

The Dean's Almanac

Questions Answered While-U-Wait

April 18, 2007

It's been a busy few weeks here in soggy Storrs, for you, for me, for our Facilities crews working hard to pump out flooded basements and unclog drains all over campus. Here's to some upcoming weeks of warmth and sunshine to finish up our semester.

There have been a number of conversations around campus about safety, about University procedures, and other topics related to the truly incomprehensible events at Virginia Tech. Like many of you, I suspect, the reality of what happened there has hit me in waves - moments when I imagine parents having to make the familiar drive to Blacksburg, but this time to claim their child's body, moments when I imagine my counterpart there, Tom Brown, having to maintain a professional demeanor, providing support for his staff, when his own heart is broken, moments when I think about students who survived the shootings but will live forever with the images of others being brutally murdered in front of them.



You have asked, and your parents have asked, "What would UConn do differently? How would you keep us safe?" It's a hard question with no easy answers. Yes, we do have emergency procedures for the types of emergencies that we can imagine. What happened this week has, in a horrible way, redefined what we can imagine. I think we have a great Department of Public Safety, and I would trust Chief Hudd and his colleagues in absolutely any situation. But the reality of our situation is this: our campus is a relatively open, accessible place, and restricting access to any part of it presents challenges. We are an institution of higher learning. Our very mission, everything we purport to be, pushes us to be open and welcoming, a sanctuary, a sacred place where we encourage and celebrate the life of the mind and the growth of the soul. To become a place where we are constantly vigilant for those who would harm us would require such a reversal of our culture, our beliefs, that it would tear at the very fabric of what we stand for.

That said, the answer to the question, "Does what happened at Virginia Tech cause us to re-examine our own policies and procedures?" is "of course." Of course it does. Everything that happens on another campus, whether it's the Elizabeth Shin case at MIT, the lacrosse team debacle at Duke, or this terrible tragedy, causes us to step back and consider how we do things. That, too, is the nature of a university - constant self-reflection, a desire for continuous improvement, learning, learning, learning. It's what we do best. And every crisis on every campus gives us a case study to examine from every possible angle. As my pal Christine over in Student Activities said recently about another situation from which we were trying to learn, "We may make mistakes, but hopefully we won't make the *same* mistakes."

I can't *guarantee* your safety. Chief Hudd can't. President Austin can't. All we can guarantee is that we will work hard every day to make our campus as safe as possible, and that we will do our best to learn from every situation that presents itself.

I can tell you this: we take seriously any kind of behavior that causes alarm. Stalking or harassing, erratic behavior in the residence halls or classrooms, threats (written, verbal, implied); all of these result in referrals to Community Standards, Counseling and Mental Health, the Police - whomever we think needs to address the problem. We are also trying to educate students and faculty about the warning signs of depression, a common cause of suicide and related violence.

I believe that we *have* saved students, that you have saved one another, by reaching out and showing your concern and compassion to those who might feel alone, or angry, or sad. You need to believe (as I do) that your interactions with others matter tremendously, and when you're kind to someone, it makes a difference. I know a lot of you do that already, so for the lives you've saved, in one way or another, by your actions, thanks.

So have you ever wondered, "How can I be a dean of students when I grow up?" Some of us are born lucky, and some of us learn about the field of student affairs and head in that direction. If you're the latter, check out a class being offered. EDLR 298: Introduction to Student Affairs, is a one-credit class being offered this Fall on Fridays from 10-12. You can learn more about it at [this website](http://www.sye.uconn.edu/application/) (<http://www.sye.uconn.edu/application/>).

Kristin asked a good question about food that's left over in the dining halls at night:

"Has anyone ever suggested bringing the extra food to a homeless shelter or something? I'm not an activist or anything, but there has to be a handful of shelters and places in the area that could use that food. It just seems like such a waste."

According to C. (stands for Compassionate) Dennis Pierce, Head Dining Guy, this actually does already happen. Dining Services has arrangements with several local agencies to receive food that is left over at Towers and in Catering. There are obviously some limitations on this process. The food can't have been set out for serving, and it must be able to be flash-frozen (which requires equipment not available in all dining halls). Dining Services staff, most of whom live in this community, are well aware of the need for this kind of support and are always looking for ways to help. If you have other ideas in this vein, send them along to [Dennis](#).

Another Dining Services question came in from **Sarah**.

"I was wondering why we're not allowed to take food out of the dining halls. What's the difference if I eat in the dining hall or in my room? Plus, I paid for my meal plan, shouldn't I get to eat my food where I want to?"

Back to Dennis: :

"This is an age old quandary. As the stewards of food preparation we are responsible for serving food in a safe environment. Once food leaves the dining unit we no longer have control. The

second issue is that the meal plan is set up and budgeted as an "all you care to eat" plan while in the dining facility. If we were to allow students to take meals out then we would find that many would abuse this feature as they did with our prior meal plan when students utilized meals for other students who did not have a plan. The essence is if we did allow meals to be removed from a traditional dining facility then (1) we would have to raise the meal plan cost and (2) we would risk the exposure to liability due to sicknesses related to improper food handling."

Bells? BELLS!!! Yes, they've continued to ring. Those sweet-sounding bells in the Congregational Church carillon sound like fingernails on a blackboard when they ring at 3 am. I've been in touch with the very sympathetic Tish, the church secretary, who said it has been discussed at the Church, and that apparently there is something broken in the mechanism, and turning the carillon off until it's repaired would mean the clock in the tower wouldn't work. Yes, I suggested (gently) that this would perhaps not be a terrible thing, at least for the few weeks of the semester (including finals) that we have left. Tish agreed, and said she would refer this to the Church's elders.

While the importance of the clock and other great theological topics are being discussed, I'll move on to some other stuff. Casey wondered why we don't have very many available tennis courts. Not being too knowledgeable about this myself, I turned to Patti Bostic, Director of Recreation and my golf tutor, who responded, "Decoturf Surface courts have been built on North Hillside Rd. Four courts are available for open recreational usage, seven days a week based on scheduling, maintenance and weather conditions." Okay, then. Casey, the ball's in your...NO! I won't say it.

Karen wrote with some more concerns about lighting on campus:

I live in the Wheeler building in Hilltop Apartments (in the lower/back part of the complex). Often times if I am walking back to my apartment, I will take the path between the apartments. This is a lovely path for pedestrians instead of walking on the road in the parking lot, and safe from the maniac drivers that sometimes tear through the parking lot at unsafe speeds. However at night it is very badly lit and I think two of the lampposts are out. Is there any way to fix the lighting in this area?

I sent this request over to Logan, Director of Residential Facilities. The problem was investigated, and it turns out it wasn't just a few burned out bulbs. The wiring was bad, which requires digging up the wiring and replacing it. Great call, Karen. Let me know if it's been fixed. The weather might have delayed the repair, but hopefully it will get done if it hasn't already.

Jackie wondered about the "sculpture" hanging from the ceiling in the Food Court. "It looks like it's supposed to be a clock, but it's never the right time." Yes, and yes. It's a clock (the red dot is 12 o'clock), but apparently it doesn't work. I think it did for about an hour when it was first installed. I've heard that the artist is not concerned that it doesn't work, because it's art first and a clock second. Don't get me started on this one.

Joe asked about HDTV coming to campus, and I believe that we will be complying with regulations that we be HD-ready over the next couple of years. And **Peter** wondered why we

don't close on Good Friday, but then answered his own question by acknowledging that we are a public university that doesn't officially recognize religious observances.

Speaking of holidays, Spring Weekend is just about here. Major kudos to USG, the Student Alumni Association and SUBOG, along with the many other groups that have worked to make this a safe and fun weekend for the 30 or 40 of you that didn't take my advice and have opted to stay around. Look for me on the Oozeball court on Saturday, playing for Vice President Saddlemyre's team, "Sloppy Leadership." As for the rest of the weekend - you know the drill. Be smart, stay safe, don't make a spectacle of yourself because it will live on the internet forever.

See you around campus.