Let's not paint alarmist view of campus killings

I was disturbed to see USA TODAY's front-page stories about murders at U.S. colleges and universities ("Campus killers' hints ignored"; "Campus security flaws a pattern in slayings," News, Wednesday).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2005 the murder rate at U.S. colleges and universities was .06 per 100,000 students -- 11 murders out of a total postsecondary enrollment of about 18 million.

By contrast, FBI statistics show that in 2005, the murder rate for the general population ages 18-24 was 14.9 per 100,000 -- 4,183 murders out of a population of 28 million.

Sadly, no workplace or community institution is immune to random violence -- whether it occurs at a local school, small business, shopping mall, place of worship or on college or university campuses.

Our institutions remain vulnerable, despite state-of-the-art security efforts, because they remain free and open places of discourse that preclude total control of movement on campus.

When rare acts of violence do occur, such as the recent shootings at Virginia Tech, campus officials around the country use such incidents as a new occasion to revisit their own security and emergency preparedness policies.

Is every campus response perfect? No. But such incidents remain extremely rare, and students, families and USA TODAY's readers deserve a non-alarmist view of this important issue.

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