

Howard Students on Alert After 14 Crimes Reported in One Month

Contributed by Jessica Lewis -- Black College Wire
Monday, 22 September 2008

12 robberies, 2 sexual assaults; emergency "blue lights" don't work

Between August 16 and September 16, 12 Howard students have been robbed, armed and unarmed, and two have been sexually assaulted.

This number, provided by the Howard University Campus Police Department, does not include unreported crime.

Five of the twelve robberies have occurred on campus. In addition, one of the sexual assaults occurred on campus.

Students may be disturbed to discover that the emergency Blue Light Systems on campus do not work and will not dial for help if you press the button.

Instead, students may hear the sounds of someone else dialing or a voice. Neither one is helping you.

Campus Police Chief Leroy K. James is in negotiations to replace the broken systems but finds that the cost of the project is slowing the progress. He reports the project will be finished within the coming months.

"I don't want to put in something that's mediocre," he said. "I want something that is available to you when you need it."

James said in the meantime, "I urge students to call the dispatch number since most students have cell phones. [Use your cell phone so] that when you're in a situation where you need help, you get help."

The number to the dispatch is (202) 806-1100 and is to be used whenever students find themselves in a situation requiring police assistance.

Besides fixing the Blue Light System on campus, James has also put together a council to find out from the students what is going on around campus.

The council is called the Chief of Police Safety and Security Advisory Council and is aimed to help James, "hear the perspectives of the end user: the students."

The council consists of members from the School of Divinity, School of Law, Howard University Student Association (HUSA) and many other heads of various departments.

HUSA Vice President Kellen Moore said, "Chief James has allowed a member of HUSA to sit on the council and I've been making a point to be a part of the council."

He continued, "He seeks our perspective and we relay our experiences with campus security. We can speak on our satisfaction or possible dissatisfaction with campus police."

Although the council has only met once during the summer, Moore feels that it has the potential to impact change.

"During the meeting, one of the questions that I had was whether or not the university could make students aware of different crime issues or crime incidents," Moore said.

Students have certainly been made aware of crime issues. At least once a week students receive crime alerts from James. So far, the total is 12 in four weeks.

"I know recently there was a robbery on the Yard and I know a lot of students have been asking for a greater campus police presence," Moore said. "That is what's going to be the value of this council. When a student is to express concerns with security on campus, this council is going to be the outlet to get those concerns addressed."

To help reduce crime, James stresses the combined effort of students, faculty, staff and police.

"This time of the year as compared to second semester, there is more crime traditionally," James said. "Criminals know when school starts. They strike and they strike fast because they know what they are looking for."

He added, "When they see someone at eight, nine or 10 o'clock at night on their cell phone and iPod, they know that

person is not paying attention."

Although James does not recommend talking on the phone while walking at night, he does suggest calling ahead of time to let somebody know where you are traveling from and so that person may notify authorities if you do not call back.

James said, "The biggest thing I ask students to do is pay attention. You really have to watch your back."

{moshaloscan} Jessica Lewis writes for The Hilltop, the Howard University student newspaper, which originally published this article.