



# Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

## CA Campus Shooting: Rare event, common pattern

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The sad news is that mass murder has once again erupted on a college campus -- apparently, not even small church-affiliated schools are immune. The fortunate news, however, is that no matter how shocking and headline-grabbing, shooting rampages on college campuses are extremely rare.

Notwithstanding the low risk for college campuses--large and small, public and private, religious and non-sectarian, there are certain themes that emerge time and time again in these tragic episodes. And the latest horror at Oikos University in Oakland, which, based on early reports, implicated a 43-year-old man of Asian descent who had failed to complete a degree in a professional field, is eerily consistent with the pattern to earlier campus shootings with multiple victims.

The table below lists the 17 fatal multiple shootings that occurred on campuses across the United States since 1990 and prior to today's massacre. Eight were committed by current or former graduate, law, medical, or nursing students, compared to 4 by more traditional undergraduates, 3 by faculty/staff or a parent, and just 2 by outsiders.

### ***Multiple Victim Campus Shootings, 1990-2010***

Date	School	Shooter, Age	Role at School
November 1, 1991	University of Iowa	Gang Lu, 28	Graduate student
December 14, 1992	Simon's Rock College	Wayne Lo, 18	Undergraduate student
January 26, 1995	University of North Carolina	Wendell Williamson, 26	Former law student
August 15, 1996	San Diego State University	Frederick Davidson, 36	Graduate student
June 28, 2000	University of Washington	Jan Chen, 42	Medical student
August 28, 2000	University of Arkansas	James Easton Kelly, 36	Former graduate student
May 17, 2001	Pacific Lutheran University	Donald Cowan, 55	None
January 16, 2002	Appalachian School of Law	Peter Odighizuwa, 42	Former law student
October 28, 2002	University of Arizona	Robert Flores, 40	Nursing student
September 2, 2006	Shepherd University	Douglas Pennington, 49	Parent of students
April 16, 2007	Virginia Tech	Seung-Hui Cho, 23	Undergraduate student
February 8, 2008	Louisiana Tech	Latina Williams, 23	Undergraduate student
February 14, 2008	Northern Illinois University	Steven Kazmierczak, 27	Former graduate student
October 26, 2008	University of Central Arkansas	Four teenagers	None
April 10, 2009	Henry Ford Community College	Anthony Powell, 28	Student
February 12, 2010	University of Alabama Huntsville	Amy Bishop, 45	Faculty
March 9, 2010	Ohio State University	Nathaniel Brown, 51	Custodian

Unlike undergraduates, students in graduate and professional programs often lack balance in their personal lives, narrowly focusing on academic work and training to the exclusion of other interests and other people in their lives. They often spend long hours in the library or lab, while ignoring or abandoning their marriages, friendships and hobbies.

Many of these advanced students, who had been at the top of their class in high school and college, come to find themselves struggling to get by with just passing grades. At a point in life where they are longer supported financially by parents, many experience great pressure to juggle employment with coursework and thesis research, with little time left over for attending to social networks. At some point, their entire lifestyle and sense of worth may revolve around academic achievement. Moreover, their personal investment in reaching a successful outcome can be viewed as a virtual life-or-death matter.

This do-or-die perception can be intensified for foreign graduate students from certain cultures where failure is seen as shame on the entire family. Foreign students also experience additional pressures because the academic visas allowing them to remain in this country are often dependent upon their continued student status.

Even if emerging facts confirm that the assailant at Oakland's Oikos University does indeed fit the mold, this does not mean that such behavior would have been foreseeable. One fact is indisputable, rare events can never be anticipated, not matter how ominous the circumstances. The best we can do is to continue efforts to keep concealed weapons as far away from college campuses as possible.