

Campus violence

US University Seeks Answers to Motive for Murder of Five Students

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Houston

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Five students have died in Illinois from the shooting Thursday in which police say a former graduate student entered a university classroom with several guns and opened fire, hitting over 20 people before taking his own life. VOA's Greg Flakus reports from Houston that, a day later, students are expressing shock.

The shooting occurred Thursday in a lecture hall at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, north of Chicago. The gunman entered the hall dressed in black and carrying a shotgun and three hand guns and began firing as students sought cover under desks.

[Students hold prayer vigil at Wellspring Chapel for victims](#)

One student who escaped unharmed told reporters his life has changed as a result of what he experienced.

[of NIU shooting in DeKalb, Illinois, 15 Feb 2008](#)

"I am going to be in class from now on, looking over my shoulder, because if he would have come through the back door, I would not be here right now. I would have been dead," he said.

Police say the gunman was Steven Kazmierczak, 27, a former graduate student in Sociology at the school. Police say he purchased the shotgun and two of the handguns on Saturday, indicating he may have planned the attack in advance, but authorities have not determined a motive for the shooting.

Kazmierczak had no criminal record and no history of mental illness. Under Illinois state law he would not have been able to purchase a weapon legally if there had been

a record of arrests or mental problems. But police said he had stopped taking an unspecified medication recently and his behavior had become erratic.

Kazmierczak received a Dean's Award from the university's Sociology Department in 2006. He served as a member of the school's Academic Criminal Justice Association and was considered a good student, but he was not enrolled this semester.

Thursday, police arrived on the scene of the shooting within two minutes, but they were too late. Witnesses say the gunman fired multiple shots in a matter of seconds, reloaded, fired some more and then took his own life.

In Washington Friday, President Bush reacted to the shooting.

"This morning I spoke to the President of Northern Illinois University," said Mr. Bush. "I told the President that a lot of folks today will be praying for the families of the victims and for the Northern Illinois University community. Obviously a tragic situation on that campus, and I ask our fellow citizens to offer their blessings, blessings of comfort and blessings of strength."

**President George W. Bush at
White House, 15 Feb 2008**

This is the latest in a string of shootings at U.S.

schools in recent years, the worst being the shooting at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Virginia 10 months ago that left 32 students and teachers dead. That incident ranks as the deadliest armed rampage in U.S. history. The shooter also killed himself in that case.