

Comparing campus alert systems in Phila.

Drexel also issued an alert following the Feb. 19 assault at 38th, Sansom streets

by [Jenny Chung](#) | The Daily Pennsylvanian | Tuesday, March 2, 2010 at 12:11 am

In the wake of the assault earlier this month near 38th and Sansom streets, much discussion has centered on the efficacy of campus emergency notification systems.

The Penn, Drexel University and Temple University notification systems all use the same software program and are, for all practical purposes, identical, according to Senior Associate Vice President of Public Safety at Drexel University Domenic Ceccanecchio.

“If there’s an emergency on campus, we have people who are trained to follow the steps of the software to send the message out,” Ceccanecchio said.

He said following the Sansom Street assault, a DrexelALERT was released to advise Drexel students about the occurrence because of its proximity to Drexel’s campus.

According to Ceccanecchio, alerts are sent out only in the event of a “severe emergency that poses an immediate, continuous threat to our community.”

Ceccanecchio, former security operations manager at Penn’s Division of Public Safety, began researching alert system technologies at Penn and continued to evaluate the suitability of various systems for the Drexel campus after assuming his current position.

“Penn and Drexel public safety collaborate in many different ways,” Ceccanecchio said, citing the Multi Emergency Radio Network (MERN) as an example. The MERN system enables communication not only between Penn and Drexel, but also between other major organizations in University City — for instance, the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, the Wistar Institute and the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia.

“When there’s an event, we use the MERN to notify one another, and that way we’re all acting simultaneously,” Ceccanecchio said.

Drexel also participates in the University City Public Safety Advisory Committee — currently headed by Penn Vice President for Public Safety Maureen Rush — which brings University City establishments together at weekly meetings to discuss crime and the allocation of security resources.

Ceccanecchio characterized the collaboration between Penn and Drexel as a “true partnership ... to provide public safety services in University City.”

According to Jon Kassa, executive director of nonprofit campus safety organization Security on Campus, sending alerts via wireless messages is a “common practice” nationwide.

“The expectations of students, families and wider campus communities have changed since Virginia Tech ... to the point where students expect to be notified after nearly every crime,” he said, adding that this has led to complaints being filed in the absence of notifications even though schools have done everything required by law.

Kassa also emphasized the importance of timeliness in issuing alerts. “Sometimes even if you don’t have all the facts together, the school may be required to get the information out there that a significant incident has occurred,” he said. “The key is containment of the incident first, then immediately getting the message out.”