

Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart

Considering the recent events at Virginia Tech, no school can take security for granted. Many schools and universities were already taking proactive steps to ensure the physical security of their campuses. Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart in Houston, Texas, is already well ahead of the curve in terms of ensuring the safety of its staff and students as well as giving parents the peace of mind that comes from knowing that their children are in the safest campus possible. In fact many parents have selected Duchesne specifically because of its superior approach to security.



Established in 1960, Duchesne Academy offers a college-preparatory curriculum for girls from Pre K through 12th grade and is part of the Network of Sacred Heart Schools. The aim of a Sacred Heart education has always been the formation of women who have faith in God; who will be in love with learning all their lives; and who will work to make the world a more just place. The campus contains two main classroom buildings, a fine arts building and theatre, tennis courts, sports fields, and a chapel.

From the beginning, Duchesne Director of Facilities, John Bowles wanted to take proactive steps in ensuring the security of the campus. One of the most important focuses of the Duchesne security system is the careful monitoring of entrances to the campus as well as main entrances to the classroom buildings and administrative buildings. To that end Duchesne took great care in planning their implementation, especially in terms of camera placement. Each of the three entrances to the campus has at least one security camera. In addition there are 6 interior cameras focused on building entrances and 5 exterior cameras focused on high traffic areas within the campus. A 24 hour guard service monitors all cameras. The Facility Director, John Bowles and the Director of Finance and Operations also have access to live and recorded video using the school network. The mere presence of the security cameras acts as a strong deterrent.

The importance of camera placement in any installation cannot be emphasized enough. However, the selection of the recording devices and software is of equal importance. Duchesne selected digital video surveillance software from Houston based Video Insight because it delivered the required functionality at an affordable price. With the Video Insight Network Client, security guards, facilities and administrative personnel can view live and recorded video from anywhere on the school network. The server itself with the video recording history resides in a secured school server room.

Recently, Duchesne hired an independent consultant to perform a security risk assessment. A team of consultants from Secure Systems International and an internationally respected security consultant Thomas Norman from Protection Partners were asked to review the physical security provisions in order to help the academy achieve the best possible security measures for the budget available. As part of the review, they examined the video surveillance system in detail. The consultants found that Video Insight had designed a technology and application that was reliable and cost effective. According to Thomas Norman, "I was pleasantly surprised at the high quality and low cost of the equipment and the competence of the contacts we talked with at Video Insight." In his experience with other vendors, it is very difficult to get anyone on the telephone who understands the application of the equipment. Says Mr. Norman, "I believe that their focus on quality and competency will help Video Insight to grow rapidly."

Both John Bowles and the consultant recommend an expansion of the video surveillance system using Video Insight equipment and software. Bowles plans to add more cameras specifically to view the Duchesne parking lots. Duchesne continues to place the highest priority on safety and security for their staff and students. Fortunately, the school is substantially ahead of many other schools and universities.