

# The Challenger

A Publication of the William Rainey Harper College Honors Program

## From The Editor...

As our community pushed on through the tragedy at NIU, we were left in a disgruntled aftermath filled with questions. *The Challenger* staff has devoted this issue to those questions.

- ① *What Happened?* - Guest Writer Vanessa Binfa of NIU recounts the day, Page 1 ("The Unanswered Question")
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## The Unanswered Question

Vanessa Binfa, Guest Writer to the Challenger

MOST PEOPLE ASK, "WHERE WERE YOU?" My mind goes back to the only other time I've been asked that, almost seven years ago, when there were buildings in New York City collapsing. What do you mean where was I? I was in my dorm room, on the computer, about to go out and get something to drink. What is so special about that? Oh, right. Some people expect me to go into as much detail as possible, asking and probing so much that I wish I could hook up my mind to an overhead projector.

Guest writer Vanessa Binfa was a Harper Honors Program student in 2007. She transferred to Northern Illinois University in the spring of 2008.

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Harper College

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# *The Ins and Outs of Safety on Harper's Campus*

Jennifer O'Connor, Challenger Staff Writer

WHEN FALL ARRIVES AND THE PARKING LOTS FILL AT HARPER, driving rules take the back seat to the fender-bump survival tactics of students running late for their first classes of the semester. The last day of summer vacation sees a prospective college student twisting his game controller to avoid colliding with a digital racecar. The day after that, it's the steering wheel. In all seriousness, Harper's parking lots are considered by most of our students the most dangerous part of the whole campus. Reaching the doors of the main buildings, or the car door at the end of the day, is almost like touching home-base. Safe!

A college campus is a daily gathering place for friends as much as it is a place to learn. Students consider it to be pretty safe, and statistics show that campuses are truly safer than the media would have the public believe. Universities around the country can boast a lower rate of theft and assault for its students than for people of the same age who are not enrolled; for every 250 students, an average of 17 instances of theft or assault have been recorded annually whereas 20.5 out of every 250 non-students have reported the same problems. Generally, the sheer crowdedness of most hallways is a strong deterrent for any bad behavior. This "safety in numbers" idea is replicated in most other (non-campus) places where people congregate. Still, the added protection of the police at Harper and other colleges provides students with a much safer environment and the knowledge that help is always there if they need it. Without the police, the gap in crime against students and non-students would surely be smaller.

That no campus is completely safe has been an issue many students have had to deal with recently. When stories about shootings, threats, and bomb scares become sensationalized on the news, fear can easily spread and fuel the question of what to do should a problem arise. Some students said that they would go to a friend, teacher, or counselor if they

found themselves in a tough situation. Some, though fewer, said that they would go to the police. To make sure trouble doesn't happen again, most students suggested simply avoiding the area where something bad happened and being more aware, though some said that they would tell the police and file a report. In general, living with the fear that something might go wrong is a state of mind so unwelcome to students that they would not alter their conduct at all.

In a completely non-scientific survey of fourteen students (attendees of a recent Honors Program meeting and the students in a Thursday-morning Spanish class), Harper enrollees were asked to give their opinions about safety on campus. Most results showed confidence and an optimistic attitude on the topic.

Keunae Choi's feelings toward safety on campus are very positive. On a questionnaire about safety at Harper, she showed her positive experience and confidence in the police and faculty to be there if a student ever needed help. "I lost my wallet and one of the officers picked it up and gave it back to me," she recounted, ending her written answer with a smiley face. A student of Harper College for three years, Keunae has never felt unsafe.

The sentiment is shared almost unanimously by the rest of the survey participants. "If you need help, they are fast at your side," said Corinna de Behr. When asked more broadly, "Do you feel generally safe on campus?" Almost all the respondents said "yes" or had a fairly positive attitude, whether it was because of the police presence or for some other reason.

David Belknap said that although "something bad can happen anywhere," he doesn't let that worry him. Indeed, the biggest concerns over safety, besides the parking lots, were that the police could actually

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It wasn't a remarkable Thursday. My roommate and I woke up on time and we walked to class together, splitting up at DuSable and Reavis Halls. I sat through my English 333 class and wondered why I couldn't say anything interesting and witty about *The Sun Also Rises*. I passed by Cole on my way to a mailbox, hoping that my letter to Arizona would be safe and arrive on time. All I had to do was wait for my roomie to get back, and we would hang out until it was time to go to dinner.

IF YOU EVER FOUND YOURSELF IN A TOUGH SITUATION ON CAMPUS, HOW DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD DEAL WITH IT?



*I would rather call or contact faculty than police because I don't feel comfortable talking to police.* - Keunae Choi

## Student Voices...

What do you feel are reasonable precautions for people to take if they have never had a bad experience on campus?



**I do not find taking certain precautions practical. Most of my focus is on my work.**

-Chris Garbarz

Where was I when it happened? The simple answer is Neptune North: on the third floor, facing the Student Center and the Bookstore.

But it's more complicated than that. Where was I? What did it matter at 2:30? I had plans for Valentine's Day later on in the evening, but other than that, what was so special about that Thursday and where I was? It didn't matter and it never had mattered until three o'clock. I was on Skype with my closest friend Renae, telling her how I wanted to go to the Trident for some chocolate milk. And suddenly I heard my roommate calling me on my cell phone. It was strange for her to call me; we're not phone people, and her tone was different. "There's been a shooting at Cole Hall. Stay in the room." That's all I remember of our conversation. You never realize how much you depend on your roomie until something like that happens and suddenly you're alone, totally alone in a little room that's next to other little rooms over another floor of little rooms somewhere out in Dekalb, Illinois.

The ventilation in Cole Hall had been making weird noises earlier in the semester. Four of us walked through Cole to get to Zulauf, the Lib Arts building, and we joked that there were ghosts in Cole Hall making those noises, telling us to stay out of their building. Our remarks, though innocent and humorous at the time, make me a little rattled and sick now. My roommate called at 3:15 p.m. For the next fifteen minutes, I was glued to both my window and computer screen. Someone ran down our floor yelling that we should lock our doors and stay away from windows. The pounding of their feet was just as loud as the helicopters flying above. I saw every ambulance come in or drive by. There were six that I counted, and I saw one person being loaded into one.

The reality of everything started setting in. I tried calling my parents, but the network was flooded. I

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was still on Skype and Nae heard everything I heard. NIU was locked down quickly, with a strong police presence, but it seemed to take hours. For fifteen minutes, that small span of time, we didn't know much. Was there more than one shooter? How many people were hurt? Was the shooter on the loose? Where were they going to go? Would the dorms be hit? Why Cole? Why this day? Why at this time? Why us? It didn't matter where I was; I just wanted answers. While these horrendous events were happening, while people were bleeding and dying in Cole Hall, I was locked inside my dorm room: watching, listening, praying, and asking what still hasn't been answered after a month and a half: "Why?"

When people ask me about the shootings, I sometimes feel like I have no right to be upset. I didn't know any of the victims. But I've learned that even though I wasn't directly involved, it still in some way happened to me. It happened to all the thousands of students, faculty, staff, and alumni of NIU. I didn't

"It's disturbing how one random place was the site of one random act of violence."

want to have a week off. I wanted to go back and face what happened. When I finally got that chance, campus was not the same. The 'ghosts' in Cole Hall were turned off. The lights were off. There was police tape everywhere. It's disturbing how one random place was the site of one random act of violence. Huskies know Cole Hall. You know the vending machines inside it, the art on the walls, the dis-

## Are There Any Changes You Would Like To See?

- There should be a physical fitness requirement for the police on campus. Other than that it provides a safer environment. There are a few officers that are out of shape and that seems to lessen vigilance. - *David Belknap*
- Give tickets or some fines to people who are smoking in front of "No Smoking" signs. - *Keunae Choi*

plays and the number of stairs you have to go up. You know, it's Cole Hall, where you have to pass through to get to Zulauf because it's warmer than going around. You know Cole Hall: it's a lecture hall building. No. You thought you knew Cole Hall. All of that has changed.

For a while I kept reliving what happened; that same sense of panic and desperation would flood back. I even imagined what it must have been like, sitting in class, trying to keep awake, praying for those last five minutes to go by quickly... and then your life changes.

What is extremely unsettling is realizing that it could have been any of us. Maybe the shooter chose Cole because it is

closest to the visitor's parking lot. Maybe he chose it because the building meant something to him. Maybe he didn't choose it. Either way, we all know that it would have been too easy for him to choose Reavis or DuSable or any other building, or any other place. The security and safety we had all felt at NIU was shattered. It didn't matter where I was, and a few people still don't understand that. It didn't matter. Our home, our community had just been dealt the most difficult and painful hand.

It could have been me. It could have been you. It could have been your friend, your sister, your cousin, and it could have been someone who was destined to cure cancer or solve world hunger. And it was someone's friend, sister, cousin, and they were people who had, without a doubt, bright futures ahead of them. To this day, remembering or talking about that day, or hearing about it, leads us all, Huskie or not, to the same old traumatic, unsettling, and unanswered question: "Why?" ■

## Legislature-approved Safety Modifications for 2007



## *The Homecoming*

*Annie Rohrbacher, Challenger Staff Writer*

BILL RAINEY DROVE WITH HIS SUNROOF OPEN and the thinning hairs on the top of his head blowing in the breeze. The sun on his lap felt like summer heat more than the chilly, 50-degree spring day it actually was. On his way back to visit a teacher at his community college, he was thankful that it wasn't windy; he remembered the way the wind whipped in between the buildings on your way to class, freezing fingers that were clutched tight around unread textbooks. He had chosen the time perfectly, he thought: 3 p.m. on a Tuesday. Surely the frenzy of the 11 a.m. parking lot would be long past. With only a few miles left, Bill was already reminiscing: ten-minute cram sessions on the grass outside his classroom, teachers that recognized him in the hallways, and the freedom to skip class if the weather was too nice to pass up after a long, Chicago winter. Harper College had been a good two years of his life.

But his first glimpse of the school was not what he had expected. Sure, he had chosen this time because he thought there would be few cars with which to compete for parking, but he didn't think there wouldn't be any! Cruising around the fountain, the only cars present were the campus police cars parked up by the curb. Bill worried something had happened, but he was an avid newspaper reader, and hadn't heard anything about Harper except some extreme new budget cuts to build a new campus safety building last semester. Plus, he could see students walking around inside. His heart backed out of his throat as he turned into a visitor parking spot.

Approaching the door, Bill swung his bag over his shoulder and sipped from his water bottle. An officer stopped him at the door and asked for his ID. "Oh," laughed Bill, "I'm not a student anymore. I'm just going to interview some old professors for an article I'm writing on community-college life."

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"All visiting personal must report to V building for a visitor ID badge. You don't think we just let anyone stroll around campus, do ya buddy?" argued the aggressive officer.

Bill asked for directions to V building, wondering if that was the new campus safety building. Upon arrival, he received a stack of sheets to fill out. He remembered filling out similar sheets on his health to get a gym membership when he had been a student. But these sheets required much more information. More than that, these sheets required much more than his name and social security number; they needed his health care plan, doctor, specific room numbers he planned to visit, license plate number, places of residence within the past fifteen years, and an inventory of everything he had brought to the campus. Flabbergasted, he told the receptionist he wasn't applying for admission; he was just going to ask a professor a few questions. She had a little trouble hearing him through the barred, glass window, so he yelled, "I just wanted to ask a professor a few questions!"

"There are no aggressive attitudes allowed on this campus, sir! One more outburst and you will be escorted off the grounds!"

"Well, could you tell me what room number I could find Andrew Wilson in?"

"That type of information is confidential," replied the batty receptionist.

Frustrated to his wit's end, Bill started walking back to his car to find his license plate number and begin to fill out the required inventory. He pulled out his slim cell phone to call Mr. Wilson. Thankfully he answered, and Bill spilled the first part of his visit to his old Honors Society administrator.

"Oh yeah, safety is very important these days. I'm in the honors office at L334," answered Mr. Wilson.

Forty-five minutes later, Bill turned in the last sheet to the receptionist, who dryly told him he was set to enter the campus. He returned tried to go

through the music hall entrance to avoid the original hostile officer he had met, but it was locked. The library was locked, too. 'What is going on? How can students get to class on time if they have to walk all around campus instead of taking the quickest route?' he thought. He resigned to go back to the L building entrance, hoping this encounter would be better.

"Ah, Mr. I'm-more-important-than-safety, you got your visitors pass?" snickered the officer.

"This is turning into a page out of Dr. Seuss' stories,"

"And don't even pretend like you think you can bring a water bottle in here!" Bill handed him the pass and tossed the water bottle and was al-

lowed to finally enter the building. Or so he thought. First he had to take off his belt, shoes, jacket, keys, cell phone, and remove his wallet to pass through a metal detector. Then he needed to pass a smell-detector, which he was informed would detect any trace of anthrax, weapons for biological-warfare, and West Nile virus.

"This is turning into a page out of Dr. Seuss' stories," muttered Bill as an officer patted him down.

Once he was reunited with his clothes, Bill headed over to the stairway to find Mr. Wilson. Before he could get to the stairwell, though, another officer checked his visitor ID to make sure he had authorization. Students were in a sort of traffic jam on the small staircase. Bill noticed that the delay was yet another officer checking IDs for everyone at the top of the stair case.

"How do you ever get to class on time?" laughed Bill to a pale girl in front of him.

"Oh, well, teachers lock the doors once class begins, so you have to get their early anyway and it's not a big deal."

"So they treat you guys like this every day?" Bill asked.

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# *Media Responsibility in School Shootings*

Jessica Chang, Challenger Staff Writer

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**EVERY TIME THE TRULY SAD AND REGRETTABLE INCIDENT OF A SCHOOL SHOOTING OCCURS, it is only natural for people to feel strong emotions and want answers. What exactly happened? What do we know about the killer? What was the motive? After the initial shock begins to subside, further questions come into play. Could this incident have been prevented? Who or what is to blame? Are there any common patterns in these incidents? What can be done to protect campuses from something like this from happening again? Everyone seems to have a different opinion on where the blame belongs: violent video games, movies, song lyrics, bullying, bad parenting, gun control (or a lack thereof), shortcomings of psychological services and medications, over-saturation of media coverage, and so on. All of those are legitimate possibilities, and although some people are quick to support one and deny the others, it's hard to say who is right or wrong. If the reason for school shootings were so clear and obvious, the problem would probably have already been resolved.**

There are no easy solutions for stopping school shootings, and most suggestions are so hotly debated back and forth between the pros and cons that it seems impossible to reach any real conclusion about what to do. However, I don't think that this means we should just throw in the towel and give up on trying to figure out the problem of campus safety. I am personally interested in the theory that media sensationalism of school shootings is a possible source of inspiration for would-be school shooters. To be sure, this is not a new theory; it has been studied in depth after the spike of school shootings following the infamous Columbine incident in 1999. Actually, the phenomenon of copycat violence resulting from media sensationalism has been observed since at least 1888, when the killer known as Jack the Ripper started violently murdering prostitutes in London. In those days, low-cost, mass-market daily newspapers known as "penny presses" survived on the sensational reporting of crimes. According to Dave Kopel, from [rockymountainnews.com](http://rockymountainnews.com), the frenzied publicity given to Jack the Ripper inspired many consequent copycat murders. Among the various reasons people give as to why contemporary school shootings have occurred more often since Columbine, I find the media-sensationalism/copycat theory to be the most compelling, because it can be directly confirmed. Also, if truly

blame-worthy, then I believe such sensationalism would be easier to correct than something more general, such as bullying or bad parenting.

It has been confirmed in numerous school shooting incidents that the gunmen were "obsessed" with prior models such as Columbine, just as the Columbine killers themselves were known to have studied previous school murders and mass killings. In the 1993-94 *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, writer Clayton Cramer explains how people who commit mass murders do so not because they actually hate their individual victims or the general population necessarily, but rather for the shock factor of killing many. In other words, its major purpose is to serve as a publicity stunt. Mass murderers often obsess over the publicity given to previous mass murderers and study them in detail to prepare for their own crimes: these people crave attention and publicity of their own. Many are known to have thoroughly researched and copied the details of previous school shootings, such as the day and time they were carried out, how the shooters were dressed, and what kinds of guns were used. Some school shooters kept blog and online shrines devoted to prior school shooters, displaying various sensationalistic photos and articles

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be more present, active, and vigilant, and that emergency phones should be installed in more areas and more prominently around the campus. "I didn't even know they had them," said Chris Garbarz about the emergency phones. If students do not know where to find the phones, they will not do much good.

## HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE POLICE PRESENCE ON CAMPUS?

- I see them often and it brings a comfortable feeling. However, I would like to see them more active. - Chris Garbarz
- Good, I lost my wallet and one of the officers picked it up and gave it back to me. Once, I locked myself out of my car and one officer came to unlock it for me at 11 p.m. for free. - Keunae Choi

in case. In a pinch, pepper spray, will provide a good defense if used properly. The best safety measure, though, is to avoid a bad situation altogether. Familiarity with your surroundings, proximity to people, an awareness of what is going on, and an air of confidence can do wonders in deterring trouble. The best part is that all of those things can be done without ever acknowledging a fear of criminals stalking around the corner. Simple common sense can go a long way in making things like pepper spray a last resort, and one rarely if ever actually used.

Most students are doing as much as they reasonably can to be safe. That trouble can happen anywhere is an idea which, while being true, does not change the nature of campus life in any big way. Perhaps it is up to the college to fill in the security gaps, such as adding more lighting in the parking lots, upping the vigilance of the police, and increasing awareness of emergency phones and the availability of counselors for support. Students, too, can take responsibility and just be more aware. ■

For students attending night classes, the darkness of the parking lots is more of a concern than empty hallways. The police not patrolling outside very much after dark only worsens the situation. More lighting is one of the parking lot improvements suggested by students who answered the questionnaire, and the other is the number of parking spaces available during the day. Aside from that, the students like it at Harper. If the biggest problem for most people here is navigating the parking lot, then Harper students have a lot to be grateful for.

Most students feel safe on campus. Although most can think of things they would like to see improved, whether it be security or respect for the "quiet zone" signs, the current presence of police and faculty and the general atmosphere of the institution provides a level of comfort and safety with which most students are satisfied.

No one in the questionnaire mentioned carrying any kind of weapon for protection, though some students on campus do carry things like pepper spray just

"I believe that something bad can happen anywhere. I don't let that worry me."

- David Belknap



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“On Fridays we get ‘free hall pass days’ so we can go to the book store or chill in the cafés,” she replied.

At this point Bill was about to start yelling, wondering what had happened to the freedom and ease of attending Harper that had appealed to him so much when he had been a student. Bill got his ID scanned and finally walked into the Honors office to find the familiar face he had been looking for.

“I’m surprised there are no students in here!” Bill said to Mr. Wilson.

“They can only come in here on Fridays,” calmly responded the aged professor.

“Yeah, I just heard. You know, I’m really taken aback by all the changes I’ve seen already. I was hoping to write a story reflecting all the good times I had here, even when I wasn’t in class.”

“Well you must have never realized how unsafe you were the whole time! Now we can never have a problem. No one could ever get a gun, knife, or sharpened pencil in this school. It has really helped the students feel safe in their environment,” replied Mr. Wilson.

“Did you just say a sharpened pencil...”

“We have a wireless network of computers for all the students, so they don’t use pens and pencils like you did as a student.”

“How do they take notes?”

“We didn’t want to take any risks, so we just print the notes for them. Are these the questions for the article you’re writing?”

“Oh, no. First, I was wondering how you solved the parking problem I so fondly remember.”

“Well, students don’t drive to school anymore, too high a chance of accidents. Now we have buses that pick up every student at his or her front door.”

“How do you coordinate the times with so many different students?”

“That is one aspect we haven’t worked out yet. Some students ride the bus for a long time, picking up other students before they get to school. Others just take a quicker bus ride but come to school earlier than their class, usually only a few hours.”

“A few hours! Where do they spend that time before class starts?”

“They can go to the library or tutoring center.”

“Alright, well my next question is what is the biggest accomplishment Harper has made in the past few years?”

“We have drastically reduced the number of cases of melanoma in students with our new safety procedures.”

“Melanoma? As in skin cancer? What does that have to do with safety?”

“It wasn’t actually something we planned, but since students can’t sit out in a wide open campus, they have less sun exposure and as a result are healthier. At first we just didn’t want them to be in a wide-open space because we didn’t have fences on the roofs yet, and we were afraid of snipers. But since it proved to be such a benefit we have kept the regulation!”

“Alright, I actually only have time for one more question. What kind of activities is the Honors Society up to this semester?”

“This week the Honors Society will be taking a self-defense class.”

“Well, at least the new safety obsession has led to an exciting activity! Where will you be going for the class?”

“Students aren’t allowed to leave campus at that time, so we will be having it in the usual class-

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room that our meetings are held in.”

“But there will hardly be room with all the desks, plus there are no mats or anything on the floor. Will the instructor bring mats?”

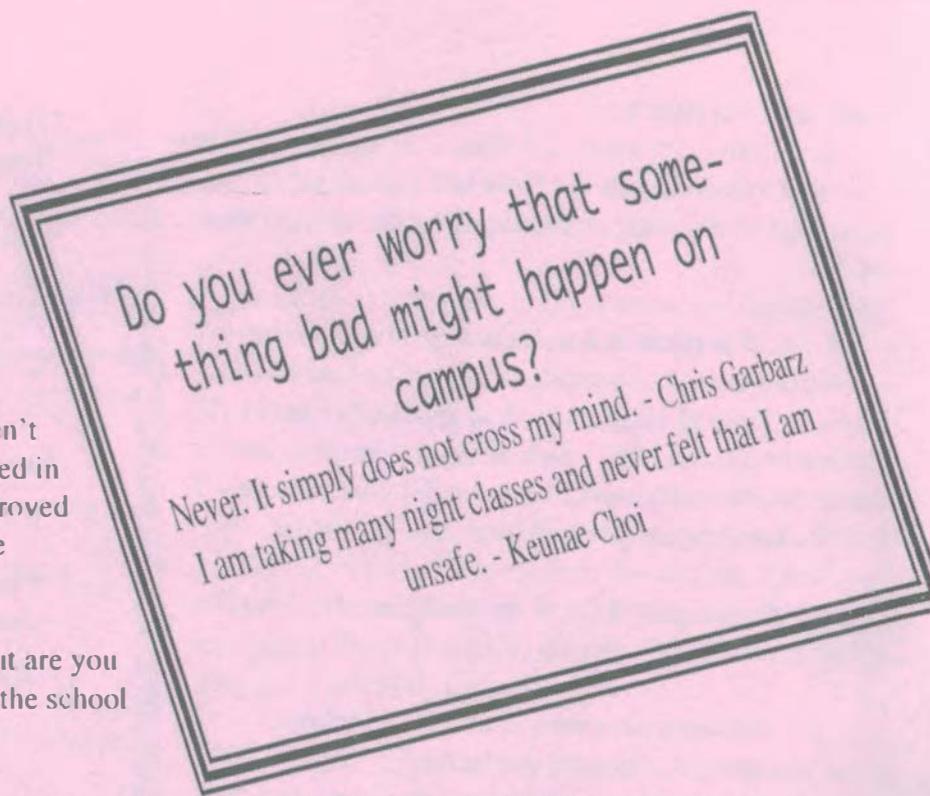
“We did try to get mats, but these aren’t on the list of approved foreign objects allowed in the school. We put in a petition to get it approved so by next year we’ll have a good idea of the Board’s decision.”

“Mr. Wilson, this is off the record, but are you actually in agreement with all the new rules the school has set just to increase safety?”

“Well Bill, you have to realize that students with a little less freedom are a lot better than students with gun-shot wounds. In this case, we take the Machiavellian approach, the ends justify the means. Do you remember that from your Great Ideas class? The new regulations are a great application of the theology we learn in Honors classes, and Honors classes always looked to take that extra step of application.”

“I do remember that, but it seems like the rest of my memories from this school will never be available for other students to experience.”

Worried the security officers would take as long to let him out as they did to let him in, Bill Rainey got ready to leave. He had enough of an experience that he didn’t need to ask very many questions, but Mr. Wilson promised to answer any e-mails to help with the article. Bill started his car and sat in the last bit of sunshine the day offered, listening to the whir of his engine. He had never known anyone to be involved in anything dangerous at Harper, but now he wondered if he had really been safe the whole time he had been there. “At least these kids could never have any doubt!” he laughed out loud and put the car in reverse. His laugh ended with a sigh; he couldn’t help but feel that the school had lost its appeal, and that the students had unfairly lost many of the opportunities it had afforded so many. ■



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from the media. Noted school violence researcher and consultant Loren Coleman provides the most convincing evidence for the copycat theory. According to Coleman’s blog, a 19-year-old shot and killed his father at home before showing up at his high school in Hillsborough, NC, dressed in a trench coat and armed with guns and pipe bombs. There, he wounded two students but was stopped and arrested before he could continue his rampage. When questioned by the police about why he did this, the shooter simply said, “Columbine. Remember Columbine.”

Further supporting this case, Coleman, who also authored *The Copycat Effect: How the Media and Popular Culture Trigger the Mayhem in Tomorrow’s Headlines*, has found that most contemporary school shootings tend to happen predictably around one month or one year after prior “celebrity” incidents that have been sensa-

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tionalized by the media. All of these things seem to confirm that the media-sensationalism/copycat theory is legitimate.

This does not mean that school shootings should be ignored or not reported. Of course they should be reported, and the public should be made aware of their occurrences. However, they should not be used as an excuse for the media to over-expose sensational details in an attempt to increase their ratings. This means that the focus of the media needs to change. Consider what happened in the Virginia Tech case. During the time period between the killer's first and second shootings, he mailed a comprehensive media package to NBC. Of course, this supports Cramer's point that these types of people seek attention and glorification. If it really were only a matter of being angry/depressed and desiring to quit this world -- though violently -- why would the shooter have put in so much effort into creating a video, composing disturbing writings, and taking photos of himself wielding his weapons in various "tough-guy" poses? Obviously, he didn't want to go unnoticed; he wanted to make a definite impression in the public consciousness forever. By airing the contents of the package, the media gave the killer exactly what he wanted, as he knew they would. Additionally, as author "Tony" wrote on scholarpreneur.com, this is the message being sent to potential school shooters: "Go ahead! Go through with it! You'll get your 15 minutes of fame. And make sure you mail us your manifesto describing why you did it too! We'll give you a voice." "Tony" goes on to make the point that people always seem to question why troubled people like school shooters consider violence to be a solution. He argues that this is because for those weak-minded individuals, it is a solution - a solution that the mainstream media provides.

An old saying in the news media world is, "If it bleeds, it leads." But now, the media must reconsider the appropriateness of reporting every last gruesome detail and airing every video, photo, and rambling rant sent in by troubled, mentally unstable killers. Do we really need to know about these things? What are the benefits of plastering this information on the front page of every paper for the next week or so? Consider the fact that when most other crimes, including serious ones such as homicides, are reported in the

news, they don't come with a complete biography of the killer. The story is limited to the crime itself, and it is told in a straightforward, factual manner. Likewise, when it comes to school shootings, the media should turn the focus off of the killers and more onto the victims, if anything. It's deplorable that the killers' identities become immortalized in memory while the victims are sometimes not even remembered by name.

In fairness to my opposition, however, I should say that some -- including the media networks themselves, of course -- argue that it is good that the killers' histories and manifestos are aired; the thinking here is that such exposure helps us to understand motives. According to Mike Berlin on buzzsawhaircut.com, NBC News President Steve Capus responded to criticism of the decision to air the Virginia Tech shooter's video with the following: "The limited video we've released clearly demonstrates this was an individual whose smoldering hatred was ready to boil over. Perhaps sharing it with the world will help to open our eyes to important warning signs." Writer Berlin points out that there was no lack of prior warning signs in the case of the obviously mentally unstable Virginia Tech killer, and that they were already being discussed in the news media by the time FOX released the killers' video. Furthermore, the killers' video, photos, and writings do not give us any truly enlightening insights about him or why he killed. Rather, we only get "his stylized and subjective portrayal, a caricature and an icon of a mass murderer," as Berlin aptly puts it. Eventually, many networks, including NBC, CBS, and ABC made the decision not to continue airing the killers' media package, but Jack Shafer on slate.com points out that this decision came

conveniently "after one hot ratings period."

Some people believe that it will be impossible to get the media to act more ethically and responsibly when it comes

"...it is up to the mainstream media itself and not the government to set the boundaries that can help reduce the vicious cycle of mass murders like school shootings."

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to reporting stories like school shootings without sensationalizing them. On the contrary, we do know that the media is capable of self-censorship, as practically all mainstream media entities (thankfully) do not publish the names of sexual-assault victims or sensational photos of murder scenes and dead victims. With all the evidence supporting the media-sensationalism/copycat theory, the media officials have a responsibility to extend their self-censorship policies to school shootings coverage, reporting what is appropriate and directly relevant. As Coleman urges, due to the rights protected by the First Amendment, it is up to the mainstream media itself and not the government to set the boundaries that can help reduce the vicious cycle of mass murders like school shootings. Additionally, Coleman suggests that the media can potentially have a more positive effect on the public awareness by including crisis hotline information and other sources for help in every story about school shootings. I personally agree that it is up to the media to reassess its own policies. This is America, after all, and I do not believe that giving the government the powers of the Chinese-style system of strict and comprehensive censorship is appropriate in this country. As I stated early on in this article, I do not know that a perfect solution exists for eliminating senseless crimes such as school shootings. However, through my research, it does seem evident to me that media sensationalism of such events do tend to inspire copycats, and thus, by removing this outlet for publicity for school shooters, the potential for a positive change seems possible. ■

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*Please be informed that Harper College offers psychological help for all students enrolled more than half time. The Health & Psychological Services Office is located in A-364 and can be reached at 847-925-6268. If you are experiencing a crisis or life-threatening emergency, call 911 or the Harper Police emergency number at 847-925-6211.*

## Honors Announcements

\* *Summer 2008 and Fall 2008 Honors courses* are already available through the "Courses" link on the Honors Program web site. Summer ('08) Honors courses:

- PSY 101 with Prof. Charles Johnston, Tues./Thurs., 1:10 - 3:45 p.m.
- HUM/HST 105 with Prof. Trygve Thoreson, Mon./Wed., 1:10 - 3:45 p.m.

\* *Inspiration Café*: On Saturday, May 10, Mr. Wilson will take up to four Honors students to the Inspiration Café, a soup kitchen designed to have a restaurant feel, in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood (Wilson and Broadway streets). If you would like to go, please let Mr. Wilson know by e-mail: [awilson@harpercollege.edu](mailto:awilson@harpercollege.edu).

\* *Lydia House*: On Saturday, May 3rd we are playing baseball with children who live in a house for children from troubled homes.

\* **The Honors Program is co-sponsoring a free performance by Kenny Endo and his Taiko Drumming Ensemble on Tuesday, April 22, at 12:15 p.m. in the Performing Arts Center.**