

# Georgia State University Police Department Lock It Up Program

## Residence Hall Burglary Prevention

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- THE PROBLEM:** In the 2005-2006 school year (05-06 SY) Georgia State University's, University Village, was being burglarized at an alarming rate. The rate of almost 5 burglaries a month in a gated complex that holds 2000 students was far too high, and the Police Department had to re-evaluate how they were policing this area.
- ANALYSIS:** After analyzing all the burglaries that occurred in student's rooms in the 05-06 SY the police department determined a trait that all of the 44 burglaries had in common. The victims in each case had left the doors to their rooms unlocked. We also considered that some portions of the burglaries were committed by people who did not live in the Village. We then observed that the card swipe entrance to the Village complex was easily bypassed when a person with an access card walked in someone could catch the door before it could close and walk in. This meant that non-students could be entering the Village with the intent to commit criminal acts.
- RESPONSE:** We hypothesized that if we were to better secure the complex in conjunction with students locking their doors, it would result in reduction in the burglaries rate. The actions we took were a two phase response. The first phase was to reassess the design to the entrances to the Village. University Housing taking the advice of the Police Department installed turnstiles at every entrance to the complex grounds allowing only one person to enter the complex per card swipe. The second phase was an attempt at modifying the students' behavior and teach them that the best way to keep their property safe was to lock their door whether they were home or not.
- ASSESSMENT:** In the year following the implementation of the two phased Lock It Up program (06-07 SY) there was a 39% drop in the number of burglaries that took place in the Village and a 49% drop in the total value stolen. We also found through surveying the freshman building that students were locking their doors at a 5% higher rate than in the previous school year.

## Introduction

Located in the heart of downtown Atlanta Georgia State University Police Department is a full-service, CALEA Accredited police department serving more than 26,000 student, staff and faculty. Blocks from some of Atlanta biggest attractions including; the CNN Center, Georgia Dome, Turner Field, World of Coke and the world's largest aquarium Georgia State University is a main thoroughfare for the residents and visitors of the City of Atlanta. Georgia State University Police Officers come into contact with everything the city of Atlanta deals with from armed robberies, to drugs, gangs and vehicle break-ins and thefts. However our most prevalent crimes are thefts and burglaries.

## Scanning

In the 2005-2006 semester year more than 40 burglaries occurred in the Georgia State University's residence halls, known at the Village, due to room doors being left unlocked. The Village, which was built to house the 1996 Olympic Athletes, is a gated complex made of 4 buildings from 6 to 13 stories, housing 2000 students. Each student lives in either a 4 or 6 person bedroom apartment. With one person per bedroom, they each share a common area among the 4 or 6 of them. Students are able to lock their own bedroom so that no other roommate has a key, and all 4 or 6 of their keys open the front door. One issue was that even if one student leaves the room and locks the main door one of the other roommates might not.

Students, who have lots of high value portable electronic devices, are prime

targets of thieves who know that students tend not to lock their doors. The thieves know that students leave items like laptops, MP3 players, video game equipment and video/camera equipment lying around their room and target them as easy prey.

In the spring 2006 the Evening Watch Commander noticed that his officers were writing a lot of reports at the Village for burglaries in the Village. The Watch Commander contacted the departments Crime Prevention Officer and asked him to look into the issues. The Crime Prevention Officer, Officer Eli Cohen, who opened an investigation into the problem to try and determined the cause. Officer Cohen did an analysis based on the number of reports generated because it was a good way to track statistical data and have the information readily available. After reading every report generated and conducting victim interviews and a security survey of the Village, Officer Cohen determined that in 43 out of 44 thefts the victims stated that they did not lock their door. Furthermore in the one report that the student stated that they did lock their door, the reporting officer observed no signs of forced entry.

## Analysis

The Officer Cohen conducted a crime analysis of the burglaries in the Village and planned to use the data collect as a pre-test. The independent variable in this study was the number of burglaries that occurred in the Village. Officer Cohen operationalized the independent variable by looking at the number of burglary reports filed to the Georgia State

University Police Department. This should, we hoped, give us an accurate number of burglaries that occurred. The problem of resident hall burglaries has been a constant struggle and over the evaluated school year (05-06 SY) we observed 44 burglaries which equates to 4.4 thefts per month, or about 1 burglary a week, and a total loss of \$56,555.

Our review of the reports showed three issues. One the issues stems from the students, most of whom are living on their own for the first time and not taking the responsibilities they need to protect themselves. Two, we found that perpetrators were getting into the Village through one of the main accesses gates. Lastly some reports would show that neighbors heard the sound of someone trying to open their door unsuccessfully. From this we deduced that the perpetrators knew that if they tried enough doors, eventually they would find one of them unlocked. Worse yet, in 12 of our 44 cases the victims were home when the theft occurred. These 12 burglaries are the ones that concerned the police department the most as they could have easily turned into robberies, or worse assaults. Before the Lock It Up Program, a housing program was used called the GOTCHA program. This program consisted of one of the resident assistants and a police officer going door to door through the entire Village and checking to see if students were locking their doors. Students who did not lock their doors were given a notice warning them to lock their door. This program was completed only once a semester with no follow up ever on the warnings given. We were however able to use this program as a way to collect data on the rate in which students lock their doors.

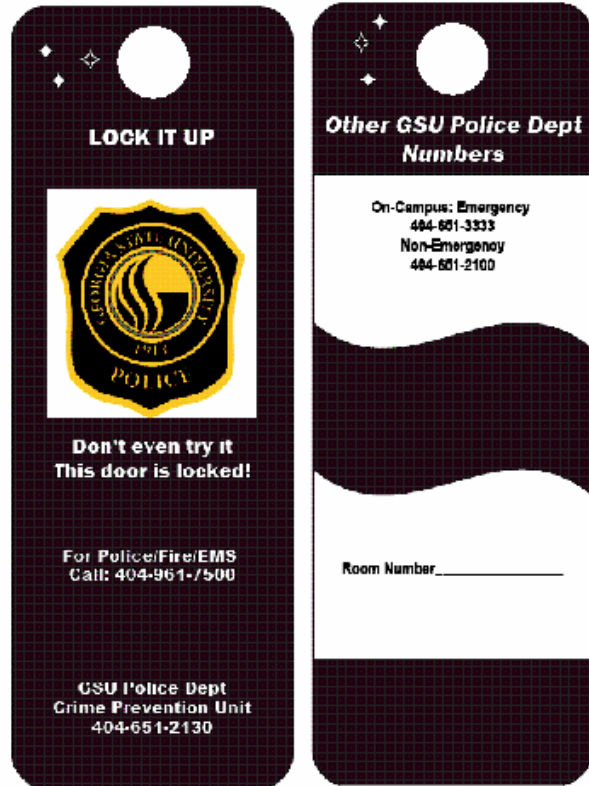
Our analysis of the reports also showed that location was a very key part of any program we might use. Of the 4 building that make up the Village, two are freshman building, one is a special interest building and the final one is a general building. The special interest building consisted of upperclassmen who were scholars, athletes, or older students who preferred a quiet resident hall. The majority of burglaries occurred in the Village were in the freshman building and only 1 of the 44 occurred in the special interest building. This told us that freshman were the most likely victim and were specifically targeted.

## Response

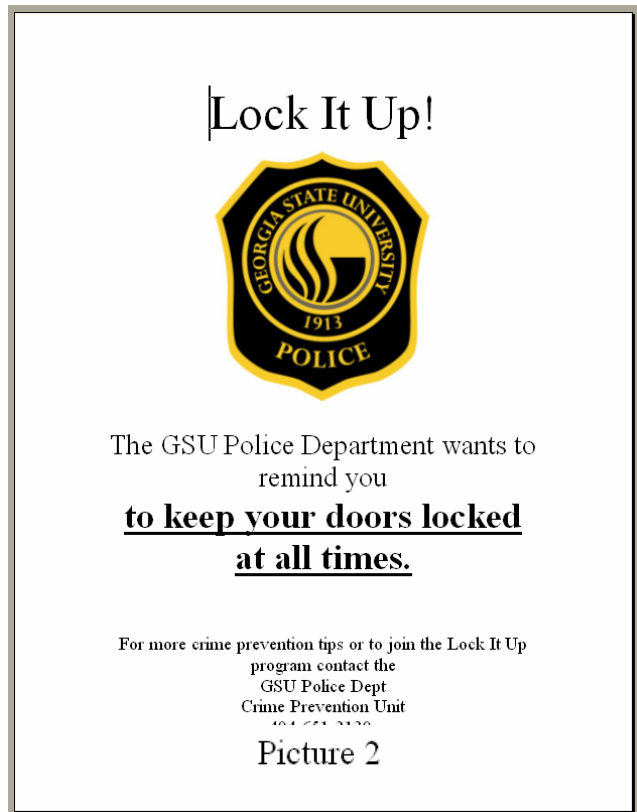
The police department determined two facts. First, this problem was never going to get better unless students were involved in the program and helped themselves. Second, a majority of the burglars were non-residents of the Village. Thus our response was tailored keeping these two facts in mind. We developed the Lock It Up Program, a two phase response that we determined could and did make a difference. Phase one consisted of target hardening the Village to make it more secure. Working with the Housing Department, we were able to install a more secure entrance in order to stop people from "piggybacking" the gates. The solution, turnstiles gates which allowed only one person to enter per swipe, meant that student had to actively want to let someone by standing there and swiping there card multiple time to let other people in. Before student were able to just holding the door for them or just let them catch the gate and walk away. These gates were installed at all three access points to the Village. The other benefit these gates had is it made it easier for officers to

identify who was trying to sneak in. There are three officers assigned full time to the Village, and they would often stand near the gates trying to see people sneak in. With the old gates intruders would just blend into the crowd. Now they would have to ask someone to let them in, a dead give. The officers would be able to see them immediately.

The second phase of our response was an attempted at a behavior modification of the incoming freshman class and the entire 06-07 SY residents of the Village. We did this through four major ways. First, every incoming student had to go to the freshman/transfer student orientation; officers had 30 minutes to talk to students about campus safety including Resident Hall safety which was a major focus. Second, every student, freshman through senior, who planned on living in the Village had to go to a Village orientation, and officers were there also to send the message on resident hall safety and to lock your door. Officer Cohen was able to talk to 8,339 students in the summer for the Fall 06 semester. We believed that an officer who was able to connect with the students would get the message through better, so we used a young officer (21 yrs old). The officer would wear plain clothes or polo police shirt. Also Officer Cohen was a fulltime student who lived in the Village as a student 2 years earlier. We also printed up door hangers (picture # 1) that we placed on every door warning would be thieves to stay away and to remind students as they leave to lock their doors. The hope was that if they see the hanger it will remind them to lock it up. Lastly officers on patrol would walk the resident halls and check doors at random to check for compliance. Any student whose doors was found unlocked would receive a letter (picture # 2). If students



Front Picture 1 Back

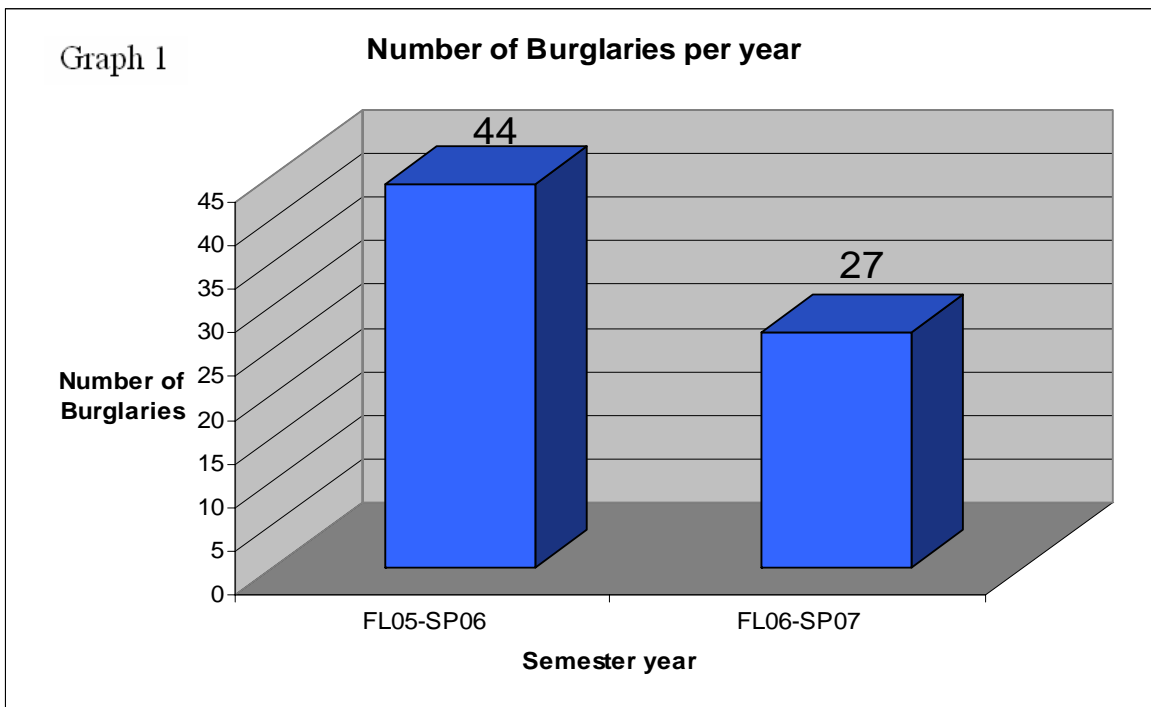


Picture 2

locked their doors, this type of crime would not occur so when an officer left a letter he would contact Officer Cohen, who would follow up with the students. We used this media and training campaign with the goal of behavior modifications among the students. With an overall goal of the program to reduce the number of burglaries that took place due to doors being left unlocked.

The budget allotted for this program was small, which is one of the reasons that we partnered with the Housing Department. Housing Department funds paid for and installed the turnstile gates at every entrance. With Housing's mandatory freshman orientation the only cost to the police department was the printing of the

of the school taking the necessary responsibility for the student's safety by making the infrastructure safer and combined with the message to student to lock their doors. While the majority of the students were able to accept the lock your door message, many students were upset with the new turnstiles. They believed that the gates made their lives harder and was not worth the trouble. On a widely used online social network called Facebook, groups were created talking about how awful the turnstiles were. One student even wrote "If security is a problem tell them damn village security to do their damn job." What the student did not realize is that Georgia State University Police and Housing were making the Village safer.



fliers and door hangers which cost less the \$400. This cost was minimal compared to the nearly \$60,000.00 that was lost to theft in the previous year.

Faculty, staff and parent response to the program was positive. They liked the idea

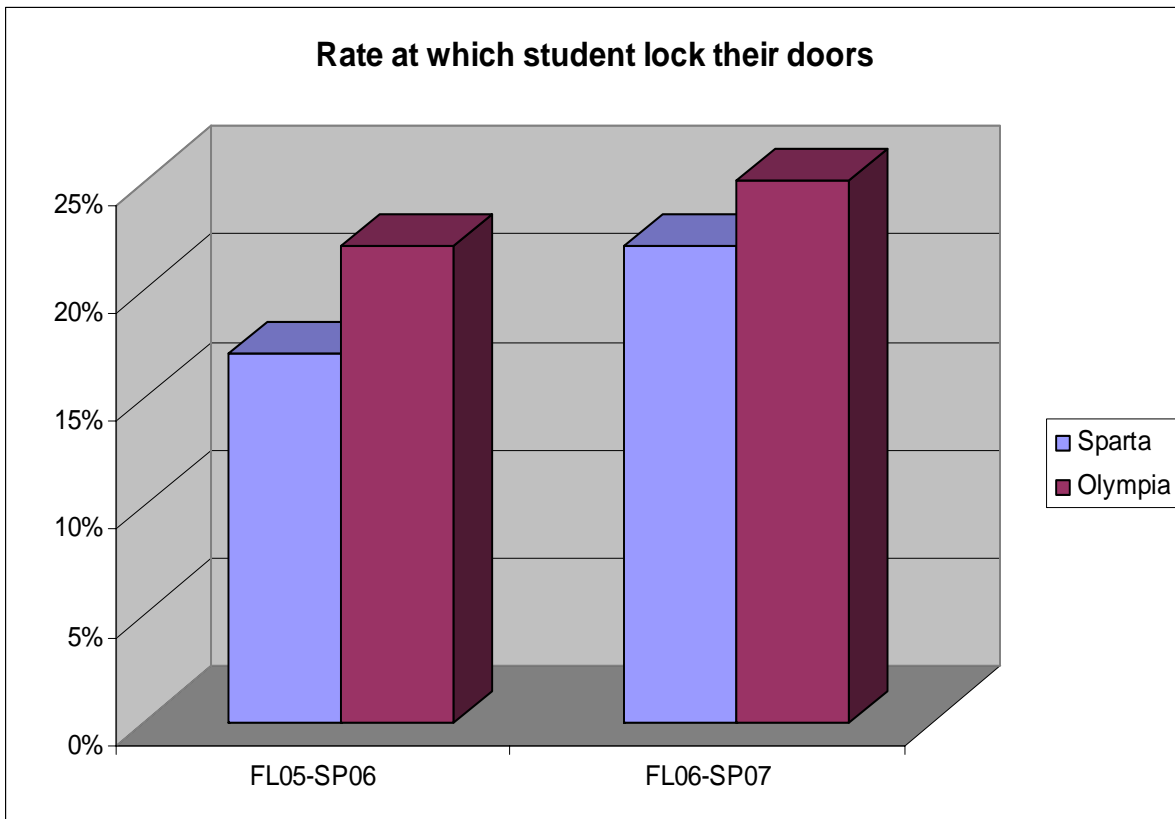
## Assessment

The next semester year after this program the number of reported burglaries fell by 39%. Graph 1 demonstrates this change, showing the drop in the number of theft

that occurred during the same time period. The first set of data 05-06 SY was before the program was administered and the 06-07 SY data is after the program. The program's original goal of lowering burglaries by 5% was surpassed by almost 800% or 8 times our original goal. Graph 1

their doors more frequently than the year before.

In conclusion, we were able to confirm our hypothesis that securing the complex and students locking their doors would result in a lower burglary rate. The biggest effect



demonstrates the overall effectiveness of the program, by showing the change that occurred taking into consideration both phases of our program.

Graph #2 shows the rate that students lock their doors. It demonstrates an increase in the desired behavior of door locking among students. Olympia and Sparta are our two freshman building and Graph 2 demonstrates that we were able to develop and manipulate to some extent student behavior. The graph shows a 5% increase for Sparta and a 3% increase in Olympia. the graph shows that students were locking

that this program had is also its demise. We will no longer be using the Lock It Up program at Georgia State University. The University has sold the Village and has instead a new complex from the ground up. The Commons is a brand new 2000 bed complex similar in style to the Village. With the success of this program we decided to install Turnstile gates at every entrance and also have auto locking doors in every dorm room. This was the biggest success of this program, being able to show the GSU community the benefits of crime prevention through environmental design. Hopefully this message will carry through to the other

buildings Georgia State University is planning on building in downtown Atlanta.

## Agency/Officer Information

Georgia State University Police Department's Crime Prevention Officer was the main force behind this project along with help from the Housing Department and their Resident Assistances Officer Eli Cohen, who is the departments Crime Prevention Officer, developed this program from the ground up. He is certified by the IACCP as a Crime Prevention Specialist but has had no specific training in problem oriented policing. Officer Cohen has been with the police department for only two years. His biggest advantage was that he was a full time student at Georgia State University and in 2003-2004 lived in the Village as a student. Which gave him a unique perspective in addressing the problem.

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