

Episode One: Unlocking Campus Lockdown

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Tragedy at UCLA

On July 1, 2016, former doctoral student Mainak Sarkar fatally shot professor William Klug in a fourth floor office in one of UCLA's engineering buildings. Sarkar then turned the gun on himself.

UCLA Police was quick to react to the shooting — invoking the Bruin emergency alert notification system to the campus community. Thousands of UCLA students raced for cover and barricaded themselves in classrooms. The campus was put on lockdown.

While tragic, the UCLA shooting provides an opportunity to look at what went wrong, and what can be done to make sure all campuses are prepared in the event of an emergency.

So What Is Lockdown?

Lockdown is a concept that fits in a group of what are called “functional protocols.” There are functional protocols for various types of emergencies. The most basic and commonly known is the evacuation. Lockdown is another.

Bart Kartoz from Dynamic Security says that locking down a campus is the act of taking the campus from an open profile — or as open as they are on a normal day — to a more secure profile.

This might look different for different organizations. It depends on the level of public safety presence, response time to the area and the type of people who occupy the building.

Another important question to consider: Who is responsible for initiating a lockdown? Chris Dorn, a security analyst with the non-profit firm Safe Havens, suggests that any staff member on campus can and should be responsible. This represents a big shift in education, as people have become more aware of emergency issues.

Dorn's company trains staff members to act: If they detect a fire, they should pull the fire alarm; if they see a gunman, they should call the appropriate department to activate a lockdown.

The problem with this everyone's-responsible concept? People don't necessarily want to be liable for calling or not calling a lockdown. They hesitate to call a lockdown unless the situation is very serious for fear of disrupting the school — or looking foolish.

Dorn understands, and he recommends that schools maintain two levels of lockdown. Having only the most extreme lockdown as an option may prevent people from initiating the protocol when needed.

*This is an excerpt from **Unlocked** — an ASSA ABLOY podcast series on campus security. **Unlocked** explores the security issues and challenges that colleges and universities face as they strive to create a safe and secure learning environment. Visit www.intelligentopenings.com/unlocked to hear more.*

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That emergency, or hard, lockdown is what we saw at UCLA: doors locked; lights off; people in offices and classrooms, and maybe even under desks — anything for protection. But the most common type of lockdown at schools is what's called a preventative, or soft, lockdown. It can be used for something as simple as a utility failure, such as a power outage when you don't want people tripping in the hallway.

Using lockdowns for these more common events makes the idea of this protocol less intimidating and more accessible. Dorn says some schools go into lockdown a couple times a week. For instance, a school in an urban area might go to lockdown mode when helicopters are nearby in case there's a police chase. Best to be safe, and the functional protocol allows for it.

Patrick Fiel, who runs PVF Security Consulting, emphasizes that door locks and access control are critical during an active shooter situation.

After the 2007 fatal campus shooting at Virginia Tech, Fiel spent three days advising the school. He believes doors should always be locked when closed, and the administrator, teacher or professor should be the only one with a key. If they hear a situation outside the room, no one should have to open the door to lock it. "Unfortunately that's what happened to a professor at Virginia Tech. He encountered the shooter."

Educating staff, faculty and students on what to do in an emergency is a challenge for most colleges and universities, but it's a must-do.

Issue #1: No Locks On Doors

Because the UCLA incident was not a mass shooting, it exposed shortcomings that many schools face during emergencies. During the lockdown, two major, yet common, campus issues came to light.

In a news report right after the incident, a UCLA student said, "We had a problem because our doors don't lock. It's actually a relatively old building, so the fact that the doors didn't lock was a huge issue. We felt very unsafe."

When she saw the BruinAlert notification, she took cover in a closed room with other students. But with doors that open outwards and didn't lock, she, like many students, were forced to improvise.

You may recall seeing pictures in the news of the barricades. One utilized a combination of a chair, a desk strapped to the door and a water bottle.

While news outlets picked up on the cleverness and the slight humor of engineering students, well, engineering, the pictures portrayed a very real problem. Many campuses have a lot of rooms with a lot of doors, and those doors can't keep someone out if they don't lock.

Fiel goes on to explain that many colleges and universities were built in the 1940s and '50s, when security was not much of a concern; the focus was always on education. Campus buildings had many "nooks and crannies," as Fiel calls them, where students could study. He believes those should be eradicated. And never should there be an unlocked classroom.

Locking doors can seem to contradict the culture of a campus. Bart Kartoz from Dynamic Security recalled his college days: "Back then, all those doors were open. ... If there was no class going on and you were with a team of six students, you walk into the room, take it over and start working. It happened all the time when I was in college. So are we saying that we are so afraid of bad things happening that we're going to lock all those rooms? ... What are we accomplishing?"

Kartoz raises an excellent point: How much security is too much? And how much is enough?

Chris Dorn of Safe Havens suggests an ideal campus situation where students can use card access technology to maintain the open campus environment. "I'm a student, I can wander into the library, scan my card, find an empty study area or empty room and use my card to get into that area. These are examples of ways we can use that technology to maintain that level of openness."

Issue #2: Lack of Training & Empowerment

Campus security involves a two-fold approach. There's the physical security (i.e., the equipment, the hardware), and there's staff training and empowerment.

To be clear, UCLA does have an extensive emergency preparedness plan in place. It enabled them to respond to the shooting very quickly and contain an incident that could have gone much worse. But UCLA is huge, and the bigger the campus, the more complicated effective emergency training can be.

Educating staff, faculty and students on what to do in an emergency is a challenge for most colleges and universities, but it's a must-do. By their nature, campuses are spread out and accessed by many people doing many things. Reaching all of those different folks is not easy.

Some staff members are part-time; some are visiting instructors. Students may attend classes every day or once a month. And campuses welcome many visitors to residential and instructional areas.

One UCLA student hit on the issue, saying, "I'm not going to say they didn't tell us what to do or provide us with this information, but we do get so many emails from the school, and we get so much information, and we have a lot going on as students. So I don't personally remember seeing anything."

There's no tried-and-true method for overcoming this challenge, but it starts with having an emergency preparedness plan.

However, not every school has an effective plan in place. According to Patrick Fiel of PVF Security, some campuses view it as "just a tick mark." Those that are unprepared will likely encounter problems in the future.

As a first step, Fiel recommends that schools get a vulnerability, all-hazard risk assessment. This will uncover exactly where the strengths and weaknesses are. It also helps when determining a practical budget. This is what most schools around the country are lacking, according to Fiel.

Training is commonly overlooked. Chris Dorn says that in many campus shootings, no training was in place.

"You hear things like lockdown failed at Sandy Hook, or lockdown failed at Virginia Tech. Well, when you don't have a key to lock your room, when you don't have a procedure and drills, it's a bit of a misnomer to say that the lockdown failed when there wasn't actually a lockdown."

While people inherently know they should secure themselves, staff members need to be trained on emergency procedures and given the tools to ensure everyone's safety.

Taking Responsibility

All schools must take responsibility for the safety of their students, faculty and staff. They must have a sufficient emergency preparedness plan in place. Schools should assess their security technologies. Are they tested? Are they up to date? Have they conducted a thorough risk assessment?

The UCLA shooting was not an isolated incident, unfortunately. Emergencies are inevitable on any campus. School leaders need to ask themselves: Have they done everything they can to be prepared and protect lives?

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