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# The Clery Act: Student Awareness and Perceptions of Effectiveness at a Public University and a Private College in East Tennessee

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# THE CLERY ACT: STUDENT AWARENESS AND PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY AND A PRIVATE COLLEGE IN EAST TENNESSEE

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## ABSTRACT

*The U.S. Congress has recognized that safety is essential on our college and university campuses. Incidents such as the Virginia Tech massacre and the death of Jeanne Clery have emphasized the need for legislation that assists students in selecting a safe college and improves their safety by reducing the incidence of crimes and fires. The Clery Act is a federal law that requires colleges and universities to provide annual information on the number and type of crimes on campus as well as the number and cause of fires occurring in the residence halls. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived effectiveness of the Clery Act by students at two higher educational institutions in East Tennessee.*

*This study determined that students are not aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the crime and fire statistics to a significant extent. However, students are aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution. Students do not tend to use the Clery Act crime and fire statistics in their decisions as to what college to attend, indicating the limited effectiveness of the Clery Act. Lack of use of the Clery Act crime and fire statistics may be related to a lack of awareness of their existence. Students perceive to a significant extent that the reporting of the Clery Act crime and fire statistics as well as the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings, improved their safety and security while on campus. The Clery Act mandated use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings issued by the institution results in students changing their behavior to protect themselves and their property. Students perceive that the reporting of crime and fire statistics as well as the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings, has reduced crime and fires on campus.*

## INTRODUCTION

Jeanne Clery, a student at Lehigh University located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was beaten, raped, and murdered in her dormitory room on April 5, 1986 (Fine & Gross, 1990). An investigation by local authorities culminated in the arrest of another Lehigh University student who was eventually convicted of murder and sentenced to death. As a result of intense lobbying by her parents, Connie and Howard Clery, and the media scrutiny that followed, the U.S. Congress passed the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act of 1990. This piece of legislation would later become known as the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, requiring all public and private higher education institutions that receive federal Title IV funding

to report their crime data to the Department of Education and publish an annual crime report for the purpose of advancing campus safety and security (McNeal, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived effectiveness of the Clery Act by students at two higher educational institutions in East Tennessee. The following research questions were addressed by this study:

1. Are student's scores significantly different from the test value of 4 as it relates to awareness of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report), fire statistics (fire safety report), and the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution?

2. Is there a significant difference of awareness scores between males and females they relate to the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report), fire statistics (fire safety report), and the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution?
3. Is there a significant difference between the responses of students who experienced a crime or fire prior to attending college and those who did not experience a crime or fire prior to attending college as related to awareness of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report), fire statistics (fire safety report), and the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution?
4. Is there a significant difference between responses of campus residents and non-campus residents as related to awareness of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report), fire statistics (fire safety report), and the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution?
5. Is there a significant difference between responses of public and private institution students as related to awareness of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report), fire statistics (fire safety report), and the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution?
6. For students who are aware of the Clery Act campus security and fire safety report, how were they made aware of the institution's provision of crime and fire statistics?
7. Do students use the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report) and fire statistics (fire safety report) to a significant extent in their decisions as to what college to attend?
8. Do students perceive that the reporting of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report) and fire statistics (fire safety report) improves their safety from crimes and fires while on campus to a significant extent?
9. Do students change their behavior to protect their property or personal well-being due to the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings issued by their institution to a significant extent?
10. Do students perceive that the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution has improved their security while on campus to a significant extent?
11. Do students perceive that the reporting of crime statistics (campus security report) and fire statistics (fire safety report) reduces crime and fires on their campus to a significant extent?
12. Do students perceive that the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings reduces crime on their campus to a significant extent?

### RELATED LITERATURE

The Clery Act, passed by Congress in 1990, requires colleges and universities to report their crime statistics and security policies for the main purpose of (1) providing information to potential students so they can factor campus security into their decision as to what college or university to attend, (2) providing safety notices, crime alerts, and timely warnings to students so they can alter their behavior to protect themselves and their property, and (3) reducing the incidence of campus crime (Janosik, 2004). Colleges and universities must also report various crime occurrences and disciplinary offenses such as murder, robbery, forcible sex offenses, non-forcible sex offenses, burglary, aggravated assault, manslaughter, arson, motor vehicle theft, weapons possession, drug related violations, and liquor law violations (Mann & Ward, 2011). In 2008 the Clery Act was amended by requiring colleges and universities to issue emergency notifications, in addition to timely warnings already required since the law was first enacted, by notifying campus occupants of any emergency situation that constitutes a threat to the safety of faculty, staff, and students. Additionally, the 2008 amendment required reporting of fire statistics through the use of a fire incident logbook, documenting every fire occurrence in the residential facilities for a period of three years. This amendment also required the publication of an annual fire safety report that described the fire protection systems that have been installed in the residence halls, such as sprinklers, standpipes, and fire alarm systems. The annual fire safety report must also include the university's fire safety programs such as the use of fire drills, fire evacuation training, fire code inspections, and fire safety training (Mann & Ward, 2011). Numerous studies (e.g. Gregory & Janosik, 2002b; Janosik, 2004; Janosik & Plummer, 2005) have been conducted with students, parents, college administrators, senior student affairs officers, assault victim advocates, judicial officers, senior housing administrators, law enforcement officials, and women's center directors in an effort to determine the effectiveness of the Clery Act by measuring awareness of the act, student use of crime statistics in their college selection deci-

sions, student change in behavior due to the crime report, and the frequency of the incidence of crimes. The findings of these studies indicate that the Clery Act has not significantly reduced the incidence of crimes or changed student behavior to protect themselves or their property, and that most students and parents are unaware of the Clery Act and do not use the crime report to select a college (Aliabadi, 2007). For instance, Gregory and Janosik (2002a) conducted a study in which 70% of senior university police official respondents believed that crime was not reduced as a result of the Clery Act, while Aliabadi (2007) established that only 18% of student respondents from three California universities changed their behaviors to protect themselves or their property. Additionally, Bush (2011) conducted a study of 1,000 Northern Michigan University students, revealing that only 25% of respondents were familiar with the Clery Act and its requirements. Gehring and Janosik (2003) also surveyed 9,150 undergraduate students in which only 8% of respondents used the Clery Act crime information in making their college selection.

With the adoption of the amendments to the Clery Act in 2008, fire statistics and fire safety are now an integral component of the act. University officials are required to be aware of the act and its fire safety reporting requirements in order to comply with the act and accomplish its goals. Additionally, students and parents should be cognizant of and familiar with the annual fire safety report, using the fire data in choosing their college and changing their behavior to protect themselves and their property from fire. Several studies (e.g. Gregory & Janosik, 2002b, 2009; Janosik & Plummer, 2005) have been conducted to determine if the Clery Act requirements have decreased campus crime, yet none were found that determined if the Clery Act has reduced campus fires.

If students and their parents were unaware of the Clery Act and its provisions, which clearly was the case as shown in numerous aforementioned studies, then students are unable to use this information in their college selection decisions or to change their behavior in protecting themselves or their property since they are unaware of the incidence of crime or fires on their campus (Janosik, 2004). Considering most students and their parents were unaware of the act and do not use the information to change their behavior on campus or make their college selection decisions, it would seem highly unlikely that crime or fires would decrease as a result of the act. Studies have shown that only a small percentage of respondents perceive that crime has been reduced due to the Clery Act. As such, an analysis of the relevant research indicates that the purposes of the act have not been realized, other than the annual reporting of crime and fire statistics, and therefore college administrators and the United States Department of Education need to make changes in implementation

to improve the effectiveness of the Clery Act (Gregory & Janosik, 2002a).

### METHODOLOGY

This researcher employed the nonexperimental quantitative research design, based on the premise that the research did not manipulate any conditions that were experienced. The population used in this study was composed of 16,200 students attending two higher education institutions in East Tennessee and included undergraduate, graduate, campus residents, and commuters, including specialty college students such as medical and pharmacy residents. One of the institutions was a public university attended by approximately 15,000 students, composed of 12,500 undergraduate, 2,500 graduate students. The other institution was a private Christian College attended by approximately 1,200 students, composed of 950 undergraduate and 250 graduate students. The total sample was comprised of 1,361 students who voluntarily agreed to complete and submit the survey.

The first 11 items of the 28 item survey were demographic in nature, enabling cross-tabulation and comparison of subgroups to ascertain the variance of responses between these groups. The next two items asked respondents whether they had read their institution's campus security report and fire safety report. The next 13 items consisted of Likert-type statements to measure degrees of awareness, decision, improvement, and perception. Each item had seven possible responses: Strongly Disagree -1, Disagree -2, Somewhat Disagree -3, Neither Agree or Disagree -4, Somewhat Agree -5, Agree -6, and Strongly Agree -7. The last two items asked respondents to identify where they observed their institution's crime and fire statistics.

### FINDINGS

#### Research Question 1

A directional, upper tail critical, single sample t test was conducted to evaluate whether responding students were aware of crime statistics, fire statistics, and the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution to a significant extent. This variable was entitled "overall awareness" (Mean = 4.37, SD = 1.34) and was composed of the average scores resulting from three separate Likert-type scale survey statements as follows: 1) I am aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the provision of crime statistics (Campus Security Report) for the college I am attending, 2) I am aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the provision of fire statistics (Fire Safety Report) for the college I am attending, and 3) I read safety notices, crime alerts, emergency notifications, or timely

warnings which are sent out by Public Safety or Campus Security. A test value of 4, which indicated neutrality on the Likert scale, was used for this analysis. The test was significant,  $t(1,303) = 10.12, p < .001$ . Therefore, students are aware of crime statistics, fire statistics, and the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution to a significant extent.

**Research Question 2**

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean score of the overall awareness of the Clery Act by students was different between females and males. "Overall awareness" of the Clery Act by students was composed of the average scores resulting from three separate Likert scale survey statements as follows: 1) I am aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the provision of crime statistics (Campus Security Report) for the college I am attending, 2) I am aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the provision of fire statistics (Fire Safety Report) for the college I am attending, and 3) I read safety notices, crime alerts, emergency notifications, or timely warnings which are sent out by Public Safety or Campus Security. The overall awareness of the Clery Act by students was the variable and the grouping variable was females or males. The test was significant,  $t(1,302) = 2.85, p = .004$ . The "overall awareness" mean for females was 4.44, with a standard deviation of 1.31, while the "overall awareness" mean for males was 4.21, with a standard deviation of 1.40, indicating that females were significantly more aware of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report), fire statistics (fire safety report), and the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution.

**Research Question 3**

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean score of the overall awareness of the Clery Act was different between those students who experienced a crime or fire prior to attending college and those who did not experience a crime or fire prior to attending college. "Overall awareness" of the Clery Act by students was composed of the average scores resulting from three separate Likert scale survey statements as follows: 1) I am aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the provision of crime statistics (Campus Security Report) for the college I am attending, 2) I am aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the provision of fire statistics (Fire Safety Report) for the college I am attending, and 3) I read safety notices, crime alerts, emergency notifications, or timely warnings which are sent out by Public Safety or Campus Security. In an effort to effectively address this research question, two separate tests were conducted: 1) a comparison of

the overall awareness of the Clery Act with students who experienced a crime prior to attending college and those who did not, and 2) a comparison of the overall awareness of the Clery Act with students who experienced a fire prior to attending college and those who did not. In the first test the overall awareness of the Clery Act by students was the variable and the grouping variable was those students who experienced a crime prior to attending college and those who did not. The test was significant,  $t(1,302) = 2.15, p = .031$ . The "overall awareness" mean for students who experienced a crime before attending college was 4.57, with a standard deviation of 1.42, while the "overall awareness" mean for students who did not experience a crime before attending college was 4.34, with a standard deviation of 1.33, indicating that students who experienced a crime before attending college were significantly more aware of the Clery Act than students who did not experience a crime before attending college.

**Research Question 4**

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean score of the overall awareness of the Clery Act was different between those students who reside on-campus and those who do not. "Overall awareness" of the Clery Act by students was composed of the average scores resulting from three separate Likert scale survey statements as follows: 1) I am aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the provision of crime statistics (Campus Security Report) for the college I am attending, 2) I am aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the provision of fire statistics (Fire Safety Report) for the college I am attending, and 3) I read safety notices, crime alerts, emergency notifications, or timely warnings which are sent out by Public Safety or Campus Security. The overall awareness of the Clery Act by students was the variable and the grouping variable was those students who reside on-campus and those who do not. The test was significant,  $t(1,302) = 2.77, p = .006$ . The "overall awareness" mean for students who reside on-campus was 4.53, with a standard deviation of 1.30, while the "overall awareness" mean for students who reside off-campus was 4.30, with a standard deviation of 1.35, indicating that students who reside on-campus were significantly more aware of the Clery Act than students who reside off-campus.

**Research Question 5**

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean score of the overall awareness of the Clery Act was different between students who attend the regional public institution and students who attend the small private Christian college. "Overall awareness" of the Clery Act by students was composed of the average scores

resulting from three separate Likert scale survey statements as follows: 1) I am aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the provision of crime statistics (Campus Security Report) for the college I am attending, 2) I am aware of the Clery Act as it relates to the provision of fire statistics (Fire Safety Report) for the college I am attending, and 3) I read safety notices, crime alerts, emergency notifications, or timely warnings which are sent out by Public Safety or Campus Security. The overall awareness of the Clery Act by students was the variable and the grouping variable was students who attend the regional public institution and students who attend the small private Christian college. The test was significant,  $t(1,302) = 2.44, p = .015$ . The "overall awareness" mean for regional public institution students was 4.41, with a standard deviation of 1.33, while

the "overall awareness" mean for private Christian college students was 4.15, with a standard deviation of 1.35, indicating that students who attend the regional public institution are significantly more aware of the Clery Act than students who attend the private Christian college.

**Research Question 6**

The survey used two separate items to collect data concerning notification, one for crime statistics and the other for fire statistics. The types of notification methods and the corresponding percentage of students who were notified by these methods are listed in the following tables:

Notification Method	n	%
Observed notification of crime statistics on college website	359	28.58
Notified of crime statistics in orientation session	262	20.86
Notified of crime statistics by a Residence Life Official	187	14.89
Notified of crime statistics by a Student Affairs Official	177	14.09
Observed notification of crime statistics in catalog	164	13.06
Observed notification of crime statistics on student application	139	11.07
Observed notification of crime statistics in Parent Handbook	97	7.72
Other notification method	93	7.4

Note: Approximately 550 respondents, or 43.79% of survey participants, did not see any notifications of crime statistics.

Notification Method	n	%
Observed notification of fire statistics on college website	168	13.47
Observed notification of fire statistics in catalog	153	12.27
Notified of fire statistics in orientation session	128	10.26
Notified of fire statistics by a Residence Life Official	120	9.62
Notified of fire statistics by a Student Affairs Official	86	6.9
Observed notification of fire statistics on student application	69	5.53
Observed notification of fire statistics in Parent Handbook	69	5.53
Other notification method	42	3.37

Note: Approximately 863 respondents, or 69.21% of survey participants, did not see any notifications of fire statistics.

### Research Question 7

A directional, upper tail critical, single sample *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether responding students use the Clery Act crime and fire statistics to a significant extent in their decisions as to what college to attend. The variable was entitled "Use of Crime and Fire Stats in College Decision" (Mean = 2.52, SD = 1.60) and was composed of the average scores resulting from two separate Likert scale survey statements as follows: 1) I considered the Clery Act crime statistics (Campus Security Report) in my decision as to what college to attend, and 2) I considered the Clery Act fire statistics (Fire Safety Report) as to what college to attend. A test value of 4, which indicated neutrality on the Likert scale, was used for this analysis. The test was significant,  $t(1,309) = -33.36$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, while the *p* value indicates significance, because the *t* value is negative, students do not use the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report) and fire statistics (fire safety report) to a significant extent in their decisions as to what college to attend.

### Research Question 8

A directional, upper tail critical, single sample *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether responding students perceive that the reporting of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report) and fire statistics (fire safety report) improves their safety from crimes and fires while on campus to a significant extent. The variable was entitled "Reporting of Crime and Fire Statistics" (Mean = 4.25, SD = 1.35) and was composed of the average scores resulting from two separate Likert scale survey statements as follows: 1) In my opinion, the reporting of crime statistics (campus security report) has improved my security on campus, and 2) In my opinion, the reporting of fire statistics (fire safety report) has improved my safety from fire while on campus. A test value of 4, which indicated neutrality on the Likert scale, was used for this analysis. The test was significant,  $t(1,304) = 6.60$ ,  $p < .001$ . Therefore, students perceive that the reporting of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report) and fire statistics (fire safety report) improves their safety from crimes and fires while on campus to a significant extent.

### Research Question 9

A directional, upper tail critical, single sample *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether students change their behavior to protect their property or personal well-being due to the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings issued by their institution to a significant extent. The variable was student behavioral change due to timely warnings (Mean = 4.83, SD = 1.66), and

a test value of 4, which indicated neutrality on the Likert scale, was used for this analysis. The analysis indicated that the mean is significantly higher than the test value  $t(1,295) = 18.11$ ,  $p < .001$ . Therefore, students do change their behavior to protect their property or personal well-being due to the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings issued by their institution to a significant extent.

### Research Question 10

A directional, upper tail critical, single sample *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether students perceive that the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution has improved their security while on campus to a significant extent. The variable was student perception of improved security due to timely warnings (Mean = 5.26, SD = 1.44), and a test value of 4, which indicated neutrality on the Likert scale, was used for this analysis. The analysis indicated that the mean is significantly higher than the test value  $t(1,300) = 31.52$ ,  $p < .001$ . Therefore, students do perceive that the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution has improved their security while on campus to a significant extent.

### Research Question 11

A directional, upper tail critical, single sample *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether responding students perceive that the reporting of crime statistics (campus security report) and fire statistics (fire safety report) reduces crime and fires on their campus to a significant extent. The variable was entitled "Reporting Reduces Crimes and Fires" (Mean = 4.15, SD = 1.20) and was composed of the average scores resulting from two separate Likert scale survey statements as follows: 1) In my opinion, the reporting of crime statistics (campus security report) has reduced crime on my campus, and 2) In my opinion, the reporting of fire statistics (fire safety report) has reduced fires on my campus. A test value of 4, which indicated neutrality on the Likert scale, was used for this analysis. The test was significant,  $t(1,279) = 4.51$ ,  $p < .001$ . Therefore, students perceive that the reporting of the Clery Act crime statistics (campus security report) and fire statistics (fire safety report) reduces crime and fires on their campus to a significant extent.

### Research Question 12

A directional, upper tail critical, single sample *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether students perceive that the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings reduces crime on their campus to a significant

extent. The variable was student perception of reduced crime due to timely warnings (Mean = 4.33, SD = 1.38), and a test value of 4, which indicated neutrality on the Likert-type scale, was used for this analysis. The analysis indicated that the mean is significantly higher than the test value  $t(1,287) = 8.62$ ,  $p < .001$ . Therefore, students do perceive that the use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings reduces crime on their campus to a significant extent.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that students perceive that the Clery Act is effective. Students are aware of timely warnings and change their behavior due to these warnings. Students perceive that the Clery Act has improved their safety and security. Additionally, students perceive that the Clery Act has reduced the incidence of crime and fires. There are, though, two areas in which the Clery Act has very limited effectiveness: awareness of the crime and fire statistics and use of the crime and fire statistics in making their selection as to what college to attend.

This study reveals that website postings, student applications, parent handbooks, catalogs, orientation sessions, student affairs personnel, and residence life officials are making students aware of the Clery Act crime and fire statistics, but not to a significant extent. Students should be aware of the existence of Clery Act statistics prior to attending college so that they can use them in making their college selection decisions. The Department of Education should devote resources to advertise the Clery Act and its intended purpose to the general public, increasing awareness of the Clery Act mandates and the usefulness of the information provided by these mandates. College students should be aware of the Clery Act requirements prior to their decision as to what college to attend, making their high school years an appropriate target for disseminating Clery Act information.

Text messages and emails should be used to notify students of the institution's Clery Act crime and fire statistics as well as policies regarding crime reporting, crime prevention, and fire safety. Use of text messages and emails should improve student awareness of the Clery Act as this form of communication has been effective in notifying students of the issuance of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings by their institution.

Due to the frequent use of the college or university website by students in obtaining Clery Act crime and fire statistics, university administrators should continue to post the Campus Security Report and Fire Safety Report on the school website. University administrators may want to focus on improving the accessibility of the Campus

Security Report on their website by posting hyperlinks at various website pages not greater than two clicks from the home page. Accessibility to the Campus Security Report and Fire Safety Report via website searches should be tested and maintained. Operability of hyperlinks should be periodically tested both on and off campus to ensure functionality.

The use of safety notices, emergency notifications, or timely warnings is effective in changing student behavior to protect themselves and their property, having the potential to increase safety and security. Therefore, colleges and universities should continue to advertise and promote the use of an emergency alert system that uses text messaging and email to reach students by cell phone.

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