

THE COLLEGE FIX

Pentagon Doles Out Assault Rifles, Armored Vehicles To College Cops

By Christopher White
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Are campus police departments preparing for war?

The Ferguson Police Department's heavy-handed response to protests and riots in Missouri in the wake of the Michael Brown shooting – complete with black helmets and assault rifles – has left many fearing that the small-town constabularies of the past are giving way to militarized RoboCops of the future.

That concern is also playing out at universities across the nation, as more and more campus police forces receive weapons and vehicles from the Pentagon designed to withstand rocket-propelled grenade attacks and impacts from improvised explosive devices, not fisticuffs in the campus quad.

Yet the list of campus police forces armed with such weaponry grows.

Ohio State University last year received a Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected (MRAP) vehicle, commonly referred to as an urban assault vehicle. It includes a turret, gun ports and a battering ram for those hard-to-get-into dorm rooms. Florida State University also has a ginormous and intimidating Army Humvee.

The University of Maryland garnered a \$65,000 armored truck, 16 “riot type” 12-gauge shotguns, 49 M16 rifles, and a handful of other items, according to Pentagon data reported on by *The Baltimore Sun*. What's more, Coppin State University received five 12-gauge shotguns and 29 40-caliber Glock pistols, and Morgan State University got six 12-gauge shotguns and 13 M16 or M14 rifles, *The Sun* reports.

Last year in Columbia, Mo., its police force, which handles much of the security at the University of Missouri, picked up its own \$200,000, ground-pounding behemoth. The vehicle is called a “Bearcat” which is an acronym for “Ballistic Engineered Armored Response Counter Attack Truck.”

The *Miami New Times* reports that at Florida International University, “FIU police have obtained 50 M16 assault rifles and a mine-resistant vehicle.”

In fact, a recent Freedom of Information Act request by MuckRock, a data aggregating website, found more than 100 college campuses with sworn-in police departments have received goodies from the Pentagon.

“The institutions include community colleges, large research universities, liberal arts campuses and entire college systems,” *Politico* reports.

It’s doled out for free through the Defense Department’s 1033 program, which distributes complimentary items to city and county municipalities and police departments as well.

The 1033 program — called 1208 before Congress revised it in 1996 — was etched out of the National Defense Authorization Act, which was, itself, a piece of legislation passed in 1996 for the purposes of arming police departments in large terrorist-centric cities with military weapons.

Not all of the equipment is weaponry. For example, along with BearCats, rifles and MRAPs, the Defense Department has also given popcorn machines, meat slicers, bouncy castles (for the kids, you know), and Xbox games, *Reason* reports.

The list of 1033 Defense Department hand outs does not detail what agency got what. The data only shows, in general terms, the state where military-grade equipment was sent.

Take, for example, one of the smallest universities to receive items from the DOD: Lincoln University, a small college located in Missouri’s state Capitol, Jefferson City. Lincoln boasts a student and faculty population of just over 3,000, yet it is the only university in Missouri currently receiving DOD equipment directly.

The Lincoln University Police Department refused to comment to *The College Fix* on the kind of military-gear the department received from the DOD’s program.

Rep. Hank Johnson (D-Ga.), who plans to introduce legislation to end the Defense Department’s 1033 program, has cited the growing trend of giving military equipment to campus police as well as police departments as part of his motivation.

But college police departments argue the program is a vital resource to help ensure campus safety.

Florida International Police Chief Alexander Casas, asked about their procurement of military-grade rifles, told *Politico* that his officers “know well the difference between our role as law enforcement for our university community and the role of the military. This equipment allows us to be better prepared to respond to a variety of critical incidents, from active shooter incidents to disaster recovery.”

And Florida State’s Humvee was cited with helping the clean-up effort after a severe campus flood. Maryland campus officials told *The Sun* the M16s are for “training

purposes.” The University of Maryland has also had several student riots after athletic games.

Still, skepticism remains.

“Schools and police officials will cite Virginia Tech or Columbine as reason for needing SWAT teams or armored vehicles, but the average campus can expect to see a homicide once every several thousand years,” Washington Post reporter and former policy analyst for the Cato Institute Radley Balko told *The College Fix* last year.