



National Campus  
Safety Awareness Month



# NCSAM 2020 PODCAST SERIES

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## TRANSCRIPT:

### THE SAME, YET DIFFERENT: AN INTRODUCTION TO CAMPUS SAFETY AWARENESS MONTH

#### Introduction

The subject matter of this podcast series will address challenging topics related to personal and campus safety. We acknowledge this content may be difficult and have included specific content warnings in each episode to help create an inclusive, positive, and safe experience for all listeners.

#### Music

[Playing]

#### Introduction

In the wake of COVID-19 and an advancing civil rights movement institutions around the nation are reaffirming their commitments to campus safety as they navigate the great reopening. And even as communities wrestle with a new normal, the Clery Act remains the same. A call to action, our paths may be different, but the purpose of the journey is still the same.

#### Sarah Barrett

Hi, I'm Sarah Barrett. And today I'll be sitting down with Clery Center Executive Director Jessica Mertz to discuss how we can take what is happening in 2020 and find relevance in the Clery Act, as we continue to do the work of creating safer campus communities.

#### Sarah Barrett

Hi Jess.

#### Jessica Mertz

Hi. Thanks for having me.

#### Sarah Barrett

Our interview today will serve as the official kickoff to the 2020 National Campus Safety Awareness Month or NCSAM. So to start things off, I thought it would be helpful to give listeners some background about why we're here today. Can you please share a little bit about Clery Center as an organization and why Clery Center promotes NCSAM each year?

#### Jessica Mertz

Sure. I'm excited to be here. I'm so glad that you're utilizing this platform to hopefully expand our reach. Um, so NCSAM, National Campus Safety Awareness Month first and foremost is really an opportunity for us to provide free and timely and relevant programming. I think one of our strengths as an organization is that we always want to reach a broader audience on campuses. We want to reach people who may not necessarily think of their role as being primarily campus safety based. Um, and I think this is a good chance for us to do that, to pull in some more people, to have conversations about safety on campus, that is not just about Clery compliance, but that is maybe thinking about building comprehensive teams, thinking about prevention and support. So



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hopefully with NCSAM and now with these podcasts in particular, we can dive into some more of those topics and pull some people into the conversation who might not be a part of it normally.

### **Sarah Barrett**

That's so important, Jess. You know, expanding that reach and pulling folks into that conversation. In your answer, you touched on free, relevant and timely resources. And as someone who just recently came from a campus, I can tell you that I really appreciated the resources that Clery Center made available each year. Many themes have actually focused on one component of the Clery Act, but this year, the theme is very broad and capture some kind of nuanced topics. Then nonetheless, they are very important topics. So can you speak to why Clery Center chose to do something a little different this year and why that's important?

### **Jessica Mertz**

Sure. Well, I think that everyone agrees that 2020 is a year, like none other, um, and it, there is, um, you know, a lot of evolving conversations right now about what campus safety looks like, especially when we think about, um, whose safety we're prioritizing and obviously the larger conversations we're having about race and racial justice, um, conversations about COVID and campuses, responsibility for keeping health and wellness a priority. And, and also what does safety look like when we don't have students physically on campus? So, you know, I think the, the more sort of flexible and, um, broad nature of this year 's NCSAM is a reflection of hopefully what folks are feeling, um, on campuses. I know people feel like they're pulled in many directions, but we want to try and have these, these different relevant conversations in a way where we're just creating space to acknowledge that this, this isn't a year like any other, right. And this isn't a year where we can necessarily just focus on one component of the Clery Act because there's so many other more pressing things happening.

### **Sarah Barrett**

That's so true. There's so much going on. And all the events that have occurred on the national stage leading up to, and throughout both the global pandemic, and like you touched on the resurgent civil rights movement that's happening right now. And, you know, even as these events continue to unfold, higher education professionals find themselves doing the same work, but in a very different way. And you touched on this a little bit, but I'd love to hear you expand on why you think the Clery Act is still relevant at a time when so much is going on in the world.

### **Jessica Mertz**

Sure. Well, you know, I think that we've seen some ways in the past six months where the Clery Act has actually continued to serve as sort of a guidepost for institutions in creating policies and having procedures for how to respond to the unprecedented or respond to the unexpected. I mean, that's often why we're encouraging schools to take the time to build policies and to get community buy-in so that there is some sort of infrastructure for how to respond. Um, I think it's also when we talk about, um, you know, creating systems or, or creating structure, um, to hold schools accountable, um, and to make sure that schools are being transparent and how they're responding. And right now with COVID, especially being transparent about what they don't know, uh, because of so much of this is uncharted territory. So, you know, I think we, we like to think of the Clery Act, um, as being sort of a framework for the different components that we would encourage institutions to consider when responding and when building systems to respond, um, to things, you know, anything that might impact um, safety and wellness on campus.



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### **Sarah Barrett**

As we think about some of those systems that are in place and the policies, you know, a lot of campuses have come out recently over the last few months, in addition to various organizations and companies to take a stand on issues related to social justice. What do you say to folks who assert that the Clery act doesn't apply to all members with any college campus community?

### **Jessica Mertz**

Yeah, I think it's, it's an important conversation to have. And I think first and foremost, we, we can't shy away from it, right. We, we will, and we have to continue to have difficult conversations about how the Clery act itself can be, um, both um hopefully a vehicle for, but also a barrier to improving racial justice and equity on campuses. Um, I think ultimately it's a law that promotes transparency and was designed to hold institutions accountable for keeping their community safe and is hopefully a model for what community-based safety can look like and having shared responsibility for safety. But I also recognize that to many people, campus safety continues to be synonymous with campus police, um, and, and feels like it is inherently prioritizing the safety of White people and privileged people on campus. I think it's hard. It's like, like most laws and policies that were themselves sort of created within systems oppressive or racist systems you have to ask who was this really designed to protect. Um, and I think we need to continue to have that conversation for us as an organization. We feel like we can be both champions of and critics of the Clery Act at the same time.

### **Sarah Barrett**

That's a great point Jess related to being a champion of the Clery Act and also a critic of the Clery Act because there are critics out there. How do you respond to them?

### **Jessica Mertz**

Yeah, again, I think we, we need to be thankful and grateful for folks who are, um, having conversation and pushing us and institutions to have conversation. And I think one of the things that we try and do now to acknowledge that and recognize that and undo some of that, um, harm that may have been done is to continue to encourage campuses, to listen to their community, to get to know their community, um, to make sure that there is diverse representation around the table when creating their policies and when making decisions, but really what you design for your campus and what you, you know the way that you implement it and the people that you have involved in those decisions is up to you. We always say that you need to make it a reflection of what, what your values are as an institution. And what's important to you.

### **Sarah Barrett**

As we think about our values and who is represented on our campuses, the occurrence of dating and domestic violence really gained national attention during and after lockdown. But these and other interpersonal crimes have long been occurring on campuses. So how can the Clery Act help center conversations around crime and support for survivors?

### **Jessica Mertz**

I think this is obviously a particularly challenging time for institutions who are wanting to, um, prevent interpersonal violence who want to respond to it, who wants to educate around it. Um, both because of this, these sort of, you know, more increased risk that we're seeing across the country. Um, and also because of it



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being harder to actually reach their students, if they're not able to see them in person, and there might be a lot of additional barriers for students to access resources. And so when you're developing policies, when you're developing processes, when you're developing prevention programming, that is not a one size fits all model. Um, and I think the problem is that often, especially when I look at the history of prevention programming, which is really sort of my expertise, it was often, um, it was often not developed with inclusion in mind, right?

### Jessica Mertz

It was often not developed with the intention of reaching women of color on campus or marginalized communities on campus. And the approach had often been, well, we're going to design this programming. It's, you know, one size fits all. And so it's, anybody can participate it's for everybody. And any time I think we designed programming, especially prevention programming in diverse communities where we say, oh, it's for everybody, what people actually mean is it's for privileged White students, uh it's for hetero cis White students. Right. Um, because that is still in people's minds, the primary identity of who they think of as college students. So I think the real charge for campuses to think about when you are creating policies, when you were building your systems, when you are looking at your disciplinary policies and prevention programming, who are you thinking about? Who are you building it for?

### Jessica Mertz

Who do you have in mind and how might you need to bring some of those voices to the table to make sure that it is actually inclusive and not just, you know, a one size fits all approach. So I, that what we, what we've seen is, is institutions needing to be much more creative and much more flexible, um, and be willing to figure out, you know, how are we going to in this, this new climate, how are we going to effectively make sure our students know that even though you're not physically here, we are here for you, we still see you as a part of our community. Um, and I, you know, I think for some schools they have the infrastructure and the resources to do that well, and then for other schools, um, that's gonna be a really big uphill battle continually this, this year as students remain, you know, at home or in remote, um, virtual classrooms.

### Jessica Mertz

I think what, again, you know, hopefully some of the guidance at the Clery Act will continue to provide schools. Is this expectation that, um, you, you need to be training your staff and your, uh, hopefully your faculty, um, on how to recognize and respond when, when they might see or hear acts of violence or harm that that students are experiencing. I think that's more important than ever because students are probably going to be less connected to those student affairs support resources that maybe they would have interacted with, uh, physically on campus. So I think, you know, other staff, especially folks who are working with students, um, academically, uh, need to be prepared to listen for and look for, um, the needs of their students, who aren't physically with them. Uh, and hopefully the Clery Act provides guidance for them to do that. And hopefully their own, you know, policies and resources are giving them some guidance on how to do that also.

### Sarah Barrett

In your answer, you touched on the fact that campuses need to be creative and flexible, and oftentimes those are traits of a good leader. And so, as we think about the last few months, we've seen demonstrators call for courageous leadership and action from those in power. So what do you think is the call to action at this moment in time?



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## **Jessica Mertz**

I think for me as I, you know, it's interesting, I've been at Clery Center for a little over a year now. Um, and there's been so many points over the past couple of months where I've thought about, um, you know, how much I miss my students. I miss working directly with students and being connected with them. Um, and I realized that one of the incredible benefits of working with young people is that they are going to always challenge you. They are always going to, um, you know, have new ideas and have new expectations. And I think it's the university's responsibility to rise to the occasion. Um, you know, our student community is, is who are you, we're there to educate and to serve. Um, so I think my, you know, my call to action would be to, um, you know, not for, for administrators and for institutions to not always think, you know, better.

## **Jessica Mertz**

I think, you know, we have a tendency to do that just as adults and grownups in general is to think like, you know, we've seen it all, we know what's best. Um, and I think, especially when we're talking about creating, um, more equitable and inclusive campus environments, and when we're talking about, um, having this as an opportunity to make, perhaps make higher education more accessible across the country, which, you know, virtual programming might, that might be one of the silver linings of this, um, is to listen to your community, to listen to your students, to have an open mind, and to be willing to make the changes that they are calling on us to make in order to, um, ensure that they're having the access to educational experience that they deserve.

## **Sarah Barrett**

So, Jess you shared that you've been at Clery Center for just over a year. Now, I'm wondering, can you share with listeners what you think the future of Clery Center looks like as we continue to think about, um, moving forward?

## **Jessica Mertz**

Sure. Yes. And what a year it has been, um, with a lot of unexpected challenges, uh, but you know, we have a great team, so I think we've made it through, um, by supporting each other. Uh, for me, my first year was really focused on getting to know the team, getting to know Clery Center and our legacy, um, getting to know the needs in the field and where we want to go as an organization. Um, and in January, we were able to adopt a, a new strategic plan. That's really going to guide us into the next five years of work. Um, and in that plan, uh, we did make diversity equity and inclusion, a key priority, which was, uh, an exciting step for us. I think for us, that means starting at home, really looking inwards at our organizational practices are our own organizational biases.

## **Jessica Mertz**

Um, our representation as an organization. Um, I know for a long time we've been an organization of predominantly White women. Uh, we need to acknowledge the ways that our own lack of diversity has impacted our, our work and our programs and our reach, um, and you know, who might see themselves reflected in the Clery Act. So, you know, starting to do some of that internal organizational culture work, um, which, you know, we're obviously now seeing organizations and institutions and individuals across the country do. Um, we're also really trying to look at, like I said, how do we expand our reach? How do we make sure that campus safety isn't just synonymous with campus police or with policing. Um, and that it's not just, uh, just public safety folks who see themselves reflected in our work. We want to, um, you know, pull folks from across campus into this conversation and to help them build comprehensive teams on their campuses.



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## Jessica Mertz

I think that's going to be a big priority of ours moving forward. We also want to think about how to expand our membership program. Uh, we see our membership program as being one of the strongest ways for us to support schools beyond just Clery compliance, um, and to support schools on a sort of more ongoing, um, mentoring relationship. So that it's not just one campus professional attending one training with us and then leaving with some increased knowledge, but they really are seeing us as folks that they can continue to come back to. And they really ideally our members would help drive some of the programming that we offered to. You know, we want to know for members, what do you need? What are your challenges? What are your struggles this year? And we want to be able to adapt our programming to meet those needs.

## Jessica Mertz

So I think it's, it's an exciting time for us and we too have needed to be flexible and open minded, you know, to recognize where our shortcomings are and where we can grow as an organization. But I think that we are in a place where we have the, the team that can do that and the energy to do that. So, um, it'll be exciting and we hope that we not only can continue to be of service to the folks who have been relying on us for so long, but can also, again, connect with some new professionals in the field and to bring in some new institutions,

## Sarah Barrett

Jess you're. So, right. This is such an exciting time for us at Clery Center. And, you know, as you said, really thinking about ways that we can continue to connect with folks and to hopefully provide offerings that speak to what they need and what they're looking for. Um, and later on this month, we'll be hosting webinars tackling some of the topics that we've touched on today in addition to others related to the events of 2020. And so we hope that folks will continue to join us throughout the month of September to really center these conversations as they relate to the Clery Act.

## Sarah Barrett

So thank you so much for, for sharing this information and for giving your perspective, not only on the events of 2020, but also how the Clery Act continues to remain relevant, but on a different note, I'd like to ask you some other questions that we are asking all of our guests as part of our podcast series this month. So my first question is, can you share a "life hack: for coping with quarantine?"

## Jessica Mertz

Um, well, I wish I had more, um, and I think the one that's been the most useful for me now that we're many months into this and I have two young children with me at home is just keeping some semblance of a routine has felt important. Uh, you know, making sure we're not wearing our pajamas all day and, uh, eating ice cream for lunch, uh, which, you know, we've done some days too, along the way. Um, but keeping some semblance of, of a routine. Um, and I think also for me as somebody who's, uh, always, who's used to sort of a more hustle and bustle lifestyle, um, appreciating some of the, the quietness and the pause that, um, the, the quarantine and the need to stay inside has brought to me and my family.



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## **Sarah Barrett**

Yeah. There are some silver linings as we think about quarantine and what we've learned about ourselves and about society, uh, following COVID-19. So my next question is what do you hope will be different after 2020? And what do you hope will stay the same?

## **Jessica Mertz**

When I, when I think about moving out of 2020, it's hard because now we, uh, it's pretty clear that the impact of, of this year is going to stay with us for a long time. Obviously, what I hope will change most immediately is the illness and the death, um, and the economic impact of, of COVID that we'll be able to recover from that, and that people will not be living in fear of their lives and their health being jeopardized. Um, I think what I hope stays the same is that we recognize the value of pausing and looking around us. Um, and in this case, seeing the injustice and inequity that's been here this whole time, you know, none of this has is new. Um, but there was something really powerful about the country, um, being sort of reawakened to the, um, reenergizing civil rights movement.

## **Jessica Mertz**

Um, and I, I feel pretty strongly that that would not have happened. Had we had so many people in privileged positions not been forced to sort of be home, um, and to, and to pause their lives a bit and to see more clearly what's been there all along. So, um, I hope that we can continue to, um, find space, create space, let me say, uh, to do that and to make that a priority. And I know that's something that I certainly personally in my life, uh, want to commit to beyond, beyond this pandemic.

## **Sarah Barrett**

I think there are things that we can all commit to, and I just want to say thank you again so much just for taking the time to share with us. And, you know, oftentimes we say that hindsight is 2020. So hopefully being able to move forward after 2020 and to have some of that clarity as we continue to identify the ways in which we might better serve our campus communities to create safer campuses for all.

## **Sarah Barrett**

Thanks so much.

## **Jessica Mertz**

Thank you.

## **Support Clery Center**

Hi, I'm Andy Cagnetta a proud Clery Center board member. National Campus Safety Awareness month is an opportunity for Clery Center to provide free resources to colleges and universities across the country. But we can't do that without the support of our generous donors. If you like me, believe in the importance of creating safer campuses for our students and want to support a mission driven nonprofit organization like Clery Center, please donate online at [clerycenter.org](http://clerycenter.org). That's— C L E R Y — center.org.