

College and Universities Not Using Mass Notifications to Full Ability

*Survey of Public and Private
Higher Education Institutions
Across the U.S.*



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Summary

Mass notification systems, since becoming part of the Clery Act in 2010, are an integral part of how colleges and universities communicate with students and faculty. As part of the Clery Act, public and private colleges and universities that receive federal funding initially had to disclose information about certain crimes that occur on or near campus. The Act evolved to mandate higher education institutions establish and implement emergency response and notification systems. They alert when an imminent danger strikes a campus and impacts their communities. Notification systems are a critical resource, sending real-time updates as the situation progresses.

These institutions put the time and effort to implement these notifications systems for these important situations, but they're missing out on other opportunities to communicate with their personnel, students and visitors.

These are some of the findings from a recent survey by Rave Mobile Safety. Respondents included CIOs, faculty and personnel from campus security and safety, emergency management, IT services and communications/marketing. Their institutions, ranging from less than 2,000 students to more than 20,000 students, included public universities and colleges, community colleges, and private universities and colleges in rural, suburban and city/urban settings.

Survey Respondents

CURRENT ROLE

Campus Safety and Security	26%
Emergency Management	19%
CIO/IT Services	20%
Communications/Marketing	9%
Faculty	3%
Other*	23%

**Other respondents were Clery compliance officer/administrator, administrators and environment health and safety personnel.*

TYPE OF INSTITUTION

Community College	23%
Private University	37%
Public University	40%

SIZE OF ENROLLMENT

Less than 2,000	13%
2,000–5,000	33%
5,000–10,000	11%
10,000–20,000	19%
Greater than 20,000	23%

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

Rural	22%
Suburban	38%
City/Urban	40%

How Are Colleges and Universities Fully Utilizing Their Mass Notification Systems?



22%

Used their mass notification systems less than two times last year

57%

Used their systems less than five times last year

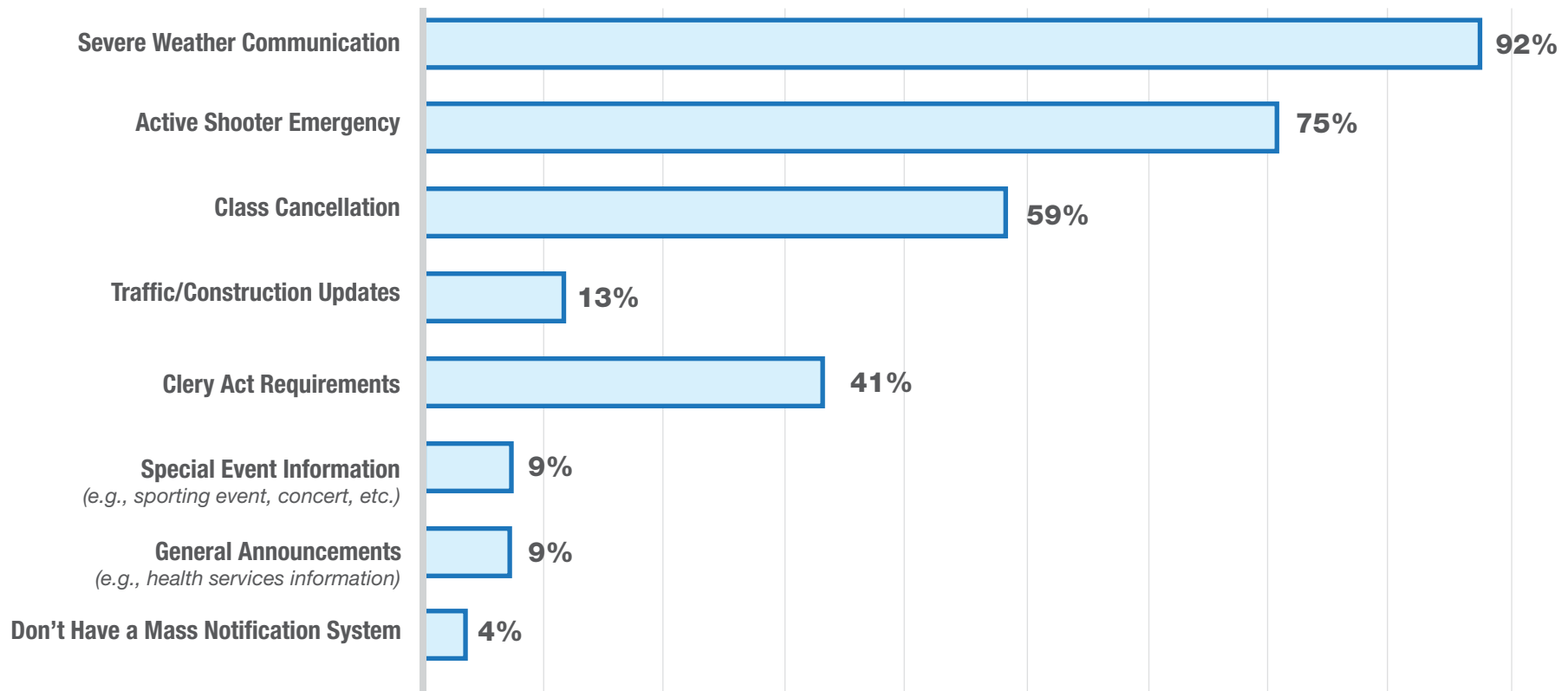
85%

Don't send notifications to visitors

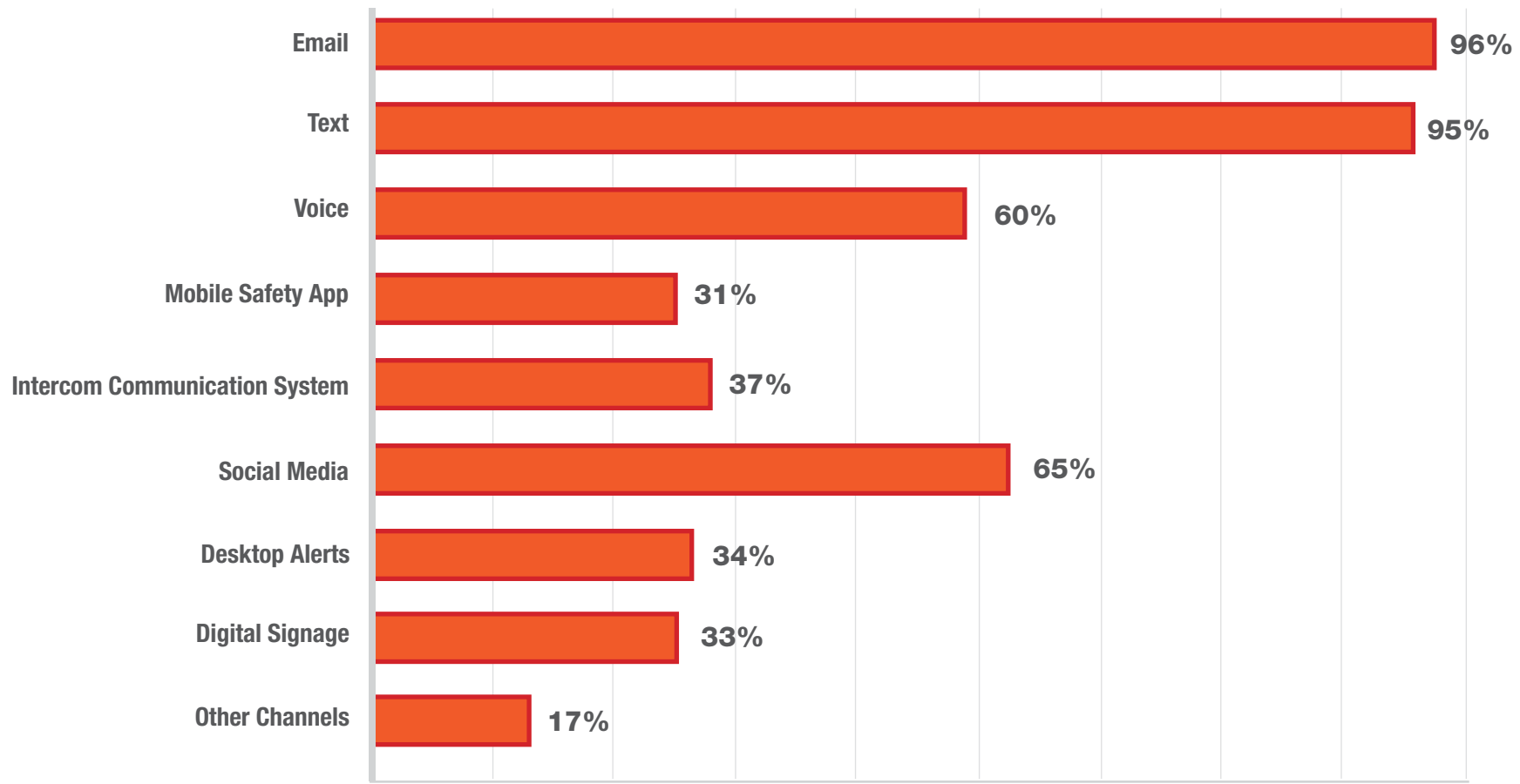
62%

Don't use a mobile safety app

For what purpose are you currently using your mass notification system?



What channels are you currently using to communicate with your community during an emergency?



**77% communicate through 4 or more channels*

Key Findings

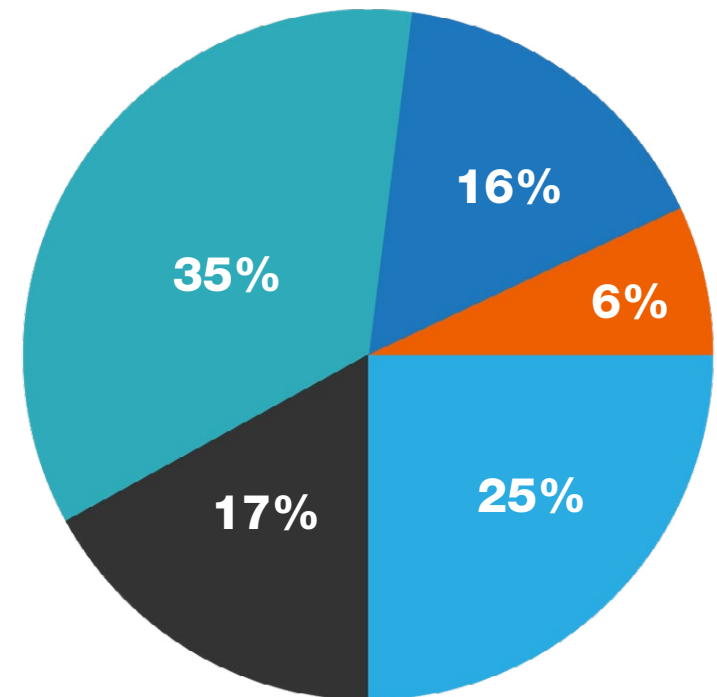
Expand Your Reach

Twenty-two percent of respondents said they used their mass notification systems less than two times last year, while 57% used their systems less than five times. Most respondents (92%) used their systems for severe weather communications, followed by active shooter emergencies (75%) and class cancellations (59%). The majority of those surveyed (70%) used notifications for more than three purposes. Very few respondents said they use their notification systems outside of emergencies.

But there's more that colleges and universities can get out of their notification systems. Some institutions may face staffing and budgetary issues or effectively sending out daily communications. Higher education institutions can use mass notifications for both official and internal use. For example, they can send out official communications about shuttle bus delays, cybersecurity threats, notify about a campus event and alert the campus when there's a viral outbreak and direct them to resources. Official notifications could also help out with move-in day, informing students (and their parents) about schedules, parking restrictions and traffic hazards.

These notifications can also be used internally, for example, informing IT staff about computer issues or outages. Institutions could use internal notifications to find a qualified replacement when a professor can't make it to class or update faculty about meetings.

Not including tests/drills, how many times in the past 12 months did you utilize your mass notification system?



Open Your Campus to Visitors

Campuses are busy places, tending to be communities unto themselves with diverse populations, ranging from professors, students and parents to guest lecturers, contractors, conference attendees, sports fans and others.

While colleges and universities have set up notification systems for their students and faculty, many don't send communications to temporary campus visitors.

Eighty-five percent of respondents don't send notifications to visitors. And that could be a problem. Colleges and universities host all kinds of temporary visitors — contractors, parents, guest lecturers and conference attendees — at all kinds of events, including football games, summer camps, conferences and commencements. If an emergency strikes, visitor notifications would allow them to know what to do and where to go. These communications can offer general information about event parking, activities during Parents Weekend or construction sites.

These notifications can be as simple as offering a SMS opt-in option to allow visitors to sign up and receive alerts, whether they're coming for a day or few weeks. Visitors can access an institution's mass notification system by entering a unique keyword for a special event or list. Their notifications would inform them of any relevant communications and then automatically expire after a certain time.

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And some respondents understand this need and are looking to change. Thirty-five percent of college and university officials said they don't have any means of communicating with visitors, though they do want to have visitor notifications in the future.

Connect with Generation Z

Respondents are using many communication channels at their disposal. According to the survey, they employed email (96%), text (95%), social media (65%) and voice (60%) to notify their campus communities. The majority of respondents (77%) reported using four or more of these channels as part of their mass notification systems. Some respondents said they also use safety apps, intercoms, desktop alerts and digital signage.

But one channel that's missing is mobile safety apps. The survey found that 62% of respondents don't use a mobile safety app, and the lack of these apps may cause higher education institutions to struggle with the new crop of students — Generation Z.

Generation Z, born between 1995–2009, are digital natives and think mobile first, according to numerous studies. These new students do everything through their phones, from shopping to banking, watch YouTube more than network TV and relate to YouTube bloggers and personalities. They find email to be outdated and [are three times more likely to open](#) a chat message through a push notification. Generation Z is less interested in Facebook and Twitter, preferring closed

messaging apps like Snapchat and WhatsApp. And according to [Forbes](#), the attention span of Generation Z is eight seconds — 33% less than Millennials at 12 seconds.

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To engage with them, students want push notifications and they are three times more likely to engage with push notifications compared to email. Generation Z also expects notifications to be customized, otherwise they won't engage. When these students receive targeted push notifications, such as information about wellness, they're more likely to be engaged.

Some institutions see the future and are interested in adopting mobile safety apps, according to the survey. More than 60% of respondents said they didn't have a mobile safety app, but they're looking to implement one soon.

Prioritize Both Gun Violence and Mental Health

After severe weather (35%), gun violence (23%) and mental health (22%) were the next two biggest concerns for respondents.

Approximately 40% of respondents said their institutions had a gun incident on campus, with most happening in the last year or so. While there's been an increase of gun incidents on campus, they've stayed relatively low in recent years, according to studies. And the FBI found not one active shooter incident occurred on college and university campuses in 2016 and 2017 in its new report, "[Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2016 and 2017](#)."

The low statistics may be contributed to campus safety and security personnel's views on guns on campuses. The International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA), a trade group of law enforcement officers, publically announced they're against allowing guns on campuses, fearing they would lead to more violence. Many

college police chiefs view their police departments should play the lead role in decreasing firearm violence on their grounds, rather than arming private citizens. Meanwhile most higher education institutions' presidents and faculty don't want concealed carries on campus, according to numerous studies.

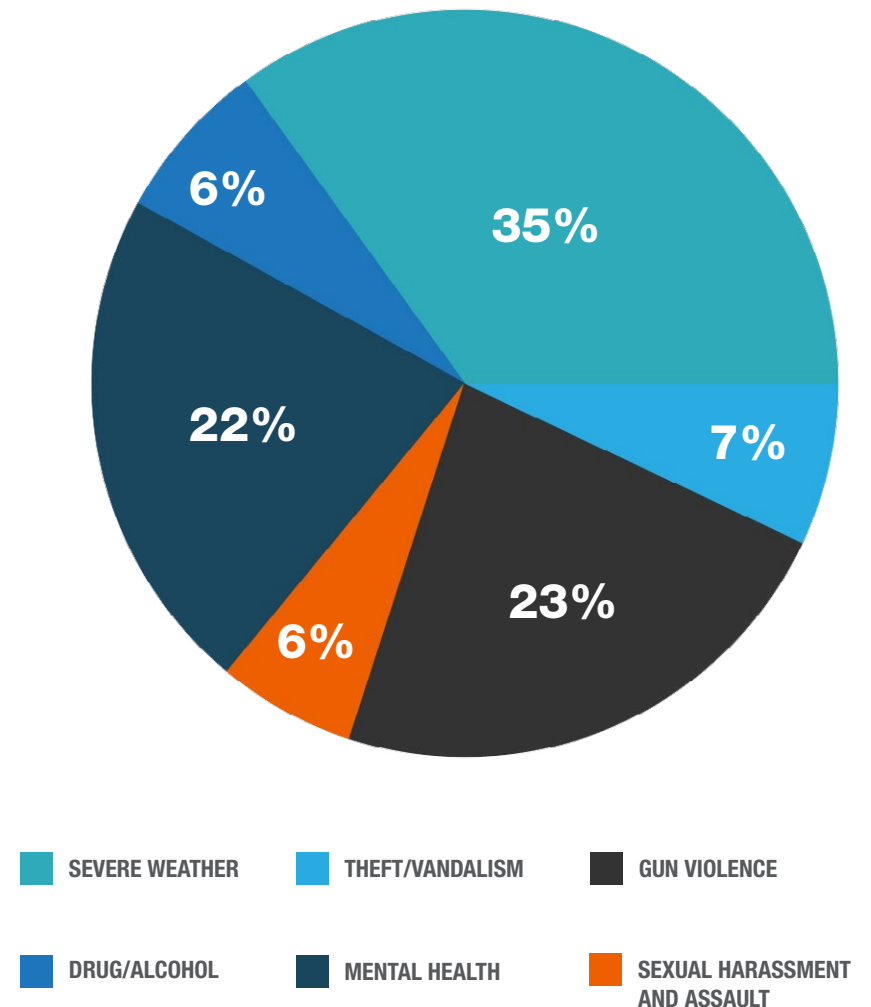
*...less than 10% are using their mass notification systems to **inform students about counseling resources and mental health services**, as well as general wellness information.*

While respondents said they're concerned about student mental health issues, less than 10% are using their mass notification systems to inform students about information on counseling resources and mental health services, as well as general wellness information.

The Center for Collegiate Mental Health at Penn State said higher education counselors are now treating more students than ever before who are dealing with various mental health problems, from depression to anxiety to serious psychiatric disorders. Students are struggling with being away from home for the first time and rigorous demands of academic life, as well as access to alcohol and drugs.

Generation Z students care very strongly about their overall mental and physical health and wellness. They may struggle to get help and don't know where or how to find it. To inform and keep them engaged, colleges and universities could share and store content resources on a mobile app for easy access, as well as send official communications about mental health and wellness to their students.

Which of the following is the biggest safety concern currently facing your institution?



Create a Safe Place for Students

Anonymous tip reporting is an option for some institutions, though the survey found how it's done differs. Students can submit tips through an online portal or website submission (45%), a mobile safety app (25%) or SMS text (15%). But 25% of respondents don't provide students an option to submit anonymous tips.

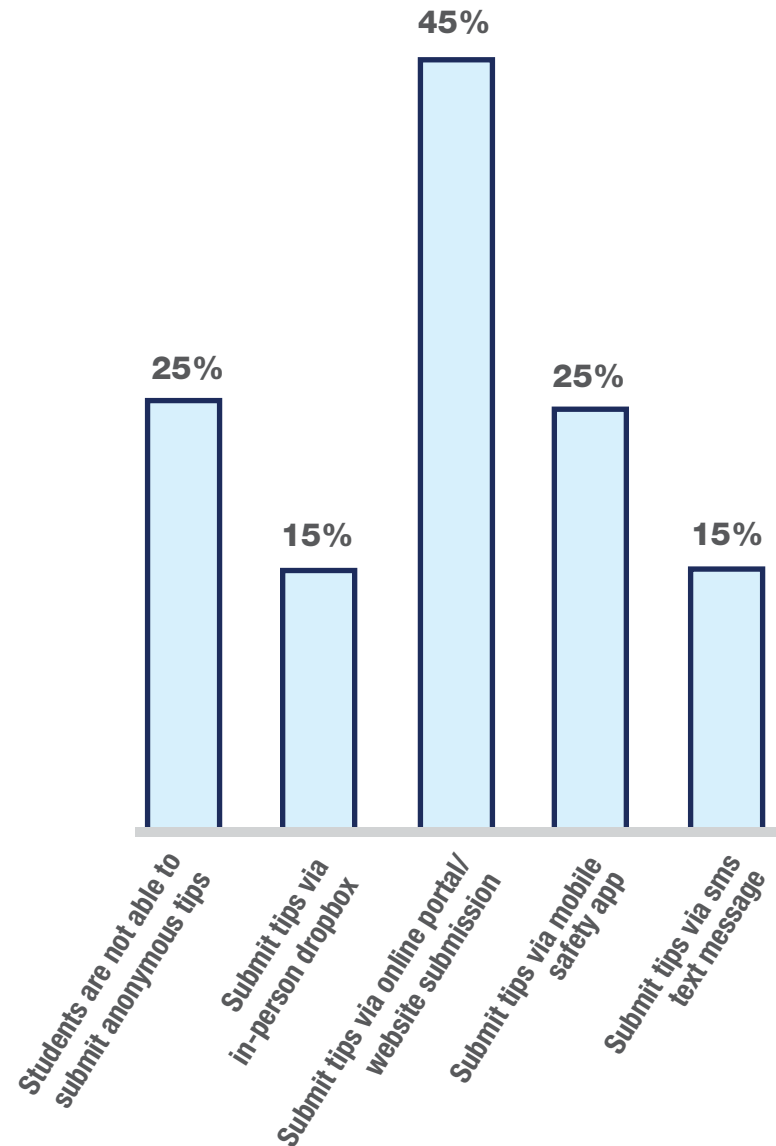
By offering anonymous tipping, it allows students to be part of law enforcement efforts by anonymously reporting crimes or suspicious activities discreetly through their mobile phones. While students are empowered to help out their communities, anonymous tipping helps campus safety and security personnel focus on preventive actions, rather than reactive ones.

Anonymous tipping also helps some students report a crime if they're not emotionally ready to do so in person or over the phone, as well as report a situation without fear of retaliation from a fellow classmate. Generation Z grew up with the Great Recession and the War on Terror, so they're more cautious about their digital footprints. And while higher education institutions may be concerned about anonymous tips and their use for crimes, this anonymous reporting feature can be used to solicit more information to help others.

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A University of Cincinnati student recently used an [anonymous tip feature](#) in the university's app to send a message to university police to help a friend threatening suicide. The student didn't want to speak directly with safety officers. An emergency communications dispatcher immediately responded to the app's two-way messaging, spoke with the student and collected information so responding officers could assist the friend in need. That student later received the needed support and resources.

Do students have a channel to submit anonymous tips to campus security?



**Response totals are greater than 100% because respondents could choose multiple answers.*

Conclusion

College and universities, regardless whether they're public or private, large or small, or in rural or city/urban areas, are dealing with diverse populations every day. And while they're using their mass notification systems to notify about important and potential life-threatening situations, there's still an opportunity for these institutions to use them for more purposes and a wider audience.

About Rave Mobile Safety

Rave Mobile Safety provides the leading critical communication and data platform trusted to help save lives. Rave connects millions to those trusted to protect them, by providing innovative solutions to prepare better, respond faster, and communicate more effectively during emergencies.

Our customers include thousands of businesses, public safety agencies, and institutes of higher education. From global corporations to universities with 100,000 students to small private institutions to 9-1-1 centers handling millions of emergency calls for service, we are privileged to work with dedicated security professionals worldwide.

Our award-winning portfolio of Rave Panic Button™, Rave Alert™, Rave Guardian™, Rave Eyewitness™, Rave 911 Suite™ and Rave Prepare™ enables millions to feel safe, secure and connected. Rave Mobile Safety is headquartered in Framingham, MA.

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