

April 24, 2007

Monday night, hundreds of students, faculty and staff gathered outside of the Idaho Commons for a candle light vigil to honor the victims of violence at Virginia Tech University and acts of violence that have recently touched the UI community. President White, student leaders and leaders of many local faith communities gave inspirational and comforting messages.

College students across America have been touched deeply by the tragedy at Virginia Tech.....and so have parents, faculty and staff. We are forced to acknowledge that even the "safest communities" are vulnerable and that campus safety is influenced by ever changing challenges. While we grieve with families in Virginia, we are also taking great care to evaluate our own practices and strive to improve based on lesson learned.

This issue is very painful also for the UI community. Three weeks ago, David Boss, a UI student, was murdered in an off campus apartment in Moscow. Several days later, John Delling, who was a childhood friend and a former UI student, was arrested near Reno, Nevada. After leaving Moscow, John Delling is also suspected of killing a Boise State student on that campus and in late March seriously wounded another student in Arizona. John and two of these men had been childhood friends.

This edition of the Vandal Parents Newsletter is dedicated solely to the issue of campus safety. You deserve to know how we are working to create a safe campus.

- Moscow Police Department provides high quality law enforcement services to the University of Idaho campus. We do not have a separate campus security operation that then must interface with a law enforcement agency. A unified and professional law enforcement service works very well.
- Moscow Police and Student Affairs staff members regularly receive training to address safety risks and take action to prevent problems.
- Campus safety meetings are conducted every week. Lead Student Affairs staff and Moscow police meet to discuss incidents, share information about high risk students and upcoming events. We evaluate campus safety each week and communicate frequently between meetings.
- Our campus disciplinary system is used to confront inappropriate behavior but it is also a screening system connecting us with students who display high risk behavior. This year, we have worked with more than 400 students for behaviors that are generally minor.
- Mandatory mental health assessment is required of students who display suicide related behavior. This assessment process is conducted by Dean of Students and Counseling Center staff.
- All residence halls and the vast majority of Greek living units are locked 24-hours a day.
- Our campus warning system depends primarily on e-mail. We are investigating more sophisticated communication methods that utilize cell phones and text messaging. Warning methods must change as communication methods evolve.

Our campus crime and safety statistics can be reviewed at <http://www.webs.uidaho.edu/security/crimestats.htm> . This information is compiled by Moscow Police personnel from their information system. You deserve to know.

We know that we must constantly evaluate factors that impact campus safety. Our campus of 11,000 students is a vibrant, high energy and sometimes vulnerable community. Public spaces are vulnerable and university campuses are very open spaces. The collective responsibility for safety is shared by faculty, staff and students. Communication about these issues will be a major focus next fall during new student orientation and faculty training so that we can be a more effective team.

We will learn lessons from the Virginia Tech tragedy and from colleagues on other campuses. We have effective and high quality safety systems and yet we will work tirelessly make improvements to make the University of Idaho campus as safe as possible.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the Virginia Tech community, the Boss family, and with families who struggle with the mental illness.

Another Vandal Parents Newsletter will be sent to you soon about other campus life issues.

My best wishes for you and your family.

Bruce Pitman
Vice Provost for Students Affairs