

Information Sharing to Promote Campus Security

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Abstract

The Florida State University Police Department has implemented a system of dispensing police reports to university decision makers which provides greater security of the information transferred, provides tracking and accountability of the information and provides for greater efficiency. This began as a need to securely and efficiently disseminate information to aid in the university judicial process as well as promote crime prevention efforts. Now it has become a standard practice within the Police Records Section, offering increased accountability for sensitive law enforcements documents and enhanced customer service to our university colleagues.

Introduction of the Organization

The Florida State University was founded in 1851 when the General Assembly of the Florida Legislature enacted a bill establishing two seminaries of learning, one east of the Suwannee River and one to the west of the Suwannee River. In 1857, the Florida Institute, established in 1854 as a school for boys, began operating as the Seminary West of the Suwannee. In 1905 the campus served as women's college which came to be known as the Florida State College for Women. During the first years, over 225 women were enrolled each year. Currently, the Florida State University is comprised of 35,346 students. FSU has a dorm capacity of 4,842 students for undergraduate college housing. There are 12,830 faculty and staff. Florida State University consists of 9,938,544 square feet of buildings on 1,445.2 acres. The Florida State University Police Department proactively institutes security measures to protect persons and property.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

The FSU Police Department adheres to a community policing philosophy of law enforcement, therefore sharing information is vital for a community to prevent future crimes and respond appropriately to those who are accused of committing criminal activity or engage in deviant behavior. Fact-finding is conducted by trained law enforcement officers for crimes and incidents occurring on campus. Police records are released to the proper state and county judicial bodies for the prosecution of criminal acts. However, the same incident may undergo review by a university judicial process to include the applying sanctions to culpable parties. Such judicial systems exist within the university's office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR), as well as University Housing. Other university units such as Greek Life, Environmental Health and Safety,

Human Resources and the Dean of Students also hold a stake in the outcomes of certain incidents, as well as their future prevention. These departments can request police reports to learn the outcome of the police investigation. However, these divisions are not always notified that these incidents have occurred. Therefore a mechanism is needed to advise campus departments of these happenings, as well as deliver the necessary information to decision makers.

Although police a report could be delivered through the mail or by fax, there are a few obvious problems to this approach. Using a delivery system through mail or fax allows the possibility of the report getting lost. Similarly, a report may sit in a tray being overlooked or discarded. One of the greatest problems though is the vulnerability that a report could be read, copied or destroyed by an individual that the report was not intended. As more departments utilize student labor for a large portion of the clerical duties, the risk was unacceptable. Any sensitive information contained in the report would then be compromised. Clearly another method was needed.

Design

While the purpose was quite simple, delivering the right information to the right person, using the ideal method needed to meet certain requirements was not so simple. Information could only be viewed by specific individuals and kept secure from others. The report could not be altered in any way. The delivery had to be timely. There must be confirmation that it was received. A method of redacting certain material must exist to edit out information that cannot be disclosed to the public. It must be simplistic enough

to be easily utilized. It must provide an accountability mechanism for decision making as to what information should be disseminated to what person. It would have to utilize existing tools and personnel as no new resources were available for this new initiative.

To meet these requirements, a secured web based system was developed. Police reports were currently being written and stored electronically. A process was developed that captured these reports, manipulated the format and uploaded the file to a secure web site. Individuals could receive the report by entering this secure web site and opening these files.

Currently, all police reports are channeled to the head of the Investigations Section. This became a key component of consistency. One single individual is accountable to decipher which incidents effected the operations of the different areas of the university. Decision making thereby rested on this individual to determine what reports should be disseminated and to whom.

Personnel within the police records section review the notes for each case determining where the report is to be sent. These reports are then put into portable document format (pdf) using Adobe Acrobat. This was accomplished by *printing* a report to Acrobat Distiller, which created the pdf version of the report. This file of the report is redacted according to the appropriate Florida Statutes. Tools exist within Adobe Acrobat that enable the user to create black boxes to cover text. A victim's identity can be confidential, so their name is redacted by a black box. The text underneath these redactions can be viewed by the receiving departments, but when the document is printed

the redactions remain to cover this material. The Document Security feature of Adobe Acrobat is also utilized, adding password protection to the redactions. Only with the proper password can any further alterations be made. Redacted and secure files are then uploaded to the web site.

Records personnel add these reports in a similar fashion to adding an attachment to an email and selecting a recipient from an address book. A list of departments is displayed in which one is selected and then the file to upload is attached through a browse function.

For an individual to view a report, a user account must first be established which provides the rights to enter the secure web site. For this to occur, a person receives an invitation to create a user account for the Online Police Reports System. This invitation comes from the Chief of Police and describes proper use of the web site and the information it contains. A link is provided for a web page to gather information of the individual requesting access and establishes the account with the necessary username and password. A second hyperlink that is provided is to the actual web site where the username and password is used to gain access to reports. After logging on, reports are listed by the corresponding case number. By clicking on a case number, the report opens in pdf form. The web site is designed in such a way that critical data is collected from those accessing this secure site. The date and time is recorded as well as the username for each report opened. Even the IP address of the computer being used is captured. This provides necessary feedback to ascertain the effectiveness and usage of the web site. Also, if

security has been compromised, i.e. stolen username and password, evidence is gathered guiding to the perpetrator's location.

Implementation

Once previous practices were deemed inadequate, efforts were turned to the development of a new system. A web site based system was established for posting and retrieving documents. A directory was created on a web server that holds all the Adobe pdf files, which are the files that contain the police reports. An Access Database was used to store information on each report, such as a case number, the department name which is to view the report, the date it was uploaded and also stores a path that points to the uploaded pdf stored on the web server directory. A log-in form was created that validates information stored in a table within the database, checking the username and password to verify account rights and the departmental listing the user has rights to view. To keep information up-to-date for users, a script was written that only allows the most recent reports to be viewed (the previous 14 days).

Research was conducted upon the appropriate state statutes regarding law enforcement records and public disclosure exemptions. A critical component was the education of users regarding these statutory requirements. Certain police records must be handled differently than others. Users who retrieve police records must be informed on fundamental public records policy.

Potential users were identified who would clearly benefit from this information. In general, these were deans and directors, or their designees, of the essential departments. These users were sent an invitation to create user account along with necessary instructions.

Benefits

The primary purpose of the Online Police Reports System was to deliver information contained in police records to particular individuals across a secure medium. This was accomplished through the use of available technology. This also allowed for further information to be gathered to greater serve the FSU Community, as to what time of day individuals checked the web site looking for updates and how frequently particular users were accessing the site. When reports are requested they can be made available almost immediately for their review. Within moments the records sections can retrieve, redact and upload a document to be viewed on the secure web site.

Users are now held accountable with the information they are sent, as controls are in place to track account activity.

Often these same reports are requested by a number of other parties. Having these documents stored in an electronic format and already redacted for public release saves the police records staff time and also save them from an unnecessary workload of having to repeat the redaction process over again.