

Warren President Will Austin gains national attention offering insight on drones and reported NJ sightings

Warren County Community College President Will Austin has been wearing a different hat lately – as an expert in drone technology helping to shed light on the reported drone sightings along the east coast, appearing in national and international reports on the issue.

In the hundreds of print and broadcast interviews, Austin has tried to calm public concern about the reported nighttime drone sightings on the east coast and particularly in New Jersey. He has said he believes some of the sightings involve citizens mistakenly identifying other aircraft for drones while others are perhaps drones that are no threat to the citizenry, being operated legally or by amateur pilots.

“I haven’t studied all the reported sightings, and I completely understand the public concern, but from what I have seen I just don’t think there is a serious threat,” he said. “I hope these sightings are fully investigated and all the information is made public, but I also hope we don’t get ahead of ourselves without a clear understanding of these reports.”

The college is the home of WarrenUAS, the institution’s nationally recognized drone training program, which Austin played a key role in developing and where he still offers instruction. The fast-growing program, training students in the design, flight and maintenance of drones for use in a wide range of sectors, is now housed in two new facilities on the campus and offers students hands on experience with some 100 different drone systems.

Austin has expressed concern that the publicity about the reported sightings will lead to negative public opinion and perhaps ill-conceived regulation of the technology that can benefit public safety in so many ways.

“We really focus on safety and security with our students, and we understand how this technology needs to be handled professionally. Training skilled technicians who clearly understand that approach is our goal. We also want the public and our students to explore and understand the tremendous benefit this technology can offer for everything from farming and environmental protection to law enforcement, search and rescue and firefighting,” Austin said.

Last year, many associate degree-seeking students in WarrenUAS found employment with salaries in excess of six-figures, and Austin says he is determined to “show the amazing life-changing potential of the technology for our students gaining careers in this field and for the public”.