Campus Safety Advisory Group

Feedback Sessions Playback

Beginning in September 2019, the ad-hoc Campus Safety Advisory Group (CSAG), along with consultants from D.Stafford and Associates, began collecting feedback from students, staff and faculty in a community-focused process to re-envision the model of campus safety. Feedback continues to be collected through a dedicated email address, an anonymous form and a series of listening sessions and focus groups.

Our Process

To date, CSAG has hosted:

- 3 open forums to which all members of the Smith community were invited
- 14 listening sessions with invited governance bodies across campus (including Student Government Association, Staff Council, Inclusion Council, House Presidents Association and Faculty Council)
- 30 campus stakeholder meetings (including Residence Life student employees and staff, Chairs and Directors, Office of Equity and Inclusion staff, Athletics staff, and Campus Police Officers)

Over 425 community members have provided feedback, resulting in more than 750 comments recorded.

What We Asked

In an effort to guide the conversation and make recommendations that best reflect the voices of the entire community, CSAG used the following six questions on both the anonymous form and at the feedback sessions:

1. Community policing is defined by visibility, accessibility and personal interaction with the campus community. Using that definition as a benchmark, what aspects of community policing does Smith do well? Are you familiar with the community policing programs that Smith offers? What are more effective ways of communicating about these programs? What are the barriers to those services? Where are the opportunities for improvement?

2. Reflecting on your own experience with campus police whether directly or indirectly, how has their presence in our community affected your Smith experience?

3. Do you have a point of view regarding the name of the new department? Should the department be called, for example, campus safety, public safety, campus police or something else? Why?

4. Name a situation that you would welcome campus police to participate in more. Why, and what role would you envision them playing -- and not playing?

5. If you could change one thing about what the current campus police department is doing or not doing, what would it be? What would the ideal campus police department do?

6. What have we not asked that is important for us to know?

What We Heard

This process is guided by the knowledge that no member of the Smith community can succeed without feeling safe while on campus. While we heard a lot of different opinions, we found some themes throughout the feedback. *Please note that quotations are meant to be illustrative, not representative.*

On the question of community policing:

> *"Officers handing out ice cream from golf carts is awesome."*

> *"I am not familiar with the community policing programs Smith offers. Smith E-Digest would be a good way of getting info out. Maybe have public safety walk through office buildings once a week to say hello or just be visible so we can see their faces and maybe get to know them."*

> *"Police being visible makes some people feel LESS safe - especially people from communities with historically poor relationships with police, i.e. people of color and trans folks. Improving those relationships would help way more with "community" than increasing "visibility" of programs."*

> *"It's not clear if community policing services are only available to students or if they are available to staff and faculty as well."*

Many people were not familiar with the community policing programs offered at Smith and who could participate in them. Generally, there was a desire to have more opportunities for officers to attend community meetings and events, and expand programming and communications about services available. Many expressed the desire to develop a relationship with campus safety before there is an emergency or situation requiring services.

Additionally, it was suggested that officers might benefit from training aimed at creating a broader understanding of factors contributing to some individuals' lack of trust in law enforcement as a tool to delicately build relationships with members of the community.

On the question of personal experience with campus police and your Smith experience:

> *"The best experiences are when the campus police talk to you and make jokes, it makes the interaction better for everyone, especially when you've locked yourself out of your room."*

> *"When campo are sitting in their cars in the same spot for hours without explanation it makes us feel like they are being watched."*

> *"Historically there have been pretty major miscommunications with campus police leaving departments feeling unsupported by police as a community presence. Hopeful this will get better with the department back at Smith."*

> *"A lot of miscommunications with dispatch because they don't know the campus, community or protocols. Bringing this back to Smith will be helpful."*

How campus police have affected an individual's experience at Smith is widely varied, personal and often influenced by outside experience. Many reported the officers assigned to Smith campus being supportive, helpful and responsive.

Others felt they "lurked" in cars, making some individuals uncomfortable. Furthermore, some reported a disconnect and lack of awareness of Smith campus from dispatch and officers not regularly assigned to this campus tainting the good work done by the officers regularly on campus. Generally, most reported optimism in the future of an internal department with strong leadership and accountability that aligns with Smith's mission and values.

On the name of the new department:

> *"The name 'campus police' should be changed to 'campus safety.' They ARE the fastest and first responders on campus, and are there for the safety of students."*

> *"I strongly advise against changing the name. Campus police is appropriate. If the department is called campus safety but they act as police there will be problems. Make the department more accountable."*

> *"Ease concern about the name and the word 'police' through outreach to develop relationships. It would be more beneficial to the community."*

> *"Avoid the word 'police' in the title since it will (understandably) have negative connotations for some students/faculty/staff."*

> *"The name needs to come out of the purpose of the department. Don't mask the actual functions with a name that isn't accurate."*

The feedback reported broad range of opinions on what name is best moving forward with little consensus. This question tended to focus more on what the role and purpose of the department will be

once it is back at Smith. Community members wanted more transparency around policies and procedures, consistency, better communication and response from dispatch, a more user-friendly website with regular updates, and training to ensure the department is equipped to serve the diversity of the community.

On situations campus police would be welcomed to participate in more and the roles they could play, or not:

"Invite officers to community events, such as Otelia Cromwell Day or the Inclusion Day, so all community members are learning, growing and dismantling systems of oppression together."

"Create opportunities to meet officers in casual settings so there are relationships before they are needed in an emergency."

"I don't want to engage with campus police, their goal is to get you in trouble."

"Have officers hand out ice cream or kettle corn, attend house tea in plain clothes, create opportunities for meet and greets with students at select house meetings."

"More cross-departmental collaboration."

Many expressed a desire for the department to become better integrated across campus. Others are resistant to any interaction with campus police. Generally, it was recommended that officers be keenly aware of systematic and social reasons contributing to discomfort with law enforcement for different members of the community that require sensitivity and intentionality by the department in order to build stronger relationships across the campus.

On changing one thing the department is currently doing or not doing:

"More officers walking, on bikes or in golf carts. It feels like surveillance when the officers are in cars."

"Create learning opportunities and continual touch-points between campo and community."

"More robust training on a variety of subjects including social justice, diversity, supporting marginalized populations, supporting assault survivors, etc."

"Integrate campus police into the community."

Three major themes emerged through the feedback sessions: First, the community wants to see the officers outside of their cars; walking, biking or driving golf carts to increase approachability. Second, the community would like to see officers trained and well-versed in mental health and crisis intervention, survivor support, and the needs of diverse and marginalized populations. Third is a desire to integrate officers, dispatch, and leadership into the community to foster relationships and understand the intricate and distinct constituencies of Smith.

On what the ideal model would look like at Smith:

> *"The ideal department would have better relationships with students, particularly marginalized populations."*

> *"Ideally, everyone, even those who don't like safety/security, still see the department is as respectful, helpful, competent and trained."*

> *"A user-friendly website with clear policies, easily accessible information and where to go with questions."*

> *"I would like to see the safety department being a part of the educational mission of the college by educating students and faculty about safety issues and their role on campus."*

> *"I believe we need to work together to come out of a triggering place. As someone who did not grow up with positive views of police, I think we need to build relationships throughout the community to grow together."*

> *"Create multiple branches of the department. Someone with alcohol poisoning needs a lot more love than someone who locked themselves out of their room. Officers who have different training to handle different situations."*

The community is looking for stronger, more supportive relationships where everyone feels safe. Participants provided a wealth of actionable suggestions, expressing openness and appreciation of the process and bringing the department back to the college.

Other Emerging Themes

Structure of the Department

In every session there was discussion on whether the department should be made up of police officers (sworn officers) or safety/security guards (non-sworn officers). Sworn police officers are certified by the State and must complete training at a state police academy. They have authority to make arrests and have access to law enforcement databases. Non-sworn officers may observe and report and provide support to law enforcement agencies. They do not have authority to make arrests and cannot access law enforcement databases. Currently, the entirety of Smith College's Campus Police is sworn, they do not carry firearms and there are no plans to arm them.

It is hypothesized that if Smith College's Campus Police were not sworn, the college would have to rely on Northampton Police Department (NPD) in all service calls requiring police response. Smith would not control the police response or their interactions with the campus community. Largely due to these reasons, many supported having at least some sworn officers on campus.

We heard suggestions that a combination department of both sworn and non-sworn personnel, including using student workers should be explored. After receiving many comments and feedback from students,

it is clear that they would like to have the campus safety department staffed with members who have specific training and experience in the following disciplines:

- Crisis Intervention
- Mental Health Strategies
- De-escalation Techniques

Other opinions included the wearing of a police uniform which was perceived to be intimidating to some students. While proactive and positive interactions between police officers and students can certainly alleviate those concerns, the use of non-sworn officers also has benefits. Use of non-sworn personnel can help support the mission by handling lock-outs and escorts among other duties.

Improved Community Engagement

As Campus Police works to establish themselves as an independent force the top priority will be better community engagement. Improved relationship between officers and the rest of the community as a result of greater knowledge of the campus, the community's needs, and more individualized responses to calls made to Campus Police will be the pillars of the new department. The majority of every conversation focused on these needs and it is the goal of the college to build the right department for the needs of the college.

Not surprisingly, a large portion of comments from the community centered around the desire to build a closer relationship with Campus Police. Of the comments recorded, over half related to community engagement, out of those comments roughly two-thirds were about creating opportunities for community members and police officers to connect on campus. Getting to know each officer by name and learning about their backgrounds is a top priority for many people at Smith College.

Feedback collected to date and moving forward will be used by the Campus Safety Advisory Group to make recommendations to the vice president for finance and administration and the president, who will make the final decision on the direction of campus safety at Smith. Decisions and next steps in the process will be communicated to the community on the model the college will adopt and next steps early in the spring semester. Community members are welcome to direct questions or feedback by emailing campuspolicingvision@smith.edu or by submitting anonymous feedback through the form.