

Cameron Lee - February 2026 - Econ of Crime

Analyzing Campus Crime Rates, New York

Tracking crime on college campuses has long been riddled with challenges over voluntary reporting, classification of offenses, and perpetrator accountability; despite these roadblocks, investigating crime rates on a school-by-school basis can provide local insight into the specific forms of crime that proliferate most frequently on campuses as well as the factors that give rise to them. In 1988, Todd Purdum published in the New York Times that crime on college campuses falls into two primary categories: crimes committed on students by outsiders and student on student crime. To the first, Purdum distilled that students on urban-site campuses were more prone to outsider predation than suburban counterparts. To the latter, Purdum's main takeaway lay in the fact that sexual assault proved both the most common, and the most difficult crime to confront amongst student populations. Therefore, both exogenous factors such as location and endogenous factors like social dynamics within universities dictate crime. Contributing to the conversation on who is impacted by campus crime and how, a modern perspective offered by Lisa Fedina, Jennifer Holmes, and Bethany Backes echoed the prevalency of sexual assault in 2016. The scholars found that overwhelmingly, women, underclassmen, and minority groups were reported victims of attacks compared to other identity groups. Their body of work, further, provided that sexual assault itself contains multitude kinds of offenses. The same goes for all other forms of crime - burglary, aggravated assault, and sexual misconduct included - necessitating clear definitions at every stage. With these points established, analyzing 2018 - 2023 trends amongst the five largest colleges in New York - namely University at Buffalo, Columbia, Cornell, NYU, and Stonybrook - proves quite revealing.

The US Department of Education releases nationwide statistics on Campus Safety and Security. With information pulled from this database on New York's four-year institutions, and looking specifically at on-campus cases, I created three dashboards to map rates of aggravated assault, burglary, and sexual misconduct. For all three dashboards, I formed measures that accounted for differences in each school's population sizes and standardized crime rates across a population of 100,000 students through the use of Calculated Fields. The use of rates rather than raw case numbers is essential for comparing data reliably, as otherwise, larger institutions would have overproportional representation. The aggravated assault tree map reflected cases of unlawful attacks on one person by another for the purpose of inflicting bodily injury, typically involving the use of deadly weapons. (FBI, 2017) In this regard, Stonybrook held the highest rate at 27.97 cases, followed by Cornell, Columbia, NYU, and trailing in last, Buffalo (3.73 cases). According to national data from 2021, the mean national rate of aggravated assault was 3 cases per 100,000 students, notably placing rates from all of these institutions far above the average. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023) Secondly, the lollipop graph demonstrates that Columbia had the highest relative burglary rate (120) followed by Cornell, Buffalo, Stonybrook, and lastly NYU. Burglary is defined as the forceful and unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft. Compared to a national average rate of 47 cases out of 100,000 students, Cornell and Columbia performed above the mean. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023) It is important to note that both the aggravated assault and burglary charts reflected rates averaged across the five year period rather than annual data over time. Lastly, the sexual misconduct rate graph was created through a Calculated Field whose formula summed the separately defined offenses of fondling, statutory rape, rape, and incest, then reflected cases over an axis of five

years, showing change over time. Cornell consistently demonstrated the highest rates over time, followed by Stonybrook, Columbia, Buffalo, and NYU.

A series of important observations can be made about these graphs in connection to supplementary research about crime. Addressing the sexual misconduct graph first, notable dips occurred in 2020, perhaps explained in part by the Covid-19 pandemic. At this point, numerous campuses entered phases of containment, prohibiting in-person contact and social gatherings which can form the prime environments leading to instances of sexual misconduct, such as parties with substances. Further, the soaring trends in burglaries at Columbia could potentially be associated with its central location in Manhattan's density, creating easy access for perpetrators to breach campus grounds and execute each crime, especially if burglars were armed with knowledge of student schedules. Notably, though, NYU is also located in various buildings around Manhattan, yet showed the lowest comparative rates. A definitional detail could be responsible for such a trend. Technically speaking, this data only reflected on-campus crime. NYU, in contrast to the other schools, does not have a singular centralized location, but is scattered across various regions of the borough, applying to its dorm buildings and classrooms. The opportunity costs for a burglar to attack NYU buildings, then, could be higher given the lack of a central cluster of target buildings.

Taken altogether, rates of crime amongst New York's five largest institutions are impacted by factors which can be difficult to pin down depending on the crime considered and the year. Just as studies become more robust with a greater amount of data points, continued comparison amongst samples with a greater amount of schools and factors held constant will be critical to investigating crime trends on college campuses.

Appendix

References

FBI. (2017). Aggravated Assault. *FBI*.

<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2017/crime-in-the-u.s.-2017/topic-pages/aggravated-assault>

FBI. (2018). *Burglary*. FBI.

<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2018/crime-in-the-u.s.-2018/topic-pages/burglary>

Fedina, L., Holmes, J., & Backes, B. (2016). How Prevalent Is Campus Sexual Assault In The United States? *National Institute of Justice*, 277, 27–30.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2023, September). *COE - Criminal Incidents at Postsecondary Institutions*. Nces.ed.gov.

<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/a21/postsecondary-criminal-incidents>

Purdum, T. (1988, April 10). The Reality of Crime On Campus (Published 1988). *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1988/04/10/education/the-reality-of-crime-on-campus.html>

AI Statement

"No generative AI tools were used in the creation of this assignment. All research, writing, and revisions were completed independently by the author to develop foundational writing and research skills."