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Keeping Students Safe: Using Benchmarking to Enhance Library Security

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Keeping Students Safe:
Using Benchmarking to Enhance Library Security

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Why tackle security?

Over the past decade we've seen fewer stacks, more learning spaces, more study rooms, and more tenants and visitors to manage.

We've also observed a rising number of incidents in libraries, and heard students telling us our building is "creepy." It's not just about protecting collections, it's about protecting people. Top concerns include theft, inappropriate behavior, and harassment using public computers.
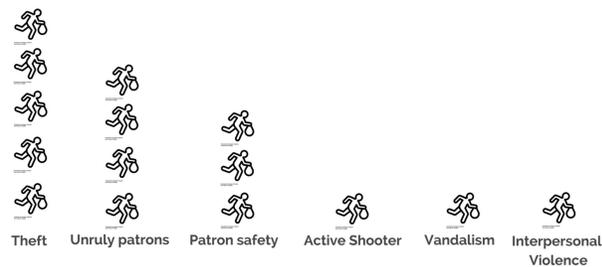
Objectives

- Compare security policies and strategies with peers
- Analyze how large academic libraries in rural settings address security concerns
- Gather ideas on how to secure students, employees, and collections
- Create a list of recommendations to enhance and strengthen security efforts
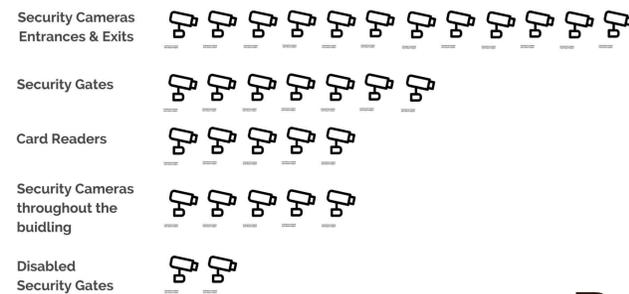
Method

- Identified 18 academic libraries, all large public institutions in college towns
- Investigated libraries' approaches to security and patron safety via websites; gathered policies
- Requested phone interview with primary security contacts
- Asked 12 questions, each interview approx. 30 minutes

Results
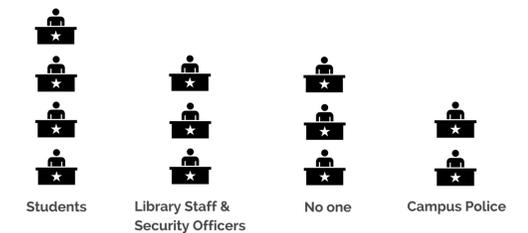
Concerns — what are common security concerns?

Theft, Unruly patrons, Patron safety, Active Shooter, Vandalism, Interpersonal Violence

Technology — what are institutions using?

- Security Cameras Entrances & Exits
- Security Gates
- Card Readers
- Security Cameras throughout the buidling
- Disabled Security Gates

Staffing — who performs security work?

Students, Library Staff & Security Officers, No one, Campus Police

Solutions — how are concerns addressed?

Staff Training, Increase patrols, Work with Campus Police, Create Staff Documentation, Add Signage, Add Cameras, Add Turnstiles
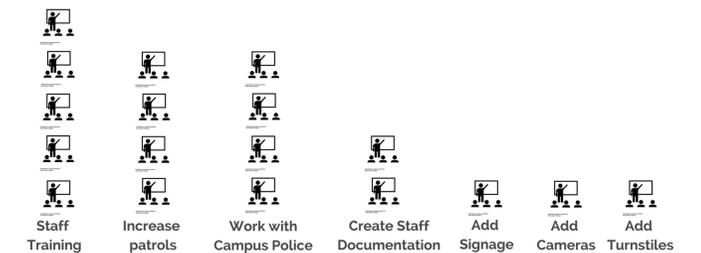
Recommendations

Staffing

- Two security staff on duty at all times
- Remove student security on the front line
- Supplement or replace contract security
- Establish a campus police substation or increase police officer presence

Technology

- Add security cameras in main library and branches
- Consider installing a "panic button" at Library Services and Security Desks
- Install a PA system or text system for alerts in the building

Communication

- Create a security blog for employees
- Discontinue walkie talkies and invest in radios for employees required to clear building during evacuations
- Use the Student Code of Conduct to create behavior guidelines for Libraries
- Write a Library Visitor Policy

Training

- Mandatory training for all new security staff
- Provide contract security with basic library info
- Review & update emergency procedures manual
- All employees complete mandatory training in emergency procedures, conflict resolution, de-escalation, and situational awareness
- Optional training offered in CPR and first aid