

SAFETY STARTS WITH AWARENESS

Despite national news coverage on school shootings and local news stories of crime, theft and abuse, we distance it all from ourselves thinking it will never happen to us.

Feeling secure on campus can cause us to overlook our surroundings. Even though the University of Houston-Clear Lake is a relatively safe campus, we still have to be cautious of our environment.

Whenever we feel secure, we tend to let our guard down. We leave our backpacks in the rooms while on break, we let people borrow our cell phones and, occasionally, even leave our car doors unlocked.

Although we do have a safe campus, we cannot control the surrounding environment. About a year ago, April 20, 2007, there was a hostage crisis and shooting at one of the NASA Johnson Space Center buildings only minutes away from the campus.

Even on campus, incidents occur that are cause for concern. Recently, a communication effort was initiated by the P.I.E.R. system, acknowledging a neighborhood sex offender on campus offering tutoring services to students.

In case of a campus threat, the university's police department's first goal is to eliminate the threat. There are systems in place to inform students and faculty in case of a threat on campus. The P.I.E.R. system

communicates emergencies by e-mail, text message and telephone calls; unfortunately, by the time all the communications go out, the damage may have already taken its toll.

Interestingly, the most common activity reported to the UHCL university police is bicycle theft. Students are arriving on campus and leaving their bicycles without securing them to the racks.

Paul S. Willingham, chief of police for UHCL, said there are three main elements to commit a crime; two elements cannot be prevented.

First, there has to be a motive. This could be caused by anything.

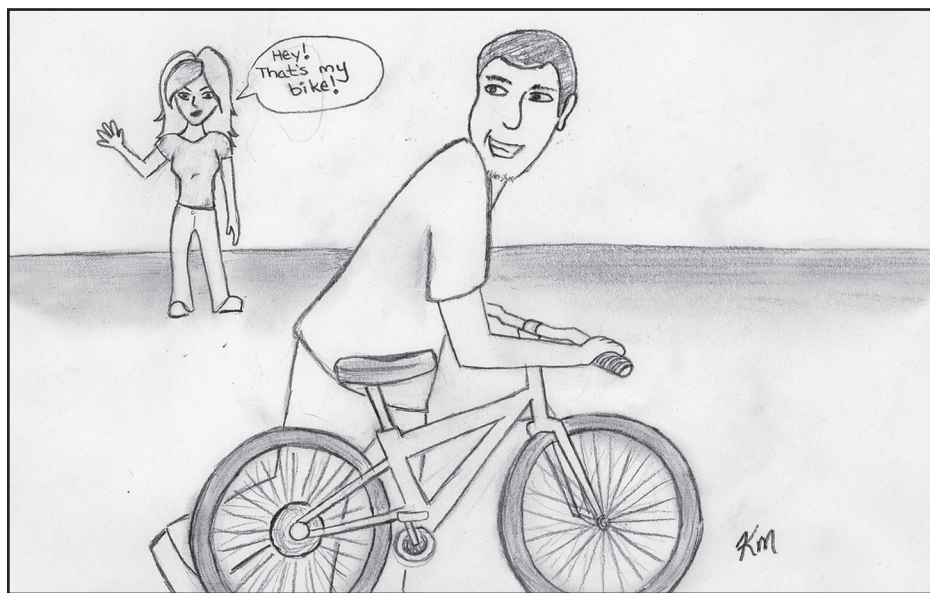
Second, there is the means the individual plans to use to achieve the crime. For example, if someone plans to harm another person, he or she may have a gun or knife.

Although we cannot change the first two elements, being able to control the last element is vital to preventing crime.

The last element an individual needs to commit a crime is opportunity. The most important factor to preventing a crime is to walk in groups. If there is a neighborhood sex offender wandering the campus, the chances are that he or she is not going to target individuals walking in a group.

Even though people may feel safe in common environments, certain safety precautions should always be taken.

Along with with other helpful tips on



Krystal Mongan: The Signal

protecting yourself on campus, Willingham reminds students to utilize the 24-hour escort service available on the UHCL campus.

Tips on Protecting Yourself on Campus – Provided by UHCL Police Department

- Do not walk alone at night.
- Before walking to your vehicle, have your keys ready and look inside your vehicle before entering.
- Report any suspicious people or circum-

stances to the University Police immediately. Stop a crime before it happens.

- Utilize the Police Department Escort Services.
- Be aware of the Emergency/Information Call Boxes that are located in the parking lots.
- Lock your vehicle upon arriving on campus.
- Valuable items should be secured in the trunk of your vehicle.
- Be aware of the environment around you.
- Know the various exits and stairways.

Cross Signals

The Signal staff members share their opinions about safety issues on campus and in the Clear Lake area. Join the discussion by logging on to The Signal blog at: www.myspace.com/thesignal_UHCL

I do not have many safety concerns regarding the campus, or anywhere else for that matter. I know it may be unwise, but I have learned through several events in my life that people aren't really safe anywhere. However, if you live in constant fear, that doesn't help anything. I believe that campus authorities are probably doing the best they can do to keep our campus and surrounding areas safe, but ultimately, not every tragedy can be fully prevented. If that were the case, our world would be a lot different.

-Julie Bray

I feel relatively safe on the campus here at UHCL. I feel that the parking lots are well-lit and security personnel patrols the area well. I also think that UHCL is unique in that it is a commuter college. Four-year universities tend to have more personal and emotional issues because younger college students live on campus.

-Aubrey Harbin

Like any public place, this school has its dangers. But overall, I feel like UHCL has

a fairly safe atmosphere. The police presence on the campus is pretty strong and that is very important. There have been a few incidents at the school, but nothing outrageous compared to other schools; the few incidents that have taken place are very minor. I feel comfortable with the environment here at this school and hope that it continues to be as safe and productive as I have found it to be.

-Brandon White

A main safety concern on campus for me is being attacked by someone walking to my car at night. As a small person, it would be hard to fight anyone off with anything other than my loud voice. The police seem pretty adamant on safety and keeping people out of the university that do not belong here. You never know what kind of people live in this area, even though I've lived here my whole life and it seems to be safe, you just never know what could happen. One other issue was at the end of last Spring semester, after the Virginia Tech shooting, a drill was done while I was working on a paper in the SSCB computer lab. Talk about being

scared, we did not know if it was a drill or the real thing, but I think it is good to practice those kinds of scenarios just to be safe.

-Jenna Lewis

I feel pretty safe on the UHCL campus. I try to be ever mindful of my surroundings when walking to and from the parking lot. And knowing that there are unstable people around who purposely thrive on deceiving unsuspecting students and staff makes me a little uneasy. But, there is a very visible police presence on campus that eases my concerns.

-Jennifer Ferguson

I feel like safety in the general Clear Lake area has taken a dive in recent years. There have been more crimes of all kinds (or at least more publicity of those crimes) and there are too many registered sex offenders living around my neighborhood. I certainly don't feel safe enough to go to the grocery store by myself at night, or walk through any parking lot for that matter. I always have my car keys in hand with my thumb on the panic button before

I even leave a store. Even when I'm walking with my boyfriend I put my purse in between us.

-Mandy Hess

Anything can happen anywhere at any time and I always try to be aware of my surroundings. But one safety issue that I think can be improved for our campus is that there should be more police patrolling during and after the nighttime classes. When I walk to my car after my late night class, I notice there are not as many people and cars as there are during the day. I know a lot more crime happens late at night, maybe not at our campus, but I think as a safety precaution there should be more patrolling during the late night classes when students walk to their cars. It's always better to be safe than sorry.

-Krystal Mongan

The discussion continues on The Signal blog at www.myspace.com/thesignal_UHCL

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