

Audit: UMass Needs to Protect Computers

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By Grant Walker - May 18, 2009

Dartmouth – The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth needs to better protect itself from computer equipment loss and theft, State Auditor Joe DeNucci found in an audit.

The university was missing from its inventory about half of the new purchases it made in fiscal 2006 and 2007, DeNucci reported, and the university never notified the state auditor's office of \$38,000 worth of thefts of laptops and other equipment as required by law.

Weakness in the inventory system – such as lack of control over keys that access areas with computer equipment and procedures for ending user privileges for staff who no longer work for the university – have left a “significant” risk for more losses, DeNucci said in a statement last Thursday.

John Hoey, the university spokesman, said the school has implemented DeNucci's recommendations as fast as possible, something DeNucci said he was encouraged by. “It's about being a lot more proactive and aggressive,” Hoey said.

Umass Dartmouth controls more than \$10 million worth of computer equipment, according to the auditor's office, much of which “is not always recorded and accounted for when received by the university, nor are inventory records being adequately reviewed and reconciled for accuracy and completeness.”

The audit sampled 45 items missing from the inventory of new purchases and could not locate 28 of them. In a separate sample of 73 items, 58 were not in the location they were marked in the inventory, the audit also found. The university also did not have a complete list of laptops, DeNucci said. Auditors, who worked until late last year, studied a period of time from July 2005 to October 2008.\

Thefts of computers and other electronic equipment is a problem at many colleges, especially laptops that are easy to conceal, said Glen Briere, DeNucci's spokesman. There was a “heightened concern” about the inventory shortcomings at UMass Dartmouth, Briere said. “It's safe to say there was a problem there.”

The thefts of \$38,000 worth of equipment between December 2007 and September 2008 were reported to the police, Hoey said. He didn't give details on why the thefts weren't reported to the state auditor's office.

In response to the audit, UMass Dartmouth created a corrective action plan and strengthened their inventory procedures, Hoey and DeNucci said.\

“I am encouraged by the positive response of UMass Dartmouth to my recommendations,” DeNucci said in a statement.