

Letter to the Editor

New Campus Security Measures: A False Sense of Security?

Dean Quincy's eloquent article published in *Student Affairs Online* (Winter 2008) about technology and campus security was very timely. At my University, like most colleges and universities, we have implemented multiple systems that are designed to notify or warn students in cases of emergencies. We have an automated email system, an automated cell phone voice messaging system, an automated text messaging system, strategically located emergency call boxes, escort services, and a campus-wide audible siren system. Since going into operation, these automated systems have been tested and tweaked to improve their effectiveness. Many colleges and universities have increased the number of campus police and improved the training they receive. Add to this, the crime report that all colleges and universities are required to publish and we have the complete college security system.

All of these notification systems do have some usefulness. Notification of cancellation of classes on snow days and cancellation of particular classes when a building has lost heat is important. However, for many types of emergencies these systems would probably fail to deliver as advertised. This does not mean that the systems should be scrapped or that more "bells and whistles" are needed. My point is that we must guard against the expectations that members of the college community are absolved of all responsibility for their own safety. It is important that in our zeal to promote our security systems, we do not impart an erroneous feeling of "absolute safety" under all circumstances and in all situations while on our campuses to our students' parents and especially to our students. My concern is creating unrealistic expectations about personal safety.

It strains credibility for colleges and universities to imply to parents of prospective students that we can ensure the safety of their son or daughter in all situations. Colleges and universities do have an obligation to provide a "reasonable" safe environment. The reasonably safe environment on a college campus is becoming more difficult to ascertain and certainly more technologically complex. If another tragedy happens, I fear that we have upped the stakes to the point that regardless of the facts in the event, in the eyes of some, it will be the institution's fault that students were not protected.

Soon my wife and I will send our son off to college with certain expectations and hopes. Safety and good grades are two that come to mind. However, safety is a complex issue. College-aged men and women are much more likely to become injured or to be killed as a result of making bad decisions about ordinary events in their everyday college life – driving too fast, drinking too much alcohol, or experimenting with drugs, than they are by some catastrophic campus event.

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