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Armed robberies have Boston University on edge

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT OCTOBER 10, 2012

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Boston University freshmen Talia Glickman-Simon and Danielle Barney, both 18, said they are concerned about the recent armed robberies.

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Liz Green said she used to feel safe taking a midafternoon stroll alone down a stretch of Commonwealth Avenue surrounded by Boston University's campus, buzzing cars, MBTA trolleys, and hordes of pedestrians.

But Wednesday, she had her boyfriend, Eric Hwang, walk with her on the way to pick up a cup of coffee.

The couple, both 22 and spring BU graduates, said they feel uneasy walking around the area after the fourth armed robbery in about two weeks was reported one night earlier.

"I don't leave the house anymore unless I need to," said Green, an Oregon native, while standing on a Commonwealth Avenue sidewalk near the corner of St. Paul Street.

The robberies, committed between Sept. 23 and Tuesday, have put the BU community on edge, altering routines and

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prompting calls from campus officials and police for students to be vigilant and cautious.

On Wednesday, BU offered a \$10,000 reward for tips leading to an arrest and conviction. In an afternoon press conference at Brookline Police Headquarters, BU, Brookline, and Boston officers released video footage of three men suspected in the armed robbery on Friday.

At least two of the robberies are believed to have been committed by the same suspects, who authorities consider to be armed and dangerous.

“I’ve been with the university for six years,” said BU Police Chief Thomas G. Robbins. “We do have crime that is certainly consistent with a large city, but nothing to this extent in terms of a pattern: the short time period, the armed robberies.”

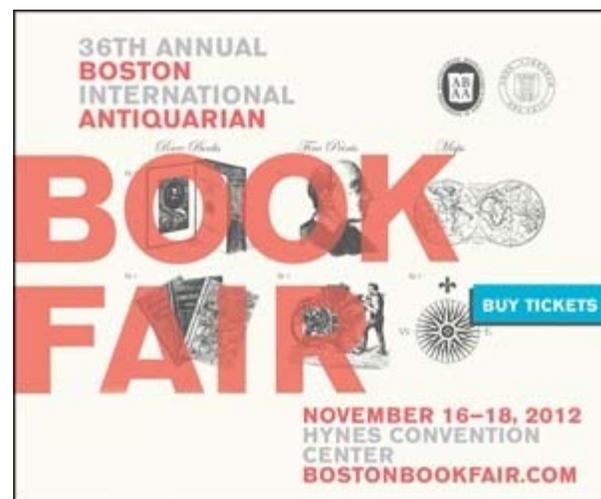
Green said she lives a few blocks away on Egmont Street in Brookline, steps from where two of the robberies were reported. Green and Hwang said one of their close friends was the man who was robbed while walking by himself Friday. “He’s fine, but he got his phone stolen,” she said.

Students and recent graduates of the university have reported being robbed in each instance. On Wednesday night, about 300 students, faculty, staff, and neighbors attended a town hall meeting at BU to update the campus community about the robberies, school spokesman Colin Riley said. Leaders of the university and the Brookline, Boston, and BU police departments answered questions and listened to concerns, according to Riley.

Some of the students said they were eager to know what police have been doing and how they will keep students safe. Police discussed how students can keep an eye out for suspicious behavior and how to contact authorities.

Concerns were also voiced by students about the alert system the university uses to notify them about crimes. And some minority students raised fears about potential racial profiling after the suspects’

BU



Police released an image taken from surveillance video of three men whom they suspect in the Oct. 5 robbery at Thatcher and St. Paul streets.

descriptions released by police.

In each case, the robbers have been described as either two or three black males in their late teens or early 20s wearing sweatshirts. The suspects have either shown or pointed a gun at the victims.

Smartphones, cash, wallets, laptops, backpacks, keys, and credit and debit cards have been stolen.

No arrests have been made. No injuries have been reported.

“I think there’s certainly evidence to indicate that the four robberies are related,” Cheryl Fiandaca, a Boston police spokeswoman, said Wednesday.

Two of the robberies happened in a residential area of North Brookline during daylight, targeting a group of three male students in one instance and a lone person in the other.

Another crime involved a male and female student who said they were robbed at gunpoint in the early morning hours in a nearby residential area of Brookline.

In the most recent case, a female BU student said she was robbed Tuesday around 8:30 p.m. while walking along Commonwealth Avenue in front of a campus academic building, according to Brookline Police.

Officers said the student told them two black males in their late teens walked up to her. One pointed a gun in her face, put his hand on her shoulder, and said, “Don’t move or I’ll shoot,” she told police.

The suspects ran away after she refused to hand over her iPhone and other belongings, police said.

Ivan Felix, 24, a student from the Dominican Republic studying at BU, said he is not worried about the robberies. But others, like BU freshmen Talia Glickman-Simon and Danielle Barney, both 18, said they are concerned.

“I definitely didn’t expect this,” Glickman-Simon of Sudbury said Wednesday afternoon while walking along Commonwealth Avenue.

Said Barney of Northborough: “I knew it was a possibility coming into the city, but I didn’t expect this many and so close together this close to campus.

They each said they plan to avoid walking around at nighttime and are more conscious about keeping their phone



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Liz Green, a recent Boston University graduate who still lives nearby, says she is wary of venturing out after a friend was robbed near the school.

and other valuables hidden in public. The two students said they are considering trying to get a license to carry pepper spray.

“My parents said they bought me some,” Glickman-Simon said. “They’re both very protective people.”

In a statement e-mailed to students Wednesday, BU president Robert A. Brown said: “This series of serious incidents has been very disturbing to all members of our community.”

Anyone with information is urged to contact the Boston police tip line at 800-494-8477 or text the word “tip” to 27463. Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mjrochele@gmail.com.

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