The U.S. Department of Education recognizes over 4,000 two- and four-year public and private institutions of higher education in the United States with over 15 million students and several million staff, faculty and visitors. These institutions have a commitment to ensure the security and general welfare of those on their campuses and to provide appropriate policies, procedures, and strategies to maintain a safe campus.

College and university campuses have many challenges in practicing emergency management that are related to the distinctive structure and environment of higher education. Campuses often cover large geographic areas. Some even resemble small towns with the full extent of services in their vicinity, such as medical centers, sports complexes, residential centers, businesses. Campus populations change from day to day, semester to semester, and year to year.

These structural and environmental characteristics pose challenges for access control, monitoring movements, defining boundaries for facilities and grounds, standardizing procedures and decision-making processes, and prioritizing resource allocations.

To understand security control for these complex environments, consider the four phases of emergency management: prevention/mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. All phases are highly interconnected, with each phase influencing the other three phases.

**Prevention/mitigation**
Prevention/mitigation helps determine the level of security risk. In a crisis planning process, the first steps should concentrate on safety audits of current campus security systems to determine potential security problem areas. A comprehensive site assessment can help identify potential problems before they lead to an event or crisis. The assessment also identifies actions that campuses can take to eliminate or reduce the loss of life and property damage related to an event or crisis, particularly those that cannot be prevented.
Preparedness
The preparedness phase designs strategies, processes and protocols to prepare the college or university for potential emergencies. Creating a safer campus requires thinking about security throughout the entire campus, from classrooms to residence halls, from academic buildings to gymnasiums.

Preparedness actions may include:
- Establishing an incident command system for organizing personnel and services to respond in the event of an emergency
- Developing all-hazard policies, procedures, and protocols with input from key community partners, such as law enforcement, medical services, public health, fire services and mental health
- Collaborating with community partners to establish mutual aid agreements among all the community partners and campus departments
- Negotiating contracts that provide the campus with resources (e.g., food, transportation, medical services, and volunteers) needed during an emergency
- Establishing an emergency notification system using multiple modes of communication to alert persons on campus that an emergency is approaching or occurred
- Working with media in the community and campus public relations office to develop a campus emergency communication plan
- Installing access control for selected buildings and campus areas
- Making structural improvements to buildings
- Making improvements in landscaping, such as removing objects that might impair visibility through windows to the outside
- Installing systems for communicating with students and others on campus to notify them of an emergency
- Improving security technology, such as security cameras, access control, and alarm systems
- Updating structural design as applied to new construction or the retrofitting of existing structures

Response
In the response phase, campus officials activate the emergency management plan. Responses to emergencies vary greatly depending upon the severity, magnitude, duration and intensity of the event. Effective response requires informed decision-making and identification of clear lines of decision authority.

Response actions often include:
- Activating communication plans using mass notification systems
- Accounting for students, faculty, and staff
- Conducting an after-action report as a tool for modifying and improving the emergency management plan

Recovery
The recovery phase establishes procedures, resources and policies to help restore the institution to a functioning condition after an emergency. Planning for recovery begins in the preparedness phase, and it requires support from campus leaders to ensure that decisions contribute to implementation and resolution of all four components of recovery.

Recovery includes physical and structural recovery, recovery of administrative and business functions, restoration of the learning environment, and psychological and emotional recovery.
Comprehensive emergency management plans need to be dynamic and adaptable, not documents that sit on a shelf and are never used or consulted.

Steps necessary to implement a plan include:

- Communicate and distribute the plan in various forms to a full range of involved parties
- Test and practice the plan in training sessions, drills, and exercises
- Implement the action items outlined related to prevention, mitigation and preparedness
- Monitor and update the plan on an ongoing and regular basis

Colleges and universities are places of learning. These environments favor a spirit of learning and information sharing that should be reflected in the emergency management planning process.