

Preventative Safety: How the Class of '13 can make its own luck

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8.26.2009

It's that time of year again – time for books, football games, new friends and the making of memories, but with it comes the all-nighters, the after-parties and the sometimes-creepy “friend of a friend.” No matter what your plans are for this year, freshmen and upperclassmen alike should take a refresher course on how to stay safe on and off campus.

“Theft is more prevalent in our community than crimes against person; however, everyone still needs to be aware of their surroundings no matter where they are in the Bryan-College Station area,” said Sgt. Allan Baron of the Texas A&M University Police Department.

Baron suggests locking vehicles and not leaving valuables visible in the vehicle to help prevent burglaries. Students should keep a log of property with each item's make, model and serial number, which will help law enforcement in the recovery of stolen property and arresting suspects.

Baron encourages students who live off campus to get to know neighbors and find out what is normal in their neighborhood so they can report any suspicious activity to the police.

“Students that inquire about locations they are interested in living are encouraged to contact their local police department and inquire as to what crimes have occurred in that neighborhood,” Baron said.

While it is important to watch out for your physical surroundings, safety on the Internet is another step students can take to ensure a safe college experience.

“Limiting the amount of personal information on cyber network sites such as Facebook and MySpace [will] help guard against stalking and harassments, as well as identity theft,” Baron said. “Being aware of the local frauds and scams occurring in our area will better protect those coming in contact with such individuals.”

Although there are many protective measures one can take, the best weapon students can have is their instincts and common sense.

“Stay alert and be aware of [your] surroundings,” Baron said. “Avoid isolated areas. Don't take shortcuts through dark areas or parking lots. Listen to [your] instincts. If someone feels uncomfortable about a person, place or situation, [you] should create some distance or leave the area. There is safety in numbers.”

These tips are helpful in any situation, whether it be going home from a late night at the library or going out for a night on the town. Of course, when alcohol is involved you should take extra measures to ensure the safety of yourself and your friends.

“Students who choose to drink alcohol should consider these safe choices: designate a driver — or two — or use CARPOOL; make major decisions about your night before you start to drink

such as how will you get home, who you go home with,” Baron said. “Know the people you’re with, watch out for yourself and your friends [and] watch your drink at all times.”

However, the best way to deal with a dangerous situation or potential crime is taking steps to prevent it from happening. To help with just such a program is Master Officer Kristi Hosea of the UPD Crime Prevention Unit.

“The Crime Prevention Unit at Texas A&M University Police Department has joined the Department of Residence Life in creating C.O.P.S. Program, which stands for Community Oriented Police Services in which the crime prevention officers spend four hours, two evenings a week, in and around the residence halls as a resource for residents,” Hosea said.

The Crime Prevention Unit is available to faculty, staff and students, as well as off-campus groups, for educational safety programs.

Tips and advice on preventing a dangerous situation, though helpful, can only go so far. Once one is in the middle of a potentially dangerous encounter, one needs to know where to turn to for help.

“We remind students that campus is relatively safe, but it’s only as safe as they help us make it. It is our job to educate and remind students to follow standard safety guidelines, but it is up to the students to limit the opportunities for crimes to occur and utilize their safety resources such as CARPOOL, Corps of Cadets Escort Program, on-campus bus service and the Student Recreation Center’s jogging path,” Hosea said. “A&M also has 120 Emergency Blue Light phones located throughout campus, which allows anyone to make a 3-minute local phone call.”

College is a time for growing and learning, and by remembering these protective measures and utilizing the campus programs, students will be able to experience university life safely. Unfortunately, crimes and dangerous situations may still occur, but do not forget to keep your wits about you, have your cell phone and utilize the campus programs.