

# Facilities Security: Easier Than You Think

When we think of making campus facilities more secure, we often think of high-tech or expensive solutions such as using the latest in communication systems or installing an extensive network of surveillance cameras. Although these efforts do deter crime and are worth the expense, says Denise Swett, dean of the Middlefield Campus at Foothill College in California, many of the efforts to make campus facilities more secure are relatively low cost and low tech.

During her recent online seminar “Including Safety and Security in Campus Facilities Planning,” Swett outlined how to make new and existing facilities more resistant to crime, including the following low-tech options:

## Faculty and student training

Students have long been experts at circumventing the safety and security hardware that campuses install in residence halls, Swett noted. They prop doors open, ignore alarms, and lend one another their IDs and/or security swipe cards. As a result, training is key in making the most of equipment.

On Swett’s campus, trainers conduct five-minute meetings in classrooms. The training focuses on the positives of staying safe, rather than on scaring students with potential dangers. (Swett said she is happy to share the script her campus uses in these five-minute classroom appearances. Please email her at [swettdenise@fhda.edu](mailto:swettdenise@fhda.edu) to request a copy.)

## Landscaping

Something as seemingly simple as landscaping can impact facilities security, Swett noted. A bougainvillea border underneath a bank of windows, for example, serves a security function. The flowering shrub’s tangle of thorns deters potential criminals from accessing the building through the windows. Low-to-the-ground hedges and trees with their lower branches pruned away also enhance security: they keep windows from being

obscured and don’t afford potential criminals places to hide.

Landscaping that offers full outdoor views also deters potential criminals. On Swett’s campus, for example, a grouping of tables in an outdoor spot affords a view in all directions, making it harder for a potential criminal to surprise anyone sitting there or commit a crime without being observed by someone else in the area. In contrast, another campus has a

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path winding through a garden of tall bamboo plants: although the garden is lovely, people on the path cannot see other people there until they’re in very close range.

## Maintenance

Well-maintained campuses send the message “We don’t want you here” to potential criminals, Swett said. In contrast, poor maintenance sends the message, accurately or not, that the campus is “unsecured, ignored, and overlooked”—in other words, a good place to get away with crime.

## Signage

Clear, well-designed signage can also deter crime. Signs should be easy to read at night and should not use confusing jargon or acronyms. Campus maps that are current and note the locations of emergency call boxes are helpful to both potential crime victims and first responders.

## Addressing windows and doors

Among the top safety modifications included in the report released after the

Virginia Tech shootings in 2006 were recommendations to install the following:

- solid doors
- window coverings
- doors without handles or bars that can be chained together

Swett noted that among the students locked into classrooms for safety reasons during the Virginia Tech shooting, all survived. Having a solid door, or at least a door with windows that can be covered by curtains or a shade, increases the safety of being locked into a room because an assailant can’t see if anyone’s inside.

Many double door sets can be chained together by an attacker because each door has a handle. If such doors can’t be replaced, at least one of the handles can be removed as an alternate solution, Swett said.

## Which approaches should your campus take?

To determine the deterrents that will work for your campus, Swett recommended the following steps:

1. Assemble a work team.
2. Conduct an audit of your facilities for its security weak spots.
3. Determine priorities for safety upgrades.
4. Find resources and enhancements.
5. Install equipment and implement changes.
6. Develop training materials.
7. Conduct ongoing training and drills.

More on facilities security, including discussion of innovations in lighting, communication systems, and surveillance systems, is available in Swett’s online seminar “Including Safety and Security in Campus Facilities Planning.” For information on ordering a CD or transcript, visit [www.magnapubs.com/catalog/cds/602263-1.html](http://www.magnapubs.com/catalog/cds/602263-1.html). ©