Surveillance and Audio Recording on the Educational Campus

Affordable Technology to Prevent, Protect and Prosecute

December, 2012—Adam Lanza, age 20, fatally shoots twenty children and six adult staff members, and wounds two, at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut. Before driving to the school, Lanza had shot and killed his mother, Nancy Lanza, at their Newtown home. After killing students and staff members, Lanza commits suicide as first responders arrive.

November, 2011—Penn State defensive coach Jerry Sandusky is charged with sexually molesting eight boys (in at least one instance, on the University campus). The scandal leads to the downfall of Penn State's president and coaching legend Joe Paterno.

March, 2010—Angry over a poor performance evaluation, Nathaniel Brown enters a maintenance building at The Ohio State University and kills building services manager Larry Wallington before turning his gun on himself.

September, 2009—Yale University student Annie Le is murdered by lab technician Raymond Clark. Le's family later files a wrongful death lawsuit.

April, 2007—At Virginia Tech, Cho Seung-Hui kills 33 (including himself) and injures many more in a shooting rampage that remains the worst shooting in American history.

There is little question that college campuses have their share of crime. Some incidents are notorious, like the ones listed here. Others are less shocking, but no less damaging to the students, faculty, staff, visitors and others whose lives are affected. For example, Miami Trace Middle School in Ohio recently fired a teacher's aide and suspended a teacher without pay after they were caught on tape bullying a special needs student.

In the midst of crime reports, however, a piece of good news is often overlooked: national statistics indicate that the incidence of major crimes on campuses is decreasing. Why? Industry experts point to better enforcement as one reason—and better surveillance as the other.

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There are a number of reasons why surveillance continues to improve in the educational world. In the past, administrators often viewed security as a cost center that could be minimized or even ignored. Large-scale or high-profile incidents…and subsequent bad publicity, decreased enrollments, and at times costly lawsuits…have shown this view to be short-sighted. In today's world of camera phones and YouTube, even incidents that don't make the evening news can damage a school's reputation. Surveillance (both audio and visual) has become a mission-critical part of security operations at most schools, colleges and universities.

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Another reason surveillance has improved is that it offers greater capabilities at a lower cost. Sophisticated video analytics, once available as part of only the highest-end systems, are now a part of every basic surveillance software package. In fact, sometimes a single camera can offer analytic functionality. Such analytics can include:

- Asset Placement/Removal (monitors expensive assets and/or detect suspicious items left behind)

- Linger/Loiter Detection (monitors whether a person or group spends too   much time in a defined area)

- Direction/Velocity (not only detects intrusions but allows identification of specific behaviors)

- Facial Detection (finds faces in the scene and improves image quality around the face while reducing bit rate in the remainder of the image)

"Not only can today's systems detect and analyze these types of events, they can also alert you to them *as they happen*," says Darin Cooper, CTO at Sound Communications, a leading integrator of surveillance and recording solutions. "The newest software is truly designed to simplify the surveillance process. For example, IntelliVid from American Dynamics requires just a few clicks to bring video clips, evidence movies, still images and case notes together into one file for investigation management."

A third reason for surveillance improvements on campus is simply that surveillance is expected. The current generation of students grew up with cameras, televisions, and recording in every aspect of their lives. "Just visit YouTube or Facebook," says Cooper. "Based on what some students share, you might even feel they're a little *too* comfortable with being on camera." Turning this into a true positive, many universities, colleges and even private K-12 schools have even begun to tout their surveillance and security capabilities in recruiting efforts.

"If all else is equal, who wouldn't pick the school with the safer, more secure environment for their child to attend?" asks Jim Capriotti, father of a high-school junior.

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Audio Recording on the Educational Campus

While cameras and video recorders have become ubiquitous in educational facilities, audio recording of telephone traffic is surprisingly less prevalent. Universities receive thousands of calls every day, and even the smallest college or elementary school may receive hundreds of daily calls. What benefit is there to recording these calls?

> Beginning in January 2012, any organization that accepts credit card payments by phone must ensure that recordings of those calls are encrypted.
> *Source: PCI Security Council*

Sound Communications' Cooper comments, "In many ways, a university or college is like a public safety facility and several businesses, all rolled into one. While recording the central switchboard and campus police department are important for security reasons, other departments may have different reasons to record."

An example might be the Student Accounts (or Bursar's) Office (or the central or main office in K-12). This department handles calls of a financial nature, including those related to payment or bill discrepancies. Recording these calls can protect the office from he said/she said disputes, and also provide clear-cut evidence in cases of litigation.

"Because the Student Accounts office functions more as a call center, PCI compliance is also likely to be of concern," notes Kristi Perozzi, a Sound Communications training coordinator who specializes in call centers. "PCI-DSS v2.0 is fully effective at the beginning of 2012, so centers need to be sure that their call recordings are encrypted, and that they are not recording sensitive authentication data."

Recording these call center-like departments also allows the university, college or school to implement recording-based initiatives like quality assurance and speech analytics. The latter is another example of once high-end technology that is now available in less costly applications. Speech analytics automates searching of recorded calls for words or phrases. Search results are returned within seconds, providing information can be shared within and beyond the organization's administration.

The Bottom Line

When it comes to protecting students and personnel; preventing crime and costly litigation; and prosecuting offenders should the worst happen; recording technology is one of the best investments available to educational institutions today.

About the Author
Gina R. George, MCSE, is an experienced project manager in the audio and video recording industry. She also speaks and writes frequently on security and PCI-related topics, and is a contributor to various online networks including Yahoo!