A Study of CCTV at Harvard

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1 Introduction

We studied London's closed-circuit television (CCTV) system and the feasibility of implementing such a system at Harvard, taking into account financial, technical, and public response factors. We examined CCTV as it is currently implemented in London and at Harvard, and we present our research in this document. We found that such a system would definitely be feasible, and we believe that Harvard will implement more CCTV systems in the near future. We examine the major barriers to the launch of such systems, and we present some suggestions for best practices for launching this future program. We also provide a few talking points for the campus Civil Liberties Union and other activists who might want to launch an anti-CCTV campaign at Harvard.

The recruitment, management, and use of user/third-party created content, ie videos from digital cameras and cellphones, is beyond the scope of this project. We chose to focus exclusively on CCTV in public areas and its applications in policing at Harvard.

2 London CCTV overview

2.1 Scope

CCTV has been used in London since as early as the coronation ceremonies of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953;[1] however, it was not until the early nineties that camera installation

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[1] Wood, David M., ed. A Report of the Surveillance Society. Surveillance Studies Network. September 2006. http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data_protection/practical_application/surveillance _society_full_report_2006.pdf , p. 19.

1

became truly pervasive in London. Today, London is the most densely surveilled city in the world, boasting over 500,000 cameras.[2] It is estimated that there is one camera for every fourteen residents in the city,[3] and the average Londoner is caught on tape up to 300 times on any given day.[4]

2.2   Cost

CCTV is the United Kingdom's most funded crime prevention method, claiming roughly 78% of the Home Office's crime prevention funding in the 1990's. Additionally, all federal Home Office money put toward CCTV is matched by local authorities.[5] Over 500M ($990M) in taxpayer money has been put toward video surveillance throughout Britain.[6]

2.3   Organization

Individual boroughs of the city are responsible for maintaining their own CCTV systems. While London authorities have access to these local feeds, the Metropolitan Police only owns a few, mobile CCTV units used for special events.[7]

2.4   Usage

In a study done on Putney High Street, 79% of CCTV systems were monitored in real-time. Of those, only 10% are monitored 24/7, while the others are watched only during daytime hours or irregularly. While monitoring the video feeds, 82% of the observers have additional duties to perform simultaneously, such as checking in visitors. In 63% of cases, a suspicious event noticed on camera triggers the deployment of building staff, security guards, or police officers to the scene (in descending order of frequency.)[8]

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[2]Myers, Jill J. Surveillance Cameras. Encyclopedia of Privacy. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007.

[3]McCahill, Michael, and Clive Norris. Estimating the extent, sophistication, and legality of CCTV in London, in Gill, Martin. CCTV. Perpetuity Press, 2003.

[4]Norris, Clive, and Gary Armstrong. The Maximum Surveillance Society: The Rise of CCTV. Oxford: Berg, 1999, p. 42.

[5]Armitage, Rachel. To CCTV or not to CCTV? NACRO Community safety practice briefing. May 2002.

[6]Wood, David M., op. cit., p. 19.

[7]McCahill, Michael, and Clive Norris. CCTV in London: On the Threshold to Urban Panopticon? Analyzing the Employment of CCTV in European Cities and Assessing Its Social and Political Impacts. The Urban Eye Project, June 2002. http://urbaneye.net/results/ue_wp6.pdf , p. 11.

[8]ibid., p. 15.

In recent months, local governments have begun rolling out talking cameras. The project was started in the city of Middlesbrough, and successes have prompted other municipalities, including London, to outfit existing cameras with loudspeakers. These cameras broadcast a warning through the built-in speaker when control center staff see somebody littering or engaging in other anti-social behaviors.[9]

2.5 Effectiveness

Studies have shown a 4% decrease in crime in neighborhoods where CCTV has been installed. CCTV is most responsible for deterring auto thefts and has the least effect on violent crimes.[10] However, some credit the crime reduction to the increased lighting that cameras require for use.[11] While the 4% figure may not seem impressive, it only represents the cameras' ability to prevent crime. Surveillance feeds can be credited with retroactively helping to solve countless cases.[12] Additionally, studies have found that public discussion and awareness of the cameras are required in order for CCTV systems to remain effective. In one case, crime rates went down in a neighborhood while the camera system was being installed, but before it was actually functioning. This rate kept up for the first few months that the system was in place, but as people talked less about the cameras, the crime rate began increasing again.[13]

2.6 Legislation

The Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) covers the collection, storage, and usage of personal data. The act covers both physical and digital forms of information, including the images captured by CCTV systems. Under the law, all public surveillance cameras must be registered with the Information Commissioner, and the following conditions must be met:[14]

- An appropriately sized (at least A4) sign must be present to indicate the presence of a camera.

- The sign must state the purpose of the camera system.

[9] "'Talking' CCTV Scolds Offenders." BBC News. 4 April 2007.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/6524495.stm

[10] Welsh, Brandon C., and David P. Farrington. Study 252: Crime prevention effects of closed circuit television: a systematic review. Home Office Reseaerch, Development and Statistics Directorate, August 2002.

[11] Painter, K. and Tilley, N. Surveillance of Public Space: CCTV, Street Lighting, and Crime Prevention. Criminal Justice Press.

[12] Welsh, Brandon C., and David P. Farrington. op. cit.

[13] Armitage, Rachel. op. cit.

[14] ibid.

- Information captured should only be used for its intended purpose.

- Cameras should be placed to avoid capturing irrelevant or invasive images.

- Individuals have a right to a copy of any data held about them.

While these mandates may seem reasonable, they are not followed as strictly as they should be. In a 2000 study in the Borough of Wandsworth, only 69% of cameras were accompanied by signs; of those, only 25% contained the statement of purpose necessary for full compliance with the DPA.[15]

3 How Harvard uses CCTV

3.1 Overview

We set out to determine how to bring CCTV to Harvard, only to find that Harvard already uses CCTV systems. Officer Steven G. Catalano of the Harvard University Police Department (HUPD) said that while he could not comment on specific security practices, he could tell us that CCTV was in use all over the Harvard campus.[16] Cameras are installed and maintained by individual schools and departments in the university, not HUPD. HUPD has access to the feeds from the cameras, but only because the schools and departments have requested that they maintain that access. The only cameras that HUPD has control over are the ones installed in their stations and garage.

3.2 Camera placement

Catalano said he could not reveal the locations of the cameras, but he said that they tended to be installed in "very public areas, lobbies, sensitive areas... and labs that people are concerned about." He emphasized that the main use of these cameras was not catching someone stealing, but for more mundane purposes. By way of example, he said that one school has very busy loading dock, and has a camera watching it. This camera is used mostly to figure out which truck banged into the building so that the repair bills can be sent accordingly.

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[15]McCahill, Michael, and Clive Norris. op. cit., p. 14.

[16]Catalano, Steven G. Telephone interview. 5 May 2007.

3.3 Monitoring

HUPD does not monitor any of the feeds, though security guards at the various schools do in some cases. In an emergency, HUPD can load the feeds live, but in general they don't have anyone watching. For the most part, Harvard's CCTV systems are passive.

None of the Harvard systems currently employ facial recognition, behavior recognition, people-counting, or any other kind of computer processing. The cameras go straight to tape, and the length of time that the tapes are stored varies from school to school.

3.4 Utility

How useful are the CCTV cameras? "We've had some instances where they've helped in ongoing investigations, or solving crimes," says Catalano. "We go back and look at tape and maybe we see a known offender on tape, or it helps us pinpoint a point in time." He stresses that CCTV is just one tool in an investigation, just as much as card-swipe access records in the case of a prank fire alarm. Catalano stressed that security has many pieces: police, guards, access control, and CCTV cameras. The cameras in and of themselves are not considered their own vehicle for security.

4 Barriers to implementation

4.1 HUPD reluctance

"I don't want a big brother," Catalano exclaims, "I want cops on the streets!" He points out that when civilians see police, we feel safe, even though we're not actually more safe. He worries that that sense of security will be lost. He also worries about the relationship between the police and the community. There's a cost benefit to cameras, he says, in that you can operate with fewer police officers. Catalano remains wary, however: "You can't put a price on that personal interaction." In a place like Harvard, where prior to ten years ago the police force had a mostly adversarial relationship with the community, one-to-one interaction between police officers and community members may be especially important.

But even so, Catalano is resigned to the adoption of CCTV: "In 15 years, this interview is going to be funny," he told us, "because cameras are going to be everywhere anyway."

4.2 Harvard slowness

Harvard is notoriously slow in implementing new programs, especially controversial ones. Because CCTV systems are a politically charged technology, it might take Harvard a long time to wade through its behemoth bureaucracy in order to approve such a such system.

4.3 Public backlash

There wasn't much public outcry in London when the CCTV systems were first installed, mostly because the rollout was quiet and small-scale at first. The announcement of the new systems also came right after the murder of a toddler by a 10-year-old was caught on CCTV tape. This horrific footage played and replayed on news channels for weeks, often with a passing mention of the new CCTV street-monitoring systems. Additionally, this was era of IRA attacks in London, so the public was more inclined to sacrifice privacy for additional security.

At Harvard, we expect that there will be some amount of public outcry. However, we've noticed that students are quite willing to sacrifice privacy in exchange for convenience. Accordingly, we would propose a few "CCTV case-study" campaigns in which the direct benefits that students can reap from CCTV installation are made to be crystal clear.

To take an example from our own residential building, the back gate of Lowell House can only be opened by Lowell student swipe cards between the hours of 7am and 10pm. Outside of those hours, students must walk around three sides of the block to go to the front gate. Many students have expressed both annoyance at this policy and safety concerns about having to spend more time outside of Harvard's gates late at night. The house administrators have responded that because no security guard monitors the back gate, and because it does not always shut by itself after someone has passed through, it is an unacceptable risk to implement 24 hour swipe access to that gate.

If a CCTV camera were to be installed to watch the back gate, the security guard in the office by the front gate would be able to watch the back gate just as much as he watches the front gate. He would also be able to see if the gate was stuck open. Students would be able to be granted 24 hour swipe access, and we anticipate that the CCTV system would be hailed as a hero for winning students this access where countless House Committee meetings and Lowell-Open flamewars had not managed to gain ground.

4.4 Deterrent threat fades over time

As we mentioned above, some studies of the London CCTV systems have suggested that part of the power of CCTV is in the deterrent threat that it poses to criminals. This effect fades to nothing after about 12 months, however, and crime rates return to their pre-CCTV levels.

One way to prolong the deterrent effect of CCTV would be to post signs declaring the presence of cameras, and then change the format and color of those signs periodically, perhaps every two months. This would help prevent people from becoming accustomed to the presence of the signs, and keep the threat in their minds.

Public backlash could actually augment the CCTV systems because it could ensure that the hype around CCTV continues beyond the 12 month mark, since Harvard student groups seem to have the ability to stay angry about issues for prolonged periods of time. Since it appears that the level of hype is what matters in CCTV's effectiveness as a deterrent, this would be very helpful.

Unfortunately, public backlash, even from a minority of community members, will still injure CCTV's reputation and make it more difficult for the community to accept use of the technology.

5 Implementation plan

5.1 Entrances to residential buildings

Recently, there has been much concern at Harvard over security within residential houses. On numerous occasions, a thief has piggybacked into a building and then stolen personal belongings from unlocked rooms. As it currently stands, it is difficult to track down the perpetrator after a crime has occurred because there is no swipe record and any identification relies on the memories of students who may have been around. Camera installation may not stop theft, but it will make identifying thieves much easier.

5.2 Active monitoring

Currently, few CCTV systems are actively monitored at Harvard. While stored footage is helpful in solving crimes, real-time monitoring is necessary if the cameras are to prevent

crimes from occurring.

5.3 Case study campaigns

Harvard will begin pilot programs to determine the benefits and costs to maintaining cameras at specific locations on campus. As in the Lowell back gate situation mentioned previously, these campaigns can show CCTV in a more positive light and help to win over acceptance of the technology. These trial runs will also help by generating discussion and drawing attention to the cameras, increasing the effectiveness of the systems, as explained earlier.

5.4 Facial recognition

While facial recognition still leaves much to be desired, hopefully the technology will soon be reliable enough for use with CCTV. The system will include a database containing information on undesirable people (registered sex offenders and people previously banned from Harvard buildings, for example) and will automatically alert authorities if a match is detected. Harvard could also use the system to help the larger Cambridge community by including wanted suspects in its database.

6 Mutability

In addition to their intended purposes, CCTV systems are sometimes obtain new usages and time passes. For example, in the early days of London CCTV, a nursery school installed cameras to record children playing for research purposes. However, the feeds are now also used to watch for safety hazards and to monitor the adults who drop off and pick up the children.

Norris and Armstrong describe three types of mutability that characterize the use of a CCTV system: intra-organizational, extra-organizational, and subjective. Intra-organizational mutability characterizes systems that are installed for one purpose but used for other purposes. Examples include the nursery school situation and stores that use cameras to watch for shoplifting but also to monitor employees. Extra-organizational mutability refers to systems that have taken on new usages that supercede their originally intended purposes. An example would be a police department that sells its video footage to crime television shows. Finally, subjective mutability describes usage of a CCTV system that is used for

the observer's own purposes, voyeuristic or otherwise.

While extra-organizational and subjective mutability should be avoided in Harvard's CCTV systems, there are many intra-organizational applications that, when sanctioned, could add to the cameras' usefulness on campus. Video feeds will provide valuable data that can be used for research. The psychology, sociology, and anthropology departments would doubtless find CCTV feeds useful. Engineers could study traffic patterns. Many departments would be helpful in contributing their research to optimize the CCTV systems' performance. As a police officer recently equipped with CCTV noted, the cameras could be used for "anything that your imagination could come up with."[17]

7 Conclusion

In the last two decades, London has become the most watched city in the world. CCTV cameras have helped to prevent some crimes, but have aided in solving many more. Harvard stands to benefit from the implementation of a similar system. Because Harvard already has CCTV systems in place, and because those existing systems are structured in much the same manner as London's much more extensive systems, Harvard could implement a London-style system without having to first commit significant resources to development. There will, of course, be obstacles - most notably in the public's response to new systems. However, we believe that the benefits of such a system - both in crime control and in general campus security - will outweigh the costs.

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[17]Norris, Clive, and Gary Armstrong. op cit., p. 58.

Appendices

A Threat analysis

What are the public's privacy-related fears about CCTV?

- Being tracked by the government (Big Brother effect)
- Feeling watched whenever in public
- Hacking of system could let information fall into the wrong hands

Who benefits from CCTV?

- Citizens: Reduced possibility for muggings and assault, perhaps increased access privileges to certain areas.
- Government: Reduced clean-up costs, reduced police force costs, lower crime rate, improved city reputation.
- Camera and equipment manufacturers: Increased business.

What does CCTV cost?

- Citizens: Loss of privacy. Increased taxes?
- Government: Costs of lots of cameras, viewing equipment, and labor. Potential public outrage.
- Manufacturers: Nothing. Increased revenue.

What does it give them?

- Citizens: Increased peace of mind.
- Government: Improved law enforcement. Data that can be used for other purposes.
- Manufacturers: Money.

Worth it?

- Citizens: Yes, if not too concerned about privacy.
- Government: Depends on effectiveness of cameras.
- Manufacturers: Absolutely.

B Privacy activist talking points

B.1 CCTV is people watching you

Harvard says that real people never watch the cameras, but this is a lie. As soon as they have any reason to wonder what happened at a certain time in a certain place, they're free to cue up the tape and go watch. HUPD and departmental security forces are getting an unlimited Tivo account to your life - they say they don't watch it on live TV but that's hardly the point. They're watching you.

B.2 CCTV means your life being sold and broadcast

In December of 2006 several clips from Harvard College lecture videos were posted on YouTube. These lecture videos were meant to be available only to students enrolled in the college, and while some technical precautions were taken (the videos are only available in streaming form), those technical barriers are easily surmounted by technically savvy students. How can we be sure that surveillance footage from Harvard's CCTV systems won't escape in the same way? It would only take one hacker to release embarrassing footage, and the college has more than its share of students who have the requisite skills and might be interested in making a quick buck by selling tapes of, say, a celebrity professor picking her nose, or a well-known student trying to avail himself of confidential services.

B.3 CCTV is social control

You act differently when you know they're watching. Maybe you don't go into that club, or maybe you don't stop to talk to a kid passing out flyers. You hesitate to stray away from social norms. CCTV has a chilling effect on actions and speech, and democracy suffers because of it.

April 14, 2016

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Surveillance Cameras Gain Ground in Schools
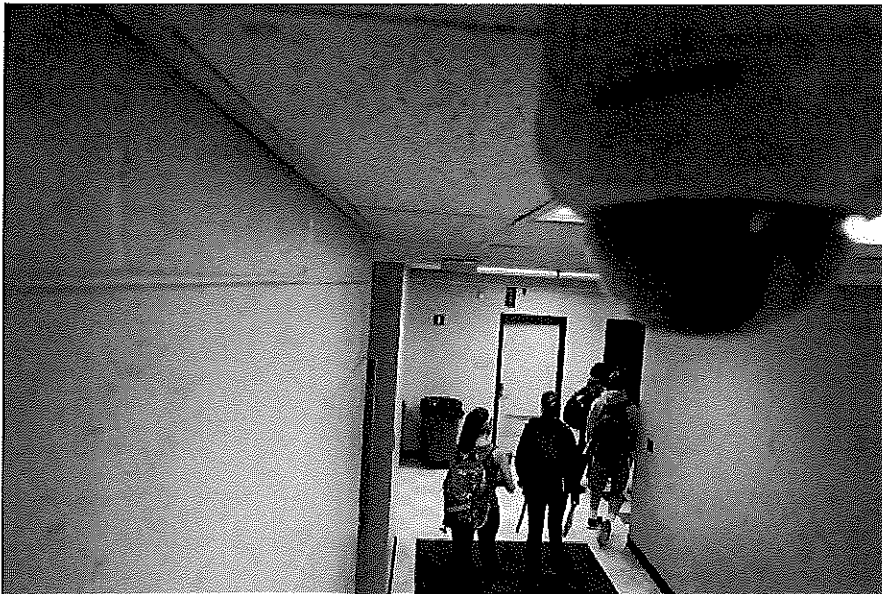
A surveillance camera watches over students heading to their next class at Walpole High School in Walpole, Mass. The town voted last month to approve the school's long-standing request to expand and update its security cameras.
—John Tully for Education Week

By Alyssa Morones

They've been watching the world from malls, gas stations, and other public places for decades, but now, surveillance cameras are becoming a standard, even expected, fixture in school hallways. And technological advances and violent incidents such as the recent Newtown, Conn., school shootings seem to be hastening their installation across the country, according to experts.

Some critics argue that pervasive fear might be clouding reasoned judgment, as schools rush to amp up their safety and surveillance measures. Newtown's Sandy Hook Elementary School, **where 26 students and staff members were killed in December,** had a video surveillance camera and buzzer entrance system, which allowed approval of all visitors seeking to enter the school. Those measures, though, were little protection against a determined killer with powerful guns.

Sending children to an environment in which they are under a constant state of surveillance does not come without some caveats, critics of the practice say.

"Constant surveillance, from the time children enter school to the time they leave, teaches the wrong thing about the relationship between the citizen and the government in a democratic society," said Jay C. Stanley, a senior policy analyst for the American

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Correction:
An earlier version of this article misspelled the last name of Ronald D. Stephens, the executive director of the National School Safety Center, in some references.

Civil Liberties Union in Washington.

Since the Sandy Hook massacre, more than 400 bills related to school safety have been proposed in state legislatures, according to **a recent *Education Week* analysis**. At least 62 of the bills directly concerned building safety upgrades, which can include school surveillance cameras.

"Any time something like what we saw at Sandy Hook Elementary happens, it encourages more schools to [install cameras]," said Ronald D. Stephens, the executive director of the National School Safety Center in Westlake Village, Calif. "It sends school board members back to the drawing board."

He noted that surveillance cameras first started finding a home in schools in the 1980s, after several school shootings, including those in Pearl, Miss., and Bethel, Ala.

Growing Demand

Stanley Security Solutions, a global company that provides security hardware to schools, hospitals, and governments, has seen an increase in demand for its products, including cameras, in recent months, with the most significant increase coming from near Connecticut and the New England region, where the Sandy Hook shootings, as well as **a devastating bombing in April at the Boston Marathon**, took place. In Boston, the nation saw how authorities' strategic use of surveillance cameras helped to identify the suspects.

"In the pre-Sandy Hook environment, schools were going through the motions and paying due diligence to common threats," said Bob Stockwell, a global technology leader with Stanley Security. "But that was on a much less violent timeline."

Among the schools that have recently moved to bolster surveillance systems is Walpole High School in Walpole, Mass. The school has petitioned the town's capital budget committee for funds to install additional security cameras for the past few years. Finally, last month, the town voted to approve allocating the funds.

Walpole High's principal, Stephen Imbusch, said "Sandy Hook is probably one of the things that has pushed the funding this time around. People are more aware of the need for camera surveillance in schools."

Once installed in schools, though, surveillance cameras are used not only for security from outside invaders, but also for monitoring inside threats and student behavior.

Mr. Imbusch said that in the 1,165-student high school, the existing security cameras have proven useful in determining what might have happened in certain disciplinary or criminal situations.

"They've primarily been used to solve any questions we might have," said Mr. Imbusch. "And they may have some kind of quality I can't assess—when people see a camera they may be less inclined to do something, so they're preventive."

Cheaper, More Advanced

Technological advances, such as enhanced remote capabilities, have also helped to lower the costs of buying and installing the equipment, making them more affordable for schools.

"They can now buy 10 cameras where they could afford two before, so they're becoming more mainstream," said Mr. Stockwell.

Likewise, cameras' growing capacity to provide sharper images have enhanced their usefulness, while digital capture and storage capabilities make the footage easier to access, view, and share. School hallways aren't simply being watched—some cameras are now capable of capturing and detecting motion and changes in temperature.

The shift from analog to IP, or Internet Protocol, cameras also means that surveillance

footage can be easily shared with police, further upping the cameras' appeal. But some, including Mr. Stanley of the ACLU, question the possible effects of having stored videos of children—videos that could be saved for years to come.

The footage from those newer cameras is stored centrally on a school's information-technology platform. Because the platform may be owned by the county or state, in the case of public schools, police departments also have access to the platform.

Technological advancements have played a role in cameras' use for security surveillance as well as **education-related purposes**, such as teacher professional development or evaluation. Cameras with 360-degree visual capability, for instance, allow users to take in an entire classroom to get a more comprehensive view of both the teacher giving the lesson and students' engagement with it.

While progress in the way cameras operate and their abilities to monitor the halls where children spend a large portion of their days seems to create a sense of increasing safety for some communities, there are limits to the security they can actually provide in a crisis, some experts note.

"No one's argued that video cameras would have done something at Sandy Hook," said Mr. Stanley. "Cameras could have only done something after the fact, but in that case, the person wasn't concerned about what happened after the fact. The pros and cons have to be thought out very carefully before changing the learning environment."

Jason P. Nance, an assistant professor of law at the University of Florida, in Gainesville, said, "It seems to be accepted throughout the public, both socially and politically, that cameras are an acceptable way to monitor students. What people don't realize sometimes is cameras are actually more intrusive than people think. Because their uses are not overt, like pat-downs or metal detectors, they don't send out a prison-like vibe."

Hidden Costs?

There are two social costs associated with school surveillance cameras, according to Mr. Nance. The first results from submitting students to a constant state of surveillance.

"Many would argue that this is a substantial invasion of students' privacy rights, especially because states have mandatory attendance requirements, so students are essentially required to be subjected to constant government monitoring," said Mr. Nance.

Second, constant surveillance in schools may lead children to accept constant government surveillance in public places.

While questions about the effects of policies incorporating surveillance cameras might arise, their continued presence in schools has legal footing.

Mr. Stephens, of the National School Safety Center, explained that the basic expectation of schools is that they provide "reasonable care" in establishing safety policies. It is up to local school boards to decide what their security practices will be in meeting that standard.

"These standards can be different depending on the kinds of risks and threats schools face," added Mr. Stephens. "It's a function of place, threat, and circumstance."

A potential legal tripwire for use of surveillance cameras comes from the Fourth Amendment's protections against unreasonable searches and seizures. But Mr. Nance said courts typically consider cameras minimally intrusive.

He explained that cameras may be placed in schools so long as they aren't placed in areas where students and staff would have a reasonable expectation of privacy, such as locker rooms or bathrooms.

In one case where cameras were found to be illegal, the devices were embedded in school-issued laptops that were used out of school.

Despite such concerns, Mr. Stephens said security cameras may now be in schools to stay. "My take is, we've certainly lost some of our innocence," he said. "And we've lost privacy to cameras."

Librarians Kathryn Dorko and Holly Peele contributed to this story.

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Another case of schools jumping to adopt the latest thing without examining the research or consequences. Since both Columbine and Sandy Hook had cameras, why assume they are preventive of major tragedies? Instead, they remove the one-on-one contact with an adult in discipline cases, a bonafide prevention strategy that really does work.

As a high school principal, I fought having them installed in my building. The summer after I left, the district installed cameras in the building. The illusion of doing something isn't the same as actually doing something. Visible administrators, positive school climate and personal contact with adults matter. Cameras? If anything, they detract from safety. See http://nogginstrain.blogspot.com/2010/12/case-against-cameras-in-schools.html

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I agree that because of recent tragedies schools are rushing to install video cameras, as if that would have prevented the tragedies. The students at our school disregard video surveillance. The person entering a school with the intent of

killing masses and themselves does not care about
surveillance either. The focus should be on how to help the
children or adults who will make tragic decisions before they
reach a breaking point.

I have noticed a drastic change in the caliber of students
entering today's school systems versus 10+ years ago. They
seem to have less respect for educators, are emotionally
disturbed and content with the consequences of irresponsible
decisions. Along with surveillance cameras, there is a national
push to support ELLs, resulting from an increase in
immigration. Will it take an increase in school tragedies for
educators and administrators to support the new caliber of
students entering schools? Or are we content with
surveillance cameras for now?

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Surveillance cameras are intrusive and create distrust. You
haven't seen yet what Stanley is up to in schools now!

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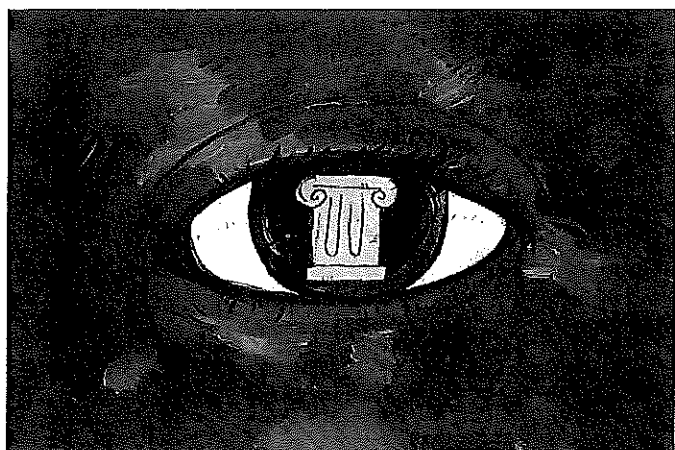
Brian Taylor

By *Gary A. Olson* | JANUARY 11, 2012

I worked as a consultant for a university not long ago and discovered that the hot topic there was the institution's video surveillance system. Some people expressed surprise and outrage when they discovered that the university operated an elaborate network of sophisticated cameras monitoring almost every corner of the campus. The university had no right to install that technology, critics argued, because it was an invasion of privacy, a violation of academic freedom, and possibly even unconstitutional.

I was surprised that they were surprised. For many years, universities have been employing comprehensive video surveillance to enhance campus security, and that technology has done much to reduce crime, foster a climate of safety, and even save lives.

I worked at one university where cameras caught a high-ranking administrator in the dead of night stealing a student's bicycle from a locked bike rack. After viewing the video, the administrator, whose annual salary totaled well over a third of a $1-million, resigned—all for a bike that was said to be worth only about $100.

A common crime on many campuses is the theft of purses from office staff members. Street-wise thieves—who know that many office workers store their purses in the bottom right-hand file drawer of their desks—will pass through university office buildings during the lunch hour searching for unoccupied offices. They will then snatch purses from unlocked drawers and flee campus within minutes. Campus surveillance cameras have played a major role in thwarting such thefts nationwide.

Campus officials from many institutions have told me of similar instances in which electronic surveillance has played a positive role. One midsized university's modest library has 35 cameras stationed throughout the building. "It's really for theft prevention," the college's chief information officer told me. "The very first day that we turned the cameras on somebody stole another student's laptop from her unattended bag, and we had the thief stealing it on eight different cameras. We were able to identify the person, and the student got her laptop back that same day. We're just trying to keep people honest."

Another institution was able to thwart a bicycle theft ring in which someone would ride up to a bike rack on one bike and ride away on another. Later, he would return to collect the first bike. The stolen bikes were then sold at a local flea market. Surveillance cameras caught the ring leader, and local police raided his house, finding a room full of bikes.

That university's police chief told me, "We put a lot of resources into campus safety so that when parents send their kids here they know it is going to be a safe place, and we want people in the community to know that when they come on campus to commit a crime we are going to pursue them as if they robbed a bank even though they might have only taken a bicycle."

One urban university helped solve a city-wide crime spree. A group of thieves was breaking into cars in parking facilities and stealing property from them. Nearly 80 cars were burgled, and the city police were stumped. When the thieves targeted a campus parking facility, one of its 75 cameras caught them in high definition. Case solved.

Occasionally, universities install surveillance equipment to solve specific cases. One college was experiencing a rash of muggings in one of its parking facilities, so the campus increased the number and visibility of surveillance cameras; the crimes stopped immediately thereafter.

At another institution, someone was stealing women's underwear from a dorm laundry room. Campus security installed a hidden camera and planted some leopard-print panties complete with special markings. When the police, using the footage, arrested the towering 250-pound thief, he was wearing a pair of the stolen underwear.

At yet another college, campus officials discovered that theater majors were engaging in sexual acts on the catwalks high above the stage in the performing arts theater—during performances. (Students referred to it as the Mile High Club.) The officials installed cameras and were able to identify the culprits.

"We weren't trying to be voyeuristic," the chief security officer told me. "We were trying to prevent a disaster. Can you imagine a standing-room-only crowd for a Shakespeare play and suddenly a couple plunges from the rafters to the stage below?"

Video is used not only to solve crimes but to prevent vandalism and to monitor equipment that might be sensitive to the institution, such as generators or electrical equipment. Most colleges experience a spike in vandalism early in the

fall semester when new first-year students arrive on the campus. After the first few perpetrators are caught and made to pay restitution, the vandalism typically drops off.

"We usually don't take students to court because that would really hurt them, but we do make them pay restitution and that hurts their pocket books," said one university official. "We tell them that if they go to the cashier's office and pay restitution by a certain date we won't press charges."

Typically, cameras are placed at building entrances and exits, stairwells, lobbies, parking areas, "at-risk" sites (where someone might be easily attacked), and any location where money changes hands. Key cameras can be monitored in real time, while the footage from others is simply recorded and stored digitally on servers, to be retrieved when a problem arises.

Many colleges and universities are in the process of upgrading their surveillance to Web-based, high-definition, digital equipment that allows the appropriate officials to access all campus cameras from a laptop wherever Internet access is available. Often, institutions then share access to the cameras with local police so that they, too, can monitor the footage when necessary.

That collaboration with local police is especially useful in "active shooter" situations—that is, when armed assailants are in the process of attacking people or threatening to. A Web-based system allows first-responders to view what is happening in real time right from their patrol cars as they approach the scene, vastly reducing the response time to a potential massacre.

Obviously, campus officials must exercise good judgment in how they employ video surveillance. Best practice, and common sense, dictates that cameras not be located in restrooms, locker rooms, or residence halls—only in public areas.

Most institutions archive the footage for a specific time period (six months in many cases) and then destroy it. The vast majority of all video footage recorded on a campus is never viewed; it is only viewed when a problem arises.
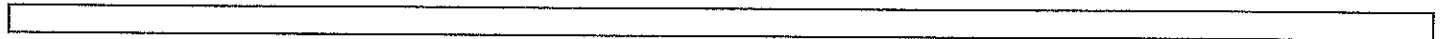
And campus security must take measures to maintain the chain of custody of all recorded video in the event that a case does enter the legal system. An official may be asked to swear under oath that only certain people had physical access to the servers containing the recorded evidence and to certify that the recording is an official record of the institution.

Camera surveillance is only one component of a comprehensive campus security system, which might include, for example, card access to buildings. Card keys are not only convenient, but the card readers record the comings and goings of everyone, which can place someone at the scene of a crime or rule him or her out altogether. Even the campus' wireless access points play a role, in that the system can track the whereabouts of devices. "If someone steals your iPad," explained one chief information officer, "I can electronically watch that stolen item moving down the hallway and then down a stairwell and then across the quad."

Campus surveillance has resulted in some unintended consequences. The Clery Act of 1990 requires that colleges report annually on all crimes on their campuses, and those statistics allow students and parents (and faculty members, for that matter) to make informed decisions about whether to attend a given institution. Some institutions experienced a sharp increase in the number of on-campus arrests for crimes such as vandalism, assault, and drug possession after increasing their video surveillance, and as a result their crime ratings would be artificially inflated compared to campuses with less surveillance. Nevertheless, the advantage of solving or controlling campus crime far outweighs that public-relations drawback.

So while some on campuses may characterize video surveillance as an Orwellian Big Brother scenario, the technology is deterring campus crime, solving those crimes that do occur, making our campuses safe to traverse at night, and even, occasionally, saving lives. So, yes, Big Brother is watching—and it's a good thing, too.

Gary A. Olson recently stepped down from the position of provost at Idaho State University and is currently on leave. He is co-editor with John Presley of "The Future of Higher Education: Perspectives from America's Academic Leaders," newly released in paperback (Paradigm). He can be contacted at http://garyaolson.com.