Overview of the Virginia Tech Tragedy and Implications for Campus Safety

The IACLEA Blueprint for Safer Campuses

IACLEA Special Review Task Force
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SUMMARY
This document is a synthesis of the reports written following the tragedy at Virginia Tech and related recommendations for campus safety by the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators

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This report is dedicated to those whose lives were taken on April 16, 2007 at Virginia Tech:

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IACLEA Analysis of the Virginia Tech Tragedy
INTRODUCTION

The impact of the rampage shootings at Virginia Tech on April 16, 2007 continues to be felt across the country and the world. Clearly this incident, along with other active shooter incidents that have occurred since the Virginia Tech tragedy, has impacted our awareness of campus safety and security. A number of states, other governmental entities, and non-governmental organizations have convened groups to examine the lessons learned from the tragedy at Virginia Tech and other aspects of campus safety. IACLEA applauds these on-going efforts and believes the national attention that is focused on this issue presents an opportunity to initiate a national dialogue to strengthen campus public safety and enhance the protection of our estimated 15 million students attending the nation’s 4,200 institutions of higher education.

In August of 2007, in the wake of the Virginia Tech tragedy, the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA) sought to develop a set of recommendations for institutions of higher education through a public safety lens. IACLEA President Raymond H. Thrower, Jr. convened a high-level task force to review the various reports and make recommendations to the IACLEA Board of Directors for a coordinated position on the various issues raised by these reports and possible further action by IACLEA and other entities. This Task Force includes the immediate past president of IACLEA and a former president; the chair of IACLEA’s U.S. Government Relations Committee, two past chairs of the International Association of Chiefs of Police University & College Police Section, and a representative from a Virginia public university. Several of the members of the review panel also serve on the International Association of Chiefs of Police Review Panel convened by then-IACP President Joseph Carter.

While nothing could have prepared Virginia Tech or any institution to deal with the loss of life of April 16, 2007, IACLEA would be remiss if it didn’t study and learn from the successes and failures of the response to the incident. This Blueprint explores the key applicable findings and identifies IACLEA recommendations for institutions of higher education. The Blueprint is divided into 3 major categories identified as foundations of campus safety: Emergency Planning and Critical Incident Response; Empowerment and Resources of the Campus Public Safety Function; and Prevention and Education Programs.

Gun violence on university and college campuses is not new. While Virginia Tech’s tragedy is by far the deadliest in history for an institution of higher education, others have also been unfortunate. On February 8, 2008, a lone female student opened fire in a classroom at Louisiana Technical College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, killing two students before taking her own life. On February 14, 2008, a former Northern Illinois University graduate student entered a packed auditorium-style classroom on the NIU campus in DeKalb, opened fire and killed five students before taking his own life. In September 2006, Douglas Pennington killed himself and his two sons during a visit to Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, WV. In October 2002, University of Arizona Nursing College student Robert Flores murdered three of his instructors on campus before committing suicide. In January 2002, former Appalachian School of Law student Peter Odighizuwa killed the dean, a professor and a student, while wounding three more, before being subdued by other students. In August 2000, University of Arkansas student James Easton Kelly shot and killed Professor John Locke before taking his own life in an apparent murder-suicide. In August 1996, Frederick Martin Davidson, a graduate engineering student at San Diego State University shot and killed three professors during his doctoral dissertation defense. In November 1991, University of Iowa graduate student Gang Lu opened fire in two buildings and killed five people, wounded two and then killed himself. Finally, in August 1966, Charles Whitman climbed the clock tower on the University of Texas-Austin campus and killed sixteen people with a sniper rifle while wounding thirty-one others. Universities and colleges owe it to the victims and their families to understand these crimes and take appropriate measures, when and where possible, to ensure the safety of their communities.

As final reports have not been prepared following some of these incidents, this Blueprint does not address these implications. In preparing this document, the authors consulted and referenced the following documents:


• Oklahoma Campus Life and Safety and Security Task Force (CLASS) Final Report, January 15, 2008

• New Jersey Campus Security Task Force Report, Submitted to Governor Jon S. Corzine, October 2007

• Expecting the Unexpected - Lessons from the Virginia Tech Tragedy, by American Association of State Colleges & Universities

• The Report of the University of California Campus Security Task Force, University of California Office of the President, January 2008


• Governor’s Task Force on Campus Safety, State of Wisconsin, November 15, 2007

• International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators Special Review Task Force on Virginia Tech

• Missouri Campus Security Task Force, Report on Findings and Recommendations, August 21, 2007

• Association of American Universities August, 2007 Survey on Safety on AAU Campuses after the Virginia Tech Shootings

• Report of the Campus Safety Task Force Presented to North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper

• National Association of Attorneys General, Task Force on School and Campus Safety, Report & Recommendations, September 2007

• Report to the President of the United States on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy, June 13, 2007

• The Report of the Virginia Tech Review Panel Synopsis prepared by Charles F. Carletta, JD, Secretary of the Institute and General Counsel, Rensselaer Polytechnical Institute, October 2007

• Personal relationships and correspondence with Chief Wendell Flinchum, Virginia Tech Police Department; Colonel Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police; Chief Kimberly S. Crannis, Blacksburg (VA) Police Department
IACLEA Analysis of the Virginia Tech Tragedy

While there are many recommendations that arise from these lessons learned for each of the disciplines that bring to bear expertise, IACLEA has identified 20 specific recommendations. They represent the Association’s priorities for the betterment of campus safety and reinforce key goals and objectives in mitigating and responding to threats at institutions of higher education. They are not designed to be all inclusive, but do represent emerging best and promising practices which institutions should consider now and implement when possible. The findings are outlined in the 3 major foundational areas identified in the introduction.

Emergency Planning and Critical Incident Response

1) All colleges and universities should conduct a threat and vulnerability assessment as part of the institutional risk management strategy. The assessment should consider the full spectrum of threats (i.e., natural, criminal, terrorist, accidental, etc.) for the campus. The results of this assessment should guide the institution’s application of protective measures and emergency planning assumptions. The assessment will necessarily be unique given the specific characteristics of individual campuses.

2) Institutions should use an array of means and methods to disseminate information to the campus community during emergencies. A campus emergency, mass notification system and plan must include multiple means of sharing information, including high-technology (i.e., mass notification system) and low-technology (flyers, loud speakers) solutions. Institutions selecting systems should ensure their systems meet these minimum criteria:

   a. Multi-Point Communication: The service should enable the campus to notify the entire campus community via multiple channels. The system should be capable of reaching its audience through multiple points of contact, such as voice messages, e-mail, and text messaging/SMS.

   b. Capacity: The system vendor should have sufficient, demonstrated capacity to deliver all messages quickly and reliably.

   c. Security and Redundancy: If the institution uses a third-party vendor, access to private student and employee data must be limited only to authorized personnel. The system must have redundant capabilities in all the power interconnects.

   d. 24/7 Client Care: A contract with a third party vendor should include training, customer service, and technical support.

   e. Experience: The vendor should have significant experience delivering calls at institutions of various sizes across the country.

   f. Assessment: The service should have reporting capabilities that allow the institution to monitor, manage and measure the system’s effectiveness.

Campus public safety officials as well as other appropriate administrators should have the authority and capability to send emergency messages from on/off campus and from anywhere around the world.

Campus administrators should consider the following criteria before sending emergency messages: 1) the message should be timely; 2) the information must be accurate; and 3) the notice must be useful to the recipients. Recipients of emergency messages should be urged to inform others.

3) Institutions should use the National Incident Management System (NIMS) as the framework to manage emergencies and should have a decision-making process and structure to facilitate interaction among institutional leadership, institutional resources and local first responders.

4) Institutions should develop succinct emergency response plans that allow for a coordinated, organized response to critical incidents while avoiding complexity and obfuscation. The plan should comply with the National Incident Management System and the Incident Command System per Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5). Ideally, such plans will specify levels of an emergency and the general responsibilities of the emergency response and policy groups at each level. Appendices may include incident action plans for specific critical incidents (i.e., snow storms, bomb threats or violent crime). Institutions should conduct annual training for the emergency operations and policy group, and include campus service providers in addition to public safety first responders.

5) Universities and colleges should work with their local government partners to improve plans for mutual aid in all areas of emergency planning and critical incident response, including that of victim services. The IACLEA “Guide to Strengthening Communications between Campus Public Safety Departments and Federal-State-Local Emergency
Response Agencies” contains model policies and practices for developing and nurturing these important relationships. The Guide is available on the IACLEA web site at: http://www.iaclea.org/visitors/WMDCPT/cprc/aboutcprc.cfm

6) Institutions should consider providing First Responder or EMT training to a sufficient number of campus public safety officers to ensure there is the capacity on the campus to provide potential life-saving treatment to injured persons at the scene of a critical incident in the event that EMT's from outside agencies face delays or otherwise cannot get to the scene in a timely manner. First Responder training generally refers to a 40-hour course of training and the EMT course typically consists of 120 hours of training in providing pre-hospital care for medical emergencies.

Empowering and Resourcing the Campus Public Safety Function

7) The campus public safety executive must report directly to the senior operations officer with institutional decision-making authority. The campus public safety director or chief of police should be part of the emergency operations team developing emergency response and recovery plans. Additionally, the campus public safety executive should have direct access to the most senior decision makers during an emergency.

8) Institutions should regularly review physical security infrastructure, including locking mechanisms on all doors, to ensure optimal safety of faculty, staff, students, visitors and guests.

9) The nature of the emergency should direct what and how campus authorities communicate with the campus and under what timeframe. See earlier recommendations on timely warning process. Universities and colleges must comply with the Clery Act, which requires timely public warnings of imminent danger. Institutions must have a policy that describes their timely warning practice and in that policy, they should develop an individual definition of "timely" in relation to available technology, available communication systems, and nature of the crisis.

10) Interoperable communications is an absolute must for effective critical incident response. Interoperable communication systems allow two or more responding agencies, even those using disparate communications systems, to exchange information directly. With interoperability, on-scene personnel can quickly access each other to coordinate needed rescue and emergency activities. The Public Safety Wireless Network program (a joint initiative of the U.S. departments of Justice and the Treasury) has identified the following as two important types of interoperability:

i) Day-to-day interoperability covers routine public safety operations, such as a building fire that requires backup from a neighboring fire department, or when a vehicle chase crosses between towns.

ii) Mutual aid interoperability supports a joint and immediate response to catastrophic accidents, large-scale incidents, and natural disasters. It supports tactical communications in response to airplane crashes, bombings, forest fires, earthquakes, hurricanes, and similar events that occur without warning.

11) Each state should pass enabling legislation that allows their colleges and universities the choice to employ a sworn police agency in lieu of or in addition to non-sworn security professionals.

12) Campus public safety agencies should explore accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) and the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA).

13) If the institution employs a full-service, sworn law enforcement agency, then the officers should have access to a range of use of force options including lethal (firearms) and less-than-lethal (impact tools, chemical, and electronic control devices). In short, sworn officers should be armed. Campus public safety personnel who are provided any defensive weapon should be trained to the standards required for public-sector law enforcement personnel within the political sub-division. Campus law enforcement or security personnel provided with weapons should meet the standards established for use of those weapons as determined by the state in which the community is located. Clear policy statements should be implemented establishing such weapons as defensive weapons. NOTE: IACLEA has a long-established Position Statement that supports this recommendation.

14) Campus public safety authorities must clearly understand their authority in addressing involuntary hospitalization procedures for members of the community they interact with who suffer from acute mental health disorders.
15) The complex nature of law enforcement demands knowledge, skill, training, and experience. Judgments frequently required are beyond the training, preparation, responsibility, or authority of private citizens. Personnel who do not have the necessary judgment resulting from the acquisition of this knowledge and skill acquired through law enforcement training should not be assigned to functions which may require them to question, detain, or restrain the movements of citizens.

Prevention and Education Programs to Address Campus Safety Risks

16) Institutions should implement a process whereby all members of the community upon application (admissions and employment) are asked whether or not they have been charged or convicted of a crime and all related details. Institutions should conduct criminal record checks for their students, faculty and staff as appropriate.

17) Institutions of higher education should have a behavioral threat assessment team that includes representatives from law enforcement, human resources, student and academic affairs, legal counsel, and mental health functions. Specifically, campus public safety should be included on the team.

18) Institutions should employ a comprehensive program to end violence against women crimes on campus. These crimes include stalking, sexual assault and relationship violence and, in addition to self-defense for women, require prevention training focused specifically on men and key campus constituencies. These areas include Athletics, Student Affairs, Judicial Affairs, Academic Support, and Residential Life. The institution should establish protocols and procedures that support a woman’s decision to not participate in a criminal or judicial proceeding, but which allow the institution to take action against the accused independent of a criminal investigation. Campus public safety should be trained to conduct these investigations and inquiries.

19) Faculty, staff and students should be trained on how to respond to various emergencies and about the notification systems that will be used. This training should be delivered through a number of delivery options, such as in-person presentations (i.e., residential life programming; orientation sessions for students and employees); Internet-based delivery; and documents.

20) Campus public safety should develop collaborative, supportive relationships with victim advocacy services in order to respond directly and immediately to the needs of victims of crime.

Ancillary Issues Related to the Virginia Tech Tragedy

Concealed Carry of Firearms on Campuses

IACLEA does not support the carry and concealment of weapons on a college campus, with the exception of sworn police officers in the conduct of their professional duties. (Please see Position Statement on pages 12 of this report).

Implementation of Security Technology

Security technology, such as automated card access systems, intrusion detection systems, and security cameras, can serve as force multipliers on a college or university campus. In fact, some systems, such as automated access control, have become the industry standard on campuses around the country. Campuses should continue to implement proven security technology in an attempt to enhance safety on campus. Some systems, such as security cameras, have proven valuable in specific circumstances and have not only increased the community’s sense of security, but have also aided in the apprehension of criminals. As with any system, policy, or practice, IACLEA recommends that the campus evaluate existing literature and research to ensure there is ample evidence of the system’s effectiveness prior to implementation.
CONCLUSION

While the tragedy at Virginia Tech is on a scale never before experienced at an institution of higher education, the circumstances that led Seung-Hui Cho to commit the crime he did are all too common. Unmanaged mental health issues; easy access to firearms; a lack of communication among campus direct service providers; and erroneous interpretation of federal law with specific focus on FERPA and HIPPA all coalesced into the perfect storm at Virginia Tech in April 2007.

IACLEA wants to recognize the professionalism and well coordinated response of the Virginia Tech Police, Virginia State Police, Blacksburg Police, and the various Emergency Medical Services that responded to the call of duty on April 16, 2007. Their heroism in the face of extreme danger speaks to the highest commitment of public safety, specifically campus public safety. Long after the spotlights dim and the news reports silence, the men and women who rushed into Norris Hall to gun fire and screams will continue to replay those images in their minds. Their heroism and dedication will not soon be forgotten. The International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators recognizes its responsibility to the fallen students, faculty and staff, and the first responders who ended Cho’s rampage. To this end, this report serves to prevent such tragedies through careful analysis and well-crafted recommendations that address prevention, physical security, and response capacity.

Securing the safety of our campuses is an iterative process that requires an institutional and personal commitment from every member of our educational communities.

Let these recommendations strengthen that resolve.
1. Cho exhibited signs of mental health problems during his childhood. In 1999, after the Columbine shootings, Cho’s middle school teachers observed suicidal and homicidal ideations in his writings and recommended psychiatric counseling, which he received.

2. During Cho's junior year at Virginia Tech, numerous incidents occurred that were clear warnings of mental instability. Although various individuals and departments within the University knew about each of these incidents, the University did not intervene effectively. No one knew all the information and no one connected all the dots.

3. University officials in the office of Judicial Affairs, Cook Counseling Center, university police, the Dean of Students, and others explained their failures to communicate with one another or with Cho’s parents by noting their belief that such communications are prohibited by the federal laws governing the privacy of health and education records. In reality, federal laws and their state counterparts afford ample leeway to share information in potentially dangerous situations.

4. Cho purchased two guns in violation of federal law. The fact that in 2005 Cho had been judged to be a danger to himself and ordered to outpatient treatment made him ineligible to purchase a gun under federal law.

5. On April 16, 2007, the Virginia Tech and Blacksburg police departments responded quickly to the report of shootings at West Ambler Johnston residence hall, as did the Virginia Tech and Blacksburg rescue squads. Their responses were well coordinated.

6. The Virginia Tech police may have erred in prematurely concluding that their initial lead in the double homicide was a good one, or at least in conveying that impression to university officials while continuing their investigation. They did not take sufficient action to deal with what might happen if the initial lead proved erroneous. The police reported to the university emergency Policy Group that the “person of interest” probably was no longer on campus.

7. The VTPD erred in not requesting that the Policy Group issue a campus-wide notification that two persons had been killed and that all students and staff should be cautious and alert. Senior university administrators, acting as the emergency Policy Group, failed to issue an all-campus notification about the WAJ killings until almost 2 hours had elapsed. University practice may have conflicted with written policies.

8. The presence of large numbers of police at WAJ led to a rapid response to the first 9-1-1 call that shooting had begun at Norris Hall. The police response at Norris Hall was prompt and effective, as was triage and evacuation of the wounded. Evacuation of others in the building could have been implemented with more care.

9. State systems for rapidly deploying trained professional staff to help families get information, crisis intervention, and referrals to a wide range of resources did not work.

10. The university established a family assistance center at The Inn at Virginia Tech, but it fell short in helping families and others for two reasons: lack of leadership and lack of coordination among service providers. University volunteers stepped in but were not trained or able to answer many questions and guide families to the resources they needed.

The report contains more than 70 recommendations directed to colleges, universities, mental health providers, law enforcement officials, emergency service providers, lawmakers, and other public officials in Virginia and elsewhere.

The other reports reviewed for this Blueprint echoed the major findings outlined in the Virginia report. Where recommendations differed, IACLEA Task Force members reviewed those points and found common themes that, when extrapolated, are presented in the IACLEA report.

Other tangential issues have arisen as a result of the tragedy. For example, there is a national movement in more than a dozen states calling for concealed weapons carry laws on college and university campuses. The State of Oklahoma recently considered legislation to allow the concealed carry of firearms on college campuses. The IACLEA position regarding this issue is contained at the end of this report.
Aug. 1, 1966
Charles Whitman points a rifle from the observation deck of the University of Texas in Austin and begins shooting in a homicidal rampage that goes on for 96 minutes. Sixteen are killed and 31 are wounded.

May 4, 1970
Four students were killed and nine wounded by National Guard troops called in to quell anti-war protests on the campus of Kent State University in Kent, Ohio.

Nov. 1, 1991
Gang Lu, 28, a graduate student in physics from China, reportedly upset because he was passed over for an academic honor, opens fire in two buildings on the University of Iowa campus. Five University of Iowa employees are killed, including four members of the physics department. Two other people are wounded. The student fatally shoots himself.

Jan. 26, 1995
Former law student Wendell Williamson shoots two men to death and injures a police officer in Chapel Hill, NC.

Aug. 15, 1996
Frederick Martin Davidson, 36, a graduate engineering student at San Diego State, is defending his thesis before a faculty committee when he pulls out a handgun and kills three professors.

June 28, 2000
Medical resident Dr. Jian Chen kills his supervisor and then himself in his supervisor’s office at the University of Washington in Seattle. Faculty say Chen, 42, was upset he’d be forced to return to China because of academic shortcomings.

Aug. 28, 2000
James Easton Kelly, 36, a University of Arkansas graduate student recently dropped from a doctoral program after a decade of study and John Locke, 67, the English professor overseeing his coursework, are shot to death in an apparent murder-suicide.

Jan. 16, 2002
Graduate student Peter Odighizuwa, 42, recently dismissed from Virginia’s Appalachian School of Law, returns to campus and kills the dean, a professor and a student before being tackled by students. The attack also wounds three female students.

May 17, 2001
Donald Cowan, 55, fatally shoots assistant music professor James Holloway at a dorm at Pacific Lutheran University in Parkland, Washington, then turns the gun on himself. He leaves a 16-page suicide note expressing anger at a colleague of Holloway’s whom he dated briefly as a teenager.

Oct. 28, 2002
Failing University of Arizona Nursing College student and Gulf War veteran Robert Flores, 40, walks into an instructor’s office and fatally shoots her. A few minutes later, armed with five guns, he enters one of his nursing classrooms and kills two more of his instructors before fatally shooting himself.
May 9, 2003

A 62-year-old man with two handguns and a bullet-proof vest fires hundreds of rounds during a seven-hour shooting spree and standoff at a Case Western Reserve University building in Cleveland. One student is killed and two others are wounded. Biswanath Halder, who authorities say was upset because he believed a student hacked into his web site, is later sentenced to life in prison.

Sept. 2, 2006

Douglas W. Pennington, 49, kills himself and his two sons, Logan P. Pennington, 26, and Benjamin M. Pennington, 24, during a visit to the campus of Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, W.Va.

April 2, 2007

University of Washington researcher Rebecca Griego, 26, is shot to death in her office by a former boyfriend who then turned the gun on himself.

April 16, 2007

Seung Hui Cho kills 32 people and injures at least 24 others in a dorm and a classroom at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. The gunman then kills himself by gunshot.

Sept. 21, 2007

Two students are wounded at a late-night shooting at a campus dining hall at Delaware State University in Dover. Shalita Middleton, 17, dies Oct. 23 from her injuries. A student is charged in the shooting.

Oct. 1, 2007

University of Memphis football player Taylor Bradford, 21, is fatally shot on campus in a botched robbery. Four men are later charged in the slaying, including one student.

Dec. 13, 2007

Two Ph.D. students from India are found shot to death in a home invasion at an apartment on the campus of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

Feb. 8, 2008

Latina Williams, 23, opens fire during an emergency medical technology class at Louisiana Technical College in Baton Rouge, killing Karsheika Graves and Taneshia Butler. She then kills herself.

Feb. 14, 2008

Steven Kozmierczak, a former graduate student at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, opens fire in a lecture hall, killing five students and wounding 15 others. He then commits suicide.
The International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators, Inc., (IACLEA) has been asked by its Members to react to legislative initiatives in some states that would allow students to carry concealed weapons on college and university campuses.

IACLEA’s Board of Directors believes “concealed carry” initiatives do not make campuses safer. There is no credible evidence to suggest that the presence of students carrying concealed weapons would reduce violence on college campuses. In fact, we are concerned that concealed carry laws have the potential to dramatically increase violence on college and university campuses that our Members are empowered to protect.

In an article published in The Christian Science Monitor, Jon Vernick, the co-director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research in Baltimore, MD, was quoted as stating that “the best science that we have says concealed carry laws do not save lives, as the proponents contend.”

Among the concerns with concealed carry laws or policies are: the potential for accidental discharge or misuse of firearms at on-campus or off-campus parties where large numbers of students are gathered or at student gatherings where alcohol or drugs are being consumed, as well as the potential for guns to be used as a means to settle disputes between or among students. There is also a real concern that campus police officers responding to a situation involving an active shooter may not be able to distinguish between the shooter and others with firearms.

We urge public policy makers to proceed with extreme caution in dealing with proposals to allow college students to carry concealed weapons on campus. IACLEA is committed to working with public policy makers on reasonable solutions to enhance campus public safety. We are working with other campus public safety stakeholders to provide and promote campus crime prevention training programs, as well as to develop strategies and programs to enhance emergency preparedness.
### Building Blocks of Campus Safety

#### Emergency Planning & Critical Incident Response

- **Prevention & Education**: Programs to Enhance Safety
  - Mitigation/Prevention
  - Preparedness
  - Response
  - Recovery

- **The Campus Public Safety Function**
  - Employment
  - Resourced
  - Empowered
  - Appropriate
  - Comprehensive
  - Collaborative
  - Evidence Based

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