# CASE STUDY

# AMERICA'S SAFE CAMPUS: HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY
## Preparing for a Worst Case Scenario

For the past four years, High Point University has been named the Best Regional College in the South. It has also secured the top spot for being the most innovative regional college in the South, according to the 2016 edition of "America's Best Colleges" by U.S. News and World Report.

Located in the Piedmont Triad of North Carolina, HPU has become a popular destination among those seeking a higher education. It has seen remarkable growth within the past ten years and approximately 4,500 undergraduate students have registered to attend this year.

According to HPU's website, two-thirds of the entering freshmen typically come from states other than North Carolina; one-third come from more than 500 miles away.

HPU is a residential campus by design, with 19 residence halls in total. All students are required to reside on campus until they have reached senior status, un-less they commute from their parent's permanent address. As a result, students are on campus overnight and on weekends. With that in mind, campus security becomes a main focus. "There are different security concerns based upon our type of campus, especially considering how residential it is," said Environmental Health Safety & Preparedness Manager Gus Porter. "Unlike a commuter campus, where the majority of the campus population leaves, we have a mini-city to contend with."

Although there has never been a major crisis at HPU, security must still be prepared to respond should an incident take place. To contend with this matter, the staff began using Omnilert as part of their emergency notification. When selecting a notification provider, Porter said it was important to consider the unique needs of the campus. Incidents can happen at any time, with little or no notice, so there had to be ease and simplicity when operating the notification system to quickly communicate with the campus community. "We must also be able to provide the notification through a number of redundant communication channels," Porter said, adding that speakers are currently being added to each of their campus buildings in order to provide another level of redundant communication. "All of our new buildings are now being constructed with this technology which ties into Omnilert seamlessly."

HPU began using Omnilert in early 2015. The first step was to create a crisis communications team, which consists of a dozen dispatchers and the communications department that have all been trained on how to use the solution. Together, they came up with different scenarios that could occur on or off the campus. "Lock down" and "all clear" messages are also built into each one.

"The Scenarios we have in place are geared towards the situations that we hope we never have on campus," Porter said. "We have the active shooter and the tornado warning Scenarios that require very little ef-

fort in broadcasting that message. Once we know we have an issue, it's nice to be able to click one button and know that our initial notification is taken care of." Messages and endpoints were also created so the right messages go the right people when it matters the most. Students and staff are part of the intial contact. Members of the Highpoint Emergency Management Team, the Guilford County Emergency Management Team, and two local schools are external partners that are currently enrolled in HPU's notification system. Several emergency managers from various colleges in the area are also enrolled so that they are aware of any critical incident on campus and are able to volunteer their assistance if needed. To simplify the notification process, a two-tiered system was created. A full scale mass notification that requires immediate action is issued under Panther Alert. There is also the Panther Advisory, which is broadcast as a text and email only. This message notifies the campus of a potential situation that they should be aware of, but where immediate action is not required. To stay current, dispatchers and other involved staff hold training sessions on a regular basis. At the beginning of each semester, Porter said, a full campus-wide drill is held. Table top discussions also take place while dispatchers are presented with different Scenarios on a routine basis. Email and text notifications are also tested regularly.

"Our emergency management team is integral in reviewing the messages we have in the system. As part of our critical communications team, we determine and build Scenarios together and appropriate templates that we are all comfortable using. Through this process, we all know the policy and procedures," Porter said.

A lot of work has gone into the commitment to use a centralized interface at HPU and there are a lot of good feelings towards Omnilert, Porter said. The ease of the system has made messaging very simple, especially in situations when the people sending the message are under significant stress. Fortunately, HPU has never had to activate a critical Scenario. The closest they came was just this past Spring, when the weather had taken a turn for the worst.

"We were in a tornado watch so we sent out a text and email to the campus," Porter said. "It was looking bad and we thought we might be elevated to a tornado warning but fortunately it cleared up. However, we were prepared and ready."
"We have speakers, we have campus phones, and we have campus computers that push notifications out. When we have a critical incident, the dispatcher is extremely busy and could potentially be overwhelmed if there is a complex system that they then have to navigate," Porter said. "Every moment that a member of campus is unaware of an incident, bad things are happening. The ease with which a Scenario can be launched and a message can be sent is the most valuable piece of a mass notification system. I feel that Omnilert is a very reliable system that integrates well with a lot of different endpoints that we have on campus."

Of course, no campus ever wants to expect the worst will happen to them. But Porter is confident that the right steps have been taken when it comes to being prepared.

**About Omnilert**
At Omnilert, we believe no one should ever die or get seriously injured due to lack of timely and accurate information. Our suite of emergency notification and critical communication solutions empowers organizations to keep their people informed and their operations viable during the most challenging times. We transform the way those responsible communicate with their people to rapidly disseminate critical information, automate emergency communications, accelerate emergency response, ensure business continuity, and recover quickly from a crisis. Our people and technology, together, help ensure successful outcomes for our customers.

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