Library unveils tough security system

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All of last semester and during interim, students did not have to fear being detained by the security system if they "forgot" to check out books or periodicals. While library desk workers continued to go through motions of desensitizing materials, many students (and presumably faculty members) knew that the alarm and gates did not work. The result, said library director Marvin Monsma, was silence by Security returning stacks of books and magazines from the FAC dorms and various other buildings on campus. Becki Dhhouse, sophomore library worker, said that by the end of last semester most people knew, "Kids were asking questions and then a lot of books turned up missing. They weren't where they were supposed to be, but they were checked out.

According to Monsma, the old arms and gates ceased operation in late August, when new overhead arms, installed by SI-M, sent out a high-frequency signal which canceled the powers of the more than 10-year-old detection system. This is not exactly a crisis: "Periodically, equipment like this becomes obsolete because of its age. The first system was installed about 1970, it wore out about 1980 or so." The third new system did not become available until the last week of interim.

What's different about the new alarm system: For one thing, it doesn't have any exit gates like the old. Dykhhouse doesn't notice any difference in behavior: "It's not a problem without the gates... people turn around and come back to the desk when the alarm goes off." Lack of gates is also a boon in providing access for wheelchairs. Monsma noted, "Gates are harder for the handicapped, but if this works out, we won't need gates anymore."

The other major difference is the strength of the system. First-year student worker VaQuisha Stanley has seen students with Blockbuster videos and car keys trigger the alarm. And for those students who try to illegally slide books along the counter outside the detector, Stanley warns that the system picks up books there too. Dykhhouse added that library patrons should be patient because the library staff occasionally forgets to desensitize materials before obtaining the new system. Those returning books may be surprised to set off the alarm while returning those materials.

Junior Susan Bauer tests the new security system.

photo by Riemersma