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Students raise safety concerns in open forum

By Jean Stevens

In response to recent assaults and armed robberies, students from Syracuse University and SUNY-ESF voiced their concerns to officials from both institutions.

A panel of 10 representatives from SU Public Safety, the Office of Residence Life, South Campus Residence Life, Syracuse Police, Off-Campus Residence Life, and State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry University Police led an open Safety Forum on Tuesday in the Schine Student Center. The Resident Hall Association and the Student Association organized and sponsored the forum.

"The Residence Hall Association has always had a safety forum every year at the end of first semester sometime, but due to recent attacks, we thought we should have it now," explained Steve Noble, a junior environmental studies major at ESF and President of the Residence Hall Association. "We wanted to get a lot of people of different backgrounds together, and let them vent a little, give them facts."

Members of the panel explained that the primary issues facing Public Safety and the Syracuse Police Department are burglaries, larcenies and assaults. The members also said they want to know the community's concerns, and that those issues will become their priorities.

Several of the major issues raised by the audience focused on safety in and around the residence halls, including increasing the number of blue lights nearby and implementing a 24-hour ID check-in system, like that of Brewster and Boland Halls, to every residence hall.

After being questioned by a member of the audience, Marlene Hall, director of Public Safety, said her organization would examine the areas near Lawrinson and Sadler Halls to decide if they need more blue lights.






"We already have quite a few blue lights in relation to other campuses, but that doesn't mean we have to stop putting them in. But we do need to explore other options," she said.

Members of the panel also explained that students in most halls do not want 24-hour ID check-in and are comfortable with the current system.

Colin Seale, president of SA, asked the panel whether the Welcome Center, new to South Campus in fall 2002, is effectively reducing crime. He added he felt many students believed the center did little to deter crime.

Anastasia Urtz, dean of students, said the Welcome Center has made a drastic reduction in crime. However, it does not intend to keep criminals away from the area, but rather to maintain access control. The main function of the center is to confront larcenies, suspicious persons, traffic issues, lighting issues and drug trade, she added.

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Hall said Public Safety is still investigating the break-in and armed robbery of a South Campus apartment a week and a half ago. Since then, Public Safety has increased its number of patrols in the area.

"We would rather get a call about suspicious behavior than have people ignore it. We will react immediately," Hall said.

One student asked why the Welcome Center remained open only from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m., when many students return early in the morning to find it closed. Hall said the current schedule was initiated because those were the times when most crime occurred, but the policy has since been under review.

She also added Public Safety is unclear as to whether its officers will be armed, and will not have a definite answer until it has more of an understanding of the community's wants and needs and if the city will permit it.

ESF is more likely to have armed officers because it is a public university, and most SUNY campuses currently have armed officers, said Paul K. McGuinness, chief of the University Police Department at ESF.

The recent proposal to have students carry personal security devices is still being explored but panel members said they are still looking at other options.

"I honestly haven't seen a product that's viable. To me, they're not user-friendly. It's really a money issue, a user issue," McGuinness said.

Panel members said they were happy with the turnout of about 70 students, citing smaller turnouts in the past. They also encouraged students to help keep the campus safe by reporting suspicious behaviors, passing along accurate information regarding crime on campus, reaching out to the local community and joining campus safety organizations.

One such safety program is Campus Crime Watch, a program formed this semester composed of students who wish to help reduce crime on campus. Carmen Jackson, a sophomore speech communications major, is one of the ten core members.

"CCW is brand new, and it's still growing. We're pushing to be recognized by January as a campus organization. We want to get students involved, and let them know what they can do about crime besides reading in the paper every day what happened over the weekend. We have a voice too," Jackson said.

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