

# **Campus cops load up on military weapons like semiautomatic rifles, Humvees**

Critics fear heightened tensions between officers, students like in Ferguson

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Under the same program that has been criticized as “militarizing” local law enforcement, campus police departments have ramped up their armed presence, with Florida State University getting a Humvee and other university officers carrying semi-automatic rifles.

Nearly all police at universities are now armed, with weapons ranging from handguns to pepper spray. About two-thirds of public and private campuses employed armed officials during the 2011-2012 school year, according to a Bureau of Justice Statistics report released Tuesday.

The school administrators have ramped up their arms and police training in response to high-profile collegiate crimes like the 2007 Virginia Tech shootings and the Penn State child sex abuse case.

But so far there hasn’t been the same heightened tensions between the officers and those participating in student campus life as has been seen in Ferguson, Missouri, said Florida State University Police Chief David Perry. Students and even parents have welcomed the extra protection, he said.

“Students love it,” Chief Perry said of FSU’s new Humvee in an interview with The Washington Times. “They like to see the tools. We’ve used it during severe weather, in the event of a crisis

[or] in the event of an emergency. It's also a community-building tool to help educate people about what we do."

But critics say arming campus police with military weapons creates a dangerous atmosphere on school grounds, which are typically safe environments.

"College campuses are some of the safest places around. The problem here is that there's a demonstrative track record of police changing how they behave when they have these weapons," said Trevor Burrus, a research fellow with the Cato Institute.

Mr. Burrus speculated that campus police will be eager to use the new tools and will end up using them in inappropriate situations like raids on rowdy campus and fraternity house parties.

"They shouldn't have [military weapons], and even local police shouldn't have them," he said in an interview. "We don't need any more of this distrust between students and faculties in college situations."

However, experts say that the problems that lead to an overmilitarized response to rioting in Ferguson don't apply to campus police, who have ramped-up arms in response to the threat of campus shootings and other violence.

"Campus police are not beefing up to be militaristic departments, but we do want to have the life-saving tools that are appropriate for situations that we face," said Chief Perry.

"Police departments were really encouraged to use that program to fill the gap for equipment and supplies that they couldn't afford," Chief Perry added. Merely "because there have been flashes of events that have brought attention to this doesn't mean that there has been a misuse of the program and the materials."

More than 100 college campuses with sworn-in police departments participated in the Pentagon's 1033 program that distributes surplus military weapons to law enforcement, according to a Freedom of Information Act request by MuckRock.

Florida International University, Ohio State University and Florida State University each received surplus military equipment, including, respectively, military-grade rifles, a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle and a Humvee.

Police at other universities have obtained full riot gear and M-14 and M-16 rifles.

"We can't ignore the tragic shootings that have taken place on public campuses and in public

arenas, and in those instances the bad guys aren't using revolvers, they are using semi-automatic weapons," Chief Perry said. "This is a response to the exaggerated use of force from bad guys."

The latest survey shows that university police jurisdiction is increasingly not limited to campus grounds.

According to the report, about 92 percent of public campuses used sworn police officers with full arrest powers. Most sworn officers are authorized to carry guns, pepper spray and patrol beyond campus grounds.

"We work very closely with the community, we assist other local law enforcement agencies, we have citywide jurisdiction. I would say that our relationship with the community is pretty good, we are well received and work well with the other agencies," said Bill Wyatt, associate director of communications at James Madison University, which has 45 sworn officers on campus.

The number of sworn police officers is much higher on public school campuses — at about 92 percent — compared to just 38 percent of private campuses that have sworn police.

But analysts expect that gap to decrease in the coming years as private colleges seek to gain a more independent campus police force that doesn't need to rely on outside departments for backup.

Statistics show that campus crime rates have decreased in recent years. Law enforcement agencies at four-year schools with at least 2,500 students handled an average of five sexual assaults or other violent crimes in 2011 and 180 property crimes, including thefts and burglaries, according to the report.

The rate of violent crime was 27 percent lower in 2011 than in 2004, while the property crime rate dropped 35 percent, the report said.