

Active Shooter Risk Assessment for College Campuses

1 Campus Environment Vulnerabilities

College campuses are open, dynamic, high-population environments that make threat prevention uniquely challenging.



Key Vulnerabilities

- Open-access buildings with minimal entry control
- Large numbers of people during peak class times
- Multiple high-density locations (residence halls, dining halls, libraries, student unions)
- Public events drawing visitors with unknown backgrounds
- Spatial complexity—numerous floors, hallways, and blind spots
- Easy movement between campus and surrounding neighborhoods
- Potential delay in threat recognition due to noise, crowds, and assumptions that “it’s a drill”



Questions Chiefs Should Ask

- Which buildings are most accessible to the public, and are security measures proportionate?
- Do we have accurate maps and pre-plans for hard-to-secure buildings?
- Where do students naturally congregate in large numbers, and do we have rapid deployment routes?
- Are residence halls adequately secured, monitored, and staffed after hours?
- How quickly can we lock down or shelter specific buildings? (integration of technology)
- What environmental features (trees, courtyards, tunnels, parking structures) impact response visibility?

2 Threat Detection & Recognition Vulnerabilities

Early detection is critical. Most shootings are over in 3–7 minutes.



Key Vulnerabilities

- Delayed 911 calls because students/staff are unsure what they heard
- Underreporting due to fear of being wrong or bothering police
- Lack of real-time detection technology (gunshot detection, cameras with analytics, weapons detection, and license plate readers)
- Slow internal notification systems (texts, push alerts, sirens)
- Communication gaps between campus PD, local PD, and dispatch centers



Questions Chiefs Should Ask

- How long does it take from the first shot fired to the first emergency notification?
- Are gunshot-like sounds consistently reported—or often dismissed?
- Do we have automated systems (e.g. ShotSpotter) to reduce reliance on witness reporting?
- How fast can we issue a campus-wide alert after confirmation?
- Does our dispatch have full situational awareness, maps, and location data?
- Are communications interoperable with city, county, and state partners?

3 Response Capability Vulnerabilities

The speed and coordination of law enforcement response heavily influence casualty numbers.



Key Vulnerabilities

- Response time delays due to campus size or traffic
- Limited officer staffing during overnights and weekends
- Confusion about shooter location or movement
- Officers lacking rapid access to rifles, shields, or breaching tools
- Unfamiliarity with interior building layouts
- Difficulty navigating crowded hallways during class changes



Questions Chiefs Should Ask

- What is our true average response time, not just our target?
- Do we maintain immediate access to keys, master cards, or forced-entry tools?
- Are officers trained and equipped for solo-officer entry, if needed?
- Do we have active shooter mutual-aid agreements with local police?
- Are our radio systems reliable inside old or dense buildings?
- How often do officers train inside actual campus buildings?

4 Campus Community Preparedness Vulnerabilities

Students, staff, and faculty play a critical role in survivability.



Key Vulnerabilities

- Lack of understanding of Run–Hide–Fight principles
- Students/teachers unsure how to barricade properly
- New students arriving each year with no prior training
- Adjunct faculty and visitors missing safety awareness
- Students reluctant to report concerning behavior
- Uneven emergency procedure knowledge across departments



Questions Chiefs Should Ask

- Do students and staff receive mandatory annual training?
- Are classroom doors lockable from the inside?
- Do faculty know where the safe rooms or hardened spaces are?
- Are emergency plans accessible and easy to follow?
- How often do we run tabletop exercises and full-scale drills?
- Do we have a behavioral threat assessment team that actually meets and acts?

5 Prevention & Pre-Incident Indicators

Many incidents show warning signs prior to the attack.



Key Vulnerabilities

- Lack of centralized reporting for concerning behavior
- Limited coordination between campus PD, counseling, and administration
- Understaffed or underutilized Threat Assessment Teams (TAT)
- Failure to follow up with concerning individuals
- Social media threats missed or unreported



Questions Chiefs Should Ask

- Do we have a clear, easy, anonymous way to report concerns?
- Are reports actually tracked, evaluated, and followed up?
- Do police, mental health, and student affairs share information effectively?
- Are we monitoring leakage behaviors (threats, fascination with prior shootings)?
- Do we have an actionable protocol for students in crisis or students making threats?

6

Technology & Infrastructure Vulnerabilities

Modern threats require modern systems. Campuses must rethink their operational posture.



Key Vulnerabilities

- Outdated or non-integrated camera systems
- Poor lighting around key areas
- Lack of campus-wide public address systems
- Limited access control on academic buildings
- Delayed alert distribution due to outdated software



Questions Chiefs Should Ask

- Are our camera feeds monitored in real time?
- Do we have technology that can detect, locate, and alert officers instantly?
- Are buildings outfitted with mass notification speakers?
- Can we lock specific buildings remotely?
- Do we test our systems at least annually?

7

Recovery & After-Action Vulnerabilities

Long-term response planning is essential for resilience.



Key Vulnerabilities

- Lack of reunification plans
- Poor coordination with local hospitals
- Confusion over media coordination
- Inadequate mental health follow-up
- Slow return-to-normal operations



Questions Chiefs Should Ask

- Do we have a family reunification plan ready to deploy?
- Are hospitals prepared for mass-casualty protocols with us?
- Do we have pre-scripted messages for the media and parents?
- Do we conduct after-action reviews that lead to real changes?
- Are mental health resources scaled for a major incident?

