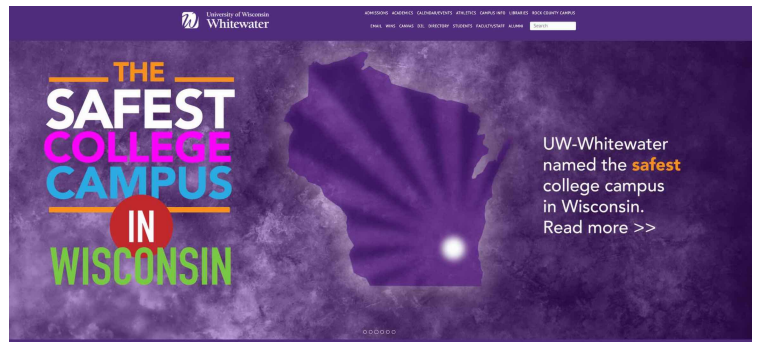


The Marketing of Misinformation:

UW-Whitewater's Use of a Counterfeit 'Campus Safety' Study



Summary

On the website of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, a beautiful campus of the UW System offering opportunity to thousands, one could find [prominently displayed](#) this last month a sham study purporting to show that the school was “the safest college campus in Wisconsin.” The study so proudly displayed is a counterfeit: an embarrassment to the many men and women on campus - students and faculty both - for whom credentialed, peer-reviewed, methodologically sound work is the hallmark of an American education.

The gaudy neon shades of a website banner touting the article stand in unworthy contrast to the careful collection of safety and crime data required by law, but buried far deeper within the university's website.

Those who attend the university - and those who have attended and have been injured - deserve plain truths over resplendent lies.

Introduction

On April 22, 2019, DEFENDERS ([d/b/a Protect Your Home](#)), an agent of burglar-alarm company [ADT](#), published an article purportedly ranking [campus safety at hundreds of American colleges](#). (ADT is a private, [hedge-fund-owned company](#) that provides security systems for residential and business customers. DEFENDERS is ADT's only 'authorized premier provider.')

DEFENDERS posted its analysis on its website, [yourlocalsecurity.com](#), at the [yourlocalsecurity.com/blog](#). The company's website intermittently publishes analyses like these, many under the byline of [Alice \[Good\]](#).

Other [authors at the blog](#) include Erica Mace (“Her handsome husband works with home security and automation, so Erica's writing about the same subjects practically makes it a family business”), Greg Jensen (“Greg is real nice”), and Kylie McQuarrie (“When she's not writing or fantasizing about owning a dog, you can find her reading, hiking, and drinking too much coffee—usually all three simultaneously”).

The [About](#) section of the blog makes clear it's a sales tool and not a serious - or really any kind - of research effort:

About

YourLocalSecurity.com – an ADT Authorized Premier Provider – aims to provide the security tools and information needed to build a safer home environment.

Ready to start reading? Check out the main blog.

Looking for a security system? Head to our homepage.

(Emphasis added.)

The ADT Dealer's Methodology

In two paragraphs, the company's post [describes](#) its methodology:

The data used for this article was provided by studies from the US Department of Education's [Campus Safety and Security analysis](#) and the FBI's [Uniform Crime Report](#). We looked at the main campuses of public, private, and non-profit colleges that offer two- and four-year degrees and have at least 5,000 students. Schools with insufficient data (Alaska, Hawaii, North Carolina, and Wyoming) weren't included in this report.

435 total schools met our required criteria for this study, and we considered four main factors to determine campus safety: hate crimes per enrolled students, violence against women per enrolled females, property crime per population, and violent crime per population. These factors were calculated based on every 1,000 students, females, or residents in each location. Reported hate crimes, instances of violence against women, and violent crime made up 90% of the final score. Interestingly, 16 of the schools on our list reported zero hate crimes or instances of violence against women.

Methodological Problems

A number of guides for laypeople - let alone academics - present criteria by which to evaluate supposed scientific studies for simple adequacy of method and analysis. By a plain standard, the problems of method of this article are significant, and may be grouped as no fewer than seven principal objections, any one of which leaves the 'campus security guide' as irreparably impaired (and unworthy of academic mention).

Expertise. The study's authority identifies herself as 'Alice,' but provides no list of credentials by which to evaluate her (or his) expertise. It's not fiction that Alice purports to offer readers. On the contrary, she offers - by her own words - an article about the weighty subject campus safety on which she certainly intends students and

families to rely for the well-being of their loved ones (as UW-Whitewater similarly means these same students and families to rely).

There is no proper academic at UW-Whitewater, in the UW System, or in the world beyond who would credibly be permitted to publish a study without a list of credentials as prima facie evidence of expertise.

Not one.

About DEFENDERS (d/b/a Protect Your Home). Although DEFENDERS, the ADT burglar-alarm dealer behind this safety study, offers no expertise, it's a remarkable company in other ways. The dealer, located in Indiana, has thousands of salesmen nationwide, and something else equally notable: no fewer than [1,859 customer complaints](#) according to the Indiana Better Business Bureau.

This 'premier' ADT dealer has had more consumer complaints listed with the Better Business Bureau than the [total number of graduate students](#) at UW-Whitewater.

Availability of collected data. The article does not make its collected data available for review. Nowhere on the ADT dealer's website does one find the collated data from US Department of Education's Campus Safety and Security reports (typically referred to as Clery reports) or the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports.

Without seeing *which* records and data were collected, it's impossible to see if the study transcribed the data accurately. In a web-based report, it would be only a matter of a few hyperlinks to publish online the figures and metrics the study used (in whatever format they were collated). Although the company's brief description lists where the data were found, there's no way to tell whether they were reproduced accurately. If one cannot see the *collated* data tables that Alice used, one cannot tell if she found and reproduced accurately the data she claims to have analyzed.

There's not even a link to a particular table anywhere in this analysis (it's all main-page links).

Lack of peer review (or any review, it seems). It's a common practice in legitimate academic work - as one might expect from the faculty of a UW System school, for example - to submit work to one's peers for review. Claims should be verifiable, and reproducible. As it is, there is no contention whatever that these claims (with the work underlying them) have been submitted to academics in criminology any other legitimate academic discipline.

These are claims about *human safety* - on which women and men are to rely - yet they've been published (and reproduced on UW-Whitewater's website) without any known, relevant, meaningful review from other experts. (One hesitates to call anything so lacking as academic peer review, as there's no claim of the author's expertise that would establish that she is a credential academic in any event).

Unclear question. The sources of data on which this study claims to rely belie the contention that this is, fundamentally, a *campus safety* analysis. Although the title of the article announcing the article is “Your Guide to the Nation’s Safest College Campuses in 2019,” the stated methodology - by its own terms - uses FBI Uniform Crime Report data that do not collect merely campus-related crime data but information from *entire cities in which campuses reside*.

In this conflated way, incidents in cities far from a campus center - or the lack of incidents in cities far from a campus center - are used to evaluate the “safest college campuses” in the nation.

A campus might be crime-ridden, for example, but under the imprecise method used here relevant campus crimes might be mixed with a lower amount of non-campus crime in host cities.

So, a given campus might experience repeated incidents of violence, yet those reported incidents would be diluted with less connected non-campus statistics far from the location of campus-related crimes.

Timeliness of the data. Not only do the data sources not match the article’s claim of campus safety, the study’s title - promising safety in 2019 - cannot possibly match the available data, as the available UCR data is from no later than 2018.

Precise weighting. Perhaps to give a veneer of methodological legitimacy, the article states that “[r]eported hate crimes, instances of violence against women, and violent crime made up 90% of the final score.”

That’s wildly imprecise: readers cannot see the collected data (to review for accuracy), and the weighting of these four measures isn’t specified. They’re simply lumped together as 90% of the weighting - with no specification the proportional values of each measure. Worse is that the other 10% of the weighting is left unstated.

Expressed Data Limitations (a Uniform Crime Reports warning). Anyone using the FBI’s Crime Data Explorer, for example, would see [two clear warnings](#) about data use. To its credit, the FBI presents the data with clear, plain cautions:

Data considerations

The data found on the Crime Data Explorer [a compilation of UCR data] represents reported crime, and is not an exhaustive report of all crime that occurs. It’s important to consider the various factors that lead to crime activity and crime reporting in a community before interpreting the data. Without these considerations the available data can be deceiving. Factors to consider include population size and density, economic conditions, employment rates, prosecutorial, judicial, and correctional policies, administrative and investigative emphases of law enforcement, citizens’ attitudes toward crime and policing, and the effective strength of the police force.

Avoid ranking and comparisons

Since crime is a sociological phenomenon influenced by a variety of factors, the FBI discourages ranking locations or making comparisons as a way of measuring law enforcement effectiveness. Some of this data may not be comparable to previous years because of differing levels of participation over time.

Incomplete Data. Significantly, the UCR data for the state of Wisconsin - and other states - are voluntarily submitted to the FBI, and data [are not available for all law enforcement agencies in the state](#):

Crime data for Wisconsin are derived from both incident-based (NIBRS) and summary (SRS) reports voluntarily submitted to the FBI.

In **2017**, the FBI estimated crime statistics for Wisconsin are based on data received from **421 of 443** law enforcement agencies in the state that year.

(Emphasis in original.)

Data received from some agencies, but not others, would compound the error of relying on city data (see **Unclear question**, above): not only would city data in some cases dilute the campus-related safety levels the study claims to assess, but city-related data would be available only for some communities in any event (further obscuring the possibility of legitimate comparisons).

It's therefore easy to see - for anyone reading the federal reporting accurately - why the FBI cautions against community-to-community comparisons.

And yet, this would-be study represents itself as a study of thousands of communities across a country stretching from one side of a continent to another.

Conflict of interest. While a study might be attention-getting, reasoned analyses - of the kind one would expect from a proper academic institution - should serve the advancement of understanding (or theoretical and practical ends). Sensationalism is not a legitimate end.

A self-described nationwide safety study that appears on the blog of a company that sells alarm systems might be expected to generate traffic for product sales. This fact could not be clearer than in this case, where DEFENDERS (d/b/a Protect Your Home), an agent of alarm-system company ADT, fills the beginning and end of the study's page with product pitches for security systems.

This 'safety' study leads visitors to ads for *burglar alarms*:

Your Guide to the Nation's Safest College Campuses in 2019

Apr 22 | BY ALICE



Campus safety is a growing concern for individuals considering opportunities for higher education. No matter what academic field they pursue, students deserve to live and learn in a

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Screenshot 1

While campus security can provide peace of mind, personal security goes far beyond the classroom. For students living off campus, [home security systems](#) can help prevent break-ins, and smart technology such as doorbell cameras and remote locks make life that much safer. Academics will always be at the heart of college selection, but campus and personal safety can ensure a more secure and rewarding educational experience.

About YourLocalSecurity.com

YourLocalSecurity.com, partner of Protect Your Home—an ADT Authorized Premier Provider—aims to provide the security tools and information needed to build a safer home environment. For media inquiries, please contact media@yourlocalsecurity.com.

Screenshot 2

If a study on the prevalence of sunny days led readers to the website of the suntan lotion maker that produced the study, one might assume the study had some other purpose.

And yet, here UW-Whitewater displays this shabby effort prominently on its university website.

In fact, the university displays this information more prominently than it displays federally-mandated and collected crime data.

Clery Reports, Generally

For decades, under federal law, colleges receiving federal student aid have been required to report statistics about crimes on their campuses and of crimes inflicted on students living off campus. The reports, known as Clery reports, are due annually to the Department of Education, and are by law to be published by universities so that students and families will know the crime risk of attending a given school.

These requirements are a result of a violent tragedy and the law inspired in response to that tragedy. The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act ([20 U.S.C. § 1092\(f\)](#)) (typically Clery Act) became law in 1990 in response to the rape and murder of [Jeanne Clery](#), a Lehigh University student who was killed in her campus residence. Ms. Clery and her family were unaware of earlier violent crime at Lehigh; the law's aim is to require clear, accurate, and reliable information about campus safety (as reported within designated categories).

Over the years, the data requirements have been refined following analysis and experience of collection. The Clery data, while not without limitations, are the single-most notable collection of their kind involving crime on campuses.

The commendable purpose of the law was to offer a reliable source of information so that other students might not attend a campus unaware of dangers like those which took Jeanne Clery's life.

Clery Reports, Specifically

A [review of Clery data](#) for the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, undiluted with other, incompatible measures from interested private companies or over-reaching public relations officers, gives a more accurate picture of UW-Whitewater's experience of on-campus and off-campus crimes. They show, [from 2015-2017](#), **1 case of negligent manslaughter, 49 reported rapes, 27 cases of fondling, 3 robberies, 5 cases of aggravated assault, 32 burglaries, 4 reported cases of stalking, 16 cases of dating violence, and 3 cases of domestic violence.**

These are reported cases only, and these data likely understate the level of injury experienced on or off campus in a given year (as not all victims report the crimes they experience).

Criminal Offenses	Year	Geographic Location			
		On-Campus Property	On-Campus Student Housing Facilities	Non-Campus Property	Public Property
<i>Murder/Non-Negligent Manslaughter</i>	2017	0	0	0	0
	2016	0	0	0	0
	2015	0	0	0	0
<i>Manslaughter by Negligence</i>	2017	1	0	0	0
	2016	0	0	0	0
	2015	0	0	0	0
<i>Rape</i>	2017	9	8	0	1
	2016	9	8	0	0
	2015	7	7	0	0
<i>Fondling</i>	2017	10	8	0	1
	2016	4	4	0	0
	2015	0	0	0	0
<i>Incest</i>	2017	0	0	0	0
	2016	0	0	0	0
	2015	0	0	0	0
<i>Statutory Rape</i>	2017	0	0	0	0
	2016	0	0	0	0
	2015	0	0	0	0
<i>Robbery</i>	2017	0	0	0	1
	2016	1	0	0	0
	2015	1	0	0	0
<i>Aggravated Assault</i>	2017	0	0	0	1
	2016	2	1	0	0
	2015	1	0	0	0
<i>Burglary</i>	2017	6	4	0	0
	2016	2	2	1	0
	2015	9	8	0	0
<i>Motor Vehicle Theft</i>	2017	1	0	0	0
	2016	0	0	0	1
	2015	0	0	0	0
<i>Arson</i>	2017	0	0	0	0
	2016	0	0	0	0
	2015	0	0	0	0

Violent crime tabulation, page 17 of the UW-Whitewater ASFSR (2018).

See generally the full UW-Whitewater 2018 [Annual Security and Fire Safety Report](#) (2018).

Conclusion

UW-Whitewater's prominent mention on its publicly-funded website of a counterfeit study of campus safety is unworthy of an accredited, comprehensive university. The long educational tradition of our state and country - for which Wisconsin and America are respected throughout the world - demands more than a flimsy hodgepodge of data, in defiance of the most basic methods, merely to make a beguiling but empty claim.

Conscience need not yield to pride; reason need not yield to public relations.

Whitewater's students and faculty deserve far better than sham studies and dishonest methodologies.

Contact

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