The last six months have been indeed worrisome, with a spate of active shooter/mass casualty incidents. Aurora, Colorado; Newtown, Connecticut; two at Houston’s Lone Star College; Christiansburg, VA; and just yesterday, the horrific bombing at the Boston Marathon remind us that the world can be an unpredictable and dangerous place. These events are part of an escalating trend within the past 10 years throughout the county of more brazen and bloody attacks on innocent citizens. Whether the attacks are a result of terrorism, mental issues, personal animosities, or the desire to overcome real or perceived injustices, the results are the same: death or disfigurement for some and wide-spread uncertainty about our personal safety.

Within this context of uncertainty and even fear, members of the NOVA Community want to know their police department is exercising due diligence in monitoring threats and that its officers possess the training and equipment to respond effectively to any contingency.

The Way Ahead

The good news is, at present, there are no indicators of likely terrorist or malevolent activities on our campuses. As you will see below, we have great intelligence and see no immediate threat on the horizon.

While NOVA Police are effectively manned, trained and equipped to maintain safety and security on our campuses, we cannot do it alone. We rely upon the eyes and ears of all of you.

You can help us in the following ways:

- Identify concerning behaviors from students, staff and faculty. Even if a law hasn’t been violated, you should still report concerning behavior. A recent FBI study revealed that in more than 30% of active shooter cases, concerning behavior was observed by family, faculty, or friends. Be proactive! Look critically at people’s behaviors and make referrals to the Care Teams. If you think an urgent response is necessary, call the police. We would rather check scores of false alarms than miss a real threat.
- Remain aware of your environment. Look inside trash cans, shrubs, and other hiding areas as you walk on campus to ensure there are no hidden devices. If you see something suspicious, call the police immediately. Examples of behaviors you should report to the police include: unattended vehicles parked for a long time, especially near entrances to campus buildings or places where people congregate; people photographing campus buildings; unattended backpacks; and questions about senior campus officials, the campus police, security cameras, maintenance personnel and procedures, and locking procedures.
- Attend training on active shooter, campus security, etc. offered by the NOVA Police. Check out our training on the NOVA Police Blog at http://blogs.nvcc.edu/police/.
- Review the monthly Public Safety Newsletter for information that can keep you safe.
The NOVA Police and College Security

NOVA has ample reason to have the utmost confidence in its police department. We are actively monitoring local, regional, state and national intelligence and we are well trained and well equipped. The following paragraphs describe some of these areas:

Awareness:

Intelligence. NOVA police officers receive daily-weekly intelligence documents from local jurisdictions, such as Alexandria City Police, Fairfax County, and the Loudoun Sheriff’s Officer. We receive regional multi-jurisdictional information from the National Capital Region, and state-wide information from the Virginia State Police Fusion Center. For instance, in the last 24 hours since the bombing in Boston, we have received seven intelligence reports/updates from the Fusion Center. We also receive regular updates from the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security. Of course, the best way to gather intelligence is to conduct active patrol. NOVA officers do this regularly, on foot, on bicycles, and in vehicles. We include significant incidents in our daily reports, which are distributed to the Command Staff (sergeants and above) for appropriate action.

Rapid Response. Having Intelligence is useless if you cannot deploy the right assets in a timely manner to deal with an issue of concern. Less than a year ago, the Department stood up its 24/7/365 Communications/Dispatch Center. Highly trained and state-certified dispatchers man state-of-the-art equipment, answering calls for service and dispatching officers to them. Additionally, NOVA’s Dispatch Center is tied in to the Dispatch Centers of all surrounding jurisdictions, so requesting assistance for large contingencies is a rapid and seamless operation. NOVA Community members should program the Dispatch telephone number (703-764-5000) into their cell phones. This will expedite a police response if you encounter something out of the ordinary or need police assistance for any matter.

Training:

Internal NOVA Training. NOVA Police train regularly and rigorously throughout the year. NOVA has certified Firearms, Active Shooter, gang, and Defensive Tactics/Use of Force instructors. Our instructors are highly regarded, and also train officers from more than 70 jurisdictions at several local police academies. Selected NOVA Police firearms and active shooter training curricula, for instance, are being used at several local police departments. NOVA instructors have been asked to evaluate active shooter training in Alexandria City, Mary Washington University, and Germanna Community College, to name a few. The entire police department conducted an all-hands active shooter training exercise in February and March. This training did more than simply evaluate our officers’ tactics; it also provided training on incident command responsibilities during a crisis. Finally, we were observed by several local jurisdictions which complimented our training and affirmed that our training will allow our officers to inter-operate with their responders.

Cross-Training. In responding to any large-scale event, NOVA will be on the scene first, but we will rely on mutual aid agreements with surrounding local jurisdictions for manpower and materiel support. In order to ensure such contingencies are handled efficiently and effectively, NOVA officers routinely train with fellow officers from local jurisdictions. We have cross-trained with officers from Prince William, Fairfax and Loudoun counties as well as Alexandria and Falls Church City departments.
Education. In addition to biennial training requirements to maintain their certifications, NOVA officers receive regular training in terrorist trends, operational practices, and response protocols. Within the last two months, 15 NOVA officers joined 300 officers from the National Capital Region for a three-day intensive FBI seminar on these issues. In addition to mastering the subject matter, NOVA officers were able to network and share ideas with their colleagues form larger departments.

Equipment:

Aware, knowledgeable and well-trained officers need the proper equipment to deal with the kinds of events in today’s news. We have such equipment, to include shields, breaching equipment, high-capacity handguns and long guns. As noted above, we train regularly with these weapons and are highly proficient.

Conclusion:

Your NOVA Police have all the tools and capabilities to serve you with effective policing on campus in these uncertain and dangerous times. We receive regular intelligence that provides situational awareness, we train regularly with fellow officers and first responders from other jurisdictions, and we have the equipment we need.

In partnership with the entire NOVA Community, we can continue to protect each other while maintaining the highest standards of safety and security on campus in support of the College’s educational mission.

NOVA POLICE
(703) 764-5000