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Computer Theft Results in Security Breach; Students Notified

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Letters have been distributed to approximately 1,400 Eastern Illinois University students, notifying them that confidential information, including their Social Security numbers, were stored on a desktop computer recently stolen from the university's Student Life office.

According to Dan Nadler, vice president for student affairs, an individual or individuals broke into the office sometime late Wednesday/early Thursday and removed the password-protected desktop computer and the hard drive and memory from two others. The office is located on the third floor of the MLK Jr. Union.

While the two individual hard drives contained only general correspondence, the desktop computer contained membership rosters from Eastern's 23 fraternities and sororities. The database contained personal information, including Social Security numbers, birth dates and addresses, of each member.

The University Police Department is continuing its investigation of the incident. Meanwhile, Nadler said, university personnel have been busy preparing and sending advisories to those whose names appear on the rosters. In addition to official notification of the incident, the letters included safety recommendations each student may take.

"Although we have no evidence that an unauthorized individual has actually retrieved and is using the data, we are bringing this theft to your attention so that you can be extra alert to signs of any possible misuse of your information," the letter reads.

Nadler stressed that the missing information is that of students currently enrolled at the university. He credited the efforts of Norma Taylor, Greek Life secretary, for "minimizing the amount of information" stored on the stolen computer.

"She does an incredible job of purging older information from semester to semester, thus reducing the risk for breaches of information," he said. "Former Greek Life students have no need for concern in this matter."

In 2005, Eastern began transitioning to a campus-wide computer infrastructure which will drastically decrease the university's use of staff and students' Social Security numbers, and completely eliminate Social Security number use for identification purposes. That transition is scheduled to be completed in early 2008.