2-17-2010

More Information Increases Perception Of Crime, UNH Survey Finds

Steven Lee
University Police Department

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More Information Increases Perception Of Crime, UNH Survey Finds
DURHAM, N.H. – The University of New Hampshire Police Department released the results of a community survey it is required to do every three years to maintain accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). The survey, conducted by the UNH Survey Center, found an increased perception from 2006 to 2009 among students as well as faculty and staff that crime is on the rise on campus despite a decrease in the number of arrests. This is directly related to the implementation of a campus alert system in 2007.

The goal of the survey is to gauge the community’s perceptions and comfort level throughout the campus compared to 2006, when the last survey was done.

“Overall, crime is not on the rise on campus,” said University Police Chief Nicholas Halias. “We’ve used the campus alert system proactively to get information to our community in a timely manner, information they wouldn’t have had access to three years ago when the last survey was done. While this has resulted in an increased perception that there is more crime taking place on campus, we believe giving people the information they need to stay safe is more important. The safety of every member of our campus community as well as our visitors is our top priority.”

Halias said that during the fall semester, when the survey was conducted, police issued eight campus alerts including updates, all of which resulted in multiple calls to the department. The October 2009 arrest of a Manchester man for an assault outside Stoke Hall was the direct result of a tip generated from the campus alert as was the timely apprehension of a man seen walking towards downtown with a firearm in his coat pocket.

Halias noted the University Police Department, a full-service nationally accredited law enforcement agency, takes crime on campus very seriously and will use the survey results to make changes. Currently, lighting on campus is constantly reviewed and upgraded, approximately 80 “blue lights” are strategically located around campus, allowing help to be summoned directly to dispatch just by pushing a red button, and students are encouraged to call police at any time to request a free escort anywhere on campus. In addition, the department has increased its visibility in and around residence halls and continues to offer popular education and prevention programs like its Citizens’ Police Academy, alcohol and drug awareness education, as well as R.A.D., a self defense program for women.

The web-based survey was e-mailed to 17,588 UNH students and 2,755 were completed, a response rate of 16 percent. The faculty and staff response rate was 24 percent, with 982 of 4,119 completing the survey.

The survey found two of the three areas with the most increased concern for both students and faculty/staff involved vandalism to cars and having cars stolen. The third increased area of concern was being assaulted on campus, which police attribute to the high-profile Halloween assault. Fifty-five percent of students and 52 percent of faculty/staff surveyed...
reported an increased perception of crime on campus, up from 7 percent of student and 7 percent of faculty/staff in 2006. Halias said police regularly look at the deployment of officers to address these concerns. In addition, the vulnerability of being victimized by computer crimes was clearly a concern for both the students and faculty. Halias noted all officers are trained to investigate computer crimes and identity-theft type investigations, and the department is involved in several collaborative law enforcement efforts to aid in the investigation of these crimes. Another noteworthy result of the survey was how those surveyed felt they were treated by members of the department. Seventy-two percent of the students who had contact with the University Police felt as though they were treated with dignity and respect compared to 73 percent in 2006; while the faculty reported in at 93 percent compared to 94 percent in 2006.

Everyone in the campus community is urged to call 911 or the University Police Department at (603) 862-1427 immediately upon observing anyone or anything suspicious. For additional safety information go to: http://www.unh.edu/upd/Prevention-General.html. The survey results can be found at: http://www.unh.edu/news/docs/UNHSurvey-2.pdf