How to protect your bike as bike thefts and cycling increase on campus

BY SIV PRINCE
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As gas prices skyrocket and “going green” becomes more popular, it is not surprising that a large number of students choose to ride their bikes to campus.

But bike theft has become a common crime at the UW, and the rates of bicycle theft tend to increase in the warmer spring months when most students cycle to campus.

Last spring quarter, the number of bicycles stolen was so high that UW police sent out an all-campus warning notification to students, urging them to take precautions when leaving their bikes at one of the many racks on and near the university.

This quarter, there have been only several bike thefts, but that number may be likely to increase when the weather gets nicer, according to the UW police.

The UWPD advises several steps students can take to keep their bicycles out of the hands of thieves. Sgt. Doug Schultz, a UWPD detective often assigned to bike theft cases, outlined some of the most important precautions.

“First of all, lock your bike up with a good U-lock. Cable locks are easier to get through,” Schultz said. “Thieves occasionally get through U-locks but that’s much rarer.”

Bikes are most often stolen from in front of the dorms, particularly in the southwest quadrant of campus. Other popular places for bike thieves are near the hospital, the B-10 parking lot and Red Square, Schultz said.

When a student phones the police to report a stolen bike, the police make a report of the bike’s make, model and serial number. The detective assigned to the case then checks nearby hack shops to see if the bike is being sold for parts.

“The more expensive bikes end up in hack shops, but sometimes stolen bikes show up at other racks on campus,” Schultz said.

Schultz said the UWPD has about a 10 percent success rate of recovering stolen bikes. When the police return to the bike rack, the bike was gone, so they called the UW police.

“They couldn’t really do anything,” Ying said. “I had brought my bike on campus from home and it was stolen after only three days.”

The bike owner recalled that she locked her bike with a cable lock in front of Odegaard at about 8 p.m. When she returned to the bike rack, her bicycle was gone, so she called the UW police.

“Phyllis Ying, a third-year UW student whose bike was stolen last spring, said she had taken these precautions.

“I knew all the resources I needed to keep my bike safe, but I didn’t know that I needed them immediately,” Ying said. “I had brought my bike on campus from home and it was stolen after only three days.”

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Schultz said the UWPD has about a 10 percent success rate of recovering stolen bikes. Finding the bikes is much easier if the police have the make, model and serial number.

“It’s important to register your bike with the college, which you can do online,” Schultz said.

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Ying also tried to find her bike by looking at ads on Craigslist to see if the thief was trying to sell it online; she had no luck.

“I knew I wouldn’t be seeing that bike again,” Ying said. “I regretted so much not taking precautions. My advice: Before you bring your bike to campus, have all the stuff you need. Do it immediately. Don’t delay.”

[Reach reporter Siv Prince at features@thedaily.washington.edu.]

Students can register bicycles quickly and easily online on the University of Washington Police Homepage at www.washington.edu/admin/police.