



**S T U D E N T
SENATE**

Residence Hall Access and Security Proposal

This Proposal was prepared by the Student Senate Student Life Committee

Approved by the Student Life Committee, March 31, 2016

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Executive Summary

Since the beginning of the 2014-2015 academic year, there have been several changes made to the access policy for residents of Rensselaer's residence halls. It is apparent that the majority of students living on campus believe that increased access between residence halls should be present for many reasons. In order to do so, policies must be altered to allow students to gain access to their residence hall from multiple points, along with selected residence halls in a local cluster with them. The Student Life Committee, which seeks to improve student life on campus and increase student morale, has written a proposal that suggests ways to slowly increase resident hall access in order further enhance and enable Rensselaer's CLASS Initiative, along with providing a greater sense of security for students living on campus.

Current Arrangement

Currently, students living on campus have access only to their individual residence hall with one point of access with some special exceptions. Other entrances are inaccessible from the outside and alarmed if one exits from the inside.

How Suggested Changes Would Improve Situation

This committee suggests three measures that can be taken in order to improve security, reestablish the class unity formed at Navigating Rensselaer and Beyond and Student Orientation, and improve student morale. A brief overview of the suggested changes and further detail will be presented later in the document.

The current arrangement harms relationships formed during NRB and SO and defeats the purpose of the CLASS Initiative. Our proposal works to reestablish these ideals, which are at the center of Rensselaer's culture, while not compromising students' safety and security.

Project History

The Universal Access program was introduced to the Rensselaer campus for the Fall 2013 semester. Under this program, all students living in on-campus housing were able to access every residence hall during approved hours through the use of their Rensselaer identification card.

On October 8, 2014, the first in a series of burglaries took place in residence halls on campus. These incidents were perpetrated by individuals who were not members of the Rensselaer community. They gained access to the residence hall by following in some students who swiped into the hall, which is colloquially referred to as 'piggybacking.'

On October 10, in response to a series of incidents, residence hall policy changes were instituted in hopes of preventing future burglaries, including the removal of Universal Access on campus residents.

After further incidents, on December 5, the single-access entry policy was introduced as students returned home from classes in the late afternoon. Plans to introduce alarms on unauthorized points of entry were also announced.

Following the various changes, the Student Senate's Student Life Committee refocused its Student Rights and Policy Subcommittee to discuss the changes made, how they affected students, and formulating ideas for further improvements.

The vast majority of students were in favor of restoring multiple points of access, according to student feedback and concerns brought by students. 443 members of the student body expressed support of this petition. Reasons for this support highlighted the program's inherent security, convenience, and accessibility.

With permission from President Jackson following a meeting with the 149th Grand Marshal Kyle Keraga '15 and 125th President of the Union Erin Amarello '15, this proposal intends to serve as compilation of suggestions that contribute to a solution that maintains resident security as a top priority, but also enhances the student experience at Rensselaer and takes full advantage of the CLASS Initiative.

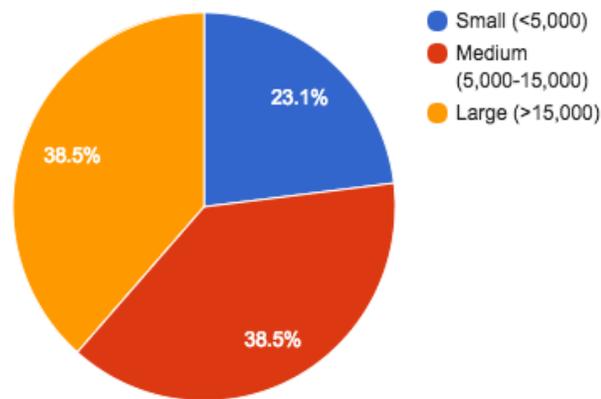
Measures taken to increase the security of students living on campus have had unintended side-effects, which students believe have decreased the quality of living on campus. Locking down all but one door provides a major inconvenience to residents and negatively impacts student morale. The alarms have increased frustration and heightened tensions between students, especially when students realize that there are few consequences, if any, to exiting through those doors. Additionally, several students feel being limited to one access point may place them in a situation where they can easily be confronted or cornered by others, as all potential access is very clearly funneled to one flow point. In short, the actions taken thus far do not increase the sense of security felt by the residents enough to offset the negative side effects.

Benchmarking

Percentage Breakdown of the Sizes of Benchmarked Institutions

RPI: Mid-sized school w/ 7,028 total students

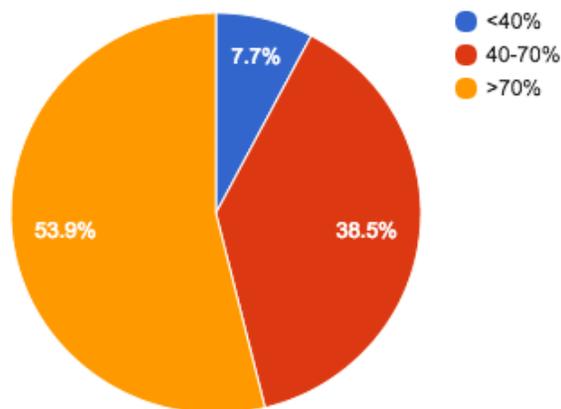
Breakdown of Peer Institution Sizes



Percentage of Students Living on Campus for Small Schools

RPI: 57% of students live on campus

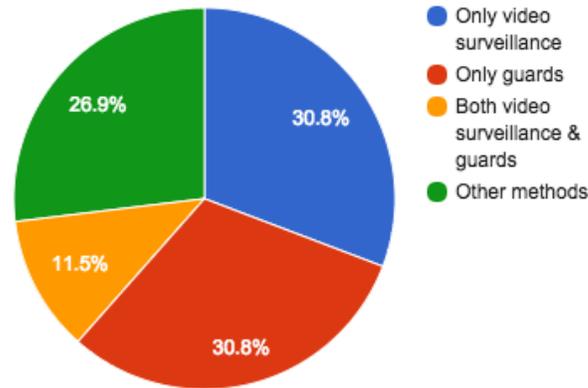
Percentage of Students Living On-Campus



Security at Peer Institutions

Other methods may include phone services, fingerprint scanning, or have no specific method of security in residence halls (with the exception of keycard access).

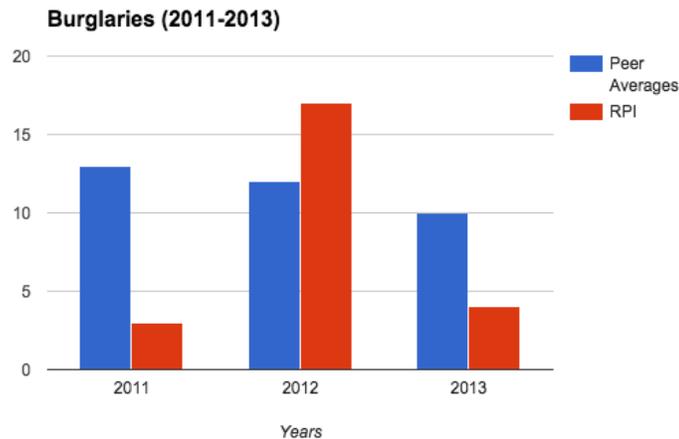
Surveillance Methods at Peer Institutions



Burglary Report

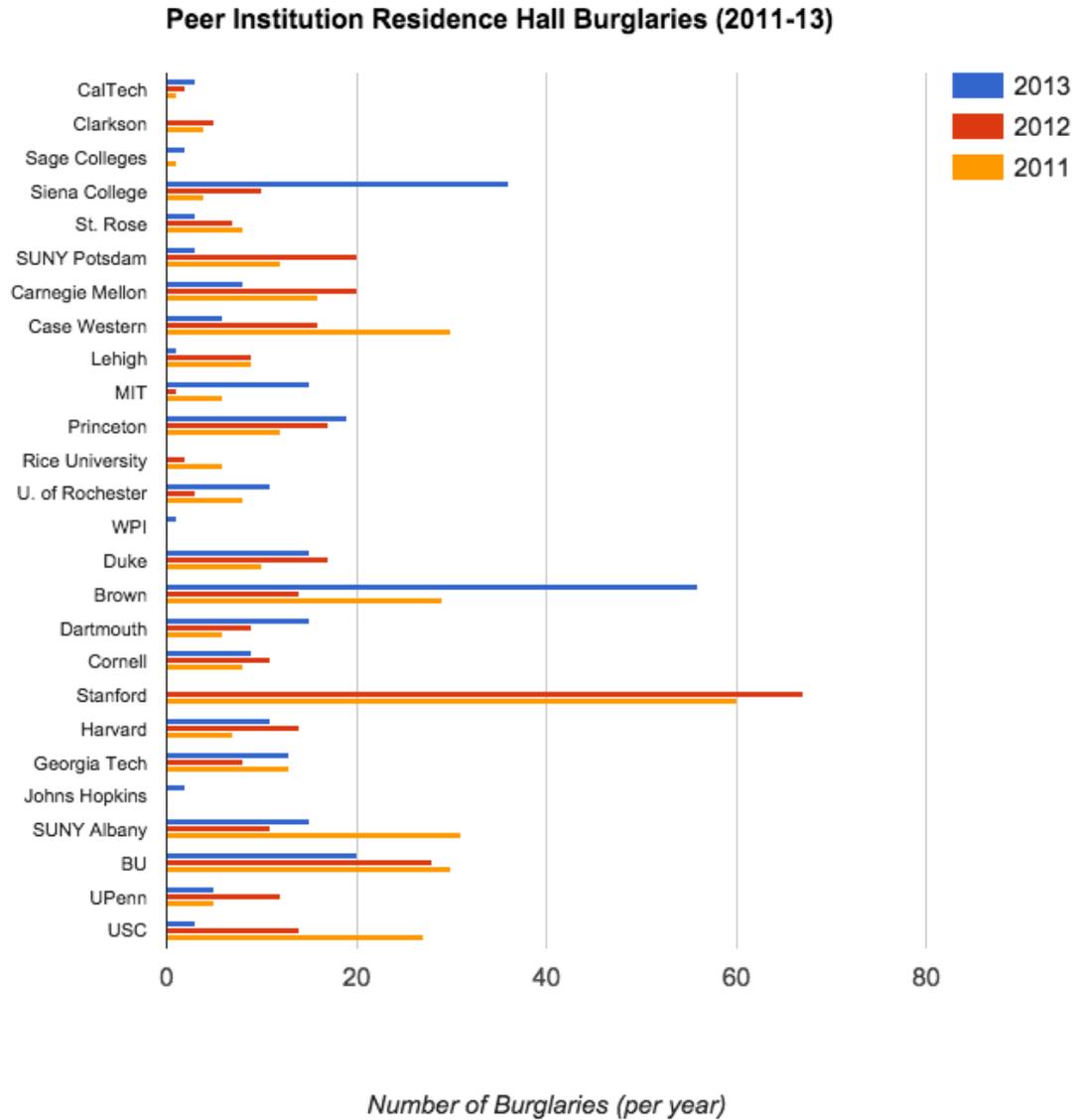
Graph comparing burglaries at RPI compared to burglaries at other peer institution averages.

- In 2011 and 2012, the Institute did not have universal access. Also in January 2012, 9 burglaries happened in Colvin Circle within a 2 week period.
- In 2013, the school instituted a limited universal access (clustered access) for the spring semester, and full universal access for the fall semester.
- Below is a comparison between the average burglaries of all peer institutions and RPI's burglary reports within the past 3 years, as well as a bar chart showing the number of burglaries at each peer institution within the past 3 years.



Peer Institution Burglary Information

Each peer institution report was found on the Crime/Safety Report 2014 on each college's website. This report only includes burglaries that occurred in residence halls. See Appendix B for more information about peer institution burglaries.



Suggested Plan for Improvement

Restoration of Multiple Points of Access

A common request received from students involves changes to policies for access to each residence hall, namely the ability for students to access their residence halls via multiple points of entry. We believe that this change would have several benefits to the overall on-campus living experience and prevent possible safety threats.

Stalking/Physical Threats

By providing the ability for students to access all entrances to their residence halls, students can reach the safe environment that exists within their residence hall faster, which, in some cases, could protect students from undesirable interactions and altercations. For students that do not live in rooms near the only point of access could be placed into unsafe situations or cornered, whereas if students had access to doors that are closer to his or her room could avoid such situations. For example, if a student is returning late at night from campus to Blitman Residence Commons, where the only point of access is entrance facing downtown, a student could be placed in an unsafe situation that could be avoided if there was access to one of the back doors facing campus.

Another form of multiple points of access could be the addition of restricted movement on each floor of a residence hall, similar to BARH's restricted access in each wing, but maintaining access to the building itself. For example, if a student could enter Cary Hall from the front door, it would resolve most safety threats from the outside, it would allow access to any commons area or classroom, and it would provide a student access to the Resident Director if a student is locked out.

Additionally, opening up more access points will reduce the quantity of students entering through any given entrance, reducing the possibility for intruders to sneak in with waves of students (commonly known as piggybacking). Restricting access has only increased the amount of piggybacking that has occurred. If a person with bad intentions is attempting to enter a residence hall that is not his or her own, he or she still has the ability to enter. Though it is encouraged for students to question those who are attempting to enter a residence hall that he or she does not have access to, most are too apathetic or are too uncomfortable to interrogate.

Active Shooters

In the unlikely event of an active shooter scenario, the current configuration of the access points and other security features would be detrimental to the safety and survivability of students on campus. In the event of an active shooter situation on campus or in a building, students have one of two choices: shelter or flee. If students are seeking shelter and they are outside the nearer, but locked entrance to a residence hall, they would have to run around the building to the other entrance, which could expose them to the assailant, or allow the assailant time to gain enough ground so that the student would be a possible target. The residence halls themselves are actually quite secure. The doors that are currently on most buildings are quite resistant to unauthorized entrance attempts. While they have glass windows, there is wiring within the pane that would prevent the unauthorized entrant from reaching through the glass and opening the door from the inside. The doors and door frames are also made of a heavier metal, making it difficult for the assailant to force entry. Additionally, most windows on the buildings are too small for an assailant to fit through. If a student is able to get into a residence hall and keep the shooter out, they would be quite safe.

This being said, if an assailant or shooter was able to gain entry into the residence hall, it would be difficult for the students occupying it to escape unknowingly. As aforementioned, most windows are too small to fit through due to attempts to suicide-proof them. If the students attempted to sneak stealthily through the rear entrance, the alarm would go off, and be heard throughout the building, signaling to the intruder that there is someone or a group of people attempting to leave through that entrance. This would allow the assailant to work their way through the building methodically with maximum casualties. We should not sacrifice the security of students in a situation such as this to add to security measures that students should be taking themselves. Most think “this would never happen to us,” but in the event that it does, a “what can we do to minimize damage” approach will be favorably looked upon in hindsight.

Weather

By only allowing access to one entry of a residence hall, this poses the risk of injury and safety due to weather conditions. In instances of inclement weather, residents have only access their hall from one entry point. This leads to problems where if a resident parks in the parking lot behind their building, they have to go around the building to the front in order to go in. Also for residence halls such as Blitman, the closest entry from the Approach is inaccessible, therefore forcing them to walk to the other side of the building. Weather such as snow, ice, and pouring rain can produce hazards such as ice and slippery surfaces and by being exposed to the element longer increases the likelihood of an accident to occur. Instead of a resident being able to go in the nearest door to shelter, they are subject to the weather for a longer amount of time. This could be avoided by restoring multiple points of access.

Physically Disabled/Injured

The ease of access into dorms for physically disabled and injured persons is greatly hindered by restricting occupants of residential halls access to only one entrance. Physically limited individuals are forced to maneuver to the singular access point which could cause them serious discomfort, may injure them further, and could be very time consuming. This is an unnecessary risk that these students would be forced to take. However, the risk could be significantly reduced by restoring multiple points of access in residence halls.

Security Improvements

Surveillance Cameras

Surveillance cameras have been installed in some residence halls; most only have one by a single door in order to allow Public Safety to monitor suspicious activity occurring around residence halls. Installing surveillance cameras at every point of access on a residence hall could better monitor any activity deemed suspicious or unsafe compared to the existing alarms installed at each door to prohibit use. While there are informative signs on alarmed doors, apathetic students will still exit through prohibited doors which have no way of monitoring which particular student sounded the alarms. Though a costly and time-consuming option, many benefits could come from installing cameras at each door. The number of access points would increase, resolving safety threats and allowing convenience for students to enter closer to their respective room, and Public Safety would be able to better monitor activity. Public Safety would also be able to hold students accountable if they allow someone into the building after them who is not permitted. Knowing that the current cameras are used after-the-fact, those monitoring the activity are at a disadvantage and will result delays if he or she just catch anyone suspicious. If surveillance cameras could monitor real-time, Public Safety would have an advantage and would be able to react quicker. Therefore, instead of triggering alarms, surveillance cameras could be installed at each door to monitor all activity that occurs at all access points.

Self-Locking Doors

Another possible security improvement could be the addition of self-locking doors on all rooms in every residence hall. Currently, only certain residence halls and various parts of other residence halls have these types of doors. While it could be bothersome and inconvenient at times, installing self-locking doors would prevent students from leaving their door open at any time when away. This would therefore inhibit anyone with the intention to steal from those who forget or are careless about locking their door. It would also force students to be more cautious, aware, and to remember to carry his or her Rensselaer ID around at all times.

Clustered Access Groups

In the 2012-2013 academic year, students had access to residence halls in “clusters” as a test run to prepare for opening up universal access in the 2013-2014 academic year. One suggested plan could involve reviving this policy as opposed to fully restoring universal access. This would allow students access to other halls in their own Residential Commons, fostering more collaborative work, as many students work in study groups with peers from other residence halls. When residents have access to more of their Residential Commons, there is more incentive to form inter-hall study groups. For first-year students, clustered access helps solidify and build on the foundation created by SO and NRB. In addition, granting freshman access to all of Freshman Hill allows new relationships to form which might not have otherwise. In this respect, the freshman class will be more connected. This becomes increasingly important throughout their academic career at Rensselaer, as classes become more major specific, and working with classmates who live in different halls becomes more necessary. By encouraging collaboration early on, this allows for students to establish study habits that will promote cooperation with others. For sophomores and upperclassmen, clustered access allows students to continue developing and fostering new relationships.

When access was first taken away in October 2014, part of the CLASS Initiative that was put in place to help students grow and form relationships was also taken away. According to the Initiative, CLASS is built on two platforms, “our residential clustering model, which undergirds a transformative campus experience, and time-based clustering, which begins with the First-Year Experience and continues with developmentally appropriate experiences throughout the collegiate experience.”^[3] To reiterate, students that have restricted access are unable to form the academic and personal bonds that would otherwise come from being granted access to residence halls in their respective clusters. CLASS was put in place to initially allow First-Year students to grow “personally and professionally”^[3] and progress throughout their entire college experience. On-campus housing consists of four residential commons; each one is unique and carries a different personality, “each harbors a small, tightly knit student community that blends the academic, social, and residential aspects of university life.”^[3] Restoring clustered access would allow students to once again take full advantage of the residential common that he or she has been placed in, in order to succeed socially, academically, and professionally.

Many universities across the country have taken on a similar initiative to create a more satisfactory living environment by carefully clustering students and allowing access to more than just his or her own residence hall. One school in particular that has taken on a unique policy is California Institute of Technology (Cal Tech), who is proud of their “self-governing living groups.”^[4] Instead of residence halls, Cal Tech has 8 “houses” which blends together academic and social backgrounds, allowing students to grow and learn with his or her respective house.

While very different from the typical residence hall atmosphere, Cal Tech’s living situation holds the same values that the CLASS initiative aspires to achieve. It is the goal of the institute to allow everyone to grow and learn with those around their respective

clusters, blending an array of characteristics to create a more well-rounded Rensselaer student. Just as each residential cluster at Rensselaer is said to have its own personality and characteristics, each house at Cal Tech has its own traditions and “somewhat of a stereotypical personality attached to them...”^[5] If we are able to apply the same ideas that Cal Tech has, our students would be able to feel more attached to a respective cluster, creating somewhat of a second home and not just a room.

More broadly, many schools such as RIT, Carnegie Mellon, and Cornell have adopted the idea of a “Living and Learning Community” (LLCs) which provide students with the tools to form friendships, gain access to academic assistance, and much more. Rensselaer has adopted a form of this Living and Learning Community, however the ideals were striped when access was limited. To reiterate again, by restoring a version of access in the form of clustered access, students will once again have the ability to feel connected to his or her community by forming friendships that would otherwise be inhibited, gain access to more academic assistance in the form of Learning Assistants, and be exposed to a larger number of students to create a more well-rounded individual.

Appendices

Appendix A: Student Petition (March 28, 2015)

We petition the Institute to reinstate students' access to all entrances of their respective hall and cease plans to alarm all doors other than the main entrance.

Locking down all but one door not only provides a major inconvenience to residents and negatively impacts student morale, but plans to alarm them pose an unnecessary financial burden on the Institute. This action does not increase the sense of security felt by the residents enough to offset the aforementioned negative side effects.

The placement of doors in residence halls was designed to allow ease of access to the residents. Nearly all residence halls have at least a door facing a parking lot and a door facing on the opposite side of the building, which were placed to help residents' path optimization. Prohibiting access to one of the doors places an undue burden on the students by causing those who live on the opposite end of the building from the single accessible door to walk through the hall, not only inconveniencing them, but also disturbing all residents who live along the corridor of increased traffic. This is inefficient and not necessary.

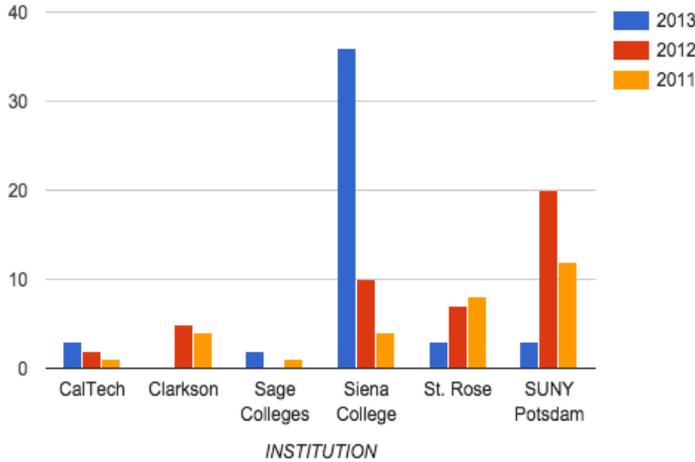
During wintertime, when students regularly walk to class in sub-zero windchill, one of their paramount desires on the way back is the warmth of their residence halls. While walking to class in the cold is expected in New York, anything the Institute can do to minimize the amount of time spent in the elements is greatly appreciated. This being said, when it unnecessarily restricts access and (whether intended or not) forces students to endure the weather for additional time, it causes frustration, anger, and an overall negative sentiment.

The Institute is not in a good financial position (http://poly.rpi.edu/2015/03/04/uncovering_rensselaers_quos_finances/) to be adding extraneous alarms to residence halls to keep students from exiting through restricted entrances. Restricting exit by posting "alarm will sound" signs on doors (that the Institute determined would immediately allow riffraff from Troy to enter if opened) not only has the two aforementioned consequences, but the "increased (sense of) security" does not justify the expense the Institute will have to pay to install the alarms.

The Institute should reverse its decision to restrict access to residence halls to only one door. If they feel that the theft issue has not been adequately addressed by removing universal access, they should have an open forum with the students to hear their input and ideas on how to solve the issue (boosting morale because students feel that they have a voice) rather than force unilateral decisions upon the populous that cause frustration, decrease in morale, and unnecessary expenditures.

Appendix B: Relevant Peer Benchmarking

Small School Burglaries

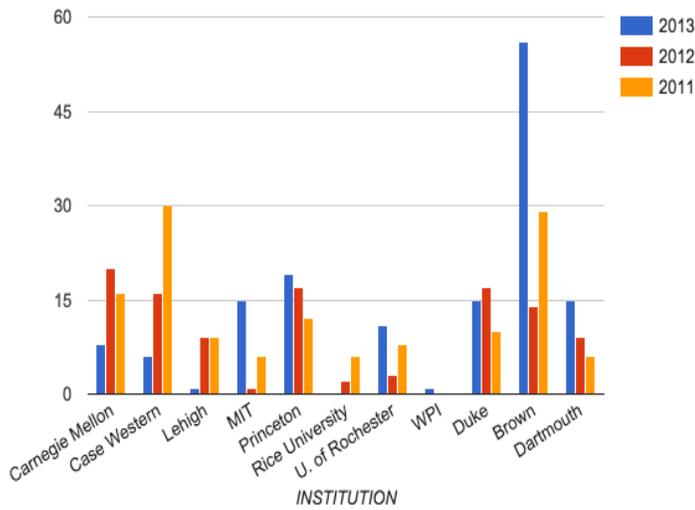


Small Schools

<5,000

California Institute of Technology
Clarkson University
The Sage Colleges
Siena College
College of St. Rose
SUNY Potsdam

Medium School Burglaries

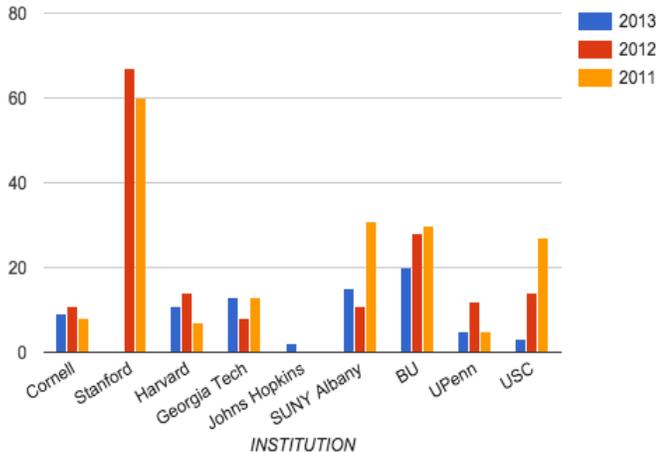


Medium Schools

5,000 - 15,000

Carnegie Mellon University
Case Western Reserve
Lehigh University
MIT
Princeton University
Rice University
University of Rochester
WPI
Duke University
Brown University
Dartmouth College

Large School Burglaries



Large Schools

>15,000

Cornell University
Stanford University
Harvard University
Georgia Tech
SUNY Albany
Boston University
University of Pennsylvania
University of Southern California

Appendix C: References

- [1] Daria E. Lidsky, “*Key Cards Should be Universal*”, 1992. [Online]. Available: <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1992/12/11/card-keys-should-be-universal-pwhen/>.
- [2] Drake MacFarlane, “*Swipe No More: L&C Universal Access Keycard Access to Dorms*”, 2015. [Online]. Available: <http://www.piolog.com/2015/02/05/swipe-no-more-lc-ends-universal-keycard-access-to-dorms/>.
- [3] “*CLASS at Rensselaer*”, 2015. [Online]. Available: <http://admissions.rpi.edu/undergraduate/life/class.html>.
- [4] “Housing and Dining”, 2016. [Online]. Available: <https://www.admissions.caltech.edu/houses>.
- [5] “California Institute of Technology - Campus Housing”, 2016. [Online]. Available: <https://colleges.niche.com/california-institute-of-technology/campus-housing/>.

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