Security cameras installed throughout campus, city
UD consults students about placement

By Marina Koren

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The university recently installed 32 security cameras to deter crime.

Over the summer, 32 new high-tech surveillance cameras were installed in key areas of campus to deter crime and increase safety measures for students, faculty and staff, using location recommendations provided by students, according to university police officials.

The Office of Campus and Public Safety partnered with Motorola to install the video and sensor technology, known as the Intelligent Campus Safety System. The new cameras have greater capabilities and better clarity than the 250 indoor and outdoor security cameras already in place around campus and Newark, according to Albert "Skip" Homiak, executive director of Public Safety.

"The cameras can be viewed as a force multiplier for the police," Homiak said. "These are things that were not available five, 10 years ago. We can actually be on the scene when watching the monitors before the police officer even arrives."

University police Chief Patrick Ogden said the presence of the security cameras will serve as a crime deterrent.

"When word gets out to the criminal element there's cameras on campus, hopefully they'll stay away from campus," Ogden said. "And when we do have a crime on campus, I'm hopeful that even though the camera might not be in the exact place to capture the crime as it occurs, potentially as the person who committed the crime is fleeing, one of the other cameras will pick that up."

Signs displaying the university and the city of Newark's logos, along with the message "Video monitoring in place," will be placed near all 32 security cameras, Homiak said.

The cameras are equipped with pan, tilt and zoom capabilities, which allow dispatchers monitoring camera footage at the 911 emergency center, located in the Public Safety office on Academy Street, to maneuver the camera and zoom in on suspicious activity.

"For instance, if one of our dispatchers gets a call about a suspicious vehicle, not only will we send an officer, but the dispatcher can go and monitor the camera in that area and can patrol with the cameras right at their fingertips," Homiak said. "If they see the car in question, they can zoom in on the car's tag."

He said the security camera system, which was university-funded, has been up and running for several weeks and has already proved successful. Last week, a dispatcher noticed a group of men appeared on camera at several locations in a short period of time-suspicious activity that prompted him to alert university police officers to the area, he said.
"At one point [the dispatcher] saw they were walking and another time saw that they were on bikes, and they didn't really look like they were on campus for a reason," Homiak said. "We ended up sending officers up there and ended up arresting the guys for stealing bikes."

At least two dispatchers, which include Public Safety student aides, will be on duty at any given time at the emergency center, he said. The Newark Police Department's officers will also be able to view the footage at its office, but will not have the ability to control the pan, tilt and zoom features.

The security cameras are also equipped with a filtering system that blurs out windows of buildings and private homes when the camera pans upward from city streets and corners, Homiak said. He said university police officers are also taking other measures to ensure people's privacy is protected.

"We have a firm policy in place for the dispatchers-it spells out what to do and what not to do," he said. "We'll have supervisors regularly checking the archive information to ensure that people aren't infringing on anybody's rights or privacy.

He said the security cameras switch into an "idle mode" when no motion is detected by the sensor technology. When movement is detected, the camera begins recording again and alerts the dispatcher to the new activity on the screen.

Homiak said this feature allows university police staff to save and archive footage that captures movement and activity, rather than just empty space.

"That's good because there's storage capacity issues with these cameras," he said. "The cameras work 24/7-it's a lot of information and if there's little or no foot traffic, there's no need to archive that information."

Senior Grace Bennett, president of the Student Government Association, said SGA played a role in helping university police officials identify which areas on campus require extra surveillance measures to increase safety.

Homiak and Ogden accompanied SGA members on their annual Campus Safety walk last year, during which students pointed out specific areas where their peers may feel uncomfortable, she said.

"Just taking an actual walk around campus and saying, 'I feel unsafe here, this spot's a little shady, someone could jump out from a bush here,'" Bennett said.

She said the installation of the new security cameras will have a positive effect on student-police officer relations and on the university community as a whole.

"It shows UD students that the police officers really aren't here to be patrolling the streets and getting them in trouble coming from parties," Bennett said.

Homiak said the Office of Public Safety employees see this security camera project as a good investment.

"This is not to spy on a student walking down the street," he said. "This is in the interest of safety."

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