New Warning System to Display Digital Alerts in Classrooms

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A new Emergency Warning System is being rolled out in UA classrooms to help police alert campus in the event of a crisis situation.

The system, now in place in 116 campus classrooms, includes two components: electronic message boards for displaying campus alerts, and blue emergency phones that allow for direct communication with the UA Police Department with the push of a single button.

The message boards, which normally display the date and time, are linked to the University's UAlert messaging system, which sends text message and email alerts to UA employees and students when there is unusual activity on campus.

In the event of a serious emergency, UAlert messages will appear on the electronic message boards in classrooms in addition to being sent via text and email.

"UAlert is the fastest and most effective way to get information out," said UA Police Chief Brian Seastone. "The message boards are an extension of UAlert that enhances our ability to get timely messages out to the community."

UAlert is used to communicate information about a variety of events, ranging from power outages to suspicious or threatening activity on campus. Not all UAlert messages will be displayed on the classroom message boards, only those that UAPD deems to be "immediate, ongoing campus threats," Seastone said.

The system provides one more way for police to communicate with students and employees, particularly those who may not have access to their phones or email during class, Seastone said.

In addition, the system's blue push-button intercom phones give classroom instructors a way to connect with UAPD if they need more information or require assistance during a crisis.

The Emergency Warning System, or EWS, is a collaborative effort among UAPD, University Information Technology Services, the Campus Emergency Response Team, Facilities Management and Risk Management.

It is being implemented as part of the UITS Campus Technology Upgrade Program, which includes a number of initiatives for upgrading campus classrooms with new technologies.
The warning system was piloted in 18 classrooms last year and has been well-received so far, said Paul Radek, program leader for the Classroom Technology Upgrade Program. In addition to the 116 classroom boards, 34 boards have been installed in the Arizona-Sonora Residence Hall. There are plans to implement the system in more classrooms and residence halls in the future, Radek said.

Instructors teaching in classrooms that have been outfitted with the system will have system instructions available. Instructors are asked to stop teaching if there is an alert and read the message to their students, Radek said.

All incoming UA students are automatically signed up for UAlert. Employees are encouraged to sign up here. More than 50,000 people currently are subscribed, Seastone said.


Links: