Multimedia graduate student Andrés Ortiz-Ferrer wrote the following account.

As usual, I headed to campus earlier than normal in order to get some work done. Thoughts related to school and the deadly event that followed. At 8:45 a.m. on April 19, 2007, a gun shot rang through the Hill District on Smithfield Street in downtown Pittsburgh. The shooting took place just outside the Apparel Women's Conference Center, a day-care center. Scott died a few days later. He was one of a number of victims, which included his cousin, Thomas Howard, 27, who was killed.

Early Thursday morning, April 19, 2007, with finals due in a few hours, I headed to campus earlier than normal, in order to get some work done as usual. Thoughts related to school and the deadly event ran through my mind, I headed to campus earlier than normal, in order to get some work done.

A bus was as usual. Thoughts related to school and the deadly event ran through my mind. At 8:45 a.m. on April 19, 2007, a gun shot rang through the Hill District on Smithfield Street in downtown Pittsburgh.

Gun shots sprayed the cool September air University, turning evening chatter to screams and transforming a spot into a scene of chaos and blood. The victims: five young athletes, some unique to their lives. The gunmen: three youths from various Pittsburgh neighborhoods.

At 12:17 p.m., shooting off five men's basketball team members, one of them shot two individuals in connection with the act of violence. Tiffany Jones, a popular 19-year-old, from Penn Hills is currently facing charges on two counts of conspiracy, receiving a firearm and reckless endangerment after she was allowed inside with guns. On her MySpace Web page, one thing called herself the middle-class girl from a modest suburban family, called herself "hoodism," to the head. Thursday, Dunson and Edwards' apartment and emerged with a gun. An eyewitness called the police. Dunson walked up to Jahrel and opened fire.

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On a September weekend in 2006, two sets of shots rang out in Pittsburgh’s Uptown region. The two shootings happened in the same neighborhood, but they were worlds apart.

On Friday, September 16, a Good Samaritan named Tyrone Edwards, 23, was killed when he came to aid of a woman who was being verbally assaulted. It was a common incident, not really newsworthy except to the Edwards’ family and friends. But early that Sunday morning after five Duquesne University basketball players were wounded in a flurry of gunfire just a few blocks away, news reports traveled around the world.

With each case of injury and death surrounding gun violence, the lives of those involved intersect for a brief moment, with results that linger well beyond the explosive flash. The statistics let us now how often these incidents occur, but only the specifics of these incidents peel back stats to reveal the human faces behind the numbers.

Most people can only imagine how many times these collisions occur everyday throughout America. During the Spring 2007 semester, the Public Affairs Reporting class at Duquesne University decided to explore these shootings and the odd geography of violence in America.

Though gun violence loses its quality of newsworthiness when it becomes commonplace, this issue of Off The Bluff features work from the class in the hopes of shedding some light on the issue.

The Society of Professional Journalists’ mission is to protect journalism and advance its interests. This progression surely cannot be achieved without young fresh minds pushing journalism forward through creative and honest writing and reporting. The students showcased in this edition strive to uphold the highest standards of journalism, contributing to its fine tradition of helping Americans comprehend complex issues facing their society.

Brian Tierney
President
Society of Professional Journalists
Duquesne University Student Chapter
Shooting and Aftermath

a timeline

The Off the Bluff Staff

Sunday, Sept. 17, 2006
- Black Student Union back-to-school dance began around 10 a.m.
- Brittany Jones, 19, a sophomore psychology major, helped Kenneth Eason, his brother and four friends enter the dance.
- Jones asked the doorman whether they were patting down at the door.
- Dance ends at 2 a.m.; group of basketball players left the dance and proceed onto Academic Walk.
- Shooting occurs at 2:15 a.m. According to police and newspaper reports, as many as 12 shots may have been fired.
- Two basketball players suffered major injuries:
  - Stuard Baldonado, 21, a junior from San Andres, Columbia, was shot in the arm and back.
  - Sam Ashaolu, 23, a junior power forward from Toronto, was shot in the head.
- Three suffered minor injuries, were all treated and released:
  - Kojo Mensah, 21, junior, Brooklyn.
  - Sean James, 23, junior, Brooklyn.
  - Aaron Jackson, 20, sophomore, Hartford.
- Duquesne and city police responded within minutes.

Monday, Sept. 18, 2006
- Number of Duquesne police on campus tripled.
- Stuard Baldonado undergoes reconstructive surgery on his arm.
- Sam Ashaolu remains in the intensive care unit at Mercy Hospital.
- Jones arrested on charges of reckless endangerment, carrying a firearm without a license and criminal conspiracy; Jones expelled from University because of several violations of the Code of Student Conduct.

Tuesday, Sept. 19, 2006
- Jones arraigned; posts bail
- Brandon Baynes, 19, of Penn Hills, is arrested and charged with five counts of aggravated assault and reckless endangerment, and one count each of carrying a firearm without a license and criminal conspiracy.
- A prayer vigil, attended by more than 1,000 students, staff and faculty members, is held outside the Student Union.

Wednesday, Sept. 20, 2006
- William Holmes, 18, of Penn Hills, is arrested and charged with five counts of aggravated assault and reckless endangerment, and one count each of carrying a firearm without a license and criminal conspiracy.

Thursday, Sept. 21, 2006
- New security measures announced include $250,000 allocation for additional permanent state-certified police officers and certified security guards, additional campus bike patrols, a parking garage patrol vehicle and metal detectors.
Monday, Oct. 2, 2006
• Ashaolu, the only player to remain hospitalized, was moved from a critical care unit to rehabilitation at Mercy Hospital.

Wednesday, Oct. 4, 2006
• Derek Lee, 18, of Pittsburgh, and Erica Lee Sager, 18, of Wilkinsburg become the new suspects in the Sept. 17 shooting.

Monday, Nov. 13, 2006
• Sam Ashalou, alongside his brother, doctors and Head Coach Ron Everhart, makes first public appearance since the Sept. 17 shooting.

Thursday, Nov. 16, 2006
• The Duquesne men’s basketball team wins opener 81-75 against Youngstown State Penguins, with the five Dukes, who were injured in the shooting, in attendance.

Wednesday, April 25, 2007
• Baldonado, one of the players injured, sues Duquesne for negligence for not providing appropriate security at the BSU-sponsored dance.

Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2007
• Trials set to take place at the Allegheny County Courthouse.
• Derek Lee pleads guilty to five counts each of attempted homicide and aggravated assault and is sentenced to seven to 14 years in prison.
• Erica Sager pleads no contest to a single charge of riot and sentenced to four years probation

Friday, Oct. 26, 2007
• William Holmes III pleads guilty to five counts each of attempted homicide and aggravated assault and is sentenced to 18 to 40 years in prison.

Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2007
• Brittany Jones pleads guilty to a charge of reckless endangerment and is sentenced to two years probation.

Photo by: Joseph Ball
One day before the shooting that took place on Duquesne campus, another shooting occurred only a short walk from the University. This incident resembled so many of the shootings that have plagued Pittsburgh's black-American community over the past several years. So common was the incident that it blended into the background of violence and failed to attract the attention of either of the two major newspapers in the city of Pittsburgh. In fact, the only news coverage of this silent shooting was in The Duquesne Duke, Duquesne University's student newspaper. The following report is written in the hopes of expanding that coverage.

It will be more than a year after the shooting death of Tyrone Edwards that his family will finally see their son's suspected killer stand trial. Originally set for April 30th, the family of Tyrone Edwards will have to postpone their chance to learn exactly what happened to their son on the night of Sept. 16, 2006.

"What happened, that was just senseless," says Edwards' mother, Desiree Williams, as she calmly stood outside of the courtroom the day of the postponement. "We want to see it put to rest."

According to accounts gathered from Edwards' family and a brief police report, 21-year-old Dale Dunson ended Edwards' life with a gunshot
to the head. They say Dunson and Edwards’ cousin, Charelle Edwards, were arguing in the early morning hours on Bentley Drive in the Hill District. Tyrone Edwards tried to pacify the situation between the couple, according to Cordnell Lee, Tyrone Edwards’ close friend and a witness to the murder. Dunson was disrespecting Charelle, Lee says, and after Tyrone confronted him, the suspected shooter’s anger shifted from Charelle to Tyrone.

Lee says Dunson slipped into a nearby apartment and emerged with a handgun.

“He ran up behind Edwards and started shooting. Six shots,” Lee mournfully uttered, standing only steps away from where his best friend was killed. “I was standing right next to Ty. One hit him in the back of the head.”

Mark Bocian, Deputy Chief of EMS in the City of Pittsburgh, says there is a 95% mortality rate for victims shot in the head.

The shot that left Edwards with such a slim chance at life is just one incident set in a growing pattern of black-on-black violence. Bocian calls gun violence in Pittsburgh “a tragic, destructive force across the city.” That force is stirring up questions in neighborhoods, like the Hill District, that are plagued by untimely death.

At a series of recent meetings in the Hill District’s Hill House organized by the Black Political Empowerment Project and One Hood, more than 150 people gathered to discuss ways to minimize violence in the community. One of the most powerful speakers was Michael Turner, a 15-year-old who said he is afraid of his future in a crime-ridden neighborhood. He wondered aloud if he would live to grow up.

“That’s the reality those kids live with,” says Tim Stevens, leader of the Black Political Empowerment Project, which sponsored the meeting with other civic groups.

Stevens said Pittsburgh suffers from “hoodism,” a problematic situation where black youths are turning into violent hoodlums, engulfed by gangs forming around hoods, or small neighborhoods. If kids believe they’re likely to die by the time they are 16 years-old, then they don’t care about killing another person, he says, characterizing the attitude as “kill them before they kill you.”

Stevens says he understands violence happens everywhere, but he’s concerned it is escalating to dangerous heights in Pittsburgh.

“Violence will always be with us, but it doesn’t need to be with us the way it is now.” Darnell Drewery, who works for the Center for Victims of Violence and Crime, says change starts with raising more kids like Turner, young people who can help prevent other kids from becoming criminals.

“There are more kids like Michael than there are kids with guns,” Drewery says. “I think we have more Michael Turners.”

Violence in black American communities is a wave rising from within and crashing upon the very waters from which it arose. In a report by the Violence Policy Center, black-on-black crime in Pennsylvania is the highest in the nation. According to the report, the state’s black homicide rate of 29.52 per 100,000 is six times the national overall homicide rate of 4.86 per 100,000. The report, which uses 2004 statistics, calls the rate at which young black teens are being killed disproportionate, disturbing and undeniable.

But the cause of violence is harder to pinpoint. Darenella Wilson, who has been an EMT working in the Hill District for over 30 years, says violence has not always been a problem in her neighborhood.

“When I first started the job back in 1975, we never even thought about people being shot. All we saw back then was little old ladies falling,” she says. “There has been a big
change, and Pittsburgh is not a big town for there to be all of this. It was never like this.”

Charles Hanna, of Duquesne University’s sociology department, points to the history of these neighborhoods, like the Hill District, where at one point a man without an education beyond high school could make a decent living in the steel mills around Pittsburgh. When those mills closed, the same people suddenly had very limited, low income employment opportunities. In order to live, many turned to the underground world of crime and drugs.

The once-comfortable neighborhoods devolved into uneasy places where guns became status symbols and crime became common. One in five black males will be incarcerated according to “New Jack,” a book by Ted Conover, and the easy acquisition of guns helps them to get there. Teens in the Hill District, Hanna points out, can rent a gun for the weekend, and it only costs $10.

Many guns have led to many shootings in this neighborhood. Tyrone Edwards and his family saw no threat in Dunson, a young man who had been arrested in 2004 for carrying an unregistered firearm with altered serial numbers, being in possession of drugs and driving recklessly with a revoked license.

Dunson was arrested again in 2005 for reckless driving without a license. This time he was wise enough not to have a gun or drugs with him. Then, in 2006, he was charged with possession of narcotics with the intent to sell. He was also charged on two separate occasions within a few months for driving without a license. One of those charges came along with receiving stolen property and the other with trying to flee from the police.

But his criminal activity turned violent when he allegedly wrote the last chapter of Edwards’ life on the night of Sept. 16. A long search for Dunson followed. The Pittsburgh crime stoppers network and the community were put to task in locating Dunson, but it took four months to put him behind bars. Jury selection for Dunson’s trial will be held on Nov. 5, 2007.

Tyrone Edwards, the man Dunson is accused of killing, was raised in the same neighborhood, but had a clean record and was known as a good person.

Robert Wiley, of Bentley Drive in the Hill District and a friend of the Edwards family says, “Everyone loved him. Ty was a loving, kind person. Even the police loved him. They been up to tell me how sorry they are, how Ty was never a problem for them and was one of the good ones.”

Tyrone’s name appeared in the New Pittsburgh Courier, listed among the 64 black individuals murdered in 2006.
Aaron attended two highly successful schools before deciding to come to Duquesne. He earned a bouquet of athletic accolades before starting his freshman year on the bluff in 2005, including MVP of Northwest Conference Tournament and all-state honors for the Hartford Courant, a Connecticut newspaper in 2003.

During his first year on the Duquesne Men's basketball team, he was one of three players to see action in all 27 games (he started in 21 games). He was ranked third in the Atlantic 10 for his assist- turnover stats in 2006. Aaron describes himself as "outgoing, fun and weird". That is exactly how his friends and classmates describe him.

Many students on campus call Aaron "funny and friendly". Fellow student Victor Bell said that Aaron "is laid back...easy to like" and often times acts "like a clown...funny." Another student and good friend, Brian Smoot, says he is "easy to get along with and doesn't cause trouble," adding, "He is very, very supportive of all athletes on campus -- no matter what sport." He is "always dancing and being silly," says Ron Jackson. "He is one of the funniest people I know."

Even students who barely know Aaron comment on his charisma. Journalism and Multimedia student Jeremy McCullough said, "I don't know Aaron that well, but whenever he is around, he makes his presence known." Another student called him "crazy...confident, cocky and cute." After what could have been a devastating event last fall, Aaron has stayed true to his nature, "outgoing, fun and weird" -- and kept his spirits up and his friends laughing.

The Duquesne University Union, located on the left of the photograph, was the venue for the Black Student Union dance that preceded the campus shooting.
Sam Ashaolu wanted to play competitive basketball until he made it big. "Sam always had a dream as a kid, and that dream was to secure a basketball scholarship to a Division 1 school and play professionally after graduating," wrote Ashaolu's three brothers Steve, John and Olu on a website they made for their brother.

Mark Graupe, Ashaolu's Junior College coach from North Dakota, remembers just how important that dream was for Ashaolu. On the 90 minutes ride from the airport with Sam, Graupe pointed out the University of North Dakota's Division 2 complex. Ashaolu made it know that he was headed for Division 1.

He finally reached his goal when he was offered a spot on Duquesne University's basketball team in 2006.

Daryn Freedman, a Duquesne basketball recruiter, happened to see Ashaolu play during an open gym workout at Toronto Academy Prep. Ashaolu had just returned home from a one-year stretch at Lake Region State College (Devils Lake, N.D), averaging 15.3 points and 6.3 rebounds per game in the 2005-06 season. He had spent the previous year at Trinity Valley College in Athens, Texas, averaging 6.9 points and 3.7 rebounds as a freshman. He also attended Coastal Christian Academy, a college preparatory school in Virginia Beach, because he had not graduated from either of the two high schools he attended in Toronto.

Leon Spencer, Ashaolu's coach at Trinity Valley Community College, told the Toronto Globe and Mail: "Sam just wanted to get to a Division 1 school. He went from here to a school in North Dakota [Lake Region State], but that's just junior college basketball. Kids move around, looking for a chance to play."

Glen McCaughtry, Ashaolu's coach at York Memorial, agreed: "You can read too much into the fact that Sam didn't graduate our school and Boylen," he said. "Sam figured he needed another year - a year at a U.S. prep school - to be ready to play junior college or Division I. He didn't graduate because it wouldn't have been in his interests - he would have lost that eligibility for prep school."

Duquesne University was an easy choice for Ashaolu. He already knew about the program through one of his friends, Wayne Smith, who had played here and liked the program. Then his brother John, 25, who came with him to visit Duquesne, liked how head basketball coach Ron Everhart was turning the team around - Ashaolu being one of the six junior college transfers on the 2006-07 roster. Kim Lewis, an old coach of John's, was now part of Duquesne's basketball staff and promised to look out for Sam. As a bonus, John could enroll in the master's in sports management program and work as a graduate assistant coach for the Dukes. It was a done deal.

Sam and John Ashaolu are not the only family members involved in sports.

Olu, the youngest brother is a junior at Christian Life Center High School in Texas. He is rated
by some scouting services as one of the best five players in the high school class of 2008 and has received scholarship offers from several U.S. universities wrote the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Steve, 31, is completing a joint sports injury and massage therapy program at Canadian Therapeutic College in Burlington. Ashaolu is also the cousin of former NBA star Hakeem Olajuwon. Even there mother Christinah Ashaolu, was captain of her university basketball team in Nigeria wrote The Globe and Mail (Canada).

Although these days Mrs. Ashaolu doesn’t have time to watch her boys play, working countless hours as a nurse in Toronto. The Ashaolu family moved back and forth between Toronto and Nigeria until finally settling in Toronto in 1989.

As a brother, John says Sam is a good listener. “He may not say anything, but you know he is listening.” He also thinks Sam makes a great older brother to Olu. “He is always calling our younger brother to check on him,” says John.

As a kid Ashaolu pretended he was Michael Jordan. He learned to play basketball from his brother John when he was about seven. “Right away he started beating me. It used to make me so upset,” says John.

Sam had bullet fragments lodged in his brain and clung to life support after the shooting. His recovery has been remarkable. He is back in school full time although he finds it difficult. Early in the fall term, he played a few practice games at the Palumbo Center, but he had not been taking his medication and had to be rushed to Mercy Hospital after a seizure. He hopes to put Duquesne's jersey back on next season.
Shawn James

By: Lynn Townsend & Ashley McNally

Birthday: Sept. 10, 1983
Hometown: Brooklyn, NY
Duquesne Athletic Position: Forward, #21
Educational Track: Redirection
High School (NY)
Notre Dame Prep
Northeastern University
Duquesne University,
Communication Major
Injury: Shot in the left foot

Shawn James arrived on campus at Duquesne University in June of 2006 to register for classes. James, 24, was named the nation's leading shot blocker with 6.53 per game before signing on at Duquesne. As one of the nation's top defensive players in college basketball, it would reunite him with Ron Everhart, whom James had been coached by for two years at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts.

At 6 feet 10 inches tall, and with his level of defensive skills, James is often compared to retired Boston Celtic player, Bill Russell. As a transfer from one NCAA Division I program to another, James had to sit out the 2006-07 season, but he will still have his final two years to prove his value to the Duke's basketball team. He is hoping to play for the NBA after college graduation.

Playing hoops was a way of life growing up in Brooklyn, N.Y. and it continues to be for James and most of his siblings. His oldest brother, Gordon, currently plays professional basketball for the Saitama Bronco's in Japan. Another brother, Lex, is a forward center at Saint Francis College in NY, and James' youngest brother Delroy, is a forward at Rhode Island. Delroy wears the same jersey number as Shawn. Other members of his family are a sister Tecetta and niece, Ebony. Today, James can be seen on Duquesne's campus attending classes and eating at Options in the Union. He is also practicing with his teammates and playing in the 2007-08 basketball season.
Kojo Mensah

By: Lynn Townsend

Kojo Mensah came to Duquesne University in the Fall of 2006. It had been quite a journey getting there. Originally from Africa, the Mensah family settled in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn. His uncle became the Ghana ambassador at the United Nations.

While growing up in Brooklyn, Mensah was active in the community by volunteering at homeless shelters and working at camps for underprivileged youth. After attending Bishop Loughlin, he finished his high school education by attending a prep school in Massachusetts before making the decision to attend Siena College in upstate New York as a marketing and management major.

Mensah brought a long list of accomplishments with him on his road to Duquesne. Honors included Student-Athlete of the Year, a member of the selected Second Team in all of NYC, most valuable player at Eastern Invitational, a top leader of the Catholic H.S. Athletic association in scoring and he was an attendee of the ABCD All-American Camp with 100 top players from across the country.

Another achievement was averaging 16 points a game while at Siena. However, per NCAA rules, upon arrival in Pittsburgh, Mensah was initially ineligible to play basketball and only was able to practice for the full 2006-07 academic school year.

After being at Duquesne a short time, he said, “I really feel comfortable with the surroundings and my classes. At first it felt different being a regular student, but I was getting used to it. But it really does feel good to be part of a team again. I’m looking forward to getting to know the players and coaching staff and I want to do all I can to help everyone push each other to get better.”

Today, he is attending classes at Duquesne and playing with the team.
Stuard Baldonado

By: Abby Krizner

Stuard Baldonado was considered one of the most promising of the ten recruits brought in by head coach Ron Everhart during the rebuilding of Duquesne's basketball team. A native of San Andres, Colombia, Baldonado was studying Liberal Arts during the 2006-07 school year.

Transferring from Miami-Dade Community College in Florida, Baldonado's impressive record (averaging 18.8 points and 9.9 rebounds and shooting 61.1 percent from the field in his 2005 year with the Tropics) and accomplishment in earning the Southern Conference Player of the Year honor for 2005-06, made him a very desirable recruit.

At the time of his arrival at Duquesne, coach Ron Everhart described Baldonado as "one of the best offensive rebounders I've ever seen. He works very, very hard to be good. He plays with a tremendous amount of intensity, which can be contagious to a team. I think our fans are really going to enjoy watching him play because of the effort he brings."

On the night of the Duquesne shootings, Baldonado suffered gunshot wounds to his left arm and back and was one of the first wounded in the attack. Baldonado was told by surgeons that the bullet missed his spinal column by one-quarter of an inch before lodging in a lower back muscle. The bullet could have caused permanent paralysis. Doctors transplanted a vein from his groin to the left arm during reconstructive surgery. With severe arm and back injuries, it was unlikely that Baldonado would play the season requiring at least two to three months of rehabilitation.

Baldonado filed suit against Duquesne University on April 25, 2007, alleging that the University failed to provide adequate security at the dance. The lawsuit stated that "rather than alerting the campus police who were present inside the ballroom about the frisking inquiry, or taking other similar reasonable steps, the doorman simply responded that they would not be frisked" and allowed the men to enter.

Arrested on twice on drug charges in early September, Baldonado pleaded guilty to a summary offence of disorderly conduct for being found smoking marijuana on Tuskin Street. He was fined $100. Charges of drug conspiracy in a separate incident were dismissed for lack of evidence.

Baldonado also faced felony charges of aggravated battery and false imprisonment for beating his girlfriend in May while he was in Miami, but those charges were dismissed after the alleged victim refused to testify and Baldonado agreed to attend counseling classes for six months.

During his hearing with Duquesne Judicial Affairs, Baldonado pleaded not responsible for the two drug charges. After review, Duquesne found him not responsible for either, even though only one has been tried in the Allegheny Court system.

A university appeals board upheld the sanctions and suspensions, which means Baldonado cannot reapply to Duquesne until the summer of 2008.

NOTE: Some quotes and information were taken from USA-today.com, an article from the Daily Stanford and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.
Brittany Jones is ready. Ready to move on with her life and put the shooting incident behind her.

Living with her parents, Edwin and Veronica, in a well-kept, two-story brick home on a quiet street in Penn Hills, Jones was working last spring at a near-by shoe store. A polite and soft-spoken 20-year-old who was charged on three criminal counts for the Sept. 17, 2006 shooting on Duquesne University's campus, said she would just like for something positive to happen in her life.

Jones' father, who works for a printing company at night, said: "She's my baby and she would eventually like to return to school." Brittany is the youngest of three daughters, two of which now are living out of the area.

Brittany's father, her mother, who recently received her doctorate from Duquesne University, and her aunt, a publisher, all appeared in Allegheny County Court in late October. Noting that Brittany had come with "such wonderful people," Judge Lawrence O'Toole asked how she ever got involved with the "lunkheads" she brought with her to campus the night of the shooting.

In a quivering voice, Jones told the judge that she was sorry for her poor judgment. On the night of the shootings, she had asked a security guard if her friends would be frisked. "I wasn't thinking, your honor," she admitted.

James Ecker, Jones' attorney said just days after the incident that "(Jones) spent a lot of time with police... and until this case goes to a hearing or trial, she's presumed innocent."

After being charged with carrying a firearm without a license and criminal conspiracy, Jones was expelled from Duquesne.
Erica Sager
By: Jen Pearson

**Birthdate:** Dec. 15, 1987  
**Hometown:** Wilkinsburg, Pa  
**Charges:** Five counts of aggravated assault, one count of criminal solicitation  
**Outcome:** Plead no contest on Oct. 26 to a single charge of riot and was sentenced to four years probation and ordered to stay away from firearms and from Duquesne University for four years.

It started as an evening out with her cousin, heading to a Duquesne University Black Student Union sponsored dance. Hours later, according to police reports, Erica Sager, of Wilkinsburg, urged 18-year-old Derek Lee, of the North Side, and 18-year-old William Holmes III, of Penn Hills, to shoot at a group of Duquesne University basketball players.

Sager's grandmother, Michelle Williams, does not agree with police or eyewitnesses, but with the version her granddaughter told as soon as she arrived home that night.

As Williams stood in her doorway of her home with a grey-peppered pony-tail, a comfortable black button-down cotton sweater and pants, and several young grandchildren hanging around the house, she retold Sager's story with an expression of sadness and concern.

On the night of the shootings Sager told her grandma she had just met some of the shooters last summer, but she did not go with them to the dance. Williams said that Sager was even pushed out of the way by the shooters.

Williams also said that basketball players were flirting with her granddaughter, but that Sager wasn't interested, so she gave them a fake name.

Sager later went with detectives willingly and told her side of the story. But they didn't believe her, Williams said with a sigh.

Sager was charged with one count of criminal solicitation and five counts of aggravated assault. District Attorney Stephen A. Zappala Jr. said during a press conference that detectives interviewed a source who observed a light-skinned black female speaking to the five students before they were shot. The woman later spoke to the two men with guns saying, 'Yeah, shoot them. Get them.' The same source, who was shown a lineup of six photos, later identified the woman as Ms. Sager, Zappala said.

Williams disagrees. "There were other girls around. It wasn't Erica," she said.

But other accounts contradicted Williams's story, too.

One witness said he saw Sager that night and believed she was bad news. "It seemed like she might have been intoxicated, but I don't know. But it just seemed like she was causing trouble because there was a lot of people at the party staring every time that somebody was trying to talk to her. So, we just decided not even associate with her," said the witness, who spoke to KDKA's John Cater.

But Williams was convinced that Sager was not responsible for what happened that night.

"I believe she is innocent. But for now, I have to put it all in God's hands," Williams said.

Sager came to live with her grandma three years ago, but she already knew the area well, as she was originally from Wilkinsburg. She had been living with her mother in Virginia. Sager now resides in her grandma's row house that sits on the cobblestone road of Rebecca Avenue.

Since the shooting in September, Sager has lost her job, but was able to find another, Williams said, and when this is all over, Sager hopes to return to school and become a nurse. She would like to follow the footsteps of her mother, who held jobs in elderly care and as a dental hygienist.

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"It seemed like she might have been intoxicated, but I don't know. But it just seemed like she was causing trouble because there was a lot of people at the party staring every time that somebody was trying to talk to her. So, we just decided not even associate with her," said the witness, who spoke to KDKA's John Cater.

But Williams was convinced that Sager was not responsible for what happened that night.

"I believe she is innocent. But for now, I have to put it all in God's hands," Williams said.

Sager came to live with her grandma three years ago, but she already knew the area well, as she was originally from Wilkinsburg. She had been living with her mother in Virginia. Sager now resides in her grandma's row house that sits on the cobblestone road of Rebecca Avenue.

Since the shooting in September, Sager has lost her job, but was able to find another, Williams said, and when this is all over, Sager hopes to return to school and become a nurse. She would like to follow the footsteps of her mother, who held jobs in elderly care and as a dental hygienist.
Derek Lee

By: Abby Krizner

Birthday: Dec. 4, 1987
Hometown: North Side
Charges: Attempted homicide, aggravated assault, criminal intent and conspiracy
Outcome: Pleaded guilty to five counts each of attempted homicide and aggravated assault. Sentenced to five concurrent terms of seven to 14 years in prison.

Derek Lee, 18, who had been living in an apartment on the North Side, was the second gunman identified in the Duquesne shootings. Lee and Brandon Baynes had been childhood friends but Baynes, who was initially named a suspect in the shootings, was released after it was determined that he had been falsely identified as a gunman.

Attorney Sumner Parker, who represented Baynes, had maintained that police had the wrong person.

"It's my understanding," Parker said, "that Derek Lee told a number of people he would turn himself in and he would not let Brandon suffer any more harm for something he did not do."

According to affidavits, three witnesses identified Derek as a gunman. One witness said that he pulled a gun from his waistband and fired twice at the basketball players. Another witness said Lee ran into a crowd while pointing his gun. As he was returning to his vehicle, the same witness claimed he heard Lee shout, "I almost shot little Bill in the head," a reference to William Holmes.

At Lee's pleading, his attorney Wendy Williams pointed out that neither of the two shots fired from his 9 mm gun that night hit anyone. Lee was also sentenced a year's probation and fined $300 in unrelated charges of possession of marijuana and heroin and motor vehicle violations, which stemmed from a July 2006 incident.

NOTE: Information and quotes were taken from the Pittsburgh Post Gazette.
**Brandon Baynes**  
By: Jen Pearson

**Birthday:** Sept. 13, 1987  
**Hometown:** Pittsburgh, PA  
**Charges:** Five counts of criminal attempted homicide, aggravated assault, criminal conspiracy, and weapons counts  
**Outcome:** All charges dropped.

Growing up in the same Penn Hills neighborhood, Brandon Baynes, William Holmes, and Derek Lee have been friends since childhood, said Holmes' mother Marcia Holmes of Penn Hills.

On September 17, 2006, their friendship was tested.

Baynes, along with Holmes, was arrested as one of the alleged shooters outside the Duquesne University Black Student Union dance. He was charged with five counts of aggravated assault, five counts of reckless endangerment, carrying an unlicensed firearm and criminal conspiracy.

"A witness who was at the dance reported hearing an argument and saw two men firing guns at the victims. Using driver's license photos, the witness identified one of the men as Baynes," wrote the AP.

But Baynes knew it was not he, but his friend Lee who fired the gun.

Sumner Parker, Baynes' attorney, also claimed Baynes' innocence. "Baynes had identified the shooter in a statement to police...and that he had gone to the dance with three of his friends, but no members of the group were involved in the shooting," he said.

A.J. Baynes, Brandon's father, knew all along that his son was not at fault. "My son never fired a gun in his life," protested A.J. Baynes. "If he's not innocent, I will swim across the Allegheny River butt-naked," he told the Duquesne Duke.

In the weeks that followed the incident, the witness who identified Baynes as the shooter recanted her story and all charges against Baynes were dropped. Lee was then arrested as the second gunman, along with Erica Sager, of Wilkinsburg, who was charged with urging Lee and Holmes to shoot at the basketball players.

"It's my understanding that Derek Lee told a number of people he would turn himself in and he would not let Brandon suffer any more harm for something he did not do," stated Parker.

Baynes may be called as a witness at future trials.

Now that his name is cleared, Baynes has plans to get on with his life. He was attending summer classes at Penn Hills High School in hopes of earning his diploma and is planning to return to the school.

Even though he did not graduate, his senior picture appears in the Penn Hills yearbook for 2006. A young Baynes, barely smiling, in a white cotton t-shirt, with neatly trimmed hair and a chain around his neck is shown with no activities listed under his name.

His attorney, Parker, knows that moving on might not be that easy. "Imagine yourself trying to finish your high school credits and graduating by attending summer school, and then in the middle of that being thrown into the Allegheny County Jail for 10 days. What's he gone through mentally? You tell me," said Parker.

Photo by: Kristen Massucci

NOTE: Some of the quotes and general information was taken from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and Associated Press.
William Holmes III

By: Ashley McNally

William Holmes III, 20, known as Bill to his friends and family, was a shy, introverted boy who started hanging with the wrong friends and had confrontations with the police as a teenager.

Holmes’ Penn Hills neighbor remembers Little Bill, as she called him, as “a nice kid... always was walking by himself.” As she leaned out the second story window of her townhouse connected to the Holmes’ residence, she described Holmes as a good kid with a bad group of friends. She said that her and her husband “would pick him up on the side of the road and give him a ride to the movies...the basketball court... [or] the plaza”. She said he was well-mannered and always said hello, but he was very quiet and muffled.

Sometimes in the winter Holmes’ neighbor said he would shovel her driveway.

“He was very nice,” she said. But she did glimpse a dark side. “He never smiled...he always seemed like he was pissed at the world.”

The neighbor realized a few years ago that Holmes was hanging out with the wrong crowd; she said that she used to tell him to stay out of trouble. She explained, however, that Holmes came from a great, religious family and he had wonderful parents.

As Holmes’ mother pulled in the driveway, the neighbor quickly shut the window. William’s mother, Marcia is a petite, welcoming woman with pain in her eyes. She was timid but open to talking about her son, who is now locked up in the Allegheny County jail—just down the hill from Duquesne University, the scene of the shooting.

Marcia said that Bill was a “shy boy” who loved sports. She recalled that he particularly enjoyed baseball, football and basketball. He also did karate when he was younger. He didn’t enjoy school very much and had fallen behind, after failing 7th grade.

“When he was in 10th grade, he was supposed to be in the 12th,” Marcia Holmes said.

When Bill was younger he wanted to be a NFL football player or a banker, she said. Bill hung out with his friends all the time; he particularly liked to hang out at the Waterfront to watch movies at Lowe’s theatre. On the night of the incident, Marcia didn’t know where her son had gone; she admitted that “he never really told me where he was.”

Marcia recalls worrying about Bill and his friends, Brandon Baines and Derek Lee. Bill had been in trouble a few years back, when he was 16 years-old. She said the police found him with a gun and sent him to Vision Quest’s Boot Camp for 90 days. Marcia remembers “feeling stupid” for not knowing that he had a gun in her house.

Bill also shares a house with his father and older sister, who recently moved back into her parent’s home. Their three-story split home is set on a busy street with a large driveway that they share with their neighbors. The inside was very clean and modest; the living room had two large couches with few decorations except for two small pictures of William and his sister on top of the TV cabinet.

Marcia said she and the family attended church regularly at St. James Methodist Church in Penn Hills. All of the church-goers were very surprised when the incident happened, she said.

Marcia spends her days working two jobs and running the household. She visits Bill whenever she can. On Good Friday, Marcia said, he had requested that she bring a book, but the jail would not allow it.

Bill hopes to finish earning his GED in the prison. His mother is still filled with worry for her son. She also prays that the basketball players continue to heal from the incident, she said.

At his hearing, Holmes was led into the court in shackles. He glanced briefly at the two rows of Duquesne athletes. His father, Williams Holmes Jr., and his sister Chanel apologized to the victims. The elder Holmes lamented that he may not see his son again in his lifetime but said he understood that the judge was being lenient. Chanel Holmes said her brother “made his bed. He must lie in it.”

William Holmes III
Last year in September 2007, Duquesne University was thinking about the beginning of a new semester. Campus was buzzing and busy as football season got underway and the annual Bluffstock festival approached. A year ago, summer was fading into fall and hot nights were turning into cool, calm evenings.

A year ago, no one was thinking that the worst tragedy to strike Duquesne would be right around the corner.

On Sept. 17, 2006, five men's basketball players were shot on Academic Walk in the single most violent crime to occur on the Bluff.

Now, a year later, the Duquesne campus has come to terms with the tragedy and has moved forward in many ways.

But during those first hours after the shooting, as the harsh reality of the situation set in, chaos reigned on a typically peaceful campus, and key University figures were equally shaken.

President Charles Dougherty recalled the shock that so many others felt in the early hours of that Sunday morning.

"My first thought was, 'Are we going to lose lives here?' And also, it was immediate concern for the victims and their families."

Dougherty's next thought was slightly more grim. With so many varied reports and incredible confusion, the initial challenge was to establish the facts.
“I thought, how do we know that the shooters are off campus? Is the damage done and now do we have to repair?” he said.

Director of Residence Life Susan Goedert said, like the others, that the call came in the middle of the night.

“Five student basketball players were shot on A-Walk - you jump out of your skin a little,” she said. “I had an entry level staff member who heard the shots and was asking me what to do, and I’m 20 miles away.”

“It’s difficult to get the facts,” Goedert said. “Our responsibility was to respond and take care of the students who were affected.”

Greg Amodio, director of Athletics, was informed almost immediately. His responsibilities stretched from notifying the players’ parents to calling the whole basketball team together, he said.

Amodio received a call from Head Football coach Jerry Schmitt asking about counseling services for some Duquesne football players who were with the basketball players when the shooting happened - he asked Amodio if counseling services would be available.

“I realized then, it’s not just about basketball. There’s a lot more here,” Amodio said. While Amodio struggled to comprehend the gravity of the situation, two basketball team members were trying to do the same.

Center Kieron Achara, who fortunately was not injured, was immediately put in a unique situation.

“As the captain, I was wanting to be there for the other players, I was trying to be there for them,” he said. “Our first concern was that they were OK.”

While Achara was caring for his own, one of the injured players, Shawn James, bounced back after receiving medical treatment and could be there for his teammates.

“I was able to sit back and really think about how they were doing. I was very fortunate.”

Later that morning, Dougherty said he felt that he had the facts straight and a good sense of the severity of the situation.

“It became plain to me, as I was driving into campus, that I had to own this. That it had to be me [who addressed the university]. This was so serious that I had to be the face at the press conference.”

As the week progressed, Dougherty and Goedert’s concern turned to the students who had witnessed it, how they would be impacted and how the general student body would deal with trauma.

“It’s easy to forget what it was like to be in the lobby of Towers when someone is bleeding,” Dougherty said. “It must have been a terrifying experience.”

“We had quite a few students who didn’t think they were affected but later needed to talk about it with someone,” Goedert said.

By later in the week, the mood on campus had improved. Students, though still on edge, were moving on with classes and getting back into the normalcy of life. But questions still remained: Why, and what now?

While Residence Life and the University as a whole have different sets of protocol to deal with different crises, not every set of procedures applied to everything, as Goedert observed with the shooting.

“I think [the residence life staff] used the skills they had and did the best that they could,” she said. “They could never fully be prepared, but did they did extremely well.”

Amodio voiced the same thought.

“I don’t think you can ever predict how things happen. More so, I had to read and react and I tried to do the right thing.”

Many times, as with the April Virginia Tech slaying that left 33 dead, Dougherty said, questions arise that we may not know the answers to yet, and some we may never know.

“People have asked of Virginia Tech, ‘Why didn’t we try to do x, y and z after the first shooting?’ It takes a while to assimilate and get the facts right,” he said.

“Looking back, I think it was the Holy Spirit protecting us. This could have been so much worse.”

A religious service of thanksgiving will be held at 4:30 p.m. Monday in the Duquesne Chapel.
On Sept. 18, 2006, the men’s basketball team sat in the Duquesne Chapel, side-by-side, praying and hoping for miracles and quick recoveries, their faces strained by confusion and sadness. Several of their own were missing, and the void was evident.

On a Monday in September 2007, the entire men’s basketball team sat in the same chapel, but in a dramatically different mood. This time, a sense of peace and thanksgiving enveloped them. This time, teammates gathered as a testament to how far they’ve come, not to question how they would carry on.

As a group of students and staff sang of basketball player’s strength during the religious observance, the Rev. Father Ray French spoke of Duquesne’s resolve and gratitude.

“One night of senseless violence shattered the peace of our campus community,” Fr. French said. “We give thanks for those that are injured and are standing with us today.”

While junior Jari Haile’s powerful version of “Amazing Grace” resonated throughout the chapel, students and staff members of various campus organizations approached the altar and lit candles in remembrance. In a heartfelt moment, Sam Ashaolu, the player whose life hung on the line in the hours following the Sept. 17 campus shooting, approached the altar last with Duquesne Police Officer Dennis
Dixon, silent and smiling.

Though Sam admitted that Monday was a pretty tough day, he said he doesn’t feel angry anymore; he’s just anxious to play ball again.

“I’m thankful that everyone is here,” Sam said after the service. “My teammates are here, my coaches are here, everybody is here.”

Today, Sam is attending Duquesne with a full academic load. He’s not practicing with the team and will not play this year, but Athletic Department Director Greg Amodio said he is hopeful that Sam will be reinstated for the 2008-09 school year.

Three others, Aaron Jackson, Kojo Mensah and Shawn James, each had a successful 2006 season and have already hit the court this year. The fifth player that was injured, Stuard Bal­
donado, has been suspended from the team and University due to drug allegations stemming from incidents earlier this month.

From residence life to the athletic department, from the counseling center to campus ministry, the caring and compassion of the students and the University have been noted time and time again. With the outpouring of support at the men’s basketball games and the OMA’s bracelet sale that benefitted Sam, a tremendous amount of good came from the incident, Dougherty said in an interview last week.

“It was evident that we had a strong faith connection here,” he said.

“There are many, many good deeds going on that we don’t know about,” Fr. French said. “Even though we don’t talk about the comfort and courage we are given by young people, I was.”

This alone has led Fr. French to realize that there’s something about Duquesne that sets it apart from other universities: a sense of respect.

“There’s something real and tangible and authentic about this place. It’s generosity,” French said. “Were we all frightened? Yes … but you always hear the saying ‘one in the Spirit.’ The words became flesh. In that moment in time, everything was suspended, and we all became one.”

Amodio said the biggest challenge following the shooting was trying to get people to understand that the incident was going to make the team stronger.

“What could we possibly face in a game situa-
tion that would be tougher than this?” Amodio said.
“Nothing is going to be more difficult than that. We should never be afraid of going into another oppo-
nent’s gym.”

The basketball team proved to be a shining example of forgiveness as they left the service on Monday, laughing and embracing. Ultimately, what was originally seen as a senseless act of violence soon morphed into a vision of camaraderie and, as French said, an ultimate display of the strength of the university and the spirit of its community.

“I believe if you’re going to be faithful in the small things, you’re going to be faithful in the big things,” French said. “And that was a big thing.”
Arkansas, West Virginia, California, Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania share one thing: They all have had deadly campus shootings. College years are supposed to be filled with promises for a new future. No one wants to think about potentially deadly dangers that lurk on campus. But, in order to be more aware, college students may want to pay closer attention to the vital crime statistics that every college must make public.

Crimes on campuses range from serious offenses such as murder and robbery, to gambling and campus drunkenness. And the law that made them public began here in Pennsylvania. In the suburbs 50 miles north of Philadelphia is the quiet campus of Lehigh University, where early in the morning of April 5, 1986, 20-year-old Jennie Clery was found dead in her dorm room. A fellow student had tortured, raped and murdered the petite blond student. He had gained access by passing through three unlocked doors in the dormitory and was later convicted and sentenced to death for his crime.

The shock of losing their daughter spurred Clery’s family to action. Finding that most crimes were not reported by universities and colleges, they decided to demand that this information be made available to the people who needed it the most: potential and current students, staff and parents.

The U.S. Student Right to Know & Campus Security Act, also known as The Clery Act, passed four years after Jeanne’s death, required all schools that receive federal funding, must submit reports of crime statistics each year. Pennsylvania was the first state to pass this mandatory reporting information, the Pennsylvania College & University Security Information Act also was created. Today, a non-profit organization, Security on Campus, Inc., created by the Clery family, gives crime statistics on over 400 national colleges and can be found on-line at www.securityoncampus.org.

With the April 2007 Virginia Tech massacre that left 33 dead including the gunman, many schools are questioning their security practices. Procedures such as screening potential students for prior behavior problems, training campus police “swat” teams, warning students of potential dangers by means of sirens, and emergency text messaging systems have been added at universities across the country.

Gun crimes on campuses have been rising at an alarming rate over the last few years.

These rates raise questions about whether metal detectors should be installed on all campus buildings and how easy is it to obtain a gun. The Keystone State is a “shall issue” state with no gun purchase limitations; buyers do not need a permit to acquire a firearm; all non-felons have a right to carry concealed weapons with a license; and there is no minimum age to possess a handgun as long as the user is accompanied by a parent/legal guardian or adult and the weapon is used in hunting or target shooting.
According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control between 1985 and 1994, the risk of dying from a firearm injury has more than doubled for teenagers ages 15-19 years old. Another 1999 study done by the U.S. Treasury and Justice Department found that 18-20-year-olds commit over 23 percent of all gun murders.

Okopal also said that in the past, post cards were sent out that gave out Duquesne’s Web site address where people could access campus crime information.

This year, a new magazine called Safety First will replace the post cards and be sent to all students and campus employees to notify them of changes being made at the University. In addition, Campus escort service is available, all students, staff and faculties are notified by e-mail when a serious crime has been committed, and six emergency “code blue” stations are set-up throughout campus to aid someone who may need assistance.

Recently, a grant was given by the U.S. Department of Justice, the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA) and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), to give all college security personnel more insights to help carry out the responsibilities of the public safety of all college personnel and attendees.

Yet students at Duquesne University and Virginia Tech are learning that crime can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time. With education, awareness and the proper training, universities can take the steps necessary to see that campus crimes are not only documented but are being prevented.

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Crimes on College Campuses
Is Crime Preventable?

Abby Krizner and Jen Pearson

The neighborhood just outside of Duquesne University tells a very different story than that of the otherwise secluded campus. Merely a block from the campus, the warning signs are everywhere: the abandoned businesses, barred doors and windows of the residential row homes, and the barbed wire atop a small unkempt storefront. They are all some of the conditions that appear to invite violent crime. A broken window at the top of a red brick row-home seems to say it all.

This neighborhood has suffered loss, but no one appears to be picking up the pieces. The shared sense of responsibility among the community members seems to have faded and these broken windows now only encourage disregard for the collective upkeep.

Aesthetics aside, this neighborhood has experienced a long decline in community living. It is now disregarding the very people that live in it. The Hill District is an area that has seen more than its share of drug abuse and violent crime.

The current state of a once thriving neighborhood calls us to explore the ways in which the incidence of crime is treated and more importantly, what is being done to prevent it.

The renovation of such a neighborhood would be presumed by some to be a lost cause; to others, it has become a mission. Community outreach has become the focal point of neighborhoods in disarray, neighborhoods that seem to have parted ways with their golden years and instead tolerated years of increased violent crime. However, not everyone has lost hope for the day of redemption for these city streets.

Tim Stevens is the leader of the Black Political Empowerment Project and One Hood, a coalition of anti-violence activists and religious leaders.
Stevens’ hands fly with the passion of his speech, commanding his audience with a booming voice as he discusses the challenges to ending black on black violence. Since early February 2007, Stevens, One Hood, and more than 52 other concerned community leaders and citizens have gathered at the Hill House to tackle the issue of violence. Stevens, who was Pittsburgh’s NAACP branch president in 1995, believes implementation is the next step towards squashing violence.

The group has identified ten community stakeholder groups and activities that should be implemented as a community wide effort. Minister Jasiri X, also a member of One Hood, said the solution to violence lies with reaching those who need it the most young black males.

“Violence is as American as apple pie,” he said. As illustrated by Stevens and Jasiri X, there is a tremendous amount of work ahead to expunge the gangster mentality. The community is at war with itself, the young have little guidance, and those who are denied their voice react violently.

Jasiri X also said that neighborhoods suffer from “hoodism,” and those imaginary boundary lines need to be erased. For Minister Jasiri X and One Hood, it is about putting the “neighbor” back into the hood. The New Pittsburgh Courier reported that Minister Jasiri X feels “the answers lie in creating a self-discipline and duty to community where residents must feel each other’s pain.”

In the heart of the Hill District, a local Christian Church in the area also believes they hold an integral piece of the puzzle. Shepherd’s Heart, located on Pride Street, opens their doors to the homeless and drug addicted members of the community and also offers regular bible study to individuals looking for direction to escape their current situation. Life on the streets is unforgiving, and the prevalence of drug use continues to fuel a violent fire. A member of Shepherd’s Heart and a homeless man from Uptown, Henry takes refuge within the churches walls.

A tall man, Henry casually sits atop a wobbling table as he says, “Drugs are what lead to violence,” he says. Another participant of the church’s services, known only as CC chimes in to the conversation. In between stroking his gray gruff beard, CC fumbles with the array of wristbands he has assumedly acquired from various hospital stays.

He begins to mend one together with tape and great care. CC illustrates the harsh life on the streets; chronic drug use, crime as a way of life, and continually refers to his days living under a bridge for shelter. He attributes the prevalence of crime to drug use as a cycle where people will do anything for drugs whether it be robbery or murder.

“About 90 percent of all the crimes here are because of drugs. I can go any direction out of here and get a gun if I want.”

Shepherd’s Heart strives to offer a safe haven for those on the streets and uses a multidimensional approach by giving members responsibilities around the church, providing food and shelter, but primarily using spiritual teaching as its cornerstone. Staff members of the church cite that they have notices improvement in the mentality of the homeless who walk through the doors.

A former homeless man turned volunteer at Shepherd’s Heart named Bill sympathizes with the great obstacles to improving an area of high crime.
The Duquesne University community will never forget Sept. 17, 2006, when five basketball players were shot, and Duquesne President Charles Dougherty said: "Our thoughts and prayers remain focused on the student victims and their families, especially Sam Ashaolu and his family." But in America at large, violence is an on-going, numbing way of life. The news is flooded with murders, break-ins and school shootings. Video shows police chasing bad guys. Shows like Cops show the world the exciting life of catching the criminal. Americans seem fixated on violence. We seem to embrace it as part of our national character. While some Americans seem to accept violence, the rest of the developed world looks with horror on this aspect of our lives. Plamen Lilovski, a 23-year-old international business and sports marketing major from Sofia, Bulgaria, never heard of shootings before coming to America. "There were never school shootings back at home," he said. "I'm even scared to go to Pizza Milano's." According to alllsafedefense.com, gun killings are on the rise in Europe. Some blame the United States outright, saying it exports gun-driven violence as blithely as it does software and Boeings. In a recent article in the News York Times, Heather Grabbe, research director for the Center for European Reform, a British research institute, said: "These killings are read as signs of a diseased society."

The French refer to high-crime areas with such phrases as "a real Bronx," or "a Chicago" — a vocabulary that is common among Americans and is quickly spreading among Europeans. Franklin E. Zimring, author of "American Youth Violence," views a number of possible theories why violence seems to be escalating. The new breed theme views offenders as "qualitatively different from young persons who had violated the law in previous times." Also, the revolving door theme discusses lenient treatment of juvenile offenders, especially in the 70s and 90s. Norman Conti, a sociology professor at Duquesne University who specializes in situational policing, said Americans have an innate need for violence. "We love crime. If you just look at what's on T.V., people want to see it framed as we are catching the bad guy." Dr. Todd Luckaseic, a social medical examiner in Allegheny County, said there is about 130 homicides a year and twice as many suicidal gun shot wounds in Pittsburgh. Canada like Europe, shares a lot of common culture with the United States, but the Canadian view of guns is shaped differently. According to the Coalition for Gun control, Canada has one-third as many guns as the United States and Canadians own guns for hunting, not for killing people. Increasingly, gun violence in the United States is a youthful phenomenon. According to Zimring, during the eight years following 1985, when the homicide rate for persons over the age of 24 did not increase, the total homicide rate attributable to juvenile offenders more than doubled. Firearm restrictions are aimed at the young, but they find them illegally sometimes tight in their own homes. Charles Hanna, associate professor of criminology and sociology at Duquesne University, said: "Teenagers are the key. They're most likely to carry a gun and perpetuate gun violence. They act out of passion and don't know the consequences. They
have guns to feel powerful and have protection.” With guns so readily available, they have actually become an adolescent fashion statement, Hanna said. The number of gun homicides has increased steadily over the years. According to Zimring, perpetrators of gun homicides between the ages of 10–17 rose to approximately 1300 in 1992. According to gunsandcrime.org, in 1997, there were 21,259 handgun deaths and 11,177 deaths from other firearms in the United States, rates three to 12 times higher than industrialized nations with stringent gun controls. “This is the first time in the vicinity of shootings. Even though back home people regularly got shot, but mostly in muggings, said 24-year-old Daniel Gamez, a supply chain management MBA student from Valencia, Venezuela. Last year, Japan, which has a population similar to that of the United States, had a total of only 53 homicides during the year, according to the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. The Swiss are among the most heavily armed people in the world. Every 18-year-old male is issued a fully automatic rifle for military training purposes. This constitutes 27 percent of homes, according to The Gun Control Alliance. Additionally, heavy artillery and explosives are available for purchase to the general public, but are seen as tools for war and are apparently respected by their owners. The Swiss federal statistical office recorded 160 violent crimes per 100,000 citizens in 2004. This pales in comparison to The Bureau of Justice Statistics finding that America experienced approximately 2000 violent crimes per 100,000 citizens in 2005. According to gunsandcrime.org, Switzerland has extremely lenient gun control (more so than the U.S.), yet it has the third-lowest homicide rate of the top nine major European countries. The Web site Europeforvisitors.com quotes the book “Crime Is Not The Problem,” by Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon Hawkins as saying “London and New York City have nearly the same number of robberies and burglaries each year, but robbers and burglars kill 54 victims in New York for every victim death in London.” The website also states: “The United States has eight times as many murders of young men as Italy, which ranks second among developed countries in that statistical category.” September 17, 2006, is still fresh in many people’s minds. The echoes in silence on Duquesne’s campus not only echoed in the hearts and minds of the Duquesne community, but also the rest of the nation. It seems that the only answer to youth crime that is readily accepted is there is no definite answer.
It all went down in a blink of an eye. Gun shots sprayed the cool September night at Duquesne University, turning evening chatter into screams and transforming an otherwise calm campus into a scene of chaos and blood.

The victims: five young athletes, some unconscious, some running for their lives. The gunmen: three youths from various Pittsburgh neighborhoods.

Shortly after the Sept. 17 shooting of five men’s basketball team members, one of Duquesne’s own would also be named in connection with the act of violence.

Brittany Jones, a popular 19-year-old sophomore from Penn Hills is currently facing charges on two counts of criminal conspiracy, carrying an unlicensed firearm and reckless endangerment after she invited outsiders to a Black Student Union dance who were allowed inside with guns.

On her MySpace Web site, one thing caught the eye of readers: Jones, a middle-class girl from a modest suburban family, called herself “half lady, half thug,” a nickname referring to a culture that has surfaced in America in the last two decades.

Thug culture has taken its own form and found its own place in present-day society. Sometimes synonymous with the term “hoodism,”
thug culture has been immortalized in movies and other publications, ranging from the 2001 movie “Thug Life,” to the all-encompassing Web site, gangsta411.com

According to collective definitions from several sources, thug culture is not only a mentality, but a way of life. A person who considers himself a thug has loyalties to particular groups of friends, though not necessarily gangs.

Materialism is heavily embodied in thug culture. Status symbols within the thug lifestyle include nice cars, heavy gold, silver, or platinum jewelry (known as “bling”) and expensive hip-hop style clothing. Extraordinary wealth, usually attained by rapping, drug dealing, playing basketball, or, rarely, some combination of all three, seems to be a universal thug aspiration. Emulating famous rappers, thugs normally strive for a high class lifestyle.

In what has become a billion dollar industry, hip-hop artists like DMX, Trick Daddy and even females rappers like Ciara and Lil’ Kim have popularized the shoot-em-up, living high attitude that permeates this rough and tough lifestyle. Many ultimately credit Tupac Shakir with the birth of thug culture, the late rapper who shook the hip-hop world with his smart street-style songs that talked about the struggles and triumphs of black men on the streets.

Many people, like hip-hop artists and producers, feel as if the mentality embodied in thug culture is more of a movement than anything else, a harmless trend and a means of self expression. Critics, however, agree that thug culture is a dangerous lifestyle that not only feeds on violence, but breeds more of it.

In a 2006 story featured in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, reporter Cynthia Tucker drew comparisons between race and thug culture. “The popularity of thug culture is among the most serious of modern-day threats to black America, far more dangerous than any lingering institutional racism,” she said, adding that it only romanticizes casual violence.

Outside of African American culture, the term thug can indeed have a negative connotation, especially one that is associated with violence, greed and the degradation of women. Hip-hop inspired thugs believe they are entitled to whatever they can get and keep through street cunning and physical force, having no moral compunction against theft from and robbery of those not known to them or part of their posse or clique. Thugs may also idealize “gangsta rap” and the idea of being cold or unfeeling.

The very real tie between violence and thug culture is becoming more and more apparent locally, according to writer and Duquesne professor Michael Dillon. In a September 2006 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette story called “The thugs next door,” Dillon, moved by the campus shooting and disgusted by Jones’ “half lady, half thug” reference, suggested that the dark side of thug culture is growing more and more acceptable.

“While thug culture may have gotten its start on the urban street, it long ago transcended any geographic or racial boundaries,” Dillon said. “It all comes down to the same thing: Anger and hostility masquerading as courage.”

Like As Dillon prefaced, thug culture has indeed transcended boundaries. In Pittsburgh, neighborhoods like the Hill District and Homewood, known for their gang activity and high levels of violence and drugs, “thugs” can be seen defending their territory. Sometimes identified by their gang colors, these young black men live the fast life of nice cars, money and hip clothes.

Richard Garland knows all about the thugs that rule the streets. Garland, a former gang member who is now a crusader to stop gang violence, is the executive director of One Vision, One Life, a Pittsburgh organization dedicated to curbing violence and creating opportunities.
A teenager who “went down the wrong path,” Gar­
land knows the dangers, and the appeals, behind be­
ing a thug on the streets. After spending more than
23 years in and out of prisons, Garland understands
the pressures the streets impose on black men, and
the dangers of giving into the demands.

Garland, however, admits that the thugs on the
street choose that lifestyle, regardless of how unre­
alistic it is and despite the opportunities that may be
available to them.

“They don’t want to work,” Garland said of the
young black men in Pittsburgh neighborhood. “You
talk with those kids and you can’t believe what
they’re saying.”

Doing things on their own terms and earning twice
the money selling drugs on the streets is what
they’re talking about, Garland said, and that
often times, maintaining thug status by making
money and doing it with force is infinitely more
respectable with their “homies.”

That lifestyle, however, doesn’t always fly in their
communities.

“Accepting responsibility is the biggest problem,”
Garland said. “They talk that big stuff about being a
man, but what’s a man? What is a man?”

What began as a cultural movement is lending itself
to a reputation of violence and lack of responsibil­
ity, one that is imitated by young adults. Teenagers
and children often are highly influenced by thug
culture because they are surrounded by this mental­
ity from a young age. Sam Pallone, a social worker
with Mind-Works, a wrap around service for Youth
Psych Services in Pittsburgh, sees this behavior in
one of his clients.

JR, an 8-year-old black boy from Knoxville, is a
“tough kid” whose father was killed when JR was
young. He was referred to the service because he
had been acting out at school, making threats and
becoming violent toward students and his teachers.
Pallone believes this is likely caused by the influ­
ence of the only male role models in his life -- four
older brothers, all who have criminal records.

“He believes in the American Dream: Bling, mate­
rual, wealth, which in his mind means you are pow­
erful,” Palone said. “JR [knows] he [has] to hustle
in order to survive.”

Hustling means that JR is selling or trading ob­
jects to get money, and already exhibiting behav­
ior typical to thug culture. On the streets, hustling
something typically implies that something illegal
or shady is taking place, like a man selling a TV set
that has been stolen.

“He always talks about getting a ‘shotty’ [shot­
gun],” Pallone said. “He is a good negotiator &
dealer. He would come up to me and say, ‘You give
me a granola bar if I’m good?’ Then after after ‘be­
having,’ he would get the granola bar and proceed
to trade it for a cheeseburger with a fellow student.’’

The trend continues into the teenage years, too.
Tim Stevens, a former NAACP president and
current member of B-Pep, a Pittsburgh organiza­
tion that encourages blacks to vote, said many of
the young black men on the streets are questioning
whether they’ll even survive until their 18th birth­
day. These young men are often surrounded by male
figures playing the thug role and grow up seeing
black men die at the hands of their own, Stevens
said.

While it is unarguable that there may be a correla­
tion between thug culture and violence, it is unclear
how the movement actually began. Some scholars
in sociology think the past years of slavery and op­
pression are to blame; but Stevens sees the current
struggles of African Americans as the reason why
the subculture started.

“The first step to violence in most cases is shut­
ting off opportunity, and then the bling bling looks
brighter,” Stevens said.
Darnell Drewery, from Pittsburgh’s Center for Victims of Violence and Crime, agreed.

“They’re young men who say that tools aren’t available to them,” said Drewery, explaining the perceived limited opportunities. “So they use the tools that are given to them, like drugs and guns.”

Others have suggested thug culture has risen from a more basic need to survive, or just pure street smarts, and is now a standard subgroup.

“A normal part of the American Dream in thug culture,” said Pallone. “The poor have really bought into the American Dream in a slight different version: a Cadillac and a Glock 9.”

A third idea is that the culture’s most apparent elements, like need for control, baggy pants and clothing, and fight-for-honor mentality came about because it mimics prison culture.

Still, some, like Pallone, can’t help but think that the thug mentality comes from much simpler roots, namely the entertainment industry and the materialism that is America today.

“It is derived from what is seen in the media, not necessarily news, but more on MTV and Hollywood. Thug culture is a by-product from the upper class,” he said.

Whether it is found in music, movies, television, or in real life, thug culture has had a profound effect on young, black men and women, and will continue to be a part of urban and suburban street cultures. Often times, the stereotype of being a thug is nothing more than a harmless imitation of what is seen in the media.

But, on occasion, the strong desire to maintain street “cred” turns into lawless actions that often end in serious consequences. Brittany Jones may have proved that she was a “half lady, half thug” with her part in the Duquesne University shooting. But as with many who choose to interrupt street culture as violent culture, their true identities can get lost in a world of guns, drugs and being thug.

--Andres Ortiz-Ferrari contributed to this story.
History of Gun Violence: Hill District and Uptown
“Wrong place at the wrong time”

Not too far from Duquesne University, shootings are relatively commonplace.

Last year, a 27-year-old man was shot in the forearm in Uptown. The shooting took place around in broad daylight in the 2000 block of DeRueda Street, four to six blocks away from Duquesne University.

On December 5, 2006, someone opened fire on a car driving in Uptown. The driver walked into the Hill District Police station claiming that his Chevy was shot at on Adelaide Street.

On the 800 block of Fifth Avenue, between Washington Placde and Diamond Street, David Agar was shot and killed during a robbery. Witness Lucio Loboi stated that in the early hours of January 28, 2006, prior to the shooting, he and Agar were seated in his silver Honda parked on the 800 block of 5th Avenue.

These are only three examples of the many cases of violence that surround the Duquesne University community. In contrast, Duquesne’s campus, which stands between these two neighborhoods, has only recently fallen victim to gun-violence, marked by the September 17, 2006 shootings.

Surprisingly, Duquesne had been free of gun crime for over one-hundred years. Furthermore, the perpetrators of the Duquesne shootings were not enrolled in the university. Hence, it took people from outside of the Duquesne University community for gun violence to take place on campus.

In the more than 100-year history of Duquesne University, this act of violence has been the first recorded, gun-related crime, on Duquesne University’s campus. “It was shocking that it was at Duquesne,” said Valerie Dixon, staff member of the Center of Victims of Violence and Crime and former Hill resident. Mostly because Duquesne has been a gun-violence free campus, Dixon reasoned that, it had to do more with the individuals who committed the crime.

“It wasn’t really induced by the surroundings. It was just the wrong place at the wrong time it seems,” Dixon said. Dixon also thought that the fact the shooter was not from the area was mostly what brought violence to Duquesne; it did not come from within.
Historically, the Hill District and Uptown were thought to be vibrant communities with promising futures, but a decline in the quality of life and sense of community has rendered its outcome as opposite. Gun violence and violent crimes have infiltrated the area. Dixon said she recalls when the Hill was a flourishing community.

“When the mills started going under, problems starting becoming more frequent. Guns started filtering in as a way of protection for people,” she said.

In the last year there has been as many as five gun related crimes alone in the Uptown neighborhood, which is within walking distance from Duquesne University Campus.

These reported Uptown crimes don’t compare to the many that happened in the Hill District neighborhood, just a few blocks away. In 2003, there was as many as six gun related crimes resulting in the victims’ death. Most of these cases were involving young adults, ranging from ages 19-23.

These recurring incidents seem to be signals that should bring attention to the community, as Ms. Dixon agreed.

“When voices are not heard, our needs are not met, then people lash out in the most heinous ways to get heard. A lot of things are being ignored and you have to voice your message without going to the extreme.”
At 8:40 a.m. on April 19, 2007, a gunman walked up to Jabreel Scott, 27, of the Hill District on Smithfield Street in downtown Pittsburgh and opened fire, shooting Scott seven times. The shooting took place just outside the Apparel Warehouse and a few doors down from a day-care center. Scott died a few days later. He was one of a series of Hill District shooting victims, which included his cousin, Thomas Howard, 27, who was killed 10 days later. Duquesne Multimedia graduate student, Andrés Ortiz-Ferrari, witnessed the Scott shooting and wrote the following account.

Early Thursday morning, April 19, 2007, with finals due and school pressure high, I headed to campus earlier than normal, in order to get some work done. The 91A bus was late as usual. Thoughts related to school and the deadlines ran through my head. Finally, on route to downtown on Butler Street in Lawrenceville, I looked out at tall buildings and rusty fire escapes. If only I had slept in for one more hour ... I would not have witnessed the horrific event that followed.

The bus was packed – people on their daily commute to work, kids on their way to school, and the regular crazies.

I slid on my headphones and ignored the world around me. As the bus approached the Wood Street station, I stumbled through the crowded bus. It was only around 8 a.m., so I decided to head to this little game room on Smithfield Street to play some pinball and release some stress.

If only I had slept in for one more hour....Walking out of the game room 40 minutes later, taking in a breath of fresh air and noticing the weather had warmed, I rolled up my sleeves. Then... Bang! I turned my sight in the direction of the sound.

A man was falling, wounded by a bullet fired from a handgun held by a man towering over his helpless victim. In a matter of seconds, the hooded assailant emptied his gun clip, at point blank, into the victim's chest and body. Screams followed, people ran or crouched down. The gunman, who was about six feet tall, ran into a side street, got into a waiting car, and fled the scene.
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Off the Bluff