

NATIONAL CAMPUS NEWS

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Criminals often target college students

by Kim McCoy
Knight Ridder Newspapers

Bobby Rush thought he had done everything right. While visiting his girlfriend, the Florida State University student locked the doors of his Nissan Pathfinder and parked in a lit parking lot at her apartment complex.

But his vehicle, along with four others parked at High Park Village, were reportedly burglarized last month.

"I just blew up," Rush said. "I was so mad. All the stuff I had in my car came out of my own pocket."

About \$1,200 worth of stereo equipment was taken, he said. The coffee table, golf clubs and clothes in his vehicle weren't touched.

"It's a significant problem," said Mark Meadows, an investigator for Tallahassee Police Department's burglary unit. "It's significant that so many happen to a certain group of our citizens, which is college students."

Although auto burglaries reported in the city dropped from 1,900 in 2000 to 1,600 in 2001, the problem is still considered prevalent, Meadows said.

Students tend to be the victims of auto burglaries simply because they make up a major portion of the city's apartment dwellers, Meadows said.

It's much easier for a criminal to take something from a car parked amidst hundreds of other ones than it is to take something from a car parked in a homeowner's driveway.

"Someone's standing next to car (in an apartment complex), no one knows who the car belongs to," Meadows said.

Students have been victims of auto burglary in the parking lots of local nightclubs as well. Women who don't want to take their purses into the clubs often leave them underneath car seats or place them in the trunk of the car once they pull into the club's parking lot, Meadows said.

"Sometimes these guys are watching for that," he said. "You see a car with four or five girls get out of the car, there's a purse in the car."

But burglars will typically hit any large parking lot, such as a movie

theater or mall. They usually work at night under the cover of darkness and tend to go for stereo equipment, laptops, cell phones and radar detectors, Meadows said.

On-campus auto burglary does happen, but it's not a major problem, according to police officials at Florida A&M and Florida State universities.

FSU is entering the second year of an initiative to curb auto theft. The school was awarded a Florida Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Authority grant from the Attorney General's Office. The department is using this year's grant of \$59,637 to pay students to patrol campus parking lots and report of suspicious incidents to police, said Lt. Linda Riley.

The program is credited with helping auto thefts drop from 45 in 2000 to 26 in 2001, Riley said. It also helped auto burglaries drop from 10 in 2000 to seven in 2001.

"Their presence _ being out and about in golf carts _ also reduced the number of break-ins," Riley said.

The FAMU campus recently noticed an increase in thefts from vehicles on campus, said Michael Wallace, assistant police chief of the FAMU Police Department. There were 21 auto burglaries reported in 2000 and 43 in 2001. But vehicle thefts decreased from 22 in 2000 to 10 in 2001.

To help curb crime, the campus became a member of Big Bend Crime Stoppers last school year, Wallace. The program offers a cash reward to those who provide information about a crime that leads to an arrest or conviction, he said.

High Park Village, where Rush's vehicle was burglarized, has tried to form a student Crime Watch, but could never get enough participation, Manager Lisa Carter said. The complex is planning to add more lighting and to cut shrubbery, she said.

And, what are your chances of seeing that CD player again? Retrieving property stolen from a car can be a challenge for police, Meadows said.

"A lot of times people have serial numbers, so we're able to track it that way," he said. "But all too often items that are stolen are kept for personal use or sold on street or just not recovered."



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There's,
like,
a lot to
'like'

Knight Ridder Tribune News Service

Here's the problem: Temple University associate English professor Muffy E.A. Siegel has studied the issue, and says teenagers' use of "like" is not always so bad.

Siegel published a study of the word in the Journal of Semantics and concluded that "like" - unlike sentence-fillers "you know," or the ever-popular "uh" and "um" - imparts particular meaning to a sentence. "Like," in fact, can change a sentence in several ways, according to Siegel's research, and that makes it worthy of study and at least a modicum of respect.

That may not convince many who have crusaded against the teen-agers' abuse of the word since it was popularized in the mid-1980s by Southern California "valley girls." According to Siegel's paper, scholars expected the "non-standard" uses of "like" to disappear as quickly as they had materialized; however, not only has the word persisted, but it has spread like an epidemic throughout the adolescent female population.

Boys use it less, and researchers don't know why. Some theories suggest it's because young women are generally not as secure in their assertions. Siegel's theory: "like" happens when the mouth gets ahead of the brain.

For some of her research, Siegel relied heavily on her teen-age daughter. Our own completely non-scientific studies show that the average teen-age girl employs the word in such prodigious quantities and staccato fashion that it is nearly impossible to keep an accurate count. One mild example, overheard during a 14-year-old's telephone conversation:

Girl: "It's like, OK, did you, like, see her at school ... like, you won't believe this ... I think I'm going to just, like, read a magazine, and do something, like, unbrain-ish."

Siegel and others have identified the many guises of "like." At its most uninspiring, it's a synonym for "said." It could also be a way to warn of an exaggeration ("It's, like, a million degrees out there"); or inject some caution into a sentence when a speaker is not absolutely certain of its accuracy ("She has, like, three guinea pigs.") And it can be used for emphasis ("That is so, like, last week.")

"What parents can feel good about," Siegel said, "is it's not a useless dumb word that kids are using in informal speech."

For the anti-"like" forces among us, she says, there is a glimmer of hope. As with any expression that becomes part of the teen lexicon, the word may simply fade with time or overuse.

But it is not likely.

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