As the public digests the commission report on the tragedy at Virginia Tech last spring, I thought Muhlenberg parents might appreciate an update on the College's review of its security protocols and emergency communication capabilities.

This letter will tell you what we have done and are doing — and asks for your help.

Prior to the events at Virginia Tech, Muhlenberg's Campus Safety Office had well developed emergency protocols in place; we have an excellent working relationship with the Allentown Police Department and other local law enforcement agencies, and we regularly host “table top exercises” and other emergency drills for these and other agencies on campus.

Nonetheless, we reviewed and planned improvements in our crisis response protocols:

1. Within days of the Virginia Tech massacre we added emergency text messaging capability to our emergency communications procedures (which already included mass e-mail and mass voice-mail).

2. Over the summer we added an alarm siren to the campus carillon system that can be activated by remote control in the Campus Safety Office. This siren will serve as an alert signal to those outdoors. We are currently refining that system to boost the volume so that it is audible throughout the campus.

3. We are installing thumb locks on all classroom doors so that they can be secured from inside in case of emergency.

4. We are installing emergency telephones in half of our classrooms this fiscal year, and the remaining classrooms next fiscal year.

5. We are developing the capability to send instant pop-up messages to all campus computers in case of emergency.

6. Campus Safety officers are conducting information sessions on emergency response for faculty, staff, and students.

None of these communication channels will work with all members of the community at all times, but we hope to develop enough overlapping systems so that we can contact the vast majority of Muhlenberg community members quickly and efficiently.
Now I need your help. Although emergency text messaging is a key element in our crisis communications system, only 40% of our students have registered for this system to date. Only 82 members of the class of 2011 have registered! I know that the vast majority of our students have cell phones with text message capability, and I suspect their failure to register is a combination of being busy with the start of classes and an innate optimism that “it can’t happen here.” While I certainly hope they are right, I think we would all agree that it is better to be safe than sorry.

Today we are sending an e-mail to all students who have not registered for emergency text messaging, sending them the link to the on-line registration site. Registering takes less than five minutes. Where do you come in? I hope you will remind (okay, to be blunt, nag) your son or daughter to register for this system. It is a small step that could be very important.

Many thanks,

Randy Helm