

Criminal Incidents at Postsecondary Institutions

Degree-granting postsecondary institutions are required to report data for several types of crimes against persons and property on campus. In 2020, about 21,200 criminal incidents of these types were reported. The number of on-campus crimes decreased by 15 percent (from 32,100 to 27,200) between 2010 and 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic; the number continued to decrease by another 22 percent (from 27,200 to 21,200) between 2019 and 2020, during the first year of the pandemic.

Since 1990, degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal student financial aid programs have been required to comply with the *Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act*, known as the *Clery Act*. The *Clery Act* requires institutions to distribute timely warnings about crime occurrences to students and staff; to publicly report campus crime and safety policies; and to collect, report, and disseminate campus crime data. Since 1999, data on campus safety and security have been reported by institutions through the Campus Safety and Security Survey, sponsored by the Office of Postsecondary Education of the U.S. Department of Education. These data are reported for each calendar year and include on-campus criminal offenses and arrests involving students, faculty, staff, and the general public, as well as referrals for disciplinary action primarily dealing with persons associated formally with the institution (i.e., students, faculty, and other staff).¹ Due to underreporting, figures for reported offenses, arrests, and disciplinary referrals likely do not capture all incidents that occurred. For example, according to reports in a student survey administered at several dozen large universities, officially reported sexual assaults represented only a minority of sexual assaults that occurred.²

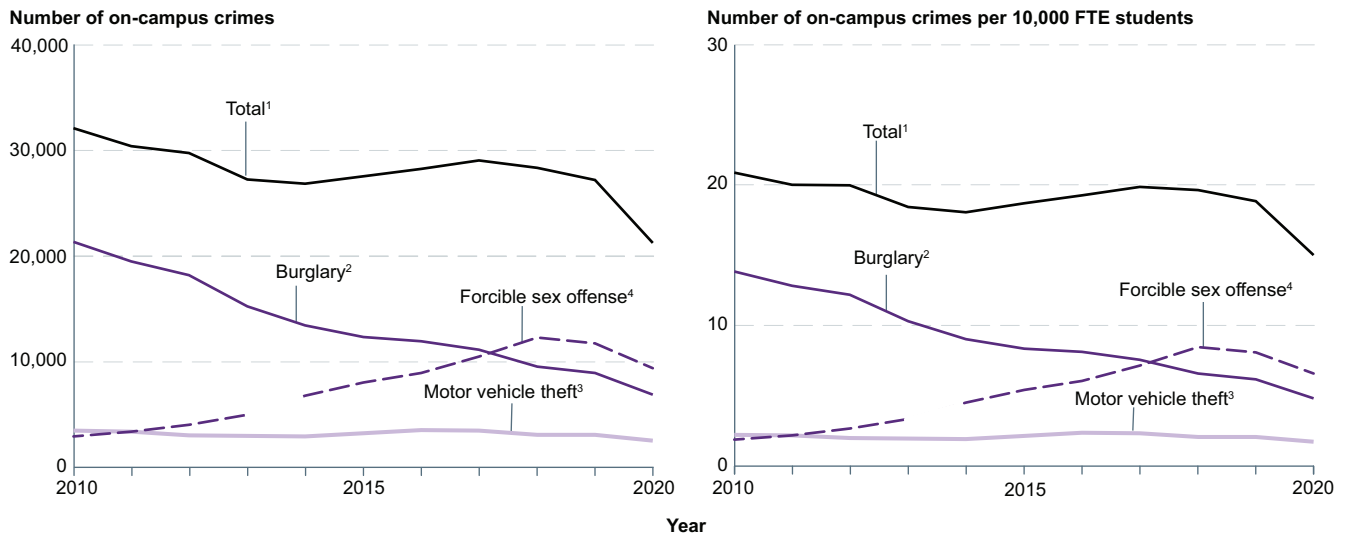
On-Campus Crimes

The *Clery Act* requires postsecondary degree-granting institutions to report data for several types of crimes,³ including the following seven against persons and property on their campuses: murder, sex offenses (forcible and nonforcible), robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and arson.⁴ In calendar year 2020—when many postsecondary institutions shifted instruction from in-person classes to online-only or hybrid education during the coronavirus pandemic—a total of 21,200 criminal incidents of these types were reported.⁵ This translates to 15.0 on-campus crimes reported per 10,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students enrolled.⁶ Among the various types of on-campus crimes reported in 2020, there were

- 9,400 forcible sex offenses⁷ (44 percent of reported on-campus crimes);
- 6,800 burglaries⁸ (32 percent of reported on-campus crimes);
- 2,500 motor vehicle thefts⁹ (12 percent of reported on-campus crimes);
- 1,500 aggravated assaults¹⁰ (7 percent of reported on-campus crimes);
- 500 robberies¹¹ (2 percent of reported on-campus crimes); and
- 400 arson¹² incidents (2 percent of reported on-campus crimes).

These estimates translate to 6.6 forcible sex offenses, 4.8 burglaries, 1.8 motor vehicle thefts, 1.1 aggravated assaults, 0.3 robberies, and 0.3 arson incidents per 10,000 FTE students.

Figure 1. Number of on-campus crimes reported and number per 10,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by selected type of crime: 2010 through 2020



¹ Includes other reported crimes not separately shown.
² Unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft.
³ Theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle.
⁴ Any sexual act directed against another person forcibly and/or against that person's will. Reporting guidelines for forcible sex offenses changed in 2014. In years prior to 2014, schools reported a total number of forcible sex offenses, with no breakouts for specific types of offenses. Beginning in 2014, schools were asked to report the numbers of two different types of forcible sex offenses: rape and fondling. These two types were added together to calculate the total number of reported forcible sex offenses.
 NOTE: Data are for degree-granting institutions, which are institutions that grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Some institutions that report *Clery Act* data—specifically, non-degree-granting institutions and institutions outside of the 50 states and the District of Columbia—are excluded from this figure. Includes on-campus incidents involving students, staff, and on-campus guests. Excludes off-campus incidents even if they involve students or staff. Caution should be used when comparing on-campus data for 2020 with those of earlier years due to the switch to online learning in many postsecondary institutions in fall 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security Reporting System, 2010 through 2020; and National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2011 through Spring 2021, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 329.10 and 329.20.

Between 2010 and 2020, the overall number of reported on-campus crimes decreased by 34 percent (from 32,100 to 21,200), but most of this decrease occurred between 2019 and 2020, during the first year of the pandemic.¹³ Specifically, the overall number of reported on-campus crimes

- decreased between 2010 and 2019 by 15 percent (from 32,100 to 27,200); and
- decreased between 2019 and 2020 by 22 percent (from 27,200 to 21,200).

When examined by the specific type of crime, the numbers of on-campus crimes reported in both 2019 and 2020 were lower than the number reported in 2010 for five categories: burglary, motor vehicle theft, aggravated

assault, robbery, and arson.¹⁴ For forcible and nonforcible sex offenses, the numbers of on-campus crimes reported in 2019 and 2020 were both higher than in 2010.

Specifically, 74 nonforcible sex offenses were reported in both 2019 and 2020, while 33 were reported in 2010. The number of reported forcible sex offenses on campus increased by 220 percent from 2010 to 2020 (2,900 to 9,400). Inflection points in this trend include

- the largest single-year increase:¹⁵ 2013 to 2014 (36 percent, from 5,000 to 6,800);
- the peak: 2018 (12,200); and
- the largest single-year decrease: 2019 to 2020 (20 percent, from 11,700 to 9,400).

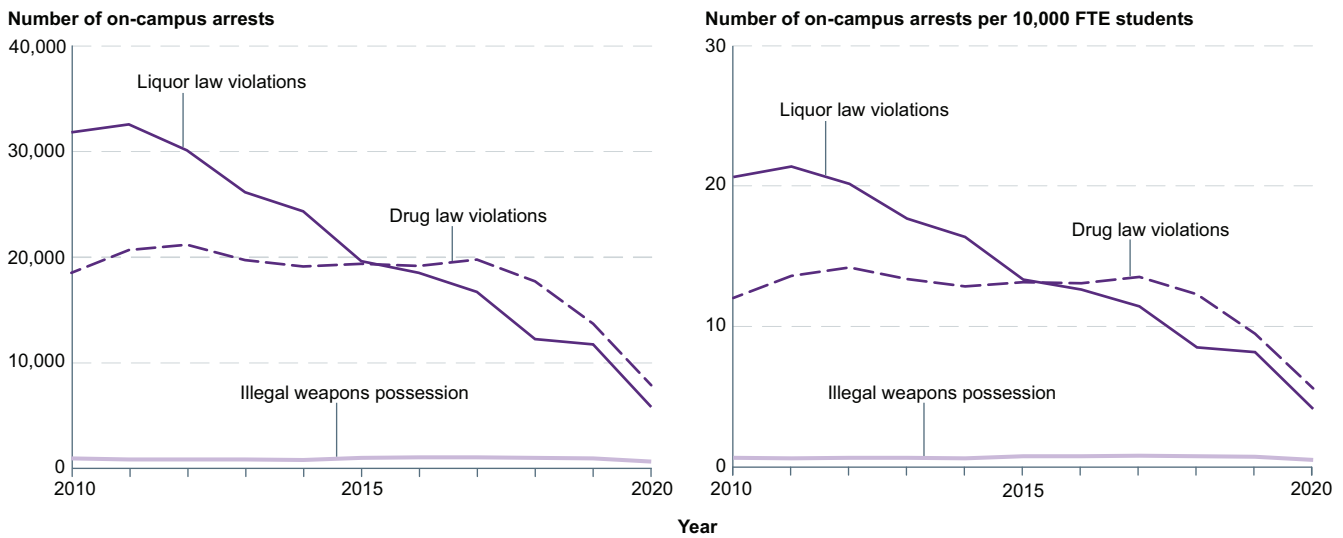
Changes over time in the number of crimes and the number of FTE students enrolled have implications for the rate of crime, or the number of crimes per 10,000 FTE students. Between 2010 and 2020, postsecondary enrollment decreased, and the number of reported on-campus crimes decreased at a faster rate (see *Digest of Education Statistics 2021* for details about college enrollment). As a result, the overall number of on-campus crimes reported per 10,000 students was lower in 2020 than in 2010 (15.0 vs. 20.9). Specifically, the overall rate of on-campus crimes

- was 10 percent lower in 2019 than in 2010 (18.8 vs. 20.9 per 10,000 FTE students), but showed no consistent trend during this period; and
- decreased by 20 percent between 2019 and 2020, during the first year of the pandemic (from 18.8 to 15.0 per 10,000 FTE students).

Considering specific types of reported offenses, the rate per 10,000 students was lower in 2020 than in 2010 for six categories: murder, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and arson. In contrast, the rate was higher in 2020 than in 2010 for forcible and nonforcible sex offenses.¹⁶ Specifically, the rate for forcible sex offenses increased overall between 2010 and 2020 (from 1.9 to 6.6 per 10,000 students), surpassing burglary

as the most reported offense beginning in 2018. However, more recently, during the first year of the pandemic, the rate for forcible sex offenses decreased between 2019 and 2020 (from 8.1 to 6.6 per 10,000 students).

In 2020, the number of crimes reported on college campuses per 10,000 students differed by level and control of institution (ranging from 2.9 at 2-year private for-profit institutions to 19.0 at 4-year private nonprofit institutions). To some extent, this range reflects the presence of student residence halls. Crimes involving students while they are on campus, including those that occur after normal class hours or in residence halls, are included in campus crime reports, while crimes involving students while they are off campus are not. In 2020, institutions with residence halls reported higher rates of on-campus crime than institutions without residence halls (19.2 vs. 4.1 per 10,000 FTE students). The rate for each individual type of crime was also generally higher for institutions with residence halls. For example, more forcible sex offenses were reported at institutions with residence halls than at institutions without them (9.0 vs. 0.5 per 10,000 students), and more burglaries were reported at institutions with residence halls than at institutions without residence halls (6.0 vs. 1.8 per 10,000 students).

On-Campus Arrests**Figure 2. Number of on-campus arrests and number per 10,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by type of arrest: 2010 through 2020**

NOTE: Data are for degree-granting institutions, which are institutions that grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Some institutions that report *Clery Act* data—specifically, non-degree-granting institutions and institutions outside of the 50 states and the District of Columbia—are excluded from this figure. Includes on-campus incidents involving students, staff, and on-campus guests. Excludes off-campus incidents even if they involve students or staff. Excludes cases in which an individual is both arrested and referred to college officials for disciplinary action for a single offense. Caution should be used when comparing on-campus data for 2020 with those of earlier years due to the switch to online learning in many postsecondary institutions in fall 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security Reporting System, 2010 through 2020; and National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2011 through Spring 2021, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 329.10 and 329.20.

As part of the *Clery Act*, degree-granting postsecondary institutions are also required to report the number of arrests made on campus for illegal weapons possession, drug law violations, and liquor law violations. The total number of these reported on-campus arrests decreased by 71 percent between 2010 and 2020 (from 51,500 to 14,800), with nearly a third of this decrease occurring between 2019 and 2020 during the first year of the pandemic. Within this period, the total number of on-campus arrests

- decreased by 48 percent (from 51,500 to 26,700) between 2010 and 2019; and
- decreased by 45 percent (from 26,700 to 14,800) between 2019 and 2020.

These downward trends were driven by the decreases in the number of arrests for drug law violations and liquor law violations between 2010 and 2020:

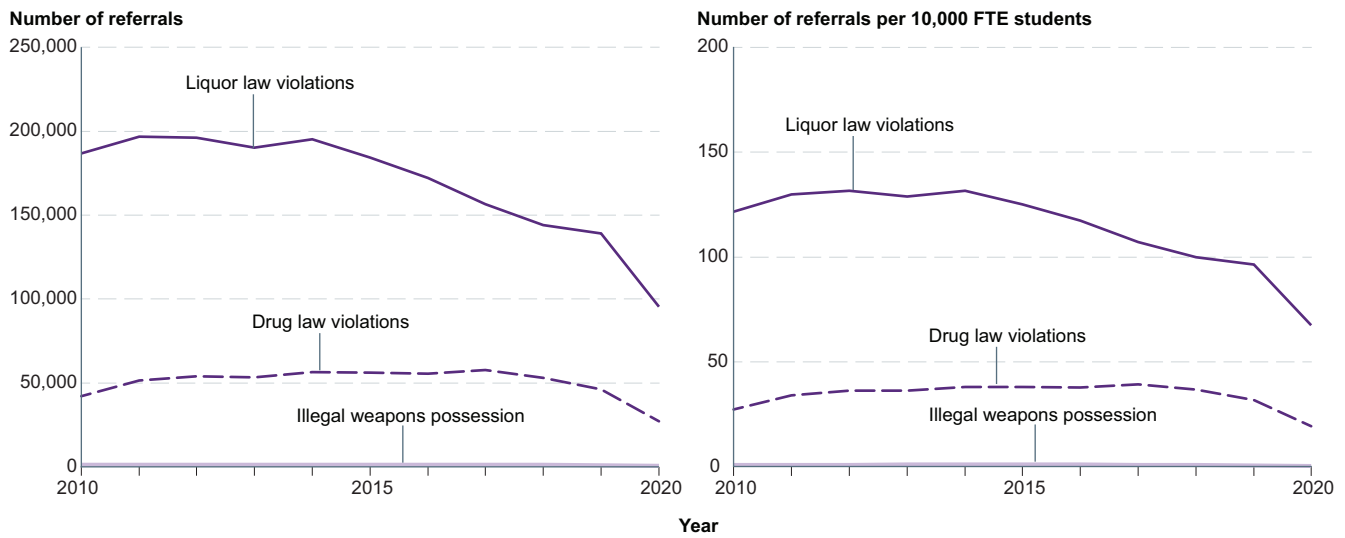
- The number of arrests for drug law violations decreased from 18,600 to 8,000, with 54 percent of the decrease occurring between 2019 (13,800) and 2020.
- The number of arrests for liquor law violations decreased from 31,800 to 5,900, with 23 percent of the decrease occurring between 2019 (11,800) and 2020.

There were 1,100 arrests for illegal weapons possession in both 2010 and 2019 (ranging from 1,000 to 1,200 throughout the period), but the number decreased to 800 in 2020.

Taken as the rate per 10,000 FTE students, the number of arrests between 2010 and 2020

- decreased overall from 33.5 to 10.4;
- showed no consistent trend for drug law violations from 2010 (12.1) to 2019 (9.5) and then decreased by 41 percent between 2019 and 2020 (5.7);
- decreased for liquor law violations from 20.7 to 4.2; and
- generally increased for illegal weapons possession from 2010 (0.7) to 2019 (0.8) but then decreased by 28 percent between 2019 and 2020 (0.6).

For each type of violation, the largest change in the rate of arrests occurred between 2019 and 2020.

Referrals for Disciplinary Actions**Figure 3. Number of referrals for disciplinary action resulting from on-campus violations and number per 10,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by type of referral: 2010 through 2020**

NOTE: Data are for degree-granting institutions, which are institutions that grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Some institutions that report *Cleary Act* data—specifically, non-degree-granting institutions and institutions outside of the 50 states and the District of Columbia—are excluded from this figure. Referrals include incidents involving students, staff, and on-campus guests. Excludes cases in which an individual is both arrested and referred to college officials for disciplinary action for a single offense. Caution should be used when comparing on-campus data for 2020 with those of earlier years due to the switch to online learning in many postsecondary institutions in fall 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security Reporting System, 2010 through 2020; and National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2011 through Spring 2021, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 329.10 and 329.20.

In addition to reporting on-campus arrests for cases involving illegal weapons possession, drug law violations, and liquor law violations, degree-granting postsecondary institutions also report referrals for disciplinary action for these types of cases. Counts of disciplinary actions only include incidents for which there was a referral for institutional disciplinary action but no arrest. In 2020, there were a total of 123,100 referrals for disciplinary action for cases involving illegal weapons possession, drug law violations, and liquor law violations. The largest number of disciplinary referrals (95,400 referrals, or 78 percent of referrals) involved liquor law violations. Most of the referrals (93 percent) involved violations in residence halls.

The total number of disciplinary referrals peaked in 2014 (253,300) before decreasing to a period low of 186,300 in 2019 and then to 123,100 in 2020. Changes over time in the number of disciplinary referrals varied by type of violation. The number of referrals for

- liquor law violations decreased between 2010 and 2020 (from 186,900 to 95,400);
- drug law violations increased between 2010 and 2017 (from 42,000 to 57,600) but then reached a period low in 2020 (27,100); and

- illegal weapons possession increased between 2010 and 2015 (from 1,300 to 1,400) and then decreased between 2015 and 2020 (600).

Similar patterns can be observed for the rate of disciplinary referrals, both overall and by type of violation. The total number of referrals per 10,000 students peaked in 2014 (170.7) before decreasing to 129.1 in 2019 and then to 87.0 in 2020. Changes over time in the number of disciplinary referrals per 10,000 students also varied by type of violation. The number of referrals per 10,000 students for

- liquor law violations decreased between 2010 and 2020 (from 121.5 to 67.5);
- drug law violations increased between 2010 and 2017 (from 27.3 to 39.4) but then reached a period low in 2020 (19.2); and
- illegal weapons possession increased between 2010 and 2015 (from 0.9 to 1.0) and then decreased between 2015 and 2020 (0.4).

Endnotes:

¹ As of October 9, 2020, the Department of Education has rescinded and archived the [Handbook for Campus Safety and Security Reporting](#), which in previous years was provided to assist institutions, in a step-by-step manner, in understanding and meeting the various *Clery Act* requirements. The Department now provides a [Clery-related Appendix to the Federal Student Aid Handbook](#). For more information about the rescission and replacement of the previous handbook, see: <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/electronic-announcements/2020-10-09/rescission-and-replacement-2016-handbook-campus-safety-and-security-reporting-updated-jan-19-2021>. Due to this change, readers should exercise caution when comparing 2020 data to those from previous years.

² Cantor, D., Fisher, B., Chibnall, S., Harps, S., Townsend, R., Thomas, G., Lee, H., Kranz, V., Herbison, R., and Madden, K. (2020). *Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct*. Rockville, MD: Westat. Retrieved November 7, 2022, from [https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU-Files/Key-Issues/Campus-Safety/Revised%20Aggregate%20report%20%20and%20appendices%201-7%20\(01-16-2020%20FINAL\).pdf](https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU-Files/Key-Issues/Campus-Safety/Revised%20Aggregate%20report%20%20and%20appendices%201-7%20(01-16-2020%20FINAL).pdf).

³ In addition to the seven crimes against persons and property reported in this indicator, degree-granting institutions are also required to report data on manslaughter. Manslaughter is not reported in this indicator because of its relatively rare occurrence, with an average of 2 manslaughter incidents reported annually across all institutions since 2010. A ninth category of crime is arrests or persons referred for campus disciplinary action for liquor law violations, drug-related violations, and weapons possession. The *Clery Act* requires additional reporting for hate crimes (for more information, see [Hate Crime Incidents at Postsecondary Institutions](#)).

⁴ Data reported throughout this section are based on these seven types of crimes.

⁵ According to the 2019-20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20), 84 percent of undergraduate students reported having some or all classes moved to online-only instruction in spring 2020 due to the pandemic. For more information, see the [First Look at the Impact of the Coronavirus](#)

[\(COVID-19\) Pandemic on Undergraduate Student Enrollment, Housing, and Finances \(Preliminary Data\)](#) (NCES 2021-456).

⁶ The base of 10,000 full-time-equivalent students includes students who are enrolled exclusively in distance learning courses and who may not be physically present on campus. The number of students exclusively enrolled in distance education courses was higher in fall 2020 than in fall 2019 (see [Undergraduate Enrollment](#) and [Postbaccalaureate Enrollment](#)).

⁷ Any sexual act directed against another person forcibly and/or against that person's will.

⁸ Unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft.

⁹ Theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle.

¹⁰ Attack upon a person for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury.

¹¹ Taking or attempting to take anything of value using actual or threatened force or violence.

¹² Willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle, or personal property of another.

¹³ Although rounded numbers are presented, calculations throughout the indicator are based on unrounded values.

¹⁴ The number of murders reported on campus ranged from 11 to 28 between 2010 and 2020. The number of negligent manslaughters reported on campus ranged from 0 to 5 between 2010 and 2020.

¹⁵ Reporting guidelines for forcible sex offenses changed in 2014. In years prior to 2014, schools reported a total number of forcible sex offenses, with no breakouts for specific types of offenses. Beginning in 2014, schools were asked to report the numbers of two different types of forcible sex offenses: rape and fondling. These two types were added together to calculate the total number of reported forcible sex offenses. For instance, 5,200 rapes and 4,200 fondling incidents were reported in 2020, for a total of 9,400 incidents of forcible sex offenses.

¹⁶ The rate for negligent manslaughter was also higher in 2020 than in 2010, although it rounds to 0.001 per 10,000 FTE students in both years.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 329.10 and 329.20; *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 307.10

Related indicators and resources: [Hate Crime Incidents at Postsecondary Institutions](#)

Glossary: Aggravated assault; Arson; Burglary; Forcible sex offense; Full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment; Incident; Motor vehicle theft; Nonforcible sex offense; Postsecondary institutions (basic classification by level); Private institution; Public school or institution; Robbery (Campus Safety and Security Reporting System)