

# Students' Perceptions of Safety and of the Importance of Crime Prevention Strategies

The Ohio State University  
May 2002

## INTRODUCTION

In order to gain a better understanding of students' impressions of safety in and around OSU's Columbus campus, the Office of Student Affairs Assessment, Student Affairs Risk Assessment and University Public Safety included questions in the annual OSU Poll addressing these issues. Undergraduate and graduate/professional students were asked a series of questions concerning their feelings of safety and their impressions of crime prevention strategies. With this information, we gain an understanding of students' perception of safety and how to promote various safety initiatives. In addition, repeating these questions on a regular basis allows us the ability to track changes over time.

The OSU Poll is an annual survey of The Ohio State University, Columbus campus community. The primary purpose of the Poll is to provide a platform for university departments/units to gather strategic planning data for their use in developing and assessing programs and services. The 2002 OSU Poll was conducted by the OSU College of Social and Behavioral Sciences' Center for Survey Research (CSR) during winter quarter.

### **Methodology**

The sampling pool for the populations consisted of OSU Columbus campus undergraduates and graduate/professional students and was drawn from databases provided by the University Registrar. These data files were reviewed and cleaned to ensure that a random selection was conducted on only those cases in which the student was involved on the Columbus campus and for which contact information existed.

The poll was conducted using a multi-mode approach. Prospective respondents who had an e-mail address were first solicited through this means. This e-mail solicitation included a link to a web site developed by the CSR, as well as a user name and password enabling the respondent to enter the site and complete the survey. Following a two-week period of web-based data collection, attempts were made to contact by telephone those individuals who failed to respond to the e-mail solicitation or who logged into the site and completed only a portion of the survey.

A total of 499 randomly selected undergraduate student names and associated contact information were sampled from the undergraduate population of 34,404. These 499 cases were used to obtain 305 completed undergraduate student surveys. The overall 95% confidence internal level sampling error for the undergraduate student sample is plus or minus 5.6 percentage points.

A total of 536 randomly selected graduate and professional student names and associated contact information were sampled from the graduate student population of 11,790. These 536 cases were used to obtain 310 completed graduate student surveys. The overall 95% confidence interval level sampling error for the graduate student sample is plus or minus 5.6 percentage points. The student sample (both undergraduates and graduate/professionals) totals 615.

### **Limitations**

Examining the demographics of the sample, one should acknowledge the potential sampling bias common to survey research. In that a sample that perfectly reflects the composition of the total student population cannot be reconstructed, there are inevitably shortages and surpluses of certain groups. In addition, all surveys are subject to other potential sources of imprecision and bias which may be associated with the question wording and/or ordering, the response rate, and the quality of the interviewers, for example, which could lead to somewhat different results from the present findings.

### **Demographics**

Of the 615 graduate/professional and undergraduate respondents:

- **GENDER**: 49.4% were female; 50.6% were male
- **RANK**: of undergraduates, 9.1% were freshmen; 12.0% were sophomores; 12.0% were juniors; 15.6% were seniors. Of graduate students, 22.8% were master's students; 13.2% were Ph.D. students; and 13.5% were professional students; 0.2% refused; 1.6% did not know
- **RESIDENCE**: 17.1% lived in the residence halls; 1.1% lived in married student housing; 51.2% lived in an off-campus apartment; 29.9% lived in some other off-campus housing; 0.3% refused to answer; 0.3% did not know
- **MARITAL STATUS**: 77.2% were single; 21.3% were married; 0.5% were living as married; 1.0% were divorced or separated
- **RACE/ETHNICITY**: (Note: Seven respondents listed multiple racial/ethnic designations.)
  - 74.1% identified as White/Caucasian
  - 13.6% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander
  - 5.6% identified as African American/Black
  - 2.6% identified as Hispanic American/Latino(a)
  - 2.3% either refused to answer or stated they did not know
  - 1.0% identified as 'Other'
  - 0.2% identified as Alaskan Native/ American Indian

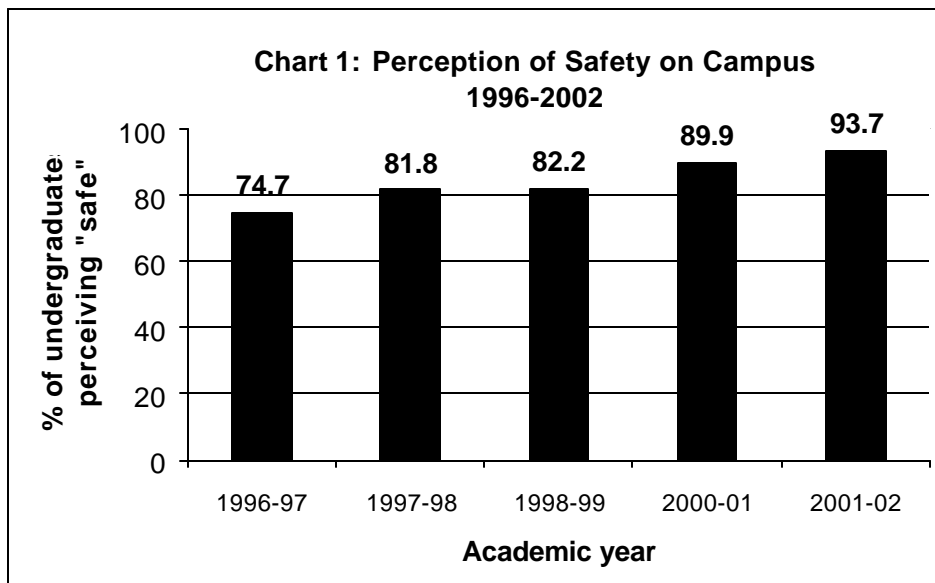
## FINDINGS

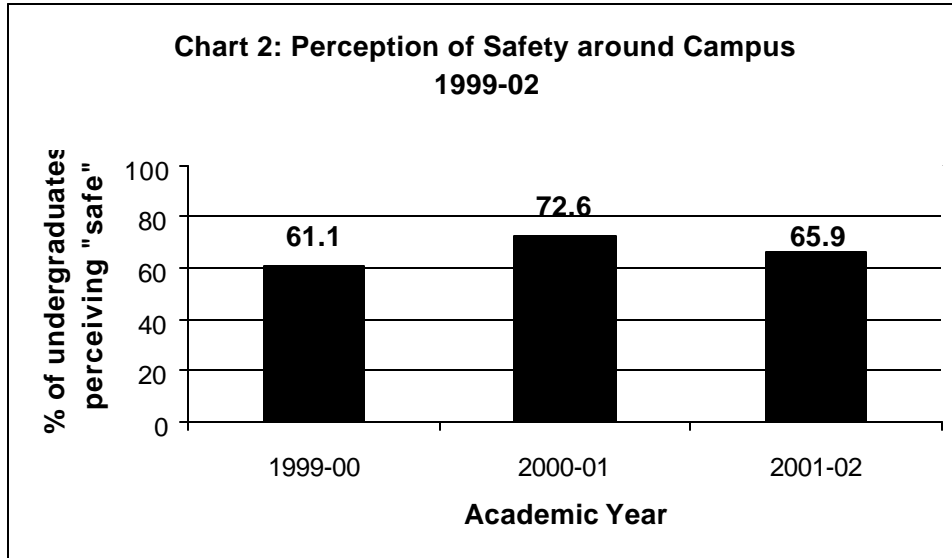
Students were asked a series of questions concerning both their feelings of safety as well as their impressions of certain crime prevention strategies. The data are first presented to show how perceptions of safety have changed over time. Following this, the 2002 data are presented in the aggregate, and comparisons are made between graduate/professional students and undergraduates, men and women, on-campus and off-campus residents. In the section on students' feelings of safety, comparisons are also made between North area and South area campus residents. [While residents of west residential areas (n=12) and Buckeye Village (n=4) were also included, they represented a small portion of the total sample, making comparison difficult.]

### Feelings of Safety

Questions of student safety have been asked over several years in the OSU Poll. In Charts 1 and 2, data are presented regarding the perception of undergraduates' feelings of safety on campus and the campus area over time.

- Evidence suggests that since 1996-97 there has been an increase in undergraduate students' perceptions that the campus is safe. In 1996-97, 74.7% of students agreed that the campus was safe; in 2001-2002, 93.7% responded this way
- In Chart 2, data suggest that students' perceptions of safety around campus have decreased from the 2000-2001 academic year, from 72.6% to 65.9% in 2001-02.





Focusing on the 2002 data, in Tables 1.0 and 1.1, data are presented regarding students' feelings of safety on campus.

- The majority of respondents (94.1%) stated that they feel safe on campus.
- A large percentage of the sampled graduate/professional students (94.4%) and undergraduates (93.7%) stated that they either “strongly agree” or “agree” that they feel safe on campus.
- There was a significant difference between men and woman, with men 17.4% more likely to report that they “strongly agree” that they feel safe on campus.
- There was a significant difference between on-campus and off-campus students' feelings of safety on campus, with on-campus students 12.6% more likely to “strongly agree” that they feel safe on campus.
- South area residents responded slightly less positively regarding feeling safe on campus when compared to North area residents, with 31.3% of South area residents “strongly agreeing” compared to 37.0% of North area residents.

**Table 1.0: I feel safe on campus; by status and gender.**

percentages	Totals (n=615)	Graduate students (n=310)	Undergraduates (n=305)	Men (n=311)	Women (n=304)
Strongly agree (1)	23.4	21.6	25.2	32.0	14.6
Agree (2)	70.7	72.8	68.5	65.4	76.1
Disagree (3)	5.4	4.9	5.9	2.6	8.3
Strongly disagree (4)	0.5	0.7	0.3	0.0	1.0
Average Scores	1.83	1.85	1.81	1.71	1.96*

\* Significantly different from men at the 99% confidence level

**Table 1.1: I feel safe on campus; by residence/location.**

percentages	On-campus (n=112)	Off-campus (n=499)	North Area (n=46)	South Area (n=48)
Strongly agree (1)	33.9	21.3	37.0	31.3
Agree (2)	64.3	72.1	63.0	64.6
Disagree (3)	1.8	6.3	0.0	4.2
Strongly disagree (4)	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0
Average Scores	1.68	1.86**	1.63	1.73

\*\* Significantly different from On-campus students at the 99% confidence level

In Tables 1.2 and 1.3, data are presented concerning the perceptions of safety around campus.

- Nearly a third (32.8%) of all respondents reported feeling either “somewhat unsafe” or “very unsafe” around campus.
- While nearly a third of both graduate students (32.6%) and undergraduates (32.5%) stated they either feel “somewhat unsafe” or “very unsafe” around campus, a majority of both graduate students (67.5%) and undergraduates (65.9%) stated that they either feel “very safe” or “somewhat safe” around campus.
- There was a statistically significant difference between the responses of men and women. Women were 15.8% more likely than men to report feeling either “somewhat unsafe” or “very unsafe” around campus.

**Table 1.2: I feel safe around campus; by status and gender.**

percentages	Totals (n=615)	Graduate students (n=310)	Undergraduates (n=305)	Men (n=311)	Women (n=304)
Very safe (1)	11.0	13.3	8.5	15.8	6.1
Somewhat safe (2)	56.2	54.2	57.4	59.2	53.2
Somewhat unsafe (3)	28.8	28.9	28.2	21.4	36.4
Very unsafe (4)	4.0	3.7	4.3	3.6	4.4
Average Scores	2.26	2.23	2.29	2.13	2.39*

\* Significantly different from men at the 99% confidence level

**Table 1.3: I feel safe around campus; by residence/location.**

percentages	On-campus (n=112)	Off-campus (n=499)	North Area (n=46)	South Area (n=48)
Very safe (1)	10.0	11.3	13.0	8.7
Somewhat safe (2)	54.5	56.7	60.9	52.2
Somewhat unsafe (3)	31.8	27.9	26.1	34.8
Very unsafe (4)	3.6	4.1	0.0	4.3
Average Scores	2.29	2.25	2.13	2.35

In Tables 1.4 and 1.5, data are presented concerning perceptions of safety in the residence halls for those students who lived on campus at the time of the survey.

- A large percentage (97.3%) of on-campus residents stated that they feel either “very safe” or “somewhat safe” in the residence halls.

- A majority of both graduates (96.0%) and undergraduates (96.6%) stated that they feel either “very safe” or “somewhat safe” in the residence halls.
- There was a statistically significant difference between men and women, with men 19.5% more likely than women to report that they feel “very safe” in the residence halls.
- A majority of both North area (97.8%) and South area (97.9%) students responded that they feel either “very safe” or “somewhat safe” in the residence halls.

**Table 1.4: To what extent do you feel safe in the residence halls?; by status and gender**

percentages	Totals (n=112)	Graduate (n=25)	Undergraduates (n=87)	Men (n=57)	Women (n=54)
Very safe (1)	73.0	68.0	73.6	82.5	63.0
Somewhat safe (2)	24.3	28.0	23.0	15.8	33.3
Somewhat unsafe (3)	2.7	4.0	2.3	1.8	3.7
Very unsafe (4)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Average Scores	1.30	1.36	1.28	1.19	1.41 <sup>α</sup>

<sup>α</sup> Significantly different from men at the 95% confidence level

**Table 1.5: To what extent do you feel safe in the residence halls?; by residence/location**

percentages	North Area (n=46)	South Area (n=48)
Strongly agree (1)	80.4	70.8
Agree (2)	17.4	27.1
Disagree (3)	2.2	2.1
Strongly disagree (4)	0.0	0.0
Don't know	0.0	0.0
Average Scores	1.22	1.31

### Crime Prevention Strategies

Students were asked to comment on the importance of six possible crime prevention strategies designed to improve and promote student safety. These strategies are as follows: *educational programming to inform students about how to prevent crime; lighting improvements; fire safety (i.e. alarms, drills, inspections); emergency telephones; greater police or security officer presence; and more locks and better control or who can access buildings on campus.*

In Table 2.0, data are presented that compare perceptions of the importance of the six crime strategies. “Importance” is a combination of the response percentages for “very important” and “somewhat important.” (See Appendix A for frequency distributions and Appendix B for average scores.)

- Of the total respondents, lighting improvements were perceived as the most important.
- For graduate/professional students, women and off-campus students, improved lighting are the most important.
- Undergraduate students, men and on-campus students noted that emergency telephones are the most important.

**Table 2.0: Crime strategies: % perceiving importance**

percentages	Totals (n= 615)	Graduate Students (n=310)	Undergraduates (n=305)	Men (n=311)	Women (n=304)	On-campus (n=112)	Off-campus (n=499)
Lighting improvements	94.6	95.4	93.7	92.6	96.7	93.7	94.7
Emergency telephones	94.2	93.2	94.1	93.2	95.4	94.7	94.1
Greater police presence	89.3	92.0	85.5	86.7	92.1	87.5	89.6
Fire safety	88.8	88.5	88.6	86.0	91.7	90.2	88.4
Educational programming	85.3	84.1	86.2	80.6	90.1	89.3	84.2
More locks	84.7	86.4	80.9	80.5	89.0	81.2	85.3

APPENDIX A

In the tables below, data are presented that present the full range of responses to questions of safety strategies. In addition to the total sample, the responses of subgroups are also shown.

**Table 3.0: Educational programming to inform students how to prevent crime; by status and gender.**

percentages	Totals (n=615)	Graduate students (n=310)	Undergraduates (n=305)	Men (n=311)	Women (n=304)
Very important (1)	37.7	38.5	36.7	32.9	42.6
Somewhat important (2)	47.6	45.6	49.5	47.7	47.5
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	7.3	9.4	5.2	9.0	5.6
Somewhat unimportant (4)	6.2	5.8	6.6	8.7	3.6
Very unimportant (5)	1.1	0.6	1.6	1.6	0.7
Average Scores	1.85	1.84	1.87	1.98	1.72*

\* Significantly different from men at the 99% confidence level

**Table 3.1: Educational programming to inform students how to prevent crime; by residence/location**

percentages	On-campus (n=112)	Off-campus (n=499)
Very important (1)	41.1	36.7
Somewhat important (2)	48.2	47.5
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	7.1	7.4
Somewhat unimportant (4)	2.7	7.0
Very unimportant (5)	0.9	1.2
Average Scores	1.74	1.88

**Table 3.2: Lighting improvements; by status and gender.**

percentages	Totals (n=615)	Graduate students (n=310)	Undergraduates (n=305)	Men (n=311)	Women (n=304)
Very important (1)	65.2	71.0	59.3	57.2	73.4
Somewhat important (2)	29.4	24.4	34.4	35.4	23.3
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	2.8	3.6	2.0	4.2	1.3
Somewhat unimportant (4)	2.5	1.0	3.9	2.9	2.0
Very unimportant (5)	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.0
Average Scores	1.43	1.35	1.51±	1.54	1.32*

± Significantly different from Graduate/Professional students at the 99% confidence level

\* Significantly different from men at the 99% confidence level

**Table 3.3: Lighting Improvements; by residence/location**

percentages	On-campus (n=112)	Off-campus (n=499)
Very important (1)	60.7	66.1
Somewhat important (2)	33.0	28.6
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	1.8	3.0
Somewhat unimportant (4)	4.5	2.0
Very unimportant (5)	0.0	0.2
Average Scores	1.50	1.42

**Table 3.4: Fire safety; by status and gender.**

percentages	Totals (n=615)	Graduate students (n=310)	Undergraduates (n=305)	Men (n=311)	Women (n=304)
Very important (1)	46.3	46.7	45.6	41.7	51.0
Somewhat important (2)	42.5	41.8	43.0	44.3	40.7
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	6.4	6.9	5.9	7.2	5.6
Somewhat unimportant (4)	3.9	3.9	3.9	5.9	2.0
Very unimportant (5)	0.8	0.7	1.0	1.0	0.7
Average Scores	1.70	1.70	1.71	1.54	1.32*

\* Significantly different from Men at the 99% confidence level

**Table 3.5: Fire Safety; by residence/location**

percentages	On-campus (n=112)	Off-campus (n=499)
Very important (1)	56.3	43.8
Somewhat important (2)	33.9	44.6
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	5.4	6.7
Somewhat unimportant (4)	3.6	4.1
Very unimportant (5)	0.9	0.8
Average Scores	1.59	1.73

**Table 3.6: Emergency telephones; by status and gender.**

percentages	Totals (n=615)	Graduate students (n=310)	Undergraduates (n=305)	Men (n=311)	Women (n=304)
Very important (1)	68.2	71.6	63.9	62.0	74.6
Somewhat important (2)	26.0	21.6	30.2	31.2	20.8
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	3.1	3.9	2.3	2.6	3.6
Somewhat unimportant (4)	2.3	2.3	2.3	3.9	0.7
Very unimportant (5)	0.3	0.6	0.0	0.3	0.3
Average Scores	1.40	1.39	1.42	1.49	1.31*

Significantly different from men at the 99% confidence level

**Table 3.7: Emergency telephones; by residence/location**

percentages	On-campus (n=112)	Off-campus (n=499)
Very important (1)	63.4	69.5
Somewhat important (2)	31.3	24.6
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	2.7	3.2
Somewhat unimportant (4)	2.7	2.2
Very unimportant (5)	0.0	0.4
Average Scores	1.45	1.39

**Table 3.8: Greater police or security officer presence; by status and gender.**

percentages	Totals (n=615)	Graduate students (n=310)	Undergraduates (n=305)	Men (n=311)	Women (n=304)
Very important (1)	52.6	58.3	46.2	46.1	59.3
Somewhat important (2)	36.7	33.7	39.3	40.6	32.8
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	5.7	4.9	6.6	6.5	5.0
Somewhat unimportant (4)	4.1	2.3	5.9	5.2	3.0
Very unimportant (5)	0.8	1.0	0.7	1.6	0.0
Average Scores	1.64	1.54±	1.74	1.52	1.76*

± Significantly different from Graduate/Professional students at the 99% confidence level

\* Significantly different from Men at the 99% confidence level

**Table 3.9: Greater police or security officer presence; by residence/location**

percentages	On-campus (n=112)	Off-campus (n=499)
Very important (1)	46.4	53.8
Somewhat important (2)	41.1	35.8
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	7.1	5.5
Somewhat unimportant (4)	4.5	4.0
Very unimportant (5)	0.9	0.8
Average Scores	1.72	1.62

**Table 3.10: More locks and better access control; by status and gender.**

percentages	Totals (n=615)	Graduate students (n=310)	Undergraduates (n=305)	Men (n=311)	Women (n=304)
Very important (1)	50.8	52.9	47.5	43.5	58.3
Somewhat important (2)	33.9	33.5	33.4	37.0	30.7
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	7.9	7.1	8.5	10.4	5.3
Somewhat unimportant (4)	6.1	4.5	7.5	7.1	5.0
Very unimportant (5)	1.3	0.3	2.3	1.9	0.7
Average Scores	1.73	1.64	1.83	1.87	1.59*

\*Significantly different from Men at the 99% confidence level

**Table 3.11: More locks and better access control; by residence/location**

percentages	On-campus (n=112)	Off-campus (n=499)
Very important (1)	44.6	52.2
Somewhat important (2)	36.6	33.1
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	7.1	8.1
Somewhat unimportant (4)	9.8	5.3
Very unimportant (5)	1.8	1.2
Average Scores	1.88	1.70

APPENDIX B

In Table 4.0, mean scores of importance are presented in rank order. These scores represent the average response, where 1 equals “very important” and 5 equals “very unimportant.” Given that these are averages, these rankings are different than the combined averages presented in Table 2.0.

- Emergency telephones were seen as the most important.
- Lighting improvements and greater police/security officer presence were ranked as the second and third most important strategies, respectively.
- Educational programming was seen as the least important.

There were significant differences between subgroups when asked about the importance of the crime prevention strategies.

- There were significant differences between men and women for each strategy. Except for greater police presence, women ranked all the strategies as being more important than did men.
- Graduate and professional students rated lighting improvements and great police presence as being significantly more important than did undergraduate students.

**Table 4.0: Crime strategies, mean scores and significance**

Average Scores	Totals (n=615)	Graduate Students (n=310)	Undergraduates (n=305)	Men (n=311)	Women (n=304)	On-campus (n=112)	Off-campus (n=499)
Emergency telephones	1.40	1.39	1.42	1.49	1.31*	1.45	1.39
Lighting improvements	1.43	1.35	1.51±	1.54	1.32*	1.50	1.42
Greater police presence	1.64	1.54	1.74±	1.52	1.76*	1.72	1.62
Fire safety	1.70	1.70	1.71	1.54	1.32*	1.59	1.73
More locks	1.73	1.64	1.83	1.87	1.59*	1.88	1.70
Educational programming	1.85	1.84	1.87	1.98	1.72*	1.74	1.88

\* Significantly difference from men at the 99% confidence level

± Significantly different from Graduate/Professional students at the 99% confidence level