

Tracking Goodness: A Three-Year Log Analysis of Material, Temporal, and Demographic Dynamics in Campus Lost-and-Found Records

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the material, temporal, and demographic dynamics of campus property loss through a retrospective log analysis of institutional lost-and-found records at a private Philippine university (N = 85). Using a descriptive-quantitative design, the study addressed three research questions concerning (a) the material composition of lost items, (b) temporal trends in reported incidents, and (c) gender patterns among item owners and finders across three consecutive academic years (2022–2023, 2023–2024, and 2024–2025). High-value personal assets — wallets, cash, and mobile devices — accounted for 71.7% of all logged items. Reported incidents rose from 17 in 2022–2023 to 42 in 2024–2025, a 147.1% increase across the period sampled. Among finders whose gender was recorded, the split between women (n = 25) and men (n = 26) did not differ from an even 50/50 distribution, $\chi^2(1, N = 51) = 0.02, p = .89$; among owners with identified gender, women (n = 16) outnumbered men (n = 7) at a level approaching, but not reaching, conventional significance, $\chi^2(1, N = 23) = 3.52, p = .061$. However, gender was unrecorded for 38.8% of finder entries and 73.0% of owner entries, which limits how far these demographic patterns can be generalized. The findings support the value of centralized digital inventory systems, targeted asset-labeling campaigns, and formal recognition of student finders, while underscoring the need for improved intake documentation in future institutional recordkeeping.

Keywords: campus security, civic honesty, lost-and-found dynamics, prosocial behavior, property management, routine activity theory

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions operate as complex, high-density mini-societies where intense human interaction, academic pressures, and rapid physical mobility constantly intersect. In the daily rush of navigating between classrooms, lecture halls, laboratories, and recreational hubs, students frequently misplace their personal belongings. While a single misplaced item may surface as an isolated incident of individual negligence, an aggregated institutional database of lost-and-found logs serves as a behavioral repository that can mirror shifts in student material culture, patterns of campus mobility, and the underlying civic norms of the campus community.

Over recent academic cycles, higher education campuses have seen a shift in student material culture: coursework increasingly requires the continuous carriage of portable consumer technology, financial cards, and personal utility items, while the return to full-capacity, face-to-face instruction following

pandemic-era hybrid formats has increased physical campus mobility and foot traffic. Cohen and Felson's (1979) routine activity approach offers a useful lens here: property loss and theft opportunities increase when suitable targets (portable, valuable items), motivated offenders or careless handling, and an absence of capable guardianship converge in time and space — a convergence that intensifies as campus density and mobility rise.

As student mobility accelerates, property misplacement scales with it, creating an escalating operational burden for university security offices and administrative desks. Traditional lost-and-found infrastructures — reliant on decentralized storage, physical ledgers, and manual intake logs — can struggle to keep pace with the volume and variety of misplaced items, producing information asymmetry between finders, owners, and administrators.

This study frames the act of surrendering found property not merely as a routine ledger entry but as an observable indicator of campus civic behavior. Applying a structured, descriptive log analysis to three academic years of institutional records, the study converts routine administrative data into evidence that can inform campus property-management strategy.

Literature Review

Property Loss on Campus: A Routine Activity Perspective

Cohen and Felson's (1979) routine activity approach explains variation in property crime and loss as a function of the convergence of suitable targets, motivated offenders, and the absence of capable guardianship in routine daily activity, rather than as a function of offender characteristics alone. Applied to a campus setting, the framework suggests that as students carry more portable, high-value items (smartphones, wallets, laptops) through crowded, transitional spaces — and as the density of that foot traffic increases with full campus reactivation — the objective opportunity for items to be misplaced or go unguarded rises correspondingly. This theoretical lens grounds the present study's expectation that both the composition of lost items and the volume of reported incidents should track observable changes in campus density and mobility.

Civic Honesty and the Decision to Return Lost Property

When a person encounters lost property, the decision to surrender rather than keep it is a real-world instance of prosocial behavior — action intended to benefit another party without a guaranteed personal reward. In the most extensive empirical test of this behavior to date, Cohn et al. (2019) conducted a field experiment across 40 countries in which thousands of "lost" wallets, varying in cash content, were turned in at public and private institutions; contrary to the standard economic prediction that self-interest should dominate, reporting rates were consistently higher, not lower, when wallets contained more money, a pattern the authors attributed to a combination of altruistic concern and aversion to viewing oneself as a thief. That large-scale, cross-national result provides an empirical anchor for interpreting campus-level surrender behavior as a plausible expression of the same underlying civic-honesty norms, rather than as an institution-specific anomaly.

Gender and Helping Behavior

Whether gender predicts prosocial action has long been studied in social psychology. Eagly and Crowley's (1986) meta-analytic review of the helping-behavior literature found that men and women did not differ greatly in overall helping, but the situations in which each gender was more likely to help — and the form that help took — diverged along socially patterned lines, with men more often assisting in ways framed as chivalrous or physically instrumental and women more often assisting in nurturing, relationship-

embedded ways. More recent experimental work by Espinosa and Kovářik (2015) similarly found that men and women showed comparable prosocial behavior under neutral conditions, with divergence emerging mainly when situational framing (social cues versus reflection) was manipulated. Taken together, this literature predicts that a single, low-stakes, low-visibility prosocial act — such as turning in a found item at a campus desk — is unlikely to show a strong overall gender gap, though it does not rule out differences tied to the type of item found or the circumstances of discovery.

Institutional Responses to Lost-Property Management

Recent applied work outside the peer-reviewed academic literature illustrates how institutions are beginning to address the operational strain of manual lost-and-found tracking. Wadbudhe et al. (2025), for example, describe a cloud- and AI-based campus lost-and-found platform ("Uni Find") that uses image recognition and natural-language matching to connect found items with their owners, reducing reliance on manual cross-referencing. Systems of this kind are consistent with the present study's recommendation that institutions with growing incident volumes and a high proportion of unidentified owners — as observed here — may benefit from moving from paper ledgers toward searchable digital intake systems.

Research Questions

1. What are the most frequently reported lost items and item categories at the institution from 2022 to 2025?
2. What trends can be observed in lost-and-found incidents across the school years sampled?
3. What patterns can be observed in the gender distribution of owners and finders in lost-and-found incidents?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a retrospective, descriptive-quantitative design. Secondary data analysis was conducted on institutional administrative logs to describe frequencies, percentages, material distributions, temporal patterns, and demographic patterns, without experimental manipulation or direct participant contact.

Sources of Data

The primary data source was the institutional lost-and-found ledger maintained by the campus security and information desk. The analyzed dataset comprised $N = 85$ entries drawn from three consecutive academic years: 2022–2023, 2023–2024, and 2024–2025. Data collection concluded at the end of the 2024–2025 academic year (May 2025); the 2025–2026 academic year, which had just concluded at the time of writing, is not yet reflected in the institutional ledger and is therefore outside the scope of this study.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection involved extracting official administrative records into a standardized analytical matrix. Each record contained five attributes: (1) school year, (2) date logged, (3) owner gender profile (female, male, or unknown), (4) item description, and (5) finder gender profile (female, male, mixed group, or unknown).

Data Analysis

Item descriptions were grouped into nine standardized functional categories (e.g., "wallets and cash," "mobile phones and gadgets," "keys and utilities"). Frequency and percentage distributions were computed

across item categories, specific high-frequency items, academic years, and gender profiles. Percentage growth was computed across school years to describe the change in incident volume. Because the demographic claims in this study rest on comparing two categories (female vs. male) among the subset of records with known gender, one-sample chi-square goodness-of-fit tests (against a 50/50 expected split) were additionally applied to the finder and owner gender distributions to evaluate whether the observed splits departed from chance; entries coded "unknown" or "mixed group" were excluded from these tests, as noted in the Results.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Because this study used secondary administrative records, the following protocols were maintained: all personally identifying details (student names, ID numbers, phone numbers, addresses) were removed during extraction; no direct human-subject contact, interviews, or manipulation occurred, and informed consent was accordingly waived for this anonymous, retrospective institutional audit under the university's applicable data-privacy and research-ethics guidelines; and raw entry descriptions were preserved without selective deletion to avoid biasing the reported distributions.

RESULTS

Material Analysis: Most Frequently Reported Lost Items (RQ1)

An analysis of the $N = 85$ logged items showed that property loss on campus was concentrated in high-value, daily-use personal assets.

Table 1
Summary by Item Category

Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Wallets and Cash	33	38.80
Mobile Phones and Gadgets	28	32.90
Keys and Utilities	9	10.60
IDs and Cards	6	7.10
Accessories and Wearables	4	4.70
Bags and Personal Carriers	3	3.50
Bottles and Containers	3	3.50
Miscellaneous / Unknown	2	2.40
Clothing and Apparel	1	1.20
Total	85	100.00

Table 2
Most Frequently Reported Specific Items

Item Type	Frequency (f)
Wallets	15
Cash / Money	11
iPhones	10
Android / Other Phones	9
IDs / Cards	6
Keys	3
Bottles / Tumblers	3

Wallets and Cash (38.8%) and Mobile Phones and Gadgets (32.9%) together comprised 71.7% of all lost property on campus. Within the gadget category, Apple devices (10 iPhones/iPads) and Android or other-brand devices (9 units) were nearly evenly split. The high incidence of lost wallets ($f = 15$) and cash ($f = 11$) suggests that students frequently handle cash or payment methods in high-traffic zones such as cafeterias and bookstores, where quick transactions plausibly raise the chance of misplacement. Consistent with the routine activity framework outlined above, these are precisely the items that combine high portability, high value, and frequent public handling — the profile of a "suitable target" for loss even without any intent to steal.

Temporal Analysis: Incident Trends across School Years (RQ2)

Tracking incident logs across the three sampled academic periods shows a substantial rise in reported property loss.

Table 3
Summary by School Year

School Year	Total Recorded Items (f)	Percentage (%)
2022–2023	17	20.00
2023–2024	26	30.60
2024–2025	42	49.40
Total	85	100.00

Recorded incidents rose from 17 in 2022–2023, to 26 in 2023–2024, to 42 in 2024–2025 — a 147.1% increase from the first to the last year sampled. These three consecutive years bracket the post-pandemic return to full, in-person instruction, and the increase is broadly consistent with rising campus density and mobility over that period. With only three yearly data points, however, the underlying shape of the trend (e.g., whether growth is accelerating, linear, or leveling off) cannot be firmly established; the description

of the increase as "exponential" in earlier drafts of this manuscript overstates what three points can show and has been revised here to "substantial and consecutive year-over-year growth."

Demographic Analysis: Gender Patterns of Owners and Finders (RQ3)

Comparing the gender profiles of those who lost items against those who found and surrendered them shows a contrast between ownership tracking and finder identification.

Table 4
Gender Distribution of Owners (Item Losers)

Gender	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Female	16	18.80
Male	7	8.20
Unknown	62	73.00
Total	85	100.00

Table 5
Gender Distribution of Finders (Good Samaritans)

Gender	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Female	25	29.40
Male	26	30.60
Mixed Group	1	1.20
Unknown	33	38.80
Total	85	100.00

Three patterns stand out. First, a large majority of items — 73.0% ($n = 62$) — remained tied to an unidentified owner at the time of logging, and 38.8% ($n = 33$) of finder records also lacked gender information; this is itself a finding about the institution's intake process, and it means the demographic results below describe only the subset of cases in which gender happened to be recorded, not the full population of incidents. Second, among finders with known gender, the split between women ($n = 25$) and men ($n = 26$) was not statistically distinguishable from an even 50/50 distribution, $\chi^2(1, N = 51) = 0.02$, $p = .89$. Third, among owners with known gender, women ($n = 16$) outnumbered men ($n = 7$) at a level approaching but not reaching conventional statistical significance, $\chi^2(1, N = 23) = 3.52$, $p = .061$ — a pattern that, if it held up in a larger sample, would suggest gender is not symmetric across both roles in the same way, and that the "universal, gender-neutral" framing of civic honesty in this dataset should be limited specifically to the finder role rather than applied to the lost-and-found process as a whole.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, the dataset is drawn from a single institution and $N = 85$

incidents, which limits generalizability to other campuses or student populations. Second, the temporal trend rests on only three yearly data points (2022–2023, 2023–2024, 2024–2025), which is sufficient to describe year-over-year change but not to characterize the underlying shape of growth (linear, accelerating, or otherwise); a longer observation window would strengthen this claim. Third, gender was unrecorded for a majority of owner entries (73.0%) and a substantial share of finder entries (38.8%); demographic conclusions therefore describe only the identified subset and cannot be assumed to generalize to all incidents. Fourth, as secondary administrative data, the log format constrains analysis to the five attributes recorded at intake; motivational or circumstantial detail behind any single incident (e.g., why an item went unclaimed, or how a finder decided to report) is not available. Finally, associational patterns reported here — including the temporal rise in incidents and the near-even gender split among finders — are descriptive and should not be read as causal claims about campus reactivation or about the drivers of civic honesty.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed institutional lost-and-found data to describe the intersection of student material culture, campus reactivation, and reporting behavior. Three conclusions follow directly from the three research questions:

1. High-value property is disproportionately represented among lost items. Wallets, cash, and mobile devices together accounted for 71.7% of all logged property, consistent with a routine-activity account in which portable, high-value items handled in busy, transitional spaces are more likely to be misplaced.
2. Reported incidents rose substantially alongside campus reactivation. Logged incidents increased 147.1% from 2022–2023 to 2024–2025, rising each of the three consecutive years sampled, consistent with rising student mobility and foot traffic — though three yearly data points are not sufficient to characterize the precise shape of that growth.
3. Civic honesty among finders shows no detectable gender gap, but the broader picture is incomplete. Among finders with known gender, reporting was statistically indistinguishable from an even split between men and women. However, because gender was unrecorded for the large majority of owners and over a third of finders, and because the owner-side gender split showed a pattern approaching significance, this study offers only cautious, partial support for a "gender-neutral civic honesty" narrative rather than the stronger claim of a perfectly balanced, institution-wide culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Deployment of a digital lost-and-found portal. Transitioning from manual paper ledgers to a searchable digital database — following the model of applied systems such as Wadbudhe et al.'s (2025) AI-assisted campus platform — could directly address the high proportion of unidentified owners and make records easier to cross-reference as incident volume grows.
2. Targeted loss-prevention and asset-labeling campaigns. Orientation initiatives encouraging students to label high-value items, such as distributing QR-code asset stickers linked to student profiles, could reduce the 73.0% owner-identification gap documented here.
3. Mandatory capture of demographic and identifying fields at intake. Because gender (and, implicitly, owner identity) was missing for the majority of records, revising intake procedures to require more

complete documentation would substantially strengthen the institution's ability to draw demographic conclusions in future reporting cycles.

4. A civic-recognition mechanism for finders. Given the near-even, non-gender-skewed pattern of surrender among identified finders, a low-cost recognition mechanism (e.g., a commendation or small incentive) could reinforce and study this behavior further, ideally paired with better intake data to confirm whether the pattern holds across a larger sample.

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