SNHU gets proactive on violence

By MICHAEL COUSINEAU

MANCHESTER — Students and staff at Southern New Hampshire University can use a new online reporting system to report suspicious or disruptive people on campus in an effort to identify troubled individuals who might contemplate a mass school shooting.

“It kind of acts as an early warning system,” said Jim Winn, associate dean of students and director of public safety.

The online report goes to a behavioral intervention team, which includes licensed mental health counselors and public safety staff, that can gather more information about the person from university or outside sources to determine whether some type of intervention is needed.

“I think this is one of the next up-and-coming programs to help address this,” Winn said.

Campus security jumped back into the national spotlight last week when nine students were fatally shot at an Oregon community college.

At New Hampshire’s seven community colleges, “we’re continually assessing (safety),” said Shannon Reid, director of communications for the Community College System of New Hampshire.

“It’s not something we simply respond to when there’s an incident,” she said. “It’s an ongoing area of attention for us.”

Each campus, she said, develops and implements its own security plan, designed to incorporate its campus layout and location within the greater community.

“Over the last several years, campus security has increasingly been a priority for us,” Reid said. “We have invested in elements like video monitoring, lockdown systems, emergency notification systems, emergency call stations along with the training and drills.”

In addition, she said, “We have text and email and phone notification capabilities that come through on people’s mobile devices.”

The CCSNH’s emergency response plan is based on emergency preparedness guidance from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and includes active shooter scenarios.

Spokeswoman Tiffany Eddy said each campus within the University System of New Hampshire has its “own response plan.”
Winn said SNHU’s crisis management team met Friday morning “to review protocols and see if there’s any steps we need to take.”

The university uses the model adopted by Homeland Security and reviewed by state public safety officials.

Students register cellphone numbers and email addresses to receive security messages. Messages also pop up on all university-owned computers.

Whether students evacuate a building or shelter in place depends on the specific threat, Winn said.

Technology also may save lives and direct people to safety quicker.

“Communication is really the key,” Winn said. “The technology that helps us with that is key.”

In an email to students and staff, Alicia Harvey-Smith, president of River Valley Community College in Claremont, said she wanted them to join her in sending their thoughts, prayers and condolences to the families of those killed.

“River Valley is committed to supporting the safety of our college community and will use this as an opportunity to examine our current system and processes and to work with our community both internal and external to support plans for improvements,” she said.

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