise when a crime is committed is “how did the perpetrator get the opportunity to get access to the campus?” The corollary questions revolve around an individual's background record. Certainly prudence demands that if the college or university contracts with a security services company that the contract security firm has the ability to engage in comprehensive background screening for employment history and criminal records, and drug tests.

New security companies and consultants are popping up everywhere, many with no real world experience or expertise. Administrators charged with hiring security contractors need to know not only what their current campus safety and security employees are doing to stay current with best practices but also what their potential contract security firm's investment is specific to the issues encountered on a college campus (Clery Act, FERPA, alcohol abuse, etc.). Does the security company support higher education association thought leadership and do they have industry advisors who can anticipate and adjust security programs based on trends with the ability to leverage vendor relationships?

Security Training

Does the college's contract security firm have a commitment to continual training? Parents and students should expect that campus security professionals and any firm engaged for campus security programs are committed to enhancing the technical skills and industry knowledge through comprehensive training programs tied to employment goals. Vigilant training for security officers is even more crucial in a multi-campus environment where more day to day variances are expected. The challenges that face officers on multi-campus facilities range from protecting an off-site research medical facility from drug theft to walking students to their cars after hours at an off campus commuter college facility.

Campus crime prevention – whether on a single campus or multi-campus facility - always starts and ends with the individual student. Every student needs to be armed with the information necessary to make safer choices each and every day. Being aware of surroundings, using assertive body language, keeping doors locked and using the buddy system will help students feel safer and may deter an attacker. These life and safety skills should be regularly promoted and shared with students. Today's higher education leaders are adopting a comprehensive approach to reducing violence and promoting safety on campus by providing specific recommendations that students, faculty, staff, and community members can follow to strengthen their programs and services.