

Daemen College

Location: Amherst, NY
Campus Type: Urban
Enrollment: Approx. 2,600
Faculty/Staff: 140
Campus Size: 35 acres
Number of buildings: 21

When it comes to emergency notification, redundancy is a good thing at Daemen College.

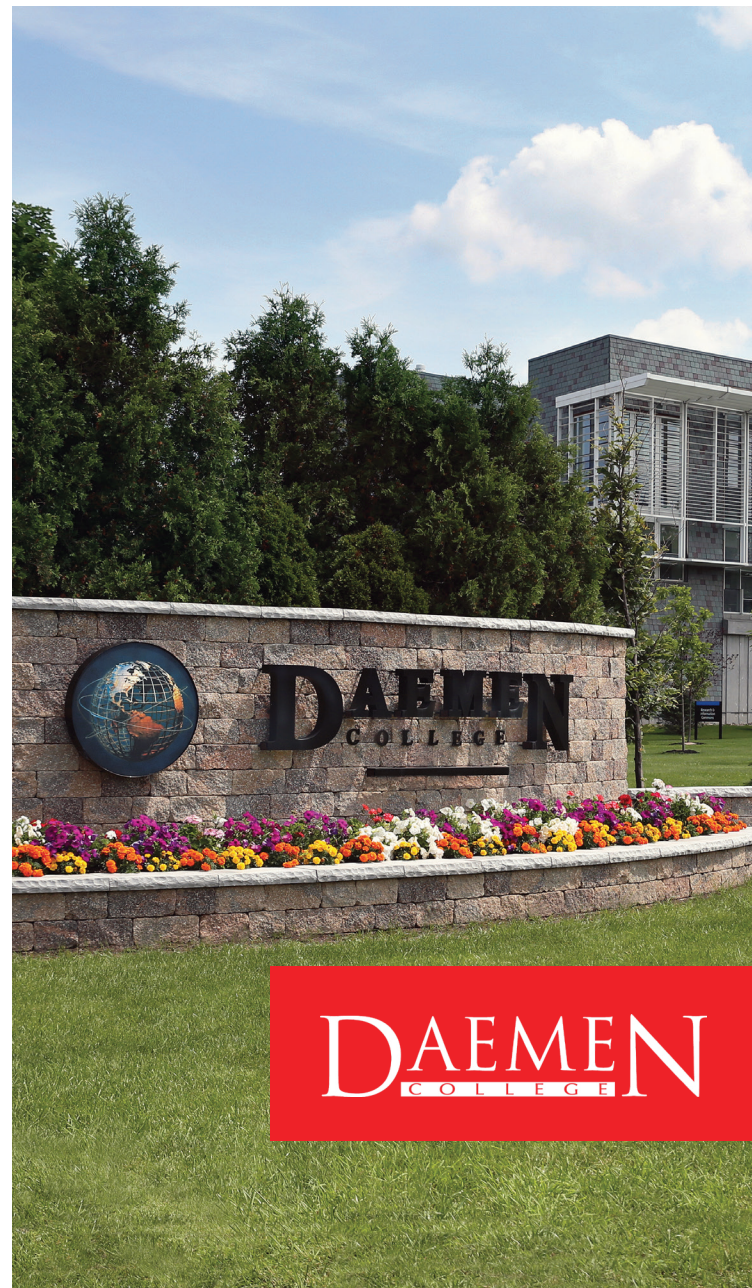
“Redundancy ensures that if one system goes down, members of the campus community are able to get their information from other sources,” said Greg Naylor, Vice President of Student Affairs at Daemen College. “If you can get the alert message out in as many different ways as possible, you have the greatest opportunity to let people know what’s coming, prevent panic, and hopefully save lives.”

The Challenge

Like many colleges and universities, Daemen College’s primary method of emergency notification was its text and email alert systems. “But that was it, and if you just send out a text or email alert you are going to miss people,” Naylor explained. “We want to do as much as we can to reach as many people as we can.”

But while Naylor recognized the need for an additional notification system to create the redundancy for dispersing alerts, he also wanted to avoid creating the inefficiencies that can come with timing to deploy several systems at once. “The worst thing that I could have happen is to have someone needing to go back and forth between multiple systems to send out alert messages,” explained Naylor. “The new system needed to complement and integrate with our existing system, so our campus safety officers only had to use one source when sending out alerts.”

“Finding all of that in one system was challenging,” Naylor added.



Integration

Nayor found his solution when he discovered the Alertus Emergency Mass Notification System. “There were several reasons why we went with Alertus,” said Nayor. “The Alertus System seamlessly integrated with our existing notification systems, enabling us to send out alerts from one system, and it provided the capability to send alerts to classroom and office computer screens, and digital screens across campus.”

Currently Daemen College has deployed the Alertus Desktop™ Notification, Alertus App, and the digital signage override that integrates with impulseGUIDE, the school’s digital signage provider. “We were able to get the initial desktop notification for free from a grant made possible by the Alertus Desktop™ Donation Initiative,” explained Nayor. The philanthropic program provides educational institutions with limited budgets the Alertus Desktop Notification tool at no cost. When activated, the highly-customizable tool grabs the attention of computer users immediately with a full screen (not in grant) pop-up alert.



Alertus Desktop™ Notification can deliver a facility-wide emergency notification in a matter of seconds.

Prepared for the Worst Case Scenario

Having a response plan in place is critical during an emergency, and Nayor tested the school’s overall emergency preparedness by coordinating a large-scale active shooter drill on campus in October 2016.

“We know that colleges and universities are soft targets and that there are more and more shootings at soft targets every day,” said Nayor. “It is absolutely critical that if something happens on our campus, we know what does or does not work with our Emergency Response Plan.” Nearly 100 members of the Daemen College community, local law enforcement and emergency response personnel took on roles in the active shooter scenario, which was held during a two-day fall break when classes were not in session. The drill occurred in real-time and entailed implementing Daemen’s emergency operations plan and campus notification system—including the Alertus Desktop Notification and digital signage override—that provided safety instructions and status updates on the emergency.

For the drill, a simulated shooter incident was staged mid-morning in Daemen’s Wick Campus Center Dining Hall. To bring a greater sense of realism to the training exercise, the scenario presented a situation that involved two shooters, multiple injuries and fatalities, efforts to transport injured victims to a local hospital, and office evacuations, all of which required a coordinated response between the college, law enforcement, and emergency responders. The drill was conducted in collaboration with the Amherst Police Department, Snyder Fire Department, and Twin City Ambulance.

“By making this shooting incident as realistic as possible, it allowed us to properly assess our Emergency Response Plan and identify areas where we can make improvements in preparation for a real-life incident,” explained Nayor. “We were able to recognize gaps in our system and where even more redundancy is needed.”

While the drill focused on an active shooter situation, it also helped prepare the emergency response for other situations that are more likely to occur such as a fire, power outage or a severe weather event. For all emergency situations, the school’s campus safety officer working dispatch can send out a general emergency notification such as a Shelter-in-Place. Templates are built into the Alertus System that ensures consistency of messaging in the time of a crisis. If for example, dispatch has identified an active shooter, they will send out an announcement immediately. From there, regular updates and announcements will be sent out until an “All Clear” can be given. Daemen College has yet to deploy the Alertus System outside of test drills, but Nayor only plans to use it when truly necessary. “We want to preserve the desktop notification for serious situations,” he said.



The Alertus Recipient App displays an alert message in the event of an emergency.

Next Steps

Moving forward, the Alertus Recipient App will become a bigger part in disseminating emergency notifications. The school will start demonstrating the app during freshman orientations to encourage students to download and install it on their phones. Nayor is also expanding the methods of activation as the school is installing computer-based, electronic panic buttons from Alertus in select campus offices with the goal to eventually add them into classrooms.