

Assault Prompts Response from Administration, Campus Safety

By Melissa Cechota, *for Southern Accent Newspaper 2009*

A female Campus Safety officer at Southern was assaulted by a student March 29, signaling a trend of incidents prompting university officials to consider safety on campus.

Taken into custody by the Collegedale Police Department just three days after the assault, Alex Ferguson Richards made bond and then withdrew himself from Southern.

Richards, a freshman engineering studies major, was charged with simple assault. This comes just six months after Ruiguang "Jay" Zhuang, a sophomore computer science major, threatened to kill a female student with a knife. He is currently awaiting a May 5 court date for aggravated domestic assault and aggravated robbery.

University senior administrators said they are always concerned when issues of student or staff security arise, and that matters of safety on campus are taken seriously.

However, Campus Safety Director Kevin Penrod said he fears our community lives in an environment of denial, and is not attuned to our vulnerability. He would like to change that.

Campus Safety and the Collegedale Police Department sponsored a rape, aggression and defense (RAD) class for university females in the fall of 2007, but Penrod said he'd like to have an on-site, staffed RAD instructor available for more programs throughout the year. The obstacle, he said, is funding.

Lt. Terry Smith said the Collegedale Police Department has a healthy relationship with Campus Safety, assisting in matters that require sworn officers. Smith said Penrod is a pro-active, forward thinker and the two agencies are always looking for new ways to partner.

Assistant Dean of Women Kristen Taylor who attended the RAD training said it was informative and gave the women an opportunity to practice force.

"They took us out of our comfort and safety zone by doing scenarios that made us think," she said. Taylor also said she believes awareness is an important factor when it comes to safety.

Penrod couldn't agree more, and that's why he's hoping Southern's administration will approve the guidelines proposed therefore enacting an open dialogue on campus about safety.

"We have to convince people who have never been in these situations that bad things do happen to good people," he said.

Penrod also wants his officers trained and authorized to react in defensive situations. Currently a proposal suggesting his officers carry pepper spray and billy clubs is being evaluated by Southern's presidential cabinet.

"I feel an inherent need to put myself between community residents and harm's way," Penrod said. "We [at Southern] have this lulled expectancy that we live in happy valley. If we're going to have security personnel, then we have a duty and an obligation to provide."

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