Office of University Life
Columbia University

REPORT OF THE INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SAFETY WORKING GROUP

Data-Gathering Subcommittee Progress Report

December 15, 2020

REPORT

The Data-Gathering Subcommittee, like the Working Group, is comprised of students, faculty and staff from both the Morningside and Medical Center campuses. Over the course of the Fall semester the members have met weekly for a total of six meetings to date. The purpose of the Subcommittee is to gather experiences, ideas, and suggestions from members of the Columbia community related to inclusive public safety at the University.

Background
During one of the first full Working Group meetings, Vice President James McShane presented on Columbia's Department of Public Safety. He shared data from the Student Quality of Life Survey, a biennial University-wide survey administered by the Senate Student Affairs Committee (SAC) that aims to better understand and enhance the student experience at Columbia by collecting and analyzing statistics on student satisfaction. According to the SAC survey:

- In 2015, over 9,500 surveys were completed and returned with an overall response rate of 26.4%. Public Safety earned the highest score (5.52) of the various support campus services, with a median score of 4.94. The question asked was "In general, how satisfied are you with being a student at Columbia?," and the range for the response was 1-7. For more information see: Senate Student Quality of Life Survey Report 2015-2016.

- In 2017, 11,796 surveys were completed and returned with an overall response rate of 36%. Public Safety again earned the highest score (5.96) of the various support campus services, with a median score of 5.24. For more information see: Senate Student Quality of Life Survey Report 2017-2018.

Vice President McShane also shared the following:

- In September 2020, Columbia University ranked as the fifth safest campus in New York State, in an analysis conducted by the organization Yourlocalsecurity.com. For more information see: https://www.yourlocalsecurity.com/availability/ny#safest-college-campuses.
- In February 2018, the National Council for Home Safety and Security rated Columbia the 22nd Safest College Campus. For more information see: https://publicsafety.columbia.edu/news/columbia-university-named-one-safest-colleges-america-2017-national-council-home-safety-and.
- In February 2016, the American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment found that 99% of Columbia students surveyed stated they 'felt safe' while attending the University.

Taken together, these data points demonstrate a high *quantitative* level of satisfaction with the overall safety environment at Columbia generally. Specifically, the bi-annual SAC survey indicates a largely positive view of the Public Safety Department. However,

even with this information the Subcommittee believed it was important to explore the question of inclusion, specifically in the context of anti-Black racism and racism in general. Given anecdotal data that some students, specifically Black and Latinx students do not always feel safe or welcome on our campus, the Subcommittee sought to better understand perceptions and experiences related to Public Safety through the collection of more *qualitative* data, as well as review of recent student reports and letters.

Qualitative Data-Gathering Plan
After consideration of this context, the Data-Gathering Subcommittee designed the Qualitative Data-Gathering Plan, which includes multiple modalities (e.g. individual interviews, focus groups and online submissions), reaching a broad and diverse group of Columbia community members, including recent alumni and parents of current students.

In designing this plan, the Subcommittee was guided by the following questions:
1. Who do we need to hear from?
2. Have we made ourselves accessible to anyone who wants to connect with us from the University community?
3. Are we asking the right questions?
4. How do we evaluate our data? And, how do we ensure equity among the voices heard?
5. How do we organize the data we have gathered, so that it is useful to the Working Group and conducive to generating recommendations?

The Qualitative Data-Gathering Plan includes:
- Four focus groups (one of Morningside students, one of Medical Center students, one of faculty and staff from both campuses, and one of Public Safety officers).
- Six to nine interviews with students, faculty, staff and recent graduates.
- Online submissions from students, faculty and staff, as well as recent alumni
- Review of recent student reports and letters

Members of the Data-Gathering Subcommittee developed and reviewed the questions to be asked in the focus groups, interviews and web form. Members of the Subcommittee also developed the list of individuals to be interviewed one to one and in focus group settings.

Implementation
In preparation for conducting interviews and focus groups, Professor Josef Sorett (Professor and Chair, Department of Religion; Professor, Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies) trained Subcommittee members on how to conduct a focus group. All Working Group members were invited to attend. This training formed the basis for the interview and focus group guides that Subcommittee members used (Appendix 1). The focus groups and interviews will be conducted in December 2020 and January 2021.

As mentioned above, the plan to gather new data also includes collecting online submissions via webform. The webform includes collection of some demographic information, as well as an opportunity for community members to share in narrative form their ideas, suggestions and experiences related to inclusive public safety. The Office of University Life shared the form with the Columbia community through multiple communication channels, beginning the week of November 16. To date there are over 400 submissions (Appendix 2).

In addition to collecting new data, the Subcommittee considered recent research, as well as letters from students, including:
- *A Brief History of Anti-Black Violence and Policing at Columbia University*, by the Black Students Organization [2019]
- *Report to Address Violence in Our Community through Restorative Justice Models,* by Colby King and Heven Haile [2020]
- *Entering Class of 2020 Consolidated Demands for VP&S and CUIMC,* by Columbia VP&S Black and Latino Student Organization (BALSO) and the Columbia White Coats for Black Lives [2020]

Initial Observations and Recommendations
Initial observations and recommendations of the Data-Gathering Subcommittee include:
- Continue to explore conducting a survey in Spring 2021 to gather additional quantitative data regarding community members' experiences and perceptions related to Public Safety and issues of inclusion at Columbia
- Gather and analyze additional data regarding community members' experiences and perceptions related to Public Safety and issues of inclusion at Columbia through focus groups and interviews
- Explore restorative justice as a means of resolving certain types of incidents on campus
- Consider how safety as a concept and an experience varies for individuals based on racial and other identities, personal experiences and other factors can be better understood by the many stakeholders across Columbia.
- Provide additional opportunities for Columbia community members, including Public Safety, to understand the history and legacies of racism, specifically anti-Black racism.

In summary, over the past eight weeks the Data-Gathering Subcommittee has refined its purpose and mission, as well as designed its Qualitative Data-Gathering Plan. In addition, the Subcommittee has begun to review recent reports and letters from students related to inclusive public safety and to identify themes and suggestions for promoting greater inclusivity at Columbia. Going forward, the Subcommittee will complete proposed interviews and focus groups, and continue to collect online submissions through January 2021. Once complete, Subcommittee members will review all data gathering to further refine its recommendations.

Table of Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample Focus Group and Interview Guides
Appendix 2: Webform text

Appendix 1

Sample Focus Group Guide (Student, Faculty, Staff Groups)

I. Arrangements
   a. Conduct focus group with a colleague or partner
   b. Make arrangements through University Life to have focus group recorded and to have a notetaker
   c. Plan for group to be one hour
II. Invitation:

Dear XXX,

I'm writing to invite you to participate in a focus group on inclusive public safety on XXX (insert date) at XXX (insert time), via Zoom.

I am a member of the Inclusive Public Safety Working Group, which was convened earlier this year by University Life with leadership from the Office of Public Safety to examine existing trainings and practices, and to recommend concrete strategies for ensuring that we have truly inclusive safety at Columbia. Information and insights gained through this focus group will inform the recommendations made by the Inclusive Public Safety Working Group, which will be shared in a report to President Bollinger later this semester. No names or identifying information for individuals will be shared in the final report.

I hope you are able to join us. Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

III. Welcoming and orienting people to the group/process
   a. Introduce yourself and have everyone in the group introduce themselves
   b. Thank them for participating in this process
   c. Remind participants of President Bollinger's letter this summer (July, 2020) addressing the University's commitment to antiracism in which he said, "[We will] form a working group with the leadership of our 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." This focus is a part of that process.
   d. We want to better understand your perceptions, attitudes and expectations in regards to public safety at Columbia. And, we want to hear your ideas about inclusive safety.
   e. Information and insights gained during this focus group will inform the Inclusive Public Safety Working Group's recommendations to ensure we

have truly inclusive safety at Columbia, which will be incorporated into a report shared with President Bollinger later this semester.

    f. Let people know that the group will be recorded. We want to make sure that we don't miss anything in our notes. The purpose of the recording is not to identify who said what but rather to be clear about what was said.

    g. Ask if people have any questions before getting started with the questions for the group.

    h. Share guidelines for the conversation

        i. Be mindful of sharing the space with others, we want to hear from everyone

        ii. It's fine to disagree with each other but it is important to be respectful of one another

        iii. Please maintain the confidentiality of this discussion – what is said in this zoom stays in this Zoom

        iv. Please let us know if you are uncomfortable with the questions or process at any time

        v. There are no right or wrong answers. We want to know what you think. Also, please feel free to share your points of view even when it might differ from others

    i. Start with informal conversation – to help people warm up and get to know each other a little

IV.   Things to be mindful during the focus group

    a. The key is listening. Priority for the group is hearing participants' thoughts.

    b. Listen for tension points and explore them, if folks disagree be sure to hear from all sides.

    c. Attend to where the group is. If people are quiet, then find ways to engage people. If people are talkative, then let conversation flow (as long as it stays on topic).

    d. Be mindful of time. Try to get through all the questions, so that each focus group is using the same (or similar) process, though it's not a failure if you're unable to get through all the questions.

    e. If there's silence, consider doing a "round robin" to get people's thoughts "off the top of their head."

    f. If a handful of people dominate the conversation, be sure to "leave room" for people who are less inclined to share – invite them into the conversation (i.e. "Let's hear from folks who haven't had a chance to talk yet," etc.)

V.   Questions

    a. When you think of Public Safety, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

    b. What do you think are some things Public Safety does well? What are some areas that you believe Public Safety can improve?

    c. What do you think the relationship is like between Public Safety and the campus community? And why?

    d. How do you think students perceive Public Safety?

      e. What does inclusive public safety mean to you? And, what would that look or feel like on campus?

      f. Do you think Columbia community members (students, faculty, staff) have a role in maintaining safety on campus? If so, what is it?

      g. What do you think is important for Public Safety to prioritize? [Depending on what emerges from participants, perhaps be prepared to probe with why?]

      h. In what ways do you think Public Safety contributes to the campus community?

      i. What are your hopes for the future of Public Safety?

      j. Is there anything I/we have not asked that you think it is important for the committee to consider/report re: public safety?

VI.   Closing

      a. Thank everyone for their participation. Let them know we greatly appreciate them taking the time to share their thoughts with us.

      b. If people have follow-up thoughts they'd like to share, refer them to the web form. Or, let them know they can contact Ixchel Rosal, AVP Student Life in University Life (irosal@columbia.edu) if they have any questions, concerns or would like to follow-up with someone.

      c. Let participants know they can follow the process of the Inclusive Public Safety Working on the University Life website. Share link in chat: https://www.universitylife.columbia.edu/inclusive-public-safety-working-group#meetingnotes

VII.   Post Focus Group

      a. Debrief with your partner/colleague and the notetaker and review notes.

      b. Share notes with Ixchel Rosal as soon as possible.

      c. Share recording with Ixchel Rosal as soon as possible.

Sample Interview Guide (Students, Faculty, Staff)

I.   Arrangements
   a.   Make arrangements through University Life to have interview recorded
   b.   Plan for interview to be 45 minutes
II. Invitation:

Dear XXX,

I'm writing to invite you to participate in an interview on inclusive public safety. I am a member of the Inclusive Public Safety Working Group, which was convened earlier this year by University Life with leadership from the Office of Public Safety to examine existing trainings and practices, and to recommend concrete strategies for ensuring that we have truly inclusive safety at Columbia. Information and insights gained through my interview with you will inform the recommendations made by the Inclusive Public Safety Working Group, which will be shared in a report to President Bollinger later this semester.No names or identifying information for individuals will be shared in the final report.

I hope that we are able to connect for this discussion. Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you and making arrangements for us to talk.

Best,

III. Welcoming and orienting interviewees to the process
   a.   Re-introduce yourself if necessary
   b.   Thank them for participating in this process
   c.   Remind interviewee of President Bollinger's letter this summer (July, 2020) addressing the University's commitment to antiracism in which he said, "[We will] form a working group with the leadership of our 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." This focus is a part of that process.
   d.   We want to better understand your perspective about Public Safety. And, we want to hear your ideas about inclusive safety.
   e.   Information and insights gained from this interview will inform the Inclusive Public Safety Working Group's recommendations to ensure we have truly inclusive safety at Columbia, which will be incorporated into a report shared with President Bollinger later this semester.
   f.   Let interviewee know that the group will be recorded. We want to make sure that we don't miss anything in our notes. The purpose of the recording is not to identify who said what but rather to be clear about what was said.
   g.   Ask interviewees if they have any questions before getting started with your questions.

    IV.   Things to be mindful during the interview
- a. The key is listening. Priority for you to hear participants' thoughts.
- b. Be mindful of time. Try to get through all the questions, so that each interview is using the same (or similar) process, though it's not a failure if you're unable to get through all the questions.

    V.   Questions
- a. Do you have any conceptions about Public Safety? If yes, what are they?
- b. Have you ever had any experiences with a Public Safety officer? If yes, can you describe that experience? How would you characterize that interaction (positive, negative, something else)?
- c. What are your thoughts about accountability of Public Safety officers at Columbia?
- d. Do you think bias impacts Public Safety officers' judgement in making decisions? If so, how?
- e. How do you think students perceive Public Safety?
- f. How do you think Public Safety perceives students?
- g. What are your thoughts on movements to re-examine universities' relationships with public safety offices and police departments?
- h. In what ways do you think Public Safety contributes to the campus community?
- i. What do you think is important for Public Safety to prioritize? [Depending on what emerges from participants, perhaps be prepared to probe with why?]
- j. What are your hopes for the future of Public Safety at Columbia?
- k. Is there anything I/we have not asked that you think it is important for the committee to consider/report re: public safety?

    VI.   Closing
- a. Thank the interviewee for their participation. Let them know we greatly appreciate them taking the time to share their thoughts with us.
- b. If someone has follow-up thoughts they'd like to share, refer them to the web form. Or, let them know they can contact Ixchel Rosal, AVP Student Life in University Life (irosal@columbia.edu) if they have any questions, concerns or would like to follow-up with someone.
- c. Let interviewee know they can follow the process of the Inclusive Public Safety Working on the University Life website. Share link in chat: https://www.universitylife.columbia.edu/inclusive-public-safety-working-group#meetingnotes

    VII.   Post Interview
- a. Review your notes immediately if possible.
- b. Share notes with Ixchel Rosal as soon as possible.
- c. Share recording with Ixchel Rosal as soon as possible.

Appendix 2

Webform Text

Share Your Feedback With the Inclusive Public Safety Working Group

Intro

The Inclusive Public Safety Working Group invites members of the Columbia community to share ideas and suggestions for achieving truly inclusive safety for all who are on Columbia's campuses. This form may also be used to share your experiences with Public Safety.

Submissions are anonymous, but if you are willing to be contacted, please opt-in to indicate that we may reach out to you; we will collect your name and contact information before you submit the form. We will review every form submitted but may not be able to contact everyone who opts in.

Form

1. What is your affiliation with Columbia? (Select all that apply)
    a. Student
    b. Faculty
    c. Staff
    d. Alum
2. If you are a student are you a first-year? (Select one)
    a. Yes
    b. No
3. If you are a first-year, have you been on campus? (Select one)
    a. Yes
    b. No
4. What campus community do you belong to? (Select one)
    a. Morningside
    b. Manhattanville
    c. CUIMC
    d. Lamont-Doherty
5. What is your gender identity? (Select all that apply)
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Agender
    d. Gender non-binary or genderqueer
    e. Gender fluid

   f. Prefer to self-describe (Please specify)

6. Do you identify as transgender? (Select one)
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to say

7. What is your racial/ethnic identity? (Select all that apply)
   a. American Indian, Alaska Native, Aboriginal, Native or Indigenous
   b. Asian (e.g., Chinese, Filipino, Indian)
   c. Black or African American
   d. Hispanic or Latinx
   e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   f. White
   g. Other *(Please briefly describe)*

8. Have you ever visited the Public Safety website?
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. Have you ever had the opportunity to interact with Public Safety? (Select one)
   a. Yes
   b. No

10. Was that interaction negative or positive? (Please describe below)

11. Should Public Safety be allowed to ask you for your ID in a closed building after hours? (Select one)
   a. Yes
   b. No

12. Do you think Public Safety is doing a good job? (Select one)
   a. Yes
   b. No

13. Please describe your experience with Public Safety at Columbia. You may also share your ideas or suggestions for ensuring we have truly inclusive safety for all who are on Columbia's campuses (maximum 10000 characters).

14. If you are willing to speak with a member of the Inclusive Public Safety Working Group, please share your name contact information here: