

Dorm Intruder Prompts Changes in Howard Security

Contributed by Tahirah Hairston, Lauren Gaspard -- Black College Wire
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University police chief says officers are being re-trained

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She finally feels safe, but there is much work to be done. After the incident of the intruder trespassing into sophomore biology Manjot Jassal's East Towers suite and taking a shower in her bathroom, an arrest has been made and an investigation is underway.

Howard University Police Department Chief Leroy K. James said the man has been arrested but he was unable to comment in further detail due to the pending investigation. As for the two HUPD officers letting the intruder out of custody, James said it was a mistake and an investigation has been launched to find out exactly why this happened. He also said he is seeking council to find how to resolve the situation.

James said he is still unsure in what exactly happened, but one of the officers was working overtime for Howard University Hospital (HUH).

"The mistake that these officers made has resulted in re-training for everyone," James said. All of the HUPD officers must undergo the same training they received when they were hired.

Howard University Student Association (HUSA) is working with administration to ensure the safety of students in all Howard dormitories.

"After the incident, I was really freaked out at first but my door is fixed so I am fine now," Jassal said. She said that she makes sure both her bedroom door and suite door are locked.

A couple of hours before the intruder entered Jassal's room, he entered HUSA Executive President Bryan Smart's suite in the East Towers.

Smart said the intruder walked into his room around 3 a.m. while he was asleep. "I thought he was one of my suitemates and as he came in further I realized he was someone I didn't know," he said.

When Smart asked the intruder why he was there, he claimed he stayed in the Towers. When he asked a second time, the intruder said Smart invited him. "I forcefully asked him to leave," he said. "Then he exclaimed that I was rude for inviting him and putting him out so I politely put him out of my room and suite."

According to HUSA Executive Vice President Jerome Joseph, HUSA is working closely with Chief James to better the safety in the dormitories. "He has been very receptive and helpful so far."

In another interview, Chief James said campus police have been working tirelessly to improve the security of campus life, and ensure the safety of the students.

"The main thing is that we can not let our guard down," James said. "We need to continuously brainstorm ideas to make our students safer in all aspects, but it is up to the community director, the resident assistants and the students to work with us, too."

Additional issues that have affected students were the recent break-ins that occurred within the individual schools on campus. The schools of Fine Arts and Business, and the Engineering and Architecture buildings have all experienced theft and intrusion since the start of the fall semester.

So far, there have been two arrests in the Fine Arts break-in, according to James.

The Dean of the School of Architecture and Campus Police have created a detailed plan to improve the security of the building in "short term" and "long term" plans. Short term plans include cutting off access to the roof, repairing all doors for security after hours and placing guards in specific areas for extra surveillance.

James sees the issues heightening within the buildings because there has been such an improvement with outside, on-campus security.

According to recent numbers given by HUPD, theft has significantly decreased to 50 percent, with only 23 incidents of theft in August 2009 compared to the 40 percent in August 2008. Robberies have also decreased within the same period.

With the implementation of the "Blue Light" emergency system, strategic placement of various cameras and the recent Howard University Guardian Service, the criminals have now "moved from outside to inside of the facilities."

Kirsten Lewis, a senior print journalism major, says that even though she's never felt unsafe, she feels safer knowing that security measures are in place and is working.

"I actually tested one of the "Blue Light" systems once while walking on The Yard, and when I got a response, I was pleased."

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Tahirah Hairston and Lauren Gaspard write for The Hilltop, the Howard University student newspaper, which originally published versions of this article.