Research on the Clery Act and Crime Reporting: Its Impact on the Literature and Administrative Practice in Higher Education

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The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (2000) (hereafter the Clery Act, the Act, or Clery) has sparked a number of questions regarding crime and safety on college and university campuses. Although these questions range from asking about the usage of Clery Act crime statistics to the Act’s effects on campus security policies, the longstanding question that underlining all these queries is quite simple: Are college and university campuses in the United States safer today because of Clery?

This question is of major concern to college administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents, lawmakers and others around the country. While we have added some material that updates our chapter from the last edition of this book, we find our conclusions are still primarily the same, relatively speaking there is little, though an increasing amount, of scientific research in the higher education literature that provides quantitative or qualitative studies of the Clery Act and its impact on campus crime. While the amount of research has increased, there is still much that can be examined related to the Clery Act. As noted above, we have added several studies related to the Clery Act and crime on campus which were not reported in our earlier chapter. We recommend that you refer back to that chapter to examine earlier studies. We also found several studies which we did not report in the earlier chapter and commend them to you for study as well.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the current state of the research literature on the Clery Act, note several books which have been written on crime issues related to campus and describe a number of studies that demonstrate how the impact of the Act is being studied. We however, as noted above, believe that there has been relatively little research conducted on this topic. While there has been a growing amount of research on campus crime, and there has certainly been much commentary, particularly in the periods after each tragic incident, there has been little research on the Act and its impact and implementation.

The Clery Act in the Literature

The Clery Act sprang from the death of Jeanie Clery who was raped and murdered in her residence hall room on the Lehigh University campus. The Clery family received an out of court settlement in its suit against the university and pushed to have a campus safety act passed, first in Pennsylvania, and ultimately by Congress in 1990. Congress passed the Act not only because of this tragedy, but because legislation was viewed as a necessity due to perceived increases in

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juvenile crime in society as a whole and a perceived increase in crime on college campuses. There were, however, no means at the time to determine whether this presumption about campus crime was accurate (Gregory & Janosik, 2003).

With the concern among the public, the press and watchdog groups such as the Clery Center for Security on Campus, about the safety of college campuses, it is surprising that so little formal research has been done on how the Act has been implemented, how campus officials have perceived its impact, and how effective it has been. In fact, the “literature” on the topic is replete with news stories and law review and other articles that opine about the Act’s level of importance and enforcement. Most of the source material one finds is popular press-based, largely because the media appear fascinated by lurid reports of crimes such as the murder of Patricia Guardado on the University of Arkansas Little Rock in 2009 (Fear on campus, 2011), the killing of Virginia Tech police officer Deriek Crouse (Quigley & Durante, 2011), the murders at Oikos University (Sander, 2012), and other high profile crimes. The Morning Call, the newspaper of the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania, has a website which is an index of campus crime articles (Morning Call, nd). On Ask.com, blogger Jackie Burrell (2009) commented on a list compiled by the Daily Beast, which provided a list of the 25 campuses with the highest crime rates, which she called the “Worst Colleges” regarding campus crime. ABC News (nd) has a series on line called “Murdered at College,” which provides pictures and small snippets on 11 women who died violently while college students. While these crimes are certainly troubling and indicate that higher education faces many challenges, there is little evidence that such crimes are the norm on American college and university campuses particularly when campus crime is compared with crime in the larger society. Unfortunately, such news outlets have little incentive to place these incidents in an objective context (Wood & Janosik, in press).

Gregory and Janosik (2002) described the tone and content of much of the literature related to the Clery Act that appeared during the 1990s. This content included media commentary about the results of campus crime, reports of institutions that failed to accurately report crime, and criticisms of campuses that failed to be adequately open about the crime on and around their campuses. This literature also included legal journal articles that described the Act, its content, its strengths and its weaknesses as well as several books on the topic (see Fisher & Sloan, 1995; Gregory & Janosik, 2002; Smith, 1988, 1989; Smith & Fossey, 1995). The quantity of literature has changed little since 2007.

Method

To examine the number, content, and variety of published material relating to the Clery Act and review that material, we conducted Google™ and Google Scholar™ searches, followed by searches of Lexis-Nexis™ Academic and ProQuest™. These sources provided a broad overview of recent writings concerning the Clery Act and its impact. The databases we selected are available to, and understandable by, people seeking information about the Act, such as parents, students, police officials and scholars. We also conducted broad Internet searches using the same search terms. While not exhaustive, our review provides a reasonable summary of what consumers and others with an interest in the Act might find.
We first conducted a Google™ search using the term “Clery Campus Safety Act” that returned 76,000 citations, some 100,000 fewer citations than we found in 2007. As before, we reviewed the first 30 pages of citations returned and found the vast majority included references to electronic versions of campus security reports and related documents from various colleges and universities in the United States. The remainder of the citations were primarily electronic postings relating to the Clery Center for Security on Campus (an advocacy group involved with insuring colleges and universities properly implement the Clery Act), the U.S. Department of Education, and news reports from campus and other newspapers covering crimes on specific campuses. We also, unlike 2007, found listings for companies selling campus safety and emergency notification products and equipment, campus safety consulting companies, and a reference to the U.S. Department of Education’s revised campus safety manual: Department of Ed Releases Updated Campus Safety Guide, 2011. While we expected such a search would likely provide sources such as those found, with 76,000 citations returned, we also expected to find citations to research, including master’s theses and doctoral dissertations posted online.

We next conducted a search on Google Scholar™ using the same search term and found 2340 “hits.” Of these, we found Gregory and Janosik, and their coauthors were mentioned in 15 of the first 20 references returned and another reference mentioned one of the editors of this volume and her colleagues (Fisher, Hartman, Cullen, & Turner, 2002). Few of the “hits” included quantitative or qualitative research on issues that in related directly to the Clery Act and other studies’ issues related to campus crime more broadly. References were returned for research on related issues such as sexual assault on campus, alcohol abuse, fraternal organization violence and the like, but most of the references were for reports similar to those found in the Google™ database.

Using the same term, we next conducted a search of popular news sources for the last several years found in the LexisNexis™ Academic Database using the “Search the News” search. We undertook this search specifically to examine how the popular and legal press has covered the Clery Act. Our search returned 86 citations from campus and commercial newspapers. Sixty-four of the stories were written in 2007 or earlier and only two were from 2012. We examined the articles and found the majority described issues related to the Virginia Tech Killings, Eastern Michigan University, and issues around Penn State, Jerry Sandusky and Joe Paterno. There were also several obituaries of Howard Clery, whose daughter’s murder resulted in passage of the Clery Act. There was also listed a story written by Nina Bernstein of the New York Times in November of 2011 entitled “On Campus, a Law Enforcement System to Itself” (Bernstein, 2011). As previously noted, the Google™ database contained sources almost exclusively from the popular and legal press and as a result, we did not expect the database to yield academic research articles.

We followed our search of popular press sources with a search of law journals/law reviews using the LexisNexis™ Academic Database using the search term “Clery Campus Safety Act.” The search produced only one return, a 2005 law review article by Seidman and Vickers published in the Suffolk University Law Review, which dealt with victim’s rights in sexual assault cases, so we revised our search using the term “Clery Act” and located 22 additional citations. Among these, eight were on unrelated topics, two dealt with issues related to guns on campus, and seven dealt with sexual assault and related topics. Only one of these
Research on the Clery Act, in that it recommended revision of the Act to improve reporting of acts of sexual assault. Three of the citations were from a special issue of the Stetson University Law Review from 2002 (these are discussed elsewhere in this chapter and other chapters in the book). One article by Griffin (2007) dealt with “recent cases regarding the legal duty American colleges and universities have to protect the student community from harm or injury resulting from safety or security breaches”. A second article by Griffin (2009) dealt with how incident command system management has impacted the development of organizational frameworks to manage emergency incidents. The article also reviews selected case law regarding campus safety and state and federal statutory responses designed to minimize threats to campus safety. Another search using the term “Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act” yielded no citations.

The final search we conducted was of the ProQuest™ Electronic Database for Education Theses and Dissertations using the search term “Clery Campus Safety Act.” Results of the search yielded seven dissertations which have been written since 2007, as well as several theses and dissertations that addressed the Clery Act and/or related campus crime issues from other sources.

Thus, while the searches we conducted were not the type of exhaustive research that may be necessary for a doctoral dissertation, using several electronic databases available to both the causal user as well as scholars, we found relatively little content that could be reasonably be considered analytical, qualitative, or quantitative research on the Clery Act. As a result, we suggest the way people inside and outside of higher education view campus crime is based on views espoused by the press and not academic research.

Below, we review the research our searches discovered. Much of this work has been conducted by a small group of scholars, including the two of us and authors of other chapters in this volume (e.g., Sloan, Fisher, Mustaine & Tewksbury).

Clery Act Research

As previously mentioned, scientific research on the impact of the Clery Act on campus crime has been limited. We now turn our attention to reviewing the substance of the dissertations, theses, articles, and research reports found in our searches. We arrange the studies by type of publication rather than by substantive content focus for ease of reference. We also report on several books that have been published recently which dealt with the Clery Act or campus crime. Finally, our review does not reveal a single set of conclusions from these studies as a whole, since their content focus, methodologies, subject populations, and research questions differed widely. There are, however, common themes we will describe in the concluding section of this chapter.

Doctoral Dissertations

The search of the ProQuest™ Electronic Database found dissertations by Patton (2010), Dagler (2009), Barnes (2009), Kerkhoff (2008), Talesh (2007), Olszewskà (2007), and Aliabadi (2007). These studies particularly focused on whether colleges or universities complied with
various requirements of the Act (e.g. crime statistics, timely warnings, reports of security policies and procedures); on perceptions of fear of victimization on campus; and on the efficacy of training and compliance efforts and whether such efforts were effectively reduced campus crime and increased campus safety.

In a study currently under way, White (2012) is examining the impact of Clery training on campus officials’ ethical commitments to campus safety, using Noddings’ (2003) ethic of care theory. According to the author,

This study aims to evaluate the influence of Clery-related training on the participants’ ethical commitment to campus safety beyond compliance at their respective institutions. In consideration of Nel Noddings’ ethic of caring theory, the researcher frames this qualitative study in connection to caring; educational decision-making; and one’s responsibility for morality, fidelity, and true concern for individuals. By surveying, examining institutional documents, and interviewing, the researcher intends to explore the influence of Clery Act Training Seminars on participants’ devotion to the letter and spirit of the law (pp. iii–iv).

Patton (2010) examined perceptions of students from Virginia community colleges regarding their fear of campus crime. He surveyed students from all 23 Virginia community colleges and found that students felt least safe in parking lots and bathrooms, and that they had the greatest fear of being a victim of a robbery, despite the fact that no robberies had occurred on the campuses in 10 years. He also studied whether the perception of safety varied on several demographic factors, as well as on the rurality of the institutions and whether the institutions had police, security or no form of campus safety force. Finally, he questioned whether best practices established by the Virginia Crime Commission have been implemented at the schools and whether these practices had any impact on perceptions of safety at the campuses identified as “most” and “least” safe in his study.

Dagler (2009) also conducted a study related to fear of crime. He used a mixed methods design to survey and interview both international and American students to determine whether the two groups differed in levels of fear of sexual assault and property crime. He found that international students were, in fact, more fearful of both types of crime compared to their American counterparts. He also noted that both domestic and international students shared common perceptions about crime, and that international students became less fearful over time.

Barnes (2009) studied crime in Virginia institutions of higher education and did comparisons of crime at institutions that had campus police and campus security departments. She used a rate of the number of crimes per 100 students similar to the crimes per 100,000 used by Janosik and Gregory, 2003 b). Her findings suggested that crime in the communities which surround these campuses needed to be better focused upon by campus officials, suggested that the campus building, layout, structure and capacity need to be examined when campus crime was compared across campuses, and noted that her study examined:

. . . the general categories of campus crime utilized in the multivariate models (total, violent/personal, and property offenses reported per 100 student), future researchers are
cautiously encouraged to determine a valid, reliable way to examine specific crime categories. However, based on the experience gained from the current research, the utility of examining any type of sexual assault is questionable due to inherent underreporting (Barnes, 2009, p. 173).

Kerkhoff (2008) studied the impact of the Virginia Tech tragedy on safety policy in community colleges in Florida. She examined changes in campus safety policy related to student mental health policy and recommendations within the Florida Task Force Report (2007) and examined tort liability for campus crime. Kerkhoff also made a variety of suggestions for future research that may provide excellent guidance for future researchers, and concluded that:

Ongoing assessment of crisis management teams should include audits to recommend improvement of internal procedures related to coordination, adequacy, and timeliness of actions, as well as the unit’s efficiency in the follow up and tracking of students designated at risk. Agent-based modeling and social networking theories provide avenues for determining where dysfunction in communication relays exist. Policymaker should define safety and the goals sought to be achieved (pp. 151-152).

Talesh (2007), in a qualitative study, explored the experiences of senior student affairs officers (SSAO) facing the leadership challenges of implementing external legislation on their campuses. Nine current or retired SSAOs shared their stories and insights about the Clery Act and provided reflections on the leadership challenges and issues they faced when the legislation was enacted. Talesh (2007) found that senior student affairs officers examined considerations of legal and crime related issues using four conceptual “frames,” including the structural, human resources, symbolic, and political. He also noted that the most important leadership skills needed by the SSAO when considering these issues were communication and relationship building; that SSAOs had to rely on colleagues and professional associations for support and assistance; and that collaboration among campus leaders improved when working on Clery-related issues.

Olszewska (2007) studied whether there was a difference in crime rates between institutions that did or did not request information about students’ disciplinary records during the admissions process. According to Olszewska (2007):

The primary independent variable was the practice of gathering disciplinary background information; the secondary independent variables were control of the institution, ratio of students living on-campus, gender distribution of the undergraduate student population, and size of the city in which the institution was located; and the dependent variable was the rate of campus crime.

She found that items such as an applicant’s criminal record, student conduct record while in high school and military discharge records were likely not effective measures to mitigate campus crime. She found no statistically significant difference in the campus crime rates between institutions which sought this information and those which did not.

Aliabodi (2007), in a mixed methods study, investigated whether students at three California universities were changing their safety/crime prevention behaviors over time as a
result of knowledge about the *Clery Act*. Aliabodi (2007, pp 126-127) reached the following conclusions:

1. The *Clery Act* is changing student behaviors in some ways. . . . It is causing students to reflect upon the issue [of campus crime] moreoften, however it is not enough. It is up to the institution to teach students methods they can use to protect themselves.

2. Student behaviors are not changing between their first and fourth year at the given institutions because of the *Clery Act* alone. The knowledge students gain from the *Clery Act* is useful and does make a difference, but it is only one of many factors that illicit change. Over time students become more acclimated to the university at large, they develop more friendships, and they develop new outlooks on what is important in life.

**Master’s Thesis**

In addition to the above listed dissertations, we found one master’s thesis related to the Clery Act which was written since 2007. Walters (2010) conducted a qualitative study including personal interviews and document reviews at three California universities. She noted the personal perceptions of compliance by those for responsibility for such compliance and examined both campus crime reports and crimes reported to the Department of Education to determine whether they were identical. While she found that the reports were identical, she also found the three institutions were in varying levels of compliance in other areas, and that training seminars were sometimes lacking.

**Books and Journal Articles**

In addition to the dissertations and theses previously described, researchers have conducted studies on various aspects of the *Clery Act* that have appeared in books, professional journals and other forums. Many of the articles are foundational and are often cited in the dissertations, theses, articles and other materials that have followed. There are several themes running through much of this research, which is not surprising since a relatively small group of scholars has produced much of this work. Further, surveys conducted by some of these scholars contained common items. In general, the studies found that large percentages of study participants believed their campuses and the surrounding areas to be “safe” or “very safe.” Students, parents and administrators indicated they did not study *Clery Act* crime statistics, and even when they did review the statistics, they did not use them to decide which school to attend. Only very small percentages of the administrative groups believed that campus officials were intentionally hiding crime on campus, and few among any study group reported that the *Clery Act* had any appreciable affect on lowering crime rates or making campuses safer. As the research beyond the foundational work of Gehring (e.g., Gehring & Galloway, 1997), Gregory (e.g., Gregory & Janosik, 2002, 2003, 2006) and Janosik (e.g., Janosik, 2001, 2004) has occurred, a broader examination of campus crime and the *Clery Act* has also occurred.
Books.

While as with the dissertations and theses, we do not claim that we have provided an exhaustive list of books on the Clery Act and related topics. We describe two books that have recently dealt with issues of campus crime.

Perhaps the book most relevant to this chapter is Hemphill and LeBanc’s (2010) *Enough Is Enough: A Student Affairs Perspective on Preparedness and Response to a Campus Shooting*. This edited volume has chapters, authored primarily by student affairs professionals at Northern Illinois University, and consists of nine chapters that examine such issues as murder on college campuses, mental health issues among college students, planning for and managing campus crises, the role of counseling centers during campus crises, and other important issues for student affairs professionals.

Another book on a related topic is *Violence Goes to College* (2010). According to a review by Gregory (2012, p. 174), The metaphor of “violence as a virus,” or at least an illness on the campus, is woven throughout the book and the primary authors, as well as several chapter authors, give a nod to this metaphor throughout. The authors assist the reader in understanding campus violence and where it comes from, discuss ways to recognize, prevent and prepare for campus violence, and then identify and examine those types of violence that are most prevalent on American campuses. Gregory (2012) also notes that while the book is interesting and draws attention to various issues, which face campuses, it is not what many would identify as “scholarly research”.

Journal Articles

Hart and Colavito (2011) interviewed 160 students at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas to study the reporting of crime by college students to police. They sought to examine whether victimization reporting differed between college students and the general public. Using the theory of “collective efficacy,” they found that social control influenced college students’ reporting and that there was little correlation between reporting by college students and the general public except with regard to crime severity. While this article did not specifically refer to the Clery Act, we felt it was important to show that research related to the topic was occurring regarding college students.

Kaminiski, Koons-Witt, Thompson and Weiss (2010) conducted interviews with students at the University of South Carolina before and after the mass shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University to determine whether the levels of fear of crime increased as a result of these shootings. They found that there was a “modest” increase in fear generally but that levels of fear varied by type of fear measured and student demographics.

Janosik and Gregory (2009) studied the perceptions of 351 senior student affairs officers regarding their awareness of and the perceived efficacy of the Clery Act in informing parents and students about campus safety as well as reducing crime, and found the respondents to be very homogeneous in terms of age and other physical characteristics such as race, educational background, years of experience, etc. as well as in their opinions regarding the Clery Act in
comparison to previous populations studied and found little difference between respondents from public and private institutions. The respondents almost universally reported they were aware of the Act and expressed the belief campus officials were not hiding crime. They had significant confidence that students were reading crime reports and would attend training programs on campus safety topics. Approximately five percent of the respondents expressed the belief that the Clery Act was having an impact on the reduction of campus crime.

Conclusion

Despite the presence of the Clery Act since 1990, prior to the first decade of the twenty-first century, there was little formal study regarding the legislation’s impact. The studies reviewed in this chapter comprise the large majority of available research, particularly that occurring from 2007 to 2012, and from which several common themes and conclusions are recognized. These themes are continuations of the research which was reviewed in the last edition of this book.

First, while the Clery Act is an important piece of legislation, it has often been perceived as confusing and ill focused. Even now, after 22 years, some administrators, and to a lesser extent campus police officers may not fully understand some of the nuances of the Act, and “institutions still do not report crime data in a way fully consistent with Federal law” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005, p. 4). Such difficulties prompted Karjane et al. (2002) to conclude that college administrators need more guidance on how to comply with Clery. While the U.S. Department of Education has provided more guidance since these statements were published, and a number of states have examined campus safety in the wake of the Virginia Tech tragedy and other high profile campus murders, there is still much confusion and relatively small amounts of scientific research being conducted on the law and its impact or campus safety more broadly. The lack of compliance with certain aspects of Clery is a theme echoed by several of the studies reviewed above.

The U.S. Department of Education has updated many of its resources to assist campuses to better understand and comply with the Act. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education revised The Handbook for Campus Safety and Security Reporting (Westat, Ward, & Mann, 2011) it created in 2005 to assist campus officials comply with Clery. The updated publication provides significant guidance and training regarding the Act. The current version of the Handbook totals some 300 pages and contains many technical definitions that define reporting expectations. However, because additional reporting requirements have been added since 2005, there is still room for misunderstanding. Wood and Janosik (in press) argue that many of these provisions are overly prescriptive and onerous.

Second, Clery does not seem to have had the positive impact that its sponsors had hoped. There is no evidence that parents and students are using the Act to make decisions regarding where to attend college and there are no reports that the Act has had an impact on reducing crime. Early studies, indicated that less than 27% of student and parents know of the Act and fewer than 25% of students acknowledge reading the crime reports mandated by the legislation (Janosik & Gehring, 2003; Janosik, 2001). Fewer than 10% of parents and students use crime information contained in Clery mandated campus security reports to make college selection
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decisions (Janosik, 2004). Despite efforts by campus administrators to improve reporting, one has to wonder about the efficacy of such a strategy. We question whether such a strategy in and of itself is of any value. While these crime incident numbers may have changed since early reports such as those noted above, since there is no known research to confirm any changes, these earlier data are likely very similar to today’s results. Perhaps Fisher et al. (2002) are correct and Clery is merely a symbolic effort to make campuses safer.

Third, though many critics indicate that campus crimes are still not being reported accurately and skepticism about the accuracy of campus crime statistics continues to exist among campus “watchdog” groups (e.g., Kerkstra, 2006), there is no evidence that the crime statistics reported per Clery mandates are in a broad way systematically and intentionally being manipulated by campus officials. A case can be made that the accuracy of Clery statistics is no greater or less than the accuracy of crime statistics generated by other agencies responsible for reporting crime. Most of the data seem to indicate that students, parents and institutional officials believe that college administrators for the most part are being candid about campus safety issues and that very few administrators attempt to hide crime. While a number of the studies cited in this chapter and in the previous edition suggest that campus crime is underreported, particularly sexual assault, we would argue that much the same phenomenon is true in society as a whole.

Fourth, research by Gregory, Janosik and their colleagues involving surveys of postsecondary institutional constituent groups showed members of these groups perceived their campuses to be at least as safe as the surrounding community and this perception is largely borne out by crime data. The fact is campus crime, like crime in the general population in the United States, has been and continues to decline. The wave of youth crime predicted by criminologists in the 1990s never materialized (Greve, 2006), while studies by Fisher et al. (2002), Janosik and Gregory (2003b), Janosik et al. (2005), and Gregory et al. (2006) all report that the campuses they studied had lower crime rates than the communities which surrounded them. Almost none of these researchers, however, attribute this finding to the Clery Act. While certainly administrators have work to do to make campuses safer, particularly in the important areas of sexual assault, hate crimes, theft, assault and substance abuse, campuses are implementing educational programs, have increased training for key personnel, have installed safety equipment, such as blue light safety phones, and since the Virginia Tech massacre the number of various types of electronic alert systems for timely notices have skyrocketed.

Finally, we do believe that the Clery Act has had some positive effects on administrative practice in higher education. Clearly, college administrators of all types have had to devote resources to comply with the Clery Act and generate the mandated reports required by the Clery Act. This allocation of resources varies widely by school and is difficult to quantify with any precision (Janosik & Gregory, 2003a). As noted in several studies cited above, fear of crime is high (Dagler, 2009; Patton, 2010) and the knowledge level of campus officials is low (Gregory & Janosik, 2006; Janosik & Gregory, 2009).

Judicial officers and campus law enforcement officers report an increased consistency in crime reporting by colleges and universities. These two groups and counselors report a slight improvement in their working relationships with one another (Gregory & Janosik, 2003; Janosik
& Gregory, 2003a). About one-quarter of administrative groups, parents and students report an increased level of confidence in campus police officers (Gregory & Janosik, 2003; Janosik & Gregory, 2003a), and a majority of students report an increased willingness to report campus crime on their respective campuses (Janosik & Gehring, 2003; Janosik, 2001). Better relationships among key officials and increased confidence are likely to result in increased reporting of campus crime.

Beyond requiring college and university administrators to prepare mandatory reports, we believe the Clery Act has influenced student affairs practice only on the margins. Even in this respect, readers should remember that many colleges and universities reported crime statistics using the FBI’s uniform crime reporting protocols long before the Act was passed. We encourage additional research in the area of campus safety, crime prevention and improvements in the Clery Act to make it even more effective. We believe that this can occur.
References


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