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The Special Nature of Campus Policing

Rick Parfitt, Florida SouthWestern State College

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An NFL Training Camp at a Small College
The Special Nature of Campus Policing

by Lt. Richard Parfitt, University of Pittsburgh

Policing in America has witnessed a tremendous evolution; from early days of watch and ward systems to professional crime fighters. Systems of inadequately trained, equipped and staffed organizations were seen not only in municipal police departments, but campus agencies as well. Campus policing has emerged from having night watchmen, who may have doubled as janitors in university facilities and maintenance departments to full service police agencies staffed with professionally trained officers. Since the 19th century, university communities, like cities, have become larger and more diverse with the need for trained professionals to handle the varied and sometimes complex situations confronted on college campuses. Early campus communities, being relatively small, seemed able to handle the problems that occurred, but as campuses grew there especially was a need for more professional police services.

Yale University is credited with establishing the first campus security department in the United States in 1894, but it was not until the 1960s that many states created campus police agencies and the modern era of campus policing began. This timeline shows that campus police agencies evolved at a pace that outdistanced many municipal agencies. In the 60 plus years between the first campus security department and the modern era campuses have experienced large increases in the number of students, which has brought with it increases in crime, traffic and other changes. These changes have brought increased responsibilities and challenges to campus police agencies.

The basic missions of campus police officers vary in a fundamental way from their public police counterparts; campus police officers, besides having the law enforcement and public safety responsibilities, have an additional function of security, covering areas such as access control, loss prevention and perimeter security.

The type and frequency of any responsibility and challenge in policing has often depended on the density and background of the population served, and none as much as a college campus. Not only are campuses diverse communities in relation to race, culture and ethnicity, they embody the principles of community policing. Though all police agencies are responsible for law enforcement and public safety, campus police have additional concerns beyond these traditional police activities. The basic missions of campus police officers vary in a fundamental way from their public police counterparts; campus police officers, besides having the law enforcement and public safety responsibilities, have an additional function of security, covering areas such as access control, loss prevention and perimeter security.

This places campus police in a specialized style of policing, a dichotomy of serving as police officers and security personnel. This style of policing was evident in the late 19th and early 20th century when early private police agencies were created in our country's mining and industrial areas. These early private police agencies were established to protect the interests of the industries and companies they represented. For example, in Pennsylvania the coal and iron police and railroad police were two types of private agencies established by statute to allow coal, steel and railroad companies to hire private police to protect their company's interests and assets. The laws creating these private police agencies have been amended over the years to include other industries, for example, in Pennsylvania there are now private police in hospitals and amusement parks. These private police agencies generally have been granted limited jurisdiction, meaning their authority and jurisdiction is limited by what the particular law allows. This dichotomy may seem to create a balancing act for campus police and in some ways this may be so.

What makes campus policing unique from other police agencies of limited jurisdiction is that campus police deal with two systems of justice. Not only do campus police deal with the criminal justice system of magistrates, prosecutors, and judges; campus police also deal with a university system of justice, a Dean of students, student affairs and a judicial board, composed of faculty, staff and students. This board dispenses justice in the form of internal sanctions. This is where the balancing act comes into play most.

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often and the question confronted is which system or under what circumstances is one system chosen over another. Likely there is some direction from departmental procedure or policy and in some cases it is a matter of an individual officers’ discretion.

Discretion is a necessary element of police work, for without it there would be gridlock in the criminal justice system. The university judicial board allows for referrals in cases that would backlog the criminal justice system or not merit their attention. The judicial board serves as a deterrent and a learning experience for would-be offenders of minor offenses and infractions of university rules and regulations. While our campus communities may be diverse in race and culture, they are predominantly young people in a learning environment, and like any component of the criminal justice system, favorable discretion is given to young people having committed minor infractions.

At one time the mission of universities was to handle all problems that occurred in the campus community through their own judicial system. Universities operated as separate entities and were viewed as sanctuaries. In the past, a student’s criminal conduct was likely to be handled internally, but today that may not be the case. Campuses throughout the United States have experienced crime from minor theft to murder, and campus officers respond like other police agencies would. The response not only includes the criminal investigation, reporting and prosecution (if warranted), but without any classification errors, the submission of the Uniform Crime Report. Unlike public police agencies, campus departments are mandated by federal law to compile and submit uniform crime reports to the U. S. Department of Education and in many cases to individual state reporting sources or face the possibility of fines. The Jeanne Clery Act and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) become familiar terminology to campus police officers as their records of crime reports face greater governmental scrutiny than many municipal agencies.

The emphasis on crime reports is, and rightly so, designed to give students, potential students, faculty, staff and others the necessary information to make informed decisions concerning their safety on campuses. Ironically, this same information may not be available to someone moving into certain neighborhoods, buying homes or sending their children to public schools. Though universities are institutions of higher education they also are businesses that market education in which students are consumers. And this leads to the most unique facets of campus policing.

Our communities, where better than half of our residents are under 21 years of age, change drastically every year, in that approximately 25% of the residents are replaced by new ones and after four years an entirely different community exists than did four years previously. This is the special nature of campus policing.

References

About the Author
Richard A. Parfitt has been a Lieutenant with the University of Pittsburgh Police Department for the past three years, serving as a shift supervisor. Prior to that he spent 21 years in municipal policing for Connellsville, a small city in Western Pennsylvania.

He has an Associate in Applied Science Degree (Law Enforcement and Police Science) from Westmoreland County (Pennsylvania) Community College; a Bachelor of Arts (Administration of Justice) from the University of Pittsburgh and a Master of Arts (Social Science) from California University of Pennsylvania. He is also a graduate of the FBI National Academy, 195th Session.

Parfitt is member of IACLEA and the American Society of Law Enforcement Trainers. He has been an instructor with the Pennsylvania Municipal Police Officers’ Education and Training Commission for 12 years and an instructor for the Constables Education Training Board/ Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency for 5 years.