

**Columbia University Inclusive Public Safety Working Group**  
**Meeting Notes for**  
**September 25, 2020 – 9:30-10:30 AM**

**Agenda**

1. Welcome New Committee Members
2. Public Safety's Work: A presentation by Jim McShane, VP for Public Safety with Q&A
3. Discussion: Elements of Inclusive Public Safety
4. Next Steps: Subcommittees for the Working Group

1. Welcome

The working group co-chairs, Suzanne Goldberg and Flores Forbes, along with Jim McShane, VP for Public Safety, welcomed new members and reminded the group of President Bollinger's charge: To work with the leadership of Office of Public Safety to examine existing trainings and practices, and to recommend concrete strategies for ensuring that we can have truly inclusive safety for all who are on Columbia's campuses.

2. Public Safety's Work

Jim McShane, VP for Public Safety, presented an overview of Public Safety's work. The powerpoint presentation can be found [on the University Life website](#). Highlights included:

Public Safety mission: The mission of the Columbia University Department of Public Safety is to enhance the quality of life for the entire Columbia community by maintaining a secure and open environment where the safety of all is balanced with the rights of the individual.

- Distinction between Public Safety and law enforcement: Public Safety officers at Columbia do not carry weapons and do not have the power to arrest people.
- Organizational structure: Public Safety is organized around these three areas: investigations, training and operations. See the PPT for detailed information.
- Staffing: Public Safety officers and supervisors, all unsworn and unarmed, who work across Morningside, Manhattanville and Medical Center campuses. Duties include access control, fixed posts, foot, bicycle and mobile patrols, as well as operations, investigations, technology, special events and administrative support. Demographic breakdown of 287 staff members: Asian (5%), Black (35%), Hispanic (40%), White (16%), N/D (4%); 83% male, 17% female.
- Training:
  - o Onboarding: Classroom training on University policy and public safety procedures: 80 hours for officers; 120 hours for supervisors. On-the-job campus orientation: 240 hours across three campuses.
  - o Training includes presentation from various University stakeholders who address these topics: implicit bias, crisis intervention, de-escalation, equal opportunity and affirmative action, diversity, multicultural and gender sensitivity, and sexual violence response and Title IX.

- Additional training: Occurs throughout the year, including 8 hours of NYS security officer training annually.
- Customer Service Ambassadors: Public Safety also serves a role as customer service ambassadors by providing wayfinding to people entering campus, guidance and support if a Columbia member is a victim of a crime, and by providing wellness checks for students who are experiencing mental health crises.
- Crime Prevention: This includes VIA rideshare, LionSafe app, safe havens, emergency call boxes, self-defense classes, anti-theft protections (devices, operation ID, PC/Mac phone home, shred fest), Campus Safety 101 video
- sale of anti-theft devices, investigating crimes on campus, and also patrolling
- Clery Alerts and community messaging: University-wide text messages are an opt-in system; Clery crime alerts are required by law to be sent by email to all.
- Preventing/mitigating violent acts: Public Safety developed active-shooter protocols, offers active-shooter seminars presented by NYPD, provides situational awareness training, emergency procedures posters and protocols to schools and departments.
- Legal compliance: Public Safety has responsibility for reporting related to Title IX and Clery requirements (crime, training, fire, timely warning notices, emergency preparedness)
- Community outreach: new section of Public Safety website with information about community members' rights and responsibilities when interacting with Public Safety, training, and instructions on how to contact Public Safety and provide feedback.
- Reviews and recognition: Public Safety has earned high scores on the biannual Student Senators Quality of Life survey and by Columbia students responding to the American College Health Association/National College Health Association Survey; and recognition by a variety of external organizations, including Yourlocalsecurity.com and National Council for Home Safety & Security.

Q&A and follow-on discussion addressed these topics:

- Surveys: Is the information about race/ethnicity of survey respondent for the Student Quality of Life survey known, and are there surveys about the surrounding community's perception of Columbia Public Safety? Response : No one on the call had this information available; gathering this data will be a part of subcommittee work.
- Student contact information requirements: Students are not required to provide a parental contact as part of their contact information, in recognition of the varied circumstances of students, some of whom may not have contact with their parents.
- ID card requirements: The text on the back of the CUID says that you are required to present this card when asked; however, there is not an official policy that requires affiliates to carry their cards on the Morningside campus. Affiliates at CUIMC are required to wear their ID cards at all times.
- Public Safety's interactions with NYPD: Public Safety confers with the NYPD to discuss criminal activity on campus. Because Columbia Public Safety officers do not

have powers of arrest, they work with NYPD on investigations. A regular example is package larceny in Columbia's off-campus housing – this is a situation where Public Safety works with the NYPD to identify people involved in removing packages from buildings in the neighborhood. Public Safety also serves as a buffer for Columbia affiliates who may not be comfortable in engaging with NYPD directly about crimes they may have experienced. There are times when students do not want to speak with the NYPD, and Public Safety will work with the individual to help them understand their options such as taking a survivor of sexual violence to discuss their case with the DA instead of involving the NYPD, or working with law enforcement to obtain restraining orders in cases of domestic violence or stalking.

- Societal concerns about race, security and policing and how Public Safety is thinking about their practices in light of this national conversation. Discussion in response noted that we will explore these concerns in the course of our work together, with the goal of reaching a more collaborative and inclusive Public Safety experience for all on our campuses. This work will include collecting people's experiences and suggestions through our data gathering subcommittee via individual interviews, focus groups and through online submissions. Jim McShane added that while Public Safety does a good job of making people safe, more needs to be done to help those people who feel unsafe to feel that they are safe, and it is the goal of the working group to find a way forward to meet that need.
- Working group data collection: Discussion noted the importance of being mindful of who is participating and sharing experiences in the data collections, and how to weigh the data when those with important experiences to share may be a smaller part of the conversation.
- Perceptions of safety: We wrapped up the large group discussion focused on how we define the idea of safety and what it means to feel safe, and how that perception differs greatly based on past experiences and identity, and recognizing the difference between being objectively safe and feeling safe.

### 3. Discussion of the Elements of Inclusive Public Safety

The working group broke into small groups to have a deeper discussion on the concrete elements of inclusive public safety. Each small group shared key takeaways and their ideas via the chat function at the end of the meeting. See below for notes from the chat.

### 4. Working-group subcommittees:

The working group will have three subcommittees: data gathering, comparative research and training. Each subcommittee will be responsible for driving specific work forward to meet the large group's December reporting deadline for the report.

- **Data gathering** – Purpose: To gather experiences, ideas and suggestions from members of the Columbia community and others related to inclusive public safety at Columbia. This subcommittee will also be responsible for reporting this data, and any additional analysis, to the full working group for use in formulating recommendations.

This group will design and carry out data-gathering through multiple modalities (e.g. individual interviews/conversations, focus groups, online submissions), with responsibility to reach a broad and diverse group of Columbia community members and others, including recent alums. A subgroup will be responsible for gathering experiences and suggestions from Public Safety team members. Working group members who are not part of this subcommittee may be asked to assist in interviewing and focus groups.

- **Comparative research** - Purpose: To gather concrete examples of innovative and other interesting and promising practices from other higher-ed institutions and other fields related to inclusive public safety that might be useful to consider at Columbia.

This group's work may include interviewing students and colleagues on other campuses and in other settings to learn in depth about how any promising practices might be adapted for Columbia. The group will generate a report that encompasses its research and recommendations for consideration by the full working group.

- **Training and other capacity building** – Purpose: To examine in depth Public Safety's current practices for building capacity to interact effectively with diverse individuals and groups on and near campus, and identify ways to assess and enhance the effectiveness of those practices in supporting inclusive public safety on campus. The group will consider both training and other means of capacity-building.

This group will report on its questions, observations and recommendations suggestions for consideration by the full working group.

**Next steps:** Working group members will be invited to their first and second subcommittee choices.

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Breakout Group and chat notes on the concrete elements and general meaning of inclusive public safety:

- Design ways for students to help participate in public safety activities. this may happen at the main campus downtown, but I don't think this happens at all campuses, including the medical center campus
- Hard to define with Inclusive Public safety means.
- How to define safe/safety when we are a campus that has multiple communities and multiple concepts of safe/safety.
- Safety is indeed important but we want to make sure underrepresented students do not feel they need to continually "prove" they are a part of the community.
- Consistent response/treatment of all on campus.
- Clarifying role of public safety & helping dispel myths.
- (1) Improve and clarify communications around campus Access (2) Create cohesive partnership between public safety and schools' Deans of Students in broadcasting access

regulations (3) Dispelling myths around campus public safety (4) Improved communications with faculty and staff

- Developing a student corps within Public Safety, issue statements in response to national climate, understanding of history of policing in the US
- Safety is relative and has many shades that many of us have not experienced and want to experience.
- 1) Transparency around the ethnic/racial makeup of our Public Safety staff (2) We need to "humanize" our public safety officers, so that community members see them as people. (3) Can we be truly radical and think if renaming "public safety" -- given how folks define "safety" in different ways
- It is important to identify the difference between perception and facts and how we disseminate information to the community that may clarify any misconceptions.
- Importance of transparency for complaints made against the department and how those instances are resolved and what comes from them. Possibly trying to make it an external process or have an external partner for handling those complaints.
- Focus on creating a welcoming environment; better transparency on roles/responsibilities
- Clear partnership with the community; an acknowledgment of their role/impact in campus security policy and practices
- Inclusive staffing within the department; externally, many training and crime preventions to the community; work with student groups to plan and ensure the safety and success of large student events. Be a friendly listener. In our ASR, the message from me highlights our need to interact with the community. 'We have achieved this honor by engaging everyone in the business of public safety. We value our partnership with the community.
- Humanizing Public Safety - sharing the experience of security officers. Getting to know them on a personal level.
- Communication - community driven communication and effective communication in a way that is not othering
- Transparency – sharing real success and challenges
- Accountability - avenues to communicate either to the dept of PS vs. retaliation/wasted effort vs. Nothing
- Safety involves students;
  - Cultivating an understanding a history of policing in the United States – bringing an awareness of this to the work.
  - When are uniforms worn?
  - Statements of understanding around concerns and the national climate.
- Trust and accountability – the difference between feeling “safe” and “safety”.
  - Transparency – clear accountability plan for situations in which there is mistreatment or misconduct
- Communication - community driven communication and effective communication in a way that is not othering
- Transparency – sharing real success and challenges
- Inclusive is that anyone in the university can come to campus and be treated right. Do you feel welcomed by the first guard you see on campus?
  - Separating what is factual and what is not factual? What is required and what is not required.

- Having enough information and having the information disseminated in a way so that the community knows what is happening. How to manage misinformation?
  - How do we get the community feed back into the mix?
- People have their own experiences and that isn't just about perception, it is about their lived experience – which may not always be taken seriously.
  - There is a lot of us VS them. It is manifested on all sides.
  - How to make this a “we”.
- Shared Governance
- Public safety often gets inflated in these conversations. The university is not in a vacuum – how do we bring other stakeholders into the convo (Harlem, West Harlem, Washington heights, etc).