

March 14, 2024

Dear Longwood University Senate:

We would like to bring to the Senate's attention concerns expressed by campus community members following the January 31, 2024 gunshot incident on Edmunds Street. This letter is in no way disparaging the critical work of the Longwood Police Department and the Farmville Police Department in handling the shooting incident on January 31. Both teams managed the situation with expediency and acted with the best interests of the town and Longwood communities in mind. Rather, our concerns are about a lack of follow-up communication following this incident and communication from the administration regarding safety protocols.

Immediately following January 31, some faculty talked with students about the incident, hearing their concerns over what students perceived as potentially inadequate or incomplete communication from Longwood. Among student responses, there was a palpable and heightened level of fear and anxiety that appeared to be a result of several factors that occurred that day:

- 1). A report of gunshots fired near Longwood - and a request to avoid the area - had some students on edge given the increased number of school shootings across the country in the last two decades. Even though the initial message was similar to those sent in the past (e.g., shots fired near X), it appears that this event was more impactful to students because a). it was during the day and b). it occurred while classes were in session. This led students to question why a shelter-in-place order was not given, even if for a very short time.
- 2). Those who received the Longwood Alert messages via *text* received them in chronological order (shots fired, looking for a suspect, suspect apprehended). However, those with *email* alerts alone received them in a different order (shots fired, suspect apprehended, looking for a suspect). Additionally, some people did not receive the notices until an hour after the first text message went out. This led to some confusion as to what occurred, when it occurred, if there were multiple parties involved, and if the situation was resolved.
- 3). No follow-up messaging was provided that could have offered appropriate context and closure to the event, such as what efforts Longwood was taking to correct the Longwood Alert system errors, opportunities for safety training, or how Longwood determines when lockdowns should be enacted.
- 4). Finally, students expressed a lack of knowledge of what to expect and what to do if an active shooter *was* on campus.

All of these previous points are valid concerns to students, staff, and faculty alike. However, student safety is no longer just left to campus police. If something tragic like an active shooter on Longwood's campus were to happen, faculty and staff would be pressed into taking leadership roles. Yet, unlike our students, most of us have not participated in active shooter drills. Their experiences with ongoing drills in school means that many students have more knowledge of what to do in these situations than faculty, staff, and administration. Given this, some faculty are concerned over the perceived lack of simple safety precautions and safety protocol measures. For instance:

1). In many classroom buildings, there is no way to prevent an active shooter from looking into the classrooms with windows on the doors for potential targets. A simple solution to this problem would be to install blinds on the inside of the doors. Drawing them down may act as a potential deterrent if a shooter were looking for victims.

2). In some buildings, like Allen Hall, the classrooms themselves cannot be locked without a key; this key is kept in a lockbox on the first floor which is only accessible by two or three people in the entire building. If an active shooter was to enter Allen Hall, there is no way to immediately lock the classroom doors from the inside to prevent entry. A practical solution to this problem would be to install a deadbolt that manually locks from the *inside* of the room.

3). There is no easily accessible protocol for what to do in case an active shooter were to come into a building. The only public information on the Longwood website was not easy to find; it took 5 clicks to find a page with a link at the bottom entitled [What to Do in the Case of an Active Shooter](#). In turn, this leads off of Longwood and on to YouTube to watch a video called [Run, Hide, Fight](#) from Ready Houston. Conversely, other institutions like the [University of Virginia](#), [Virginia Tech](#), [William & Mary](#), [University of Lynchburg](#), and the [University of Richmond](#) put emergency information procedure links on their main webpage or they could be found within 1-2 clicks. More readily accessible, detailed information on emergency procedures would better prepare Longwood faculty and staff.

As such, we urge the Senate to work with the administration, faculty, staff, and student leaders to further prepare the campus and improve communications in the future. This includes:

1). Perform a comprehensive risk assessment to help determine which buildings across campus have safety issues (e.g., no locks on the inside, key access, blinds on door windows, etc.), communicate the assessment results with the Longwood employees working in those buildings within a timely manner, and then address the identified issues.

2). Develop and communicate to students, faculty, and staff an emergency preparedness plan in case an incident happens in the future. Feeling safe also means feeling empowered with the knowledge of how they should act in case an event occurs. This readily accessible plan should then be easy to find on the Longwood website.

3). Develop routine, well publicized active shooter drill training available to faculty, staff, and students.

4). Work to provide more detailed and clarifying communications after an event to help prevent further miscommunication and allay any fears that might result.

We hope you consider our suggestions in the spirit in which they were offered: to help all of us provide a safe environment to learn and live in the Longwood and Farmville communities. We hope that it will never be needed in the future, but if so, we need to be well-prepared to manage the situation.

Respectfully,

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