WCU locked-down after bank robbery

CULLOWHEE — A series of potentially dangerous incidents near UNC schools resulted in five lockdowns in the last two months — including one at Western Carolina University on Wednesday.

Campus police issued a “shelter-in-place” order for the 9,600-student campus because of a robbery at a nearby bank.

The step was the school’s first crime-related lockdown, though officials asked people to stay inside during tornadoes last spring.

Police alerted students, faculty, staff, parents and others with text messages, voice calls and emails using the CAT Tracker emergency notification system.

WCU also used sirens to alert the campus of the emergency. Students and staff are trained to go inside when they hear the sirens.

Campus police were stationed at WCU’s five entrances and looked for the suspect while on patrols.

About 5,700 people signed up for the alert service, which is not mandatory for students.

The system was created in the wake of the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech.

The first alert went out at 10:49 a.m. from WCU Police Chief Ernie Hudson.

“Details are still sketchy,” the chief said of the robbery across N.C. 107 at the State Employee Credit Union. “Suspect is described as a white male, wearing a mask, a hooded maroon sweat shirt and blue jeans with a patch.

No weapon information is available, but as a precaution we are assuming that the suspect is armed. A dye pack did go off as the suspect left the scene.”

Five more messages from WCU officials conveyed information about the robbery and exams planned for the day before the lockdown ended at 1:12 p.m. after the suspect was captured.

The noon finals were postponed.
Jackson County Sheriff Jimmy Ashe didn’t immediately respond to a message seeing details about the incident.

WCU spokesman Bill Studenc said officials are considering making the CAT Tracker alert system an opt-out program to get more users.

Lockdowns are rare at UNC System schools, said Brent Herron, associate vice president of the system’s campus safety and emergency operations.

But a series of incidents has resulted in five in two months.

“I think that is very unusual,” Herron said. “This is probably the most I have seen at one time since I have been there.”

UNC Wilmington has had two lockdowns, with at least one involving a robbery. East Carolina and Elizabeth City State each had one, he said.

The incident at ECU — reported as a man with a rifle — turned out to be a man carrying an umbrella.

In addition to exams, WCU’s announced its new athletic director, Randy Eaton, on Wednesday.

Visitors to campus for the announcement were advised to stay inside.

Studenc said WCU will use the incident on Wednesday to learn how it can better respond to a crisis on campus.

An additional 384 people signed up for the CAT Tracker alert system after the lockdown started, he said.

“We take this stuff pretty seriously,” Studenc said. “You have to.”
CHAPEL HILL—In the wake of an NCAA investigation and amid the hiring of a new football coach, some University of North Carolina faculty members are urging the university's leadership to assess the role of athletics in campus life.

"We want to make sure that the academic integrity is protected," UNC history professor Jay Smith said Wednesday during a telephone interview. "We want to see what we can do to reduce the walls of separation that leave athletics on one side and academics on the other and that segregates students and takes student-athletes away from the rest of the campus."

Smith and four other members of the UNC faculty recently wrote an open letter to the UNC Board of Trustees that expressed concern about the role of athletics at UNC. The faculty members released the letter on Friday, the day that UNC introduced Larry Fedora as its new head football coach. The university agreed to a seven-year contract with Fedora that will pay him $1.73 million annually.

In the letter that Smith and other faculty members wrote, they asked the university's trustees to address five questions. The first of those was this: "How do the hiring of a new head football coach and the associated contract provisions advance the missions of UNC?"

The letter also asked the trustees to address how the university's academic integrity could be protected "in the competition to move ever higher in football polls." The letter also took aim at the commercialization of college sports, the anticipated fallout from the NCAA investigation into academic fraud and impermissible benefits within the UNC football program and the "increasing segregation" of football and basketball players from the rest of campus life.

Smith said the decision to release the letter as Fedora was introduced on campus didn't come by accident.

"It was something of a spur of the moment decision to draft the letter and circulate it at the press conference," he said. "It was the hiring of the coach that sparked the decision."
Smith said he and his four colleagues who came together to write the letter shared a concern that UNC planned to "resume business as usual (and) assume that the major issues have all been solved just because we changed the coach."

"And we want to make sure that we don't lose this opportunity to pause and reflect on the state of the institution and what the place of athletics should be in the institution," Smith said.

Smith said some members of the faculty are working with university leadership to organize open forums for the campus community to come together and discuss these concerns.

"We're hoping that this committee in the next month or so comes out with a more systematic statement of what we'd like to see done," Smith said.
University of Vermont fraternity accused of asking members who they would like to rape

By Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. — A University of Vermont fraternity has been suspended while school officials, national organization leaders and police investigate allegations that a survey was circulated among members asking them who they would like to rape.

Members of the Sigma Phi Epsilon chapter would not discuss the allegations Wednesday.

A student reported the questionnaire to school officials over the weekend, school officials said, leading both the university and the national Sigma Phi Epsilon organization to suspend the chapter temporarily. The school is investigating how widely the survey was circulated, and the campus police department is trying to determine if any crimes have been committed.

The survey question was “incredibly offensive and inappropriate,” said Annie Stevens, the university’s associate vice president for student and campus life.

University officials contacted the national fraternity, which said Wednesday that it has instructed the chapter to cease all operation, pending further investigation.

“Sigma Phi Epsilon and its leadership programs are built on the concept of respect for both self and others. Any behavior that demeans women is not tolerated,” it said. A national representative arrived in Burlington on Tuesday and was interviewing chapter members as part of an internal investigation, said Brian Warren, executive director.

Sigma Phi Epsilon has over 15,000 undergraduates in 240 chapters, making it one of the largest fraternities in the country. Its mission is “building balanced men” by having members embrace the principles of virtue, diligence, brotherly love and committing to the practice of sound mind and sound body, according to the fraternity’s website.

A Burlington feminist organization named FED UP Vermont and other groups posted an online petition seeking to shut down the fraternity chapter.
By Wednesday afternoon, it had more than 1,500 signatures. Organizers planned a news conference to speak out against “rape culture and sexism” Thursday afternoon on the steps of the university library.

“An institution that discusses who it wants to rape has no place at UVM or in the Burlington community,” the group said.
Under settlement with family, Va. Tech must notify parents of suicidal students

By Daniel de Vise

One November day in 2007, an e-mail arrived at the Virginia Tech health center warning that a 21-year-old senior named Daniel Kim might be suicidal.

Within weeks, Kim was dead. And only then did his parents learn of the e-mail.

Four years later, the university has reached a legal settlement with the Kim family that requires school officials to notify parents or guardians when a student is suicidal. The agreement, signed by a Fairfax County judge last month, was disseminated by the Kim family last week.

Colleges don’t routinely call home at the first sign that a student is in trouble. It’s one of the ways college differs from high school: College officials view students as adults, capable of self-governance and entitled to a measure of privacy.

It’s a hard stance for some parents to accept, particularly when a child’s welfare might be at stake.

“No parent should be kept in the dark when their child is thinking of killing himself,” said William Kim, Daniel’s father, who owns a convenience store in the Palisades section of Washington. The family lives in Reston and Daniel attended South Lakes High School.

The agreement between Virginia Tech and the Kims essentially requires the immediate notification of parents of “potentially suicidal” students, unless school officials have good reason to keep quiet.

Kim says his goal was to get that mandate in writing. Few colleges have policies that explicitly require someone to contact the parents of a suicidal student, according to experts on student affairs and collegiate law.

“It wouldn’t be something you’d find in a student handbook,” said Ada Meloy, general counsel of the American Council on Education, an association representing college presidents.
Daniel Kim appeared on the radar of Virginia Tech health officials on Nov. 5, 2007, when a friend e-mailed that Kim was “acting very suicidal recently,” had purchased “a $200 pistol” and was “claiming he’ll go through with it.”

The e-mail triggered a review by Virginia Tech’s Threat Assessment Team and a visit to Kim’s off-campus apartment by the Blacksburg police, a procedure known in counseling parlance as a “wellness check.”

Kim told officers he did not know the person who had sent the e-mail (the sender was, in fact, a friend at another university). He told police he was fine, according to Edward Spencer, vice president for student affairs at Virginia Tech.

As an final, precautionary step, “we went to check whether Daniel had purchased a weapon,” Spencer said. “He had not.”

Three weeks later, authorities said, Kim did purchase a gun. Then he drove his car to a Target parking lot in nearby Christiansburg and shot himself in the head.

Kim’s parents couldn’t understand why university investigators didn’t call them. They were his family, the ones who paid his tuition, the keepers of his permanent address.

“They said it never even came to their mind that they had to let me know,” William Kim said. “They just never thought about it.”

Virginia law requires public universities to notify parents when a health official determines a student might commit “serious physical harm” to anyone, language added after the 2007 mass shooting at Virginia Tech by student Seung Hui Cho. Cho killed 32 people on the campus before turning the gun on himself.

But the law doesn’t specifically mention suicide. And it didn’t apply to Kim, because no one at the university had diagnosed him as suicidal. It’s debatable, in fact, whether the new school policy would have applied to him.

“If we get to the point where we determine that a person is, in fact, suicidal, that it’s a danger to themselves, then we notify the parents,” Spencer said. “In Daniel Kim’s case, he was not determined to be suicidal.”

Potential suicides on campus can be complex narratives, fraught with ambiguity. Many more students threaten suicide than attempt it. Suicidal students might refuse aid, might even deny their own suicidal thoughts. Parents can be a help, or a hindrance.
Roughly half of all college students experience “at least one fleeting thought” of suicide, said Gwendolyn Jordan Dungy, executive director of the industry association Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Only about 1 percent of students attempt suicide, she said, and the rate of actual suicide is less than one-tenth of that.

Naturally, when a student is suicidal, parents want to be the first to know. But colleges tend to view the student, not the parent, as their primary contact, administrators said.

“Once the kid turns 18, they are legally adults,” said Greg Eells, director of counseling and psychological services at Cornell University. “You can’t assume a college is going to treat them the same way a high school treats a minor.”

Cornell administrators opened up to parents of suicidal students several years ago with a rule change that allowed them more freedom to contact the family without a student’s permission. Other schools have followed suit.

Federal privacy laws generally forbid such contact without the student’s consent but make an exception where a child’s welfare is concerned. In the past, some universities misunderstood the rules and balked at notifying parents about potentially suicidal students. That changed after the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre, which spawned a national discussion of student privacy. Higher education leaders say the Kim settlement bespeaks a broader trend of colleges becoming more assertive in contacting parents of potentially suicidal students.

“The general direction nationally after Virginia Tech has been toward more parental notification,” said Gary Pavela, a University of Maryland scholar who studies suicide law.

Suicide-prevention experts mostly applaud the way colleges handle suicidal students.

“The fact of the matter is that there are fewer suicides on college campuses, many fewer, than there are in the general population,” said Morton Silverman, senior adviser to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center in Waltham, Mass.

Virginia Tech has registered between zero and four suicides annually in recent years, Spencer said, about average for a school of 30,000 students. Total student deaths have ranged from three to 16, with the exception of 2007, the year of the shootings.
Daniel Kim’s parents see a link between that tragedy and their own son’s death eight months later.

Asian Americans number only 5,000 in Montgomery County, Va., where Virginia Tech is located, according to Census data. Kim, raised in the Washington suburbs, might have felt out of place from the start.

After the Virginia Tech shootings, Kim became painfully aware of his identity as a Korean American. He took to wearing sunglasses and a hat. He told his parents he was taunted and punched by xenophobic students, and expressed concern that he looked like Cho, also a Korean American student from Northern Virginia.

“There were a lot of attacks on Korean students after the shooting,” William Kim said. “I think my son was one of the students under attack, and it probably messed up his head.”
“My gut feeling is lives are in danger,” said Dr. Peter J. Papadakos, of the University of Rochester Medical Center.

As Doctors Use More Devices, Potential for Distraction Grows

By MATT RICHTEL

Hospitals and doctors’ offices, hoping to curb medical error, have invested heavily to put computers, smartphones and other devices into the hands of medical staff for instant access to patient data, drug information and case studies.

But like many cures, this solution has come with an unintended side effect: doctors and nurses can be focused on the screen and not the patient, even during moments of critical care. And they are not always doing work; examples include a neurosurgeon making personal calls during an operation, a nurse checking airfares during surgery and a poll showing that half of technicians running bypass machines had admitted texting during a procedure.

This phenomenon has set off an intensifying discussion at hospitals and medical schools about a problem perhaps best described as “distracted doctoring.” In response, some hospitals have begun limiting the use of devices in critical settings, while schools have started reminding medical
students to focus on patients instead of gadgets, even as the students are being given more devices.

“You walk around the hospital, and what you see is not funny,” said Dr. Peter J. Papadakos, an anesthesiologist and director of critical care at the University of Rochester Medical Center in upstate New York, who added that he had seen nurses, doctors and other staff members glued to their phones, computers and iPads.

“You justify carrying devices around the hospital to do medical records,” he said. “But you can surf the Internet or do Facebook, and sometimes, for whatever reason, Facebook is more tempting.”

“My gut feeling is lives are in danger,” said Dr. Papadakos, who recently published an article on “electronic distraction” in Anesthesiology News, a journal. “We’re not educating people about the problem, and it’s getting worse.”

Research on the subject is beginning to emerge. A peer-reviewed survey of 439 medical technicians published this year in Perfusion, a journal about cardio-pulmonary bypass surgery, found that 55 percent of technicians who monitor bypass machines acknowledged to researchers that they had talked on cellphones during heart surgery. Half said they had texted while in surgery.

About 40 percent said they believed talking on the phone during surgery to be “always an unsafe practice.” About half said the same about texting. The study’s authors concluded, “Such distractions have the potential to be disastrous.”

Doctors and medical professionals have always faced interruptions from beepers and phones, and multitasking is simply a fact of life for many medical jobs. What has changed, doctors say, especially younger ones, is that they face increasing pressure to interact with their devices.

The pressure stems from a mantra of modern medicine that patient care must be “data driven,” and informed by the latest, instantly accessible information. Annual investment in gadgets and other technology by hospitals and doctors has soared into the billions of dollars.

By many accounts, the technology has helped reduce medical error by, for example, providing instant access to patient data or prescription details.
Dr. Peter W. Carmel, president of the American Medical Association, a physicians group, said technology “offers great potential in health care,” but he added that doctors’ first priority should be with the patient.

Indeed, doctors and nurses face growing pressures to listen carefully to patients, provide customer service and show empathy as they look for subtle cues that might explain an illness.

“The computer has become a good place to get a result, communicate with other people,” said Abraham Verghese, a doctor and professor at the Stanford University Medical Center and a best-selling medical writer. “In the interest of preventing medical error, it’s a good friend.”

At the same time, he said, the wealth of data on the screen — what he frequently refers to as the “iPatient” — gets all the attention.

“The iPatient is getting wonderful care across America,” Dr. Verghese said. “The real patient wonders, ‘Where is everybody?’”

It is hard to know the precise impact that distracted doctoring has on patient care, because it is hard to measure. But at least one example puts the risks in sharp relief.

Scott J. Eldredge, a medical malpractice lawyer in Denver, recently represented a patient who was left partly paralyzed after surgery. The neurosurgeon was distracted during the operation, using a wireless headset to talk on his cellphone, Mr. Eldredge said.

“He was making personal calls,” Mr. Eldredge said, at least 10 of them to family and business associates, according to phone records. His client’s case was settled before a lawsuit was filed so there are no court records, like the name of the patient, doctor or hospital involved. Mr. Eldredge, citing the agreement, declined to provide further details.

Others describe multitasking as relatively commonplace.

“I’ve seen texting among people I’m supervising in the O.R.,” said Dr. Stephen Luczycki, an anesthesiologist and medical director in one of the surgical intensive care units at Yale-New Haven Hospital. He said he had also seen young anesthesiologists using the operating room computer during surgery.

“It is not, unfortunately, uncommon to see them doing any number of things with that computer beyond patient care,” Dr. Luczycki said, including checking e-mail and studying or entering logs on a separate case. He said that when he was in training, he was admonished to not even study a
textbook in surgery, so he could focus on the rhythm and subtleties of the procedures.

When he uses computers in the intensive care unit, he regularly sees what his colleagues were doing before him.

“Amazon, Gmail, I’ve seen all sorts of shopping, I’ve seen eBay,” he said. “You name it, I’ve seen it.”

Dr. Luczycki is also a huge fan of technology’s positive impact on medicine. So, too, is Dio Sumagaysay, administrative director of 24 operating rooms at Oregon Health and Science University hospitals, even though he has heard about or witnessed instances of people using devices during critical moments.

In early 2010, he heard several complaints that doctors or nurses were using their phones to check or send e-mails even though they were part of a team intubating a patient before surgery.

Mr. Sumagaysay established a policy to make operating rooms “quiet zones,” banning any activity that was not focused on patient care. He later had to reprimand a nurse he saw checking airline prices using an operating room computer during a spinal operation.

Medical professionals say young doctors can be particularly susceptible to distraction because they have grown up being constantly connected.

At Stanford Medical School, for example, all students now get iPads, which they use to read medical texts and carry with them in hospitals but are also admonished not let get in the way of their work.

“Devices have a great capacity to reduce risk,” Dr. Charles G. Prober, senior associate dean for medical education at the school, said. “But the last thing we want to see, and what is happening in some cases now, is the computer coming between the patient and his doctor.”
Like Ivies, Berkeley Adds Aid to Draw Middle-Class Students

By JENNIFER MEDINA

LOS ANGELES — The University of California, Berkeley, announced Wednesday that it would offer far more financial aid to middle-class students starting next fall, with families earning up to $140,000 a year expected to contribute no more than 15 percent of their annual income, in what experts described as the most significant such move by a public institution.

As state budget cuts have led to rising tuition and fees at the University of California and other prestigious campuses across the nation, the middle class has increasingly been squeezed out of what was long seen as higher education’s best balance between quality and affordability.

At Berkeley, officials said, the number of low-income and wealthy students has grown over the last several years, while the number from middle-class families has remained flat. That has raised concerns that some of the state’s best and brightest are choosing private schools whose generous financial aid
can erase differentials in sticker price or not enrolling at all. The cost of a year at Berkeley has risen sharply to $32,000.

“We see early signs that middle-income families who cannot access existing assistance programs are straining to meet college costs,” said the Berkeley chancellor, Robert J. Birgeneau. “As a public institution we feel strongly that we need to sustain and expand access across the socioeconomic spectrum.”

While several elite private universities — including the Ivy League triumvirate of Harvard, Princeton and Yale — offer similar programs for families with incomes up to $200,000, experts said that Berkeley was the first public university to do so. For the most part, public colleges have focused on merit scholarships to lure top students and aid for the poorest families to ensure access, but many now worry that approach has left out a wide group of families.

“Berkeley has really just changed the game,” said Terry W. Hartle, senior vice president of the American Council on Education, which represents the nation’s large research universities. “Other schools will follow if they can, but the problem is that most universities don’t have the resources to match it. On the other hand, given how competitive colleges are with each other, they are certainly going to try.”

At the University of Washington, where tuition, room and board amount to about $24,000, officials said they were trying to be creative with aid because they know that earnings are not increasing as fast as tuition amid cuts in education financing by the state.

“We’re looking at our families and seeing that there is more financial need, not as many options in terms of a family’s ability to borrow, and trying to find a way to make it work,” said Kay Lewis, assistant vice president for student life at the University of Washington. “It really is an issue of access and trying to ensure that access for middle- and low-income students is something we are constantly thinking about.”

Berkeley’s definition of middle-class in creating its new financial aid program is a family with income between $80,000 and $140,000 a year. On top of the parental contribution of 15 percent of income, students would also have to pay about $8,000 per year — generally a combination of loans, work-study and private scholarships. At the bottom end of the spectrum, that would make for a total payment of $20,000, a 37.5 percent discount off the $32,000 total of tuition, room and board for California residents. On the upper end, it would be about $29,000, or a 10 percent discount.
(Out-of-state students, who make up 30 percent of Berkeley’s freshman class this year, will get comparable discounts on the first $32,000 of tuition and fees, but still have to pay an additional $23,000.)

The announcement came a day after Gov. Jerry Brown of California announced a $2.2 billion budget shortfall, and another severe round of cuts to state colleges and universities. A report by the College Board published this year showed that California’s public universities had the nation’s largest jump for in-state tuition in 2011-12.

Although there are only a few anecdotal reports of middle-class students actually dropping out because of rising college costs, the issue has become a rallying cry of Occupy protesters around the country. Berkeley officials, like their counterparts elsewhere, are increasingly worried that some of the state’s brightest students, who in previous generations would have chosen their campus because it was a bargain, are now being lured by private universities with big endowments to underwrite aid.

Indeed, in New Jersey, Seton Hall University announced a new plan this fall to give early applicants with top academic credentials a discount of up to two-thirds — making the cost comparable to that of Rutgers University, the elite public institution a few highway exits away.

Mark Kantrowitz, who tracks school aid programs on his Web site, FinAid.org, said, “When tuition is going up, that can have a chilling effect, but something like this has an emotional effect that works as a recruiting tool.” He added, “It sends the message that we know everybody struggles to pay for college.”

Berkeley officials said the program was expected to cost $12 million a year and would be paid for from out-of-state and international student tuition, as well as private donations. Officials said they had recently received an $8 million donation for financial aid and expect to raise more.

Fewer than 2,000 students from families with incomes over $80,000 received financial aid this year, officials said. They estimated that under the new policy, an additional 4,000 middle-class students would receive grants ranging from $3,600 to $16,000 next year. Officials said that the program was devised so that they could increase aid — most likely reducing the 15 percent contribution — if they raised more money, but acknowledged that they could also end up changing in the other direction if money fell short.
Editorial: Three-year bachelor's degree has merits
Updated 12h 17m ago
Thursday Dec. 15, 2011

With college costs and student loan debt continuing to soar in the United States, here's an idea from our neighbor to the north: Allow students to get a bachelor's degree in three years, the way many Canadians do, instead of four.

The three-year bachelor's degree has been a staple of the Canadian university system for decades — a century, in some cases. (Three-year degrees are common in Europe, too.) The coursework is typically the same; there are just fewer credit hours required for graduation, and sometimes there is a special-project requirement at the end. Students get through college faster — and at 75% of the price.

At Canada's University of Western Ontario, which has 21,000 full-time undergraduates as well as top-tier professional schools, close to 10% of undergraduates get three-year degrees, called "bachelor's degrees," rather than four-year "honors bachelor's" degrees. And, yes, Canada also has community colleges.

The three-year degrees aren't for everyone. They don't meet requirements for many graduate programs, for instance. And in a tough jobs environment, some students might find that less education leaves them less competitive than their peers.

But for students who don't plan to go on to graduate school, or who are going into professions that don't require a four-year bachelor's degree, or who can't afford a fourth year, this express lane could be ideal.

What's more, students who choose the three-year path can always upgrade to four years if they want to. They simply talk to their advisers and stick around for a fourth year, making up the credit-hours they haven't yet taken.

Some U.S. schools have been experimenting with three-year programs — either the Canadian model or, alternatively, one that condenses the full four
years' worth of course work into three years by using summer classes, online courses and Advanced Placement credits from high school.

In May, Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio got state Board of Regents approval for a three-year bachelor of arts in communications disorders with reduced credits. In April, Washington's governor signed a law establishing an accelerated three-year degree.

The California, Minnesota and Ohio university systems are also considering implementing three-year degrees, and a handful of private colleges already offer or are set to offer them, including Bates College in Maine and Lake Forest College in Illinois.

Students wedded to the traditional "college experience" won't be attracted to these experiments. But for financially strapped parents and students who don't want to emerge buried in mountains of debt, the three-year degree has real appeal.

For its benefits to be realized, however, this option has to be comparatively attractive and well-publicized — something that for the time being it is not, at least on this side of the border.

This is the sixth in an occasional series of editorials on lessons the USA can learn from abroad. To view previous editorials, go to ideasfromafar.usatoday.com.