

University developing video surveillance system

By Patrick Ygnacio
The University Star

A campus-wide surveillance system that would provide the University Police Department with unlimited access to video taken at specific campus locations is currently in development.

Officials involved in implementing this surveillance system are emphasizing it as a documentation tool and not as a health and safety mechanism.

"The only way you can use a camera for health and safety is if you have a human all the time, 24 hours watching, and it's not something we can do," said UPD investigator Jeb Thomas. "We don't have enough people and even if we did — if you sat somebody down and gave them a wall of cameras to watch, is he going to be watching the right

one at the right time?"

Last fall, existing security cameras at San Jacinto Hall were utilized in apprehending two students charged with burglarizing a residence.

Texas State currently has cameras deployed at strategic locations in one parking garage and some residence halls. Thomas said those cameras are operated on an individual basis within their respective departments and not by university police. Because the operation of each camera is not entirely regulated by UPD, Thomas said there are instances when they are not utilized efficiently.

He said the proposed system would expand on existing surveillance and would be a centralized network maintained by UPD.

"What we're trying to do with this initiative is bring it all un-

der one umbrella, that way we have a set thing," Thomas said. "We know they're being recorded, we know how they're being recorded (and) we can have access to them."

Rick Bishop, director of network operations, said his department has been working closely with UPD in finding the appropriate vendor to implement the expanded camera system. He said a pilot system utilizing 75 cameras across campus will be initiated to help identify where other surveillance would be necessary once the network is fully established.

"What we're trying to do is get a cross-section of where we need them," Bishop said.

Future surveillance would be an Internet protocol system that would use the university's current communications network to consolidate the cameras into

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a manageable structure.

Kyle Morris, Associated Student Government president, has been monitoring the development of the camera surveillance network and said he is confident the system would not invade the privacy of students while documenting activity on campus.

"We don't want this to turn into a Big Brother issue, but we're confident the university administration will be able to manage that particular concern," Morris said. "And from what I can tell from discussing the issue with them, it looks like a totally reasonable proposal that you would have surveillance at dorm entry points and also in the parking garages, particularly in the parking garages where you have a higher rate of crime."

With the recent shooting

at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Va., Thomas said there comes a need to reevaluate the security measures at every school campus.

"Every university, I think, is going to have to look at that," Thomas said. "Just like Columbine had most school districts reevaluating how they did things and looking at what they could update, it's going to be the same thing with this shooting."

Though cameras will offer a valuable resource to police, Thomas said the Texas State community carries an important responsibility to be vigilant in identifying suspicious activity on campus and reporting it to authorities.

"Usually, the citizens are the ones that have the most knowledge about who should be in an area or (whether an activity is) normal," Thomas said.