

Behrend police officers say they should be allowed to carry weapons

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that given the nature of police work, weapons come with the territory.

"If you're going to ask people to do police functions, shouldn't you give them the tools to do so?" said Hoffman.

The question of arming campus police has been brought before the judiciaries of several states recently. Across the nation, college campuses are being held both civilly and criminally liable if the safety of those on campus, including their police forces, is jeopardized.

Recently, Western Washington University was fined \$2,550 by the state's Department of Labor when it was determined that having unarmed police officers created a harmful working environment.

Pro-gun advocates insist that armed police officers are a deterrent to crime. Hoffman cites the history of University Park. Presently, University Park police carry guns; however, ten years ago they were unarmed. According to Hoffman, there were a number of assaults committed against the unarmed police officers. Then "when they got armed it was a completely different ballgame. They (the potential perpetrators of crime) were not as confrontational. Fewer people made threats. It seemed to improve the sense of safety."

The most commonly committed crimes on college campuses are vandalism and fights. These are frequently committed under the influence of alcohol, according to Hoffman.

"Alcohol definitely in one way or another tends to manifest itself in many forms of crime." Physical assaults, including rape, are the most serious. "Assaults, while few in number, just by the nature of them are so severe that we consider them very serious. Crimes against a person get no break," said Hoffman.

A third category of crimes common to college campuses are those committed by outsiders. People unrelated to the campus are considered potentially much more dangerous than people with connections to the college. They have no vested interest, are usually on campus for a short time and therefore show little or no concern for the consequences of their actions.

"Based on the ten years experience I've had at University Park and a few things I have seen here, outsiders are a chronic problem," said Hoffman.

The many social events held at Behrend and the natural beauty of the gorge both attract a number of outsiders to campus. At a recent dance, there were over 100 non-affiliated individuals present including members of two gangs.

Officers say the "it can't happen here" syndrome is prevalent among many students.

"There is no sign out there at the gate that says 'This is Behrend Campus. Things don't happen here'" said officer Chip Sanders. In his experience here at Behrend, Sanders said he has dealt with disgruntled boyfriends of female students who were armed and has chased armed burglars through the gorge. "Behrend goes into the street, the street can come on to Behrend," said Sanders. Officers argue that giving them weapons gives them a better chance of survival should a life-threatening situation occur.

Officers at Edinboro University carry firearms, according to David Zerner, head of Edinboro Campus Police.

"The reason we are armed is not to control students. It is to protect," said Zerner. Edinboro has

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- Officer Chip Sanders

been armed since 1974 and reportedly made the change with little opposition from the student population.

Edinboro campus police have a mutual aid agreement with Edinboro municipal police wherein they provide backup for one another, acting as two separate but equal police forces.

According to Zerner, there have been many physical assaults with weapons at Edinboro, but in the 15 years they have been armed, no shots have been fired. Slippery Rock is also armed and reports no shootings. Closer to

home, Gannon and Mercyhurst both have unarmed security forces and depend on City of Erie Police should a violent situation arise. The Penn State campus at Altoona is involved in the process of arming and reports there is little opposition from students.

Here at Behrend, the administration is in an evaluation period. "Whether or not we need to be armed, I think, is something that needs to be assessed," said Director of Operations, John Ream.

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