

Safeguarding our campus

By Roderick J. McDavis



The events that unfolded in mid-April on the Virginia Tech campus mark a very tragic chapter in the history of higher education. This incomprehensible act of violence has

resonated throughout communities and college campuses across our nation.

In the wake of these events, some students, parents and alumni may wonder whether Ohio University is prepared to handle a similar tragedy. Please let me reassure you. We are prepared for a wide range of incidents, including random acts of violence. Our critical response team meets regularly to assess and evaluate response plans, which outline a variety of tactics and communication methods. Maintaining the safety and security of our students is always of paramount concern, and we remain vigilant in doing everything possible to that end.

For those of us in public higher education, who hold a core belief in making a college education as accessible as possible for our citizens while maintaining an open campus where freedom of expression thrives, the recent tragedy raises some difficult philosophical issues. Exactly what additional safety measures should institutions take? How can we best protect students without making our campus environments resemble fortresses? Should we place de facto limits on students' freedom of expression by creating policies that require professors to report content in

student projects that may suggest violent thought? Is it appropriate for universities to screen applicants for mental illness? And, if so, is it fair to restrict the ability of those afflicted to obtain a college education? What are the legal ramifications of such measures for a democratic society?

In the process of renewing a focus on student safety, these are just a few of the questions with which universities across the nation — and our society as a whole — will have to grapple in the years ahead.

In the near term, Ohio University will participate in a task force on campus security established by the chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents. This group will examine the issues involved in securing college campuses across our state as well as look at measures used in response to violent situations.

On April 18, our students, faculty and staff honored the victims of the Virginia Tech tragedy. As a result of suggestions from students, many members of our campus community wore Virginia Tech's school colors, and some 1,500 attended a candlelight vigil on the College Green.

Standing on our campus in Athens, Ohio, we were united in grief with those stricken by this tragedy hundreds of miles away. And as I looked out at the sea of flickering candles, I was reminded of the caliber of students who attend Ohio University. I am truly humbled and grateful to be part of such a caring community of young people.

I invite readers of *Ohio Today* to join our students, faculty and staff in continuing to remember the families of the victims and the entire Virginia Tech community in your thoughts and prayers.



DENNY CULBERT

Adrienne Picchioni (left) and Diane Skala comfort each other during a vigil honoring victims of the Virginia Tech tragedy.

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