Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs

Volume 36 | Issue 1

7-2020

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Recommended Citation

Cooper, C. L. (2020). College in the Crosshairs: A Book Review. *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 36(1). <https://doi.org/10.20429/gcpa.2020.360107>

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College in the Crosshairs: An Administrative Perspective on Prevention of Gun Violence (Book Review)

Labanc, B. H., & Hemphill, B. O. (2015). *College in the crosshairs: An administrative perspective on prevention of gun violence*. Sterling, VA: Stylus. 184 pp. ISBN: 978-1-620-36352-2. \$39.95 suggested retail price.

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Violence has existed on college campuses throughout the history of higher education in America. In the Colonial Era of higher education, tension between faculty and students often led to riots and revolts led by disgruntled students (as cited in Thelin, 2011). During the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Era, demonstrations on campuses were occasionally met by violent overreactions of law enforcement (as cited in Cohen and Kisker, 2010). In recent decades, violence on college campuses has been marked by the use of guns, leading to casualties, like in the tragic case of the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007. *College in the Crosshairs: An Administrative Perspective on Prevention of Gun Violence* examines gun violence on campus and seeks to provide suggestions to limit

such violence. In the following sections, I will summarize the contents and argument of the book and provide an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses.

About the Editors

College in the Crosshairs: An Administrative Perspective on Prevention of Gun Violence was edited by Brandi Hephner LaBanc and Brian O. Hemphill. LaBanc is the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and a scholar in campus crisis management. Before starting her current role, she served as the Associate Vice President in the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management at Northern Illinois University. Hemphill currently serves as the President of Radford University, and has held previous administrative

Cooper, C. (2020). *College in the crosshairs: An administrative perspective on prevention of gun violence (book review)*. *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 36(1), 71-75.

ISSN: 2330-7269

roles including Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management at Northern Illinois University. He is a known scholar in the field of gun violence and threat preparedness.

LeBanc and Hemphill share similar administrative experience in higher education and are both scholars in campus safety. These experiences and scholarly work not only inform their roles as editors of this book but qualifies them to speak on the subject. Each chapter has well curated suggestions for campus administrators, which were clearly chosen based on their professional experience and research.

Content

College in the Crosshairs is a collection of chapters that examine different aspects of violence on college campuses. The topics include an overview of homicides related to higher education in recent years, considerations based on school type, the guns on campus debate, and preventative measures.

Overview of incidents in recent years.

In the opening chapter, "Murder in Academia," the author categorizes homicides from 2009-2014 into *rampage shootings* or *conventional murders* with the ultimate goal of determining whether violence on campuses has lessened. The author concluded that rampage-type violence related to higher

education has increased, while conventional homicides have not increased (LaBanc & Hemphill, 2015).

In addition to this analysis of violence on campus, this chapter offers suggestions for reform. The author first recommends reform of gun policies in which guns are only allowed on campus for law enforcement and degree instruction. Additionally, the author recommends including additional services in campus counseling centers like help with managing chronic mental health conditions and conducting threat assessments. Finally, the author recommends that the federal government return to the original interpretation of Title II to allow for the use of involuntary leave for people who are a threat to themselves, instead of only a threat to others (LaBanc & Hemphill, 2015).

Considerations based on school type.

The book includes chapters that analyze the issue of violence on campus through the perspective of specific school types. Specifically, chapter 8 considers the perspective of a small college, and chapter 9 considers the community college. Small schools face challenges that are unique to their size, such as the lack of resources and staff due to limited funding. Small colleges are also experiencing an increase in competition from for-profit institutions (LaBanc & Hemphill, 2015). Com-

munity colleges also experience unique challenges due to their mission and size. They often have less funding which leads to fewer fulltime faculty and staff and less resources, like counseling services. These limitations make it difficult to prioritize programs such as violence prevention. With these challenges in mind, the authors of these chapters offer suggestions for tackling violence on campus tailored to the school type based on their unique characteristics.

The guns on campus debate.

The editors of the book include chapters that consider the place of guns on campus. In the years following the Virginia Tech shooting of 2007, more and more states have passed laws allowing the concealed carry of weapons on college campuses. These laws forced campus administrators to create new policies regarding guns on campus. In chapter 2, authors Melear and St. Louis provide readers with an overview of state laws that permit concealed weapons and additionally discuss recent legislation and litigation that are of note to higher education.

Preventative measures and suggestions.

The remaining chapters of the book offer suggestions for prevention of violence, as well as how to handle active violence on campus. These suggestions fall into categories such as emotional health, intervention,

risk assessment, and timely communication. In the category of emotional health, the authors recommend creating a comprehensive plan to improve well-being of all campus community members. This includes “creating a sense of urgency” and increasing buy-in to improve the campus climate (LeBanc & Hemphill, 2015, p. 82). In addition to this, administrators should prioritize counseling resources on campus and partnerships with community mental health providers. Intervention is also an important piece in prevention. The authors of “Creating an Emotionally Healthy Community” recommend incorporating “gatekeeper training programs” in which “campus members who are in a position to observe behavior...provide initial outreach to someone who may be struggling” (LeBanc & Hemphill, 2015, p. 96).

These examples illustrate a portion of the range of suggestions offered; the authors include many more suggestions for prevention, intervention, and management of campus violence. Some of these recommendations include creating a crisis management team, implementing a communication system, and conducting active shooter drills.

Argument

The common argument found in each chapter of the book is that higher education administrators should study violence on campuses and share policies and procedures to

attempt the prevention of future violence. This is succinctly captured in the forward written by ACPA Executive Director Cindi Love and NASPA President Kevin Kruger: “we should act as agents of responsible policy by adding to the conversation with lawmakers, campus leaders, and the public about what it takes to keep our communities safe” and “act as responsible stewards of our campuses, acting in good faith to comply with the legal and regulatory framework in which we practice” (as cited in LeBanc & Hemphill, 2015, p. xiv). The editors present a wide range of topics to educate and in turn catalyze higher education administrators to engage in the gun control debate in society and simultaneously foster a safe community on college campuses.

Strengths of the Book

College in the Crosshairs begins with a strong forward that introduces the content and purpose of the book. This forward is written by the Executive Director of ACPA and the President of NASPA, which elevates the level of authority the book provides. This is complemented by the experience and scholarly work of the editors, which no doubt provided valuable feedback to the chapter authors.

The book provides a robust overview of the issue of violence on campus. The chapters on small schools and community

colleges offer perspective of how this issue needs to be addressed differently on varying campuses. Additionally, the inclusion of a personal account of a gun violence incident in chapter 10 was a strong choice of the editors. It prevents the readers from becoming desensitized to the issue. This chapter also provides unique recommendations from the author, including the idea that counseling centers may not be the right resource for all students. In addition to these areas, the book includes sections on legislation, theory, and many strategies for prevention and crisis management.

Weaknesses of the Book

While *College in the Crosshairs* has many strengths, it is not without weaknesses. In the first chapter, the author provides an overview of homicides on college campuses in recent years. The main weakness was the method of rating *rampage shootings*. A few of the incidents included were either not on a campus, or not closely related to higher education. The inclusion of these incidents warps the numbers and could change the outcome of the conclusion of the chapter—that violence on campuses have gotten worse in recent history. The author does, however, explain the inclusion of these incidents.

Another weakness of the book was the disjointed tone from one chapter to the next. This is to be expected in a book that is

a collection of chapters by multiple authors, but still the flow could be improved. Related to this weakness is the inclusion of repetitive information. Because each chapter has its own introduction and conclusion, the issue of violence on campus was explained multiple times, leading to a repetitive feel in the book. For example, many chapters cited mental health being linked to perpetrators of campus violence. While this is an important fact, the readers do not need an explanation of that idea more than once.

The repetitive nature of the book leads to the final critique: organization. The repetition could be remedied by including a single introduction and conclusion for the book. The book could also be organized into sections based on subtopics. For example,

separating the book into parts such as Background, Legislation, Prevention, etc. may create a more cohesive flow.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the strengths of this book outweigh the weaknesses. The experience of the editors and well written and researched chapters provides an overview of the issue of violence on college campuses. Most importantly, the book offers many suggestions for both prevention and management of campus violence from creating an emotionally healthy community to using instant communication tools. I would recommend this book to higher education graduate school students, as well as higher education and student affairs professionals. It is an excellent addition to the library of any higher education administrator, present or future.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY & CONTACT INFORMATION

Carlie Cooper is a graduate student pursuing her M.Ed. in Higher Education Administration at Georgia Southern University. She also works as an Academic Advisor in the School of Electrical and Computer Systems Engineering at the University of Georgia, and previously was an advisor in the Terry College of Business. She earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology from UGA. Her research interests include advising in STEM fields, supporting underrepresented students, and college student development.

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