

REPORT OF THE INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SAFETY WORKING GROUP

APPENDIX B: COMPARATIVE RESEARCH SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

December 15, 2020

Methodology

The Comparative Research Subcommittee's work proceeded in two phases throughout the Fall of 2020. The first half of the semester consisted of conversations among the members to determine how best to learn about the statuses and structures of public safety departments at higher education institutions across the country. Various factors were considered when determining which other universities might be similar in ways that could offer useful insights for inclusive public safety at Columbia. This Subcommittee used these factors to create a list of universities and relevant questions to pose to different parties at the selected schools.

During the second half of the Fall, members of this Subcommittee members reached out to student affairs departments, public safety offices, and students within each school's student government body as part of the research process. Throughout the course of both phases, this Subcommittee gathered additional research from various reports and resources (see Appendices 1 and 2), that provided insight into public safety departments on an individual level as well as on a national scale. The information received from the various sources was aggregated to give the Subcommittee both a sense of where Columbia stands relative to peer institutions. This Subcommittee leveraged examples of best and promising practices for recommendations made in the larger Inclusive Public Safety Working Group's report.

Colleges and Universities that responded to administrative outreach included: Barnard College, Brown University, California College of the Arts, Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, Maryland Institute College of Art, New York University, Tulane University, University of Chicago, University of Pennsylvania, Washington University in St. Louis, Yale University.

Students from the following schools responded: Duke University and the University of Pennsylvania.

Questions included:

For administrators:

- How does your public safety department engage with your student community? (ex. orientation sessions, outreach forums/mediums, emails, self-defense training, electronics engraving)
- If your public safety department is involved in responding to mental health/student wellness concerns, what role do they play?
- If your public safety department is involved in staffing student events, what role do they play?
- If your public safety department is involved in limiting/restricting building access, what role do they play?
 - If your public safety department staffs building entry, what attire do they wear?

- What types of diversity, equity and inclusion training does your public safety staff receive? How long is it, how is it delivered (e.g. online or in person), are there knowledge assessments, and how frequently must they take it? Is the training proprietary or is it purchased? If we wanted to learn more about the comprehensive training of your officers can you connect me with your training coordinator?
- Do you have any best practices to share? Have you implemented program changes as a result of student feedback?

For students:

- How does the student population view the public safety department and its relationship with students?
- How does the public safety department engage with the student community? (e.g. orientation sessions, outreach forums/mediums, emails, self-defense training, electronics engraving)
 - Does the public safety department have any form of advisory board composed of students, faculty, or community members?
 - Does Public Safety provide information about their training and the material that is taught?
- Have the Black Lives Matter/Defund the Police movement and protests this summer triggered any reflections, changes or modifications within the public safety/campus security departments?
- Is the public safety department involved in responding to mental health/student wellness concerns? If so, what role do they play?
- How are complaints against public safety/campus security departments filed? Who is responsible for the investigation? What role does the student have in how the complaints are addressed and resolved?
 - Does the review process include dissemination of outcomes to different divisions (e.g. student affairs office, Deans, complainants)?
- If the public safety department is involved in staffing student events, what role do they play?
- If the public safety department is involved in limiting/restricting building access, what role do they play?
 - What attire do they wear?
- Does your school have any best practices to share? Have program changes been implemented as a result of student feedback?
 - Are there changes that students wish to see in how Public Safety operates?

Overview

University public safety departments across the country generally fall into two categories: 1) the school has a police force whose officers are armed and sworn (i.e. they possess the power to arrest) or a combination of sworn, unsworn, armed and unarmed public safety employees; or 2) a public safety department that employs officers who are unsworn and unarmed. The vast majority of campuses across the United States employ the first structure, with fully operating police departments with powers of arrest. Columbia

falls into the minority with security officers who are unsworn, cannot make arrests, and are unarmed.

When comparing Columbia University to other universities contacted, it appears that, in light of the events of this past summer, many have begun to have similar conversations and reflections on the structure of their public safety departments. These schools vary extensively in their approach to public safety in terms of student engagement and outreach, how they respond to different circumstances, and how they staff events and buildings. It appears that Columbia falls along similar lines to many other universities in the questions that are arising and the issues that public safety addresses, but it appears that this Working Group is somewhat unique in the extent to which it has been vested with the charge of providing recommendations focused on inclusive public safety for and with the Department of Public Safety.

The Subcommittee has narrowed in on several key themes and observations in our discussions with other universities that have spurred recommendations directly from other schools' policies. We have also discussed further recommendations that are not directly drawn from other universities, but developed from our conversations within the working group.

Observations:

- One of the most common themes of discussions with other schools is the importance of changing and strengthening the approach to de-escalation and other responses to student mental health crises, including mental health crises where race is a relevant factor or other situations that have a racialized dimension.
- Community Advisory Oversight: At the University of Pennsylvania, there is a Department of Public Safety Advisory board consisting of faculty, staff, and students from a cross-section of centers and divisions within the University. In this integrated approach, community members can interface with the Vice President for Public Safety, offering advice and constructive criticism concerning campus security policy that adequately reflect the larger University of Pennsylvania community.
- Another theme involves the choices made about whether and where public safety officers wear uniforms or an alternative, such as the dress shirts and blazers that a few officers wear at CUIMC, which has been well received. For some, this choice may affect perceptions of Public Safety, including by suggesting a link to uniformed law enforcement officers.
- Schools vary in their approaches to public safety staffing of student events. Some schools rely on their public safety officers to make decisions about staffing, while others rely primarily on student affairs staff or other staff to make staffing determinations.

- Some schools have a “community/integrated” approach to public safety to strengthen trust-building with students and other community members. In some places, such as University of Pennsylvania, the structure for building out these kinds of community relationships between students and staff includes assigning a specific officer to each undergraduate college house and various centers around campus in order to build stronger bridges.
- Some schools have taken additional steps to increase transparency, as a way of increasing the community’s trust. In addition to the observations above, this is done in various schools through openness and outreach regarding protocols, training, and other areas of work.

Recommendations:

- **Responding to mental health crises:** The Subcommittee recommends additional discussion among Public Safety leadership, Student Affairs staff, and students with the goal of developing and implementing action items that strengthen the approach to student mental health crisis on two issues: 1) increased and shared training in mental health and de-escalation; and 2) determining new dispatch strategies for responding to on-site mental health crises, taking into consideration the potential of mental health professionals, public safety staff, student affairs staff, and students to assist with de-escalation.
- **Uniforms:** The Subcommittee recommends further discussion and consideration of the uniform worn by Public Safety officers who are staffing entrances of undergraduate residence halls and possibly other building-access points.
- **Student events:** The Subcommittee recommends further discussion among student affairs staff, students and Public Safety to develop enhanced transparency in the standards and clear processes for safety assessments and decision making about staffing student events.
- **Partnerships and collaborations:** The Subcommittee recommends further discussion to identify interesting and helpful partnerships and collaborations between Public Safety and other University offices and the Schools, including consideration of “community/integrated” roles for Public Safety officers that are in place at some other institutions. Some of this happens already through well-received Public Safety Q&As and open discussions with students. Additional suggestions include building out more of these sessions during and after orientation to include more of a conversational aspect to build the relationships between students and security personnel instead of purely information sessions.
- **Transparency:** The Subcommittee recommends further discussion to identify ways to increase transparency in relation to Public Safety protocols, training, and the process for resolving complaints regarding Public Safety staff members. An establishment of an Advisory Board that meets regularly, involving Public Safety

leadership, faculty, staff and students is the recommended location for this discussion.

Table of Appendices

Appendix 1: [Bureau of Justice Statistics/Campus Law Enforcement Report 2011-2012](#)

Appendix 2: [Bureau of Justice Statistics/Campus Law Enforcement Report 2004-2005](#)