Checking In or Out: Should Students Undergo Background Checks for College?

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In the wake of the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007, many questions were posed concerning student safety, including how did such a calculating menace get into college and fly under the radar for so long. Background checks are one alternate deterrent for such massacres as the one in Virginia.

Such an alternate can provoke the question of “when did society become so dangerous that college students had to be screened to determine if they are too dangerous for higher education?” The answer to that question is April 2007 at Virginia Tech University or maybe April 1999 at Columbine High School or February 2008 at Louisiana Technical College. The reality is this is the society we now live in.

But are background checks too intrusive for college students? Not really. When applying to rent an apartment (which most college students will probably do at least once in their lifetime) you must surrender to a background check. When applying for certain jobs background checks must be performed. Even some churches require background checks before clearing volunteers to work church events or work with church members, so why prolong the inevitable?

In addition, we have all heard the old adage, “past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.” If a college applicant has a record of past violent encounters then odds are those traits are still alive and well within that student. Nonetheless, people can and do learn from their mistakes, rehabilitation and change is completely possible but not always probable, thus the reason background checks that deem themselves dubious could possibly have a student hearing in conjunction, an opportunity for the incoming student to “plead their case” so to speak.

Lastly, it is the college/university’s responsibility to protect each of its students as best as they can; that means working diligently to provide students with a safe campus that is conducive to learning. Clearly, a shooting rampage is not the best supplement for learning. Background checks on college students can be viewed many different ways, a Catch-22, either the higher

education institution will experience resistance for being too intrusive on the college student's past and potentially profiling students. On the contrary, the institution will catch flack if a shooting were to occur; there would be an outcry of outrage because the school did not protect their students.

The point is simple, nobody is going to like every decision a school makes but the ultimate goal is to keep students safe. Background checks on incoming students won't totally eradicate the potential dangers but can and will prevent some dangerous situations from occurring. Background checks are a part of life, might as well expose students to them now.

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