

Syracuse University Enhances Campus Safety Through “Seamless Integration” with the Rave Platform



Higher Education



**Mass Notification
Personal Safety App**

22,000+ students

1,800+ faculty members

5,500+ academic staff

Ensuring an entire campus community is safe, informed and engaged is a complex undertaking for colleges and universities. Having the ability to do so through one platform helps departments, such as campus safety, communications and public safety, provide their students, faculty, staff, visitors and others with critical information more efficiently.

Syracuse University rolled out the Rave Guardian app to its campus community in February 2021. The university has over 22,000 students attending its undergraduate, graduate and law programs. It has more than 1,800 faculty members and over 5,500 academic staff.

The university, which is spread across 721 acres, sits on University Hill in the city of Syracuse in central New York State. Its main campus encompasses residence halls and academic and administrative buildings, and the south campus also includes student apartments and outdoor sports facilities.



“[Rave Guardian] was a significant savings for us and, obviously in a COVID world where there’s a lot of budgetary restrictions, it was going to save the university money. It just made sense to have that seamless integration with the app with all of our other mass communications.”

CHRISTINE WEBER
PUBLIC INFORMATION AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION OFFICER
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Key stakeholders at Syracuse were looking to switch to another personal safety app to help with budget restrictions, as well as bolster their emergency communications strategy. The university also has had Rave Alert, a custom-branded mass notification system that’s part of a critical communication and collaboration platform, since 2011. Syracuse calls its system, Orange Alert.

“I liked the idea of a one-stop shop,” said Christine Weber, Syracuse University’s Public Information and Internal Communication Officer for Campus Safety and Emergency Management Services. “[Rave Guardian] was a significant savings for us and, obviously in a COVID world where there’s a lot of budgetary restrictions, it was going to save the university money.”

“It just made sense to have that seamless integration with the app with all of our other mass communications,” she added.

Campus Safety and Emergency Management Services includes the department of public safety, emergency management, fire and life safety services, global safety and support.

Rave Guardian is a custom-branded personal safety app that’s also part of the platform. The

app allows students, faculty and staff members to directly connect to 9-1-1 and campus security through an emergency call button. Administrators can send push notifications through the app. Rave Guardian also includes a virtual safety timer, call directory and centralized content directory.

Before integrating Rave Guardian into its Orange Alert system, administrators would have to take additional steps to send notifications to the campus community.

“You’re not having to retype [a message], copy and format it to go into another program,” said Joseph Hernon, Syracuse’s director of emergency management and business continuity. “It’s all right there, so I think that is very helpful as we push these apps to our students, faculty and staff here. It’s right on their phones and it’s easy to access for them. It’s another way to communicate with them.”

Rave Guardian also features two-way texting, which allows campus members to discreetly send anonymous tips to campus police. Campus members would be able to include photos and locations in these texts as needed.

Weber said the “biggest piece” of Rave Guardian is the ability to submit tips anonymously.

“We get a lot of those, especially in the world of COVID,” she said. “We have specific guidelines and restrictions when it comes to COVID that are probably a little bit stricter than the CDC’s guidance. It’s because we’re just in a different environment. If they see a group or something that’s not in compliance, they’re able to submit that information to the [department of public safety] and our public health team will look further into it.”

Tackling COVID-19 Through Orange Alert

Campus Safety and Emergency Management Services actively used Orange Alert, its branded Rave Alert mass notification system, this academic year to notify and stay engaged with the Syracuse campus community during the coronavirus pandemic.

“It makes life a lot easier for our team,” Weber said. “We have templates set up, so when an incident happens, it’s just a matter of plugging in the who, what, where, and when. They literally update the text [of the template], push the button, and send it out. It’s a one-stop shop that is super simple.”

Rave Alert features a customizable interface that can be accessed from any Internet-connected device. Messages can be sent out simultaneously through text, email, voice calls, social media, IPAWs, digital signage and desktop alerts — all through a single launch point. Text, voice calls and emails can be automatically translated into about 60 languages. Campus members can receive messages in the modes and languages they prefer.

Visitors and others can register for these messages through Rave Alert’s text to opt-in feature, which allows them to sign up for alerts by texting a unique keyword to a short code.

Rave Alert is backed by a public safety grade infrastructure of multiple carriers, carrier networks and aggregators, as well as geo-redundant data centers.

“It automatically aligns with a lot of our database systems,” Herson said. “It’s really seamless for our users to have their information in our systems and, in the event that we needed to, we would be use it to notify them on anything.”

He said Orange Alert, Syracuse’s branded Rave Alert system, is often used during severe weather and alerts include campus closings or class cancelations. Notifications are also sent out for “high-risk events,” including police chases, according to Herson.

During the recent academic year, administrators expanded their use of Orange Alert to help the campus community manage COVID-19.

“If we needed the students to comply with a testing requirement for COVID or show up to a spot for a COVID-related issue, we were able to utilize our database and Rave to notify those students about that activity or requirement,” Herson said. “We were able to notify them the night before via a text to make sure they have done XYZ or they couldn’t come to campus.”

“We always thought of [Orange Alert] as a crisis notification tool, but we really got into using it more of it as a typical mass communication tool,” he continued. “We could send a particular message to a large group of people or inform a particular group of people routinely in a template format to both text and email. So we used it very heavily with isolation and quarantine notifications on campus.”

Orange Alert helped to inform, update and bolster collaboration between the university’s public safety, health, housing and facility services, and other teams that supported Syracuse University’s COVID operations. For example, these teams would be notified if a student was in isolation following a positive test or was quarantining after being potentially exposed to the disease.

“We used the tool to notify the food services team that there’s a new person in that [quarantine] space and they need to provide them with food,” Herson said. “It was very, very helpful for us as a mass notification tool throughout COVID.”