

Merced College Community Talks About Plans to Deal with an "Active Shooter"



May 2, 2007

The recent killings of 32 students at Virginia Tech have caused many in the education community to examine its plans to deal with similar "active shooter" situations. Merced College is no exception and has, in fact, already been in the process of planning for such an event.



On May 1, College employees engaged in a conversation with members of the Merced County Sheriff's Department on its "Active Shooter Rapid Tactical Deployment" plans. The Sheriff's Department manages security at the college campus. College President Dr. Benjamin Duran noted that steps have already been taken by the College to respond to just such a scenario.

A "Critical Incident Response Team" at the college routinely meets to discuss plans and procedures to address any number of emergency situations the College might face. A "table top" exercise on an active shooter scenario was conducted last year, Dr. Duran noted.

Currently, several committees are working on campus to address issues of communications and surveillance, as well as trauma and grief counseling. Dr. Duran said that an agreement has been signed between the College and the county Probation Department to identify students with potentially violent behaviors that might surface when those students are enrolled in classes.

"We have an open campus," noted Sheriff's Deputy Jim Wilde, the College's officer in charge of security. "This presents its share of problems. But, we need to be able to identify problems before they occur."

Dr. Anne Newins, vice president for Student Services, said that a committee has been formed to address post-event trauma and grief counseling. This "crisis" committee will also serve to identify potentially dangerous individuals the College may need to monitor in the interest of public safety.

The College is currently reviewing options for a campus-wide emergency communications network both at its main campus in Merced and at the Los Banos Campus. These may include email and cell phone communications and an external loudspeaker system. New locking systems for doors and windows are also being considered. Dr. Larry Johnson, vice president for Administration, noted that many video cameras have already been installed around the campus.

"We have to balance privacy issues with our public safety needs," Dr. Johnson said. After a presentation on the Sheriff Department's active shooter response plans, a question and answer period was held in which staff and students addressed some of their concerns.

Dr. Duran said that training will be held for faculty and staff regarding the response plans, and an active shooter simulation will likely be conducted in the near future.

For more information on the College's active shooter response plan, contact Dr. Larry Johnson at Ext. 6108 or Deputy Jim Wilde at (209) 384-6304.