



## [A whole new consideration for campus safety](#)

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There's an unfortunate side effect of the mostly positive student travel experience: As local and international travel increases, so does the potential for safety risks.

As technology begins opening doors to cheaper and more easily navigated local and foreign travel thanks to shared services like [Airbnb](#), [Uber](#), and [Lyft](#), students are more likely than ever to place their trust in an unknown driver, homeowner, or even Wi-Fi user ([FON](#)).

But while these technology-enabled shared services provide unprecedented ease and access for students, it can quickly become the student's, and institution's, worst nightmare.

But is the institution responsible?

"In the world of risk management, the more progressive thinking starts by thinking 'yes,'" said Jim Hutton, chief security officer and board member of the privately held travel risk management company [On Call International](#). "'Yes' to training staff to start from 'yes;' 'yes' to technologies and the services provided; but also 'yes' to having an equal responsibility to provide safety measures and procedures to safeguard against the inherent risks these services pose."

Hutton believes this 'yes' way of thinking has been on the uptick in higher education due to recent rises in "difficult to process and handle" student-related incidents and crimes. Because of the increase in these incidents, colleges and universities have the unfortunate task of reconsidering their safety strategies and protocols.

"It's actually these incidents and crimes that spurred the landmark legislation of the Clery Act," he said. "Now, a number of tragedies are prompting universities to look differently at student experiences both domestically and abroad."

Outside of on-campus shootings, a number of shared services-related safety incidents have popped up around the world, many of which happen to often-inexperienced young people. One recent example happened to a 19 year-old traveling in Madrid. The teen was allegedly [locked inside an Airbnb owner's house](#) and then sexually abused. Without options, the alleged victim texted his mother in the U.S. When the mother called Airbnb, the company told her to contact local police. By the time the police were sent, the alleged assault had already occurred.

There are also numerous [troubling reports of assaults](#) occurring in Uber and Lyft rides.

But is it an institution's responsibility to provide protection for students using these shared services domestically and abroad?

According to Hutton, it can't hurt to be proactive. In fact, understanding the risks associated with the shared services economy could, in the long run, help institutions better prevent all safety emergencies, he explained.

"We like to think of it on a macro framework level, or umbrella view," he noted. "Meaning that, in general, more companies and institutions across the U.S. are implementing the mentality of '[A duty of care](#)'—they're moving toward commonly accepted safety practices for their traveling employees, or in this case, the higher education community's students."

### **It's a Mixed Bag**

On Call, which serves 30 academic clients with services available to more than 750,000 academic members, says that the number of interested higher education clients in the company's security and emergency assistance services has been rising lately due to these in-the-national-spotlight safety incidents.

But it's difficult to picture the higher education safety landscape, says Hutton, because safety protocols span a broad range.

"Some institutions have a full-time safety and security director, but there are also those that are really struggling with how to envision and implement these new safety procedures. A large subset for this struggling group is figuring out how to keep study abroad and extension program students safe."

The confusion, he explains, stems from two points: Figuring out shared responsibility across a number of organizations (the student's field of study department, the main campus, local police chiefs, the shared service, etc.); and the lack of in-house consensus in what constitutes an institution's legal student safety responsibilities when it comes to travel abroad and off-campus technologies.

"For example, one of On Call's clients, a large university in Philly, had me take them through the offerings of our company, as well as our advice. There were 17 stakeholders in the room, and all with different points of view in training, the pillars of campus safety, and the services the institution should provide!" he exclaimed. "These are all good intentions in terms of legality and student safety, but it's a challenge to gain consensus."

### **Gaining Ground**

Hutton, who says he has a personal investment in higher education safety since both of his sons went on college-vetted student abroad programs, also volunteered for work with the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC). Hutton was part of an OSAC committee that worked with state-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic constituents. The committee was tasked with starting a conversation on what safety standards in higher education should look like.

And while the recent work on these standards by the OSAC committee is more a clearinghouse to begin a conversation rather than a specific outline, a number of thought leaders emerged on the subject of 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education safety standards, said Hutton.

But until a more formalized standards outline exists, Hutton says all institutions interested in being proactive should adhere to these characteristics of a best practice environment:

1. Set campus and student safety policies, processes and procedures to live by.

2. It is important for the institution to have a *professional* look at strategic risk-assessment, especially for travel abroad programs. These professionals should assess the risk environment geographically as well (natural disasters, terrorism, air quality, and more for an all-hazards approach). These safety and risk-assessment professionals shouldn't be professors who lead the abroad programs, even though Hutton says this is what often occurs.
3. Focus on training and communication that touches students directly. This means that institutions should set up a framework for sharing best practices in personal safety with students. Sharing also means making sure students understand the risks involved in the shared services economy.
4. The institution should also strive for a process that students can use to communicate in an emergency, or an emergency response plan.

"If the institution holds up a mirror to their abroad program, it should reflect these four elements," he emphasized.

When asked what specific tactics forward-looking institutions should include for students using shared economy services, especially abroad, Hutton explained that "redundancy is key."

For instance, especially in travel abroad circumstances, the student may be urged to call the local police, but there could be a language barrier. Therefore, the institution should have an international (and national) hotline students can call. An emergency tracker is also good, he noted, even if that may sound like a stretch.

"The emergency tracker could be a great idea, especially for students in high-risk countries. For example, an archaeology student studying in the Middle East could have a transmitter to relay an emergency message to satellite geolocation technology."

Hutton explained that colleges and universities should also make clear to students traveling abroad that social media shouldn't be the first technology to send a message of help, because some countries can block social media. However, texting can usually get through on a consistent basis.

"It's imperative for institutions to examine 'What's going on in your near and what's going on in your far,'" meaning what's going on in our program, but what's also going on in the program's political environment and shared services environment."