

Inclusive Public Safety Advisory Committee Meeting
May 6, 2022 - 9:00-10:15am - Zoom

Agenda:

- The meeting focused on follow up related to April's conversation on Public Safety's stated goals of building and strengthening its communications.
- The Committee also reviewed possible uniform alternatives in the residence halls and drafted a work plan for its Fall 2022 agenda.

Communications Discussion: Next Steps from April

Deidre Fuchs, Interim Vice President for Public Safety, presented follow up items and next steps as a continuation of April's conversation about Public Safety communications:

- Public Safety is moving forward with needed updates to the LionSafe app, based on recommendations from Engineering students. Public Safety has hired students as casual workers to implement changes and promote to students to increase use.
- Rave messages pushed out on the app.
- Public Safety is taking into consideration the Committee's ideas shared in April on ways to broaden the reach of its communications, and enhance usability.
- Public Safety is also rethinking about more effective ways to communicate with undergraduate parents via Columbia College's Family Life Office.
- Additionally, they are considering the Committee's feedback and discussion on the popularity of/demand for self-defense and situational awareness classes, in terms of both how frequently to offer, and better methods of marketing these opportunities to students.
- Public Safety has made key changes to Clery alert emails based on dialogue with the Committee this Spring, including adding additional language about individual incidents and downplaying the prominence of the suspected perpetrators' photos. Going forward, they will also consider how/whether it could be helpful to:
 - Include resources in the messages for students who may have been victims in similar types of crimes (eg. steps to take, resources to access).
 - Incorporate marketing for their situational awareness classes.
 - Adjust language used in these alerts (eg. "person responsible") given the U.S. adherence to innocence until proven guilty.

Review of Possible Uniform Alternatives for Public Safety Officers in Residence Halls:

To frame the discussion, Committee Chair Josef Sorrett asked the Committee to consider what Public Safety's uniforms communicate about safety and inclusion. He reminded the Committee of the Working Group's recommendation to examine the need for formal uniforms for officers posted within residence halls, citing the possible benefits of a softer, visible appearance where appropriate. The Working Group focused on the residence halls as one place to consider such a change (versus a wholesale change to Public Safety officers' uniforms across campus).

He also acknowledged the challenge of the discussion and the need to strike a balance, which is not always easy. Some community members believe that a recognizable uniform is useful during an emergency, and may prefer a more visible presence during this time of heightened

crime in New York City. On the other hand, he acknowledged the idea that perception of uniforms varies based on lived experiences and cultural context. For some community members, a uniform that looks like NYPD is not welcoming.

Public Safety shared four different possible options for uniforms, noting that different uniforms can be worn on-campus and off-campus, and be modified for specific duties (eg. bike patrol).

The following is an aggregated list of points from the discussion.

General

- Among the options shared, some (with ties) appeared more formal than others. This is likely a matter of aesthetic preference.
- There was discussion of a need (possibly) for a different look at the medical center (eg. a “sports coat” look at some locations) to blend into the setting.
- A change in uniform may make the role of Public Safety less clear to visitors and outside guests.
- Additional conversation would be needed if changes were considered for Columbia residential buildings outside of undergrad housing

Discussions around a change in uniform possibly impacting community members’ ability to identify Public Safety officers, especially in an emergency:

- The options presented do not clearly distinguish the officers as being part of “Public Safety,” versus other departments at Columbia. (eg. Facilities, UEM)
- There was a concern that an officer may need to change location during an emergency and an alternate uniform may hinder community members’ ability to identify them.
 - To alleviate this concern, the group discussed whether some other identifier might be added to signal that the officer is part of Public Safety (eg. a hat, sash, badge or lanyard in a moment of crisis), or the idea that an identifying icon or patch on the front and/or back of a shirt, signaling Public Safety.
- The group noted that it is important to visibly distinguish Public Safety from door attendants (other staff) in residence halls, given that the officers usually sit at a desk near the front entrance and their full uniform are typically not seen. The group discussed that students would likely need training at their orientation to have a clear understand of differing functions of staff in residence halls (eg. Public Safety officers versus front desk attendants) to clearly understand who to go to in the event of an emergency.

Additional uniform discussion points:

- The current uniforms are more aligned with NYPD, so an alternative look and feel could be a helpful way to set Public Safety apart as a Columbia-specific resource.
- The Committee noted that contracted officers, Allied guards, work primarily off campus, versus the Columbia Public Safety staff guards who work on campus. There was less focus and concern about the Allied’ officers’ uniform choice.
- Idea was shared to survey a group of undergrad students with the uniform options. Results from the survey, along with the Committee’s suggestions, could be taken into consideration in making the decision to change uniforms.

Discussion of Fall Agenda Focus Areas (2022):

Committee member Sandi Garcia Bernal presented a host of possible topic areas for the Inclusive Public Safety Committee to focus on in the coming Fall term for the group's consideration and discussion. Among them:

- **Public Safety Training**
 - Establish a process for a Subcommittee/diversity affairs network to assist with enhancing trainings
 - Different training needs for different types of officers (higher turnover rate for contract officers)
 - Communication about the culture at Columbia

- **Mental Health and Wellness Checks**
 - Deescalation strategies for students in distress
 - Strengthening Public Safety's approach to mental health crises and other sensitive situations
 - Review of procedures related to students in crisis
 - Preventive approaches and care teams instead of reactive responses

- **Clery reports and additional communication discussions**
 - Best practices for the Clery alerts
 - Fostering greater campus inclusivity and sense of belonging
 - Transparency in addressing complaints and concerns

- **Student Events**
 - Enhancing transparency in processes for event safety, assessment and staffing
 - Exploring issues with campus stakeholders, student organizations and Public Safety
 - The group discuss that at Mailman it has been valuable that CUIMC Public Safety leadership met with student government leaders, in building relationships and fostering trust and putting faces to names

The group discussed the possible topics and strongly agreed that focusing on mental health and wellness checks would be the highest and best use of the Committee's focus in the Fall.

Additional topic the group discussed as being important to work on was the relationship between Columbia Public Safety and other anchor institutions in the area.

Close and Next Steps:

Committee Chair Josef Sorett closed by sharing updates on the hiring process for the incoming Vice President of Public Safety, and committing to sharing invitations with the Committee over the summer to participate in the interview process at the appropriate time.