

**REPORT ON SECURITY AT
COLUMBIA AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
IMPROVEMENTS**

Columbia College Student Council

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To the administration:

Security is one service at Columbia that touches every aspect of student life. From participation in student groups to life in residences halls, contact with security personnel and procedures is frequent and inevitable.

Even with the specter of crime often associated with large urban centers, we believe most students feel secure and safe at Columbia. On the whole, we believe security at Columbia is highly effective in making students feel safe. The enrolled student survey regularly indicates a high level of student satisfaction with security. Despite these results, we still believe there are many issues concerning security which students want addressed.

In general, we would like to emphasize here that Columbia University Security is a security detail and not a campus police force. Their place is not to discipline students, but to protect students' safety. As a service agency, this report and associated proposals are largely oversight measures deigned to improve customer service and relations between students and security.

We strongly believe that giving students increased opportunity for input, and by expanding oversight in general will create a more efficient security force as well as promoting student cooperation with security protocols and personnel.

Certain portions of this report do require substantial financial resources. We would, however, like to emphasize the importance in protecting the free and open exchange of ideas, in encouraging political dialogue on campus, and promoting meaningful cocurricular activities.

Respectfully submitted,

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Security and Students Rights

Observation:

- a. Most students are unaware of the rights they possess when interacting with members of Columbia University Security.
- b. Security officers should treat students in a courteous and professional manner; should not behave unprofessionally or rudely; and should seek to provide an appropriate level of service. In some cases, members of Columbia University Security fail to meet these criteria.

Proposal:

[1] A committee of students, members of Columbia University Security, and other administrators should be convened to determine a standardized procedure by which Security officers will be directed and required to follow when interacting with students. This procedure should be publicized to the student body via inclusion in FACETS and through distribution of a Security Policy Brochure through Resident Advisors.

[2] The Security Office's web resources should be improved to include directory information for security personnel, the standardized procedure in Proposal [1], and a webform for filing grievances.

Argument:

In non-emergency situations, students are entitled to an elucidation of their infringement, including a citation of the policy being violated. Establishing a procedure for interaction that promotes communication will reduce tensions between security personnel and students and encourage students to adhere to security policy. Students should be made aware of these procedures through the means mentioned in Proposal [1].

The web resources of the security office are deficient. The directory for Facilities, which includes the Security Department, lists neither Assistant Vice President for Security George Smartt, nor any of his three security directors. Students unfamiliar with the office have no idea to whom to report concerns or how to lodge a complaint.

Currently, the enrolled student survey exists as the only mechanism by which students can provide the Security Office with feedback. Although the survey does indicate a high level of satisfaction with Columbia Security, its results should be taken with a grain of salt. Most complaints with Columbia Security stem from specific incidents. The broad nature of the enrolled student survey, however, makes it difficult for students to address specific complaints. For this reason, an online form should be created on the Security Department's website; such a form would provide students with an opportunity to describe complaints as they occur.

The website of the Harvard University Police Department provides an online form with which students can register complaints with officers, commend officers, report a crime or ask general questions.¹ While the University of Pennsylvania's Division of Public Safety website does not allow for online submission of complaint forms, it does, at the very least, make them available for printing.²

¹ http://www.hupd.harvard.edu/contact_us.php

² <http://www.upenn.edu/police/dps.htm>

Security in University Residence Halls

Fixed Guard Assignments in Residence Halls

Observation:

Recently, security guards ceased to be assigned to one residence hall. Instead, they are now rotated from building to building each month.

Proposal:

Security guards should be assigned to one building and should be reassigned only if the Security Office determines, on an individual basis, that there is a significant problem with the presence of a particular guard in a particular residence hall.

Argument:

When granting students access to their residence halls, guards serve as both security officers and doormen. To the extent that they function as security officers, assigning particular guards to particular buildings has one significant benefit: such guards have the opportunity to become acquainted with the surrounding area and are better able to notice any anomalies that appear in it. When guards are rotated from dorm to dorm, it is difficult for them to acquire sufficient knowledge of their surroundings to effectively notice points of concern.

By being assigned to particular residences halls, guards stand to gain familiarity not only with those halls but also with the students who live in them. Indeed, by adopting a non-rotating assignment system the security office can foster better relationships between guards and students. In the long run, better relations will promote student cooperation with security guards both in and outside of residence halls. Such cooperation will contribute to greater success and efficiency of security at Columbia.

Call up sign-ins

Observation:

In order for non-residents to enter campus dormitories, they must be signed in by a resident of the building to which they are visiting. Residents must sign-in their guests in person.

Proposal:

When guests arrive, security officers should be permitted to call the guests' hosts as an alternative access plan.

Columbia security should implement an alternative access policy for non-resident guests. This policy would allow guards to call residents when guests have arrived; residents would then be able to authorize guest entry over the phone.

Argument:

Students find the process of signing in non-residents to their residence halls to be highly inconvenient and very unnecessary. Currently, at Barnard dormitories, desk attendants are authorized to call the resident being visited and obtain verbal authorization to allow the visitor access to the residence hall. The desk attendant then takes and holds identification of the visitor until he or she signs out. This process still ensures that the building remains secure

In Columbia residence halls, a security guard or desk attendant can use the Campus Pages to find the resident being visited. Notably, this access policy still relies on the direct interaction of the resident and the desk attendant.

Although Security has claimed that this will place an undue burden on desk attendants and security guards, we do not believe it will be significantly more burdensome to the attendant. Phones and directories are already in place at the security desk. A call to a resident would take less than thirty seconds. Many guards currently call residents to inform them of deliveries at the front desk which has not placed any substantial burden on those guards. While we recognize that there is more frequency of visitors, we still contend that the time it takes to authorize by phone access to the building is not sufficiently large to warrant its disuse. Additionally, this policy should be understood as an option the security guard can choose not to utilize. If he or she determines that the desk is too busy, then current sign-in procedures can be used. This will prevent any reduction in the level of security by making it available at the determination of the guard.

Sign-in for Minors

Observation:

- a. Any visitors to University residence halls are required to leave a form of identification to enter the building.
- b. Most minors (such as siblings of Columbia students) do not have any form of identification.

Proposal:

Security guards should be granted discretion to waive the requirement of leaving identification if he or she believes that the visitor is too young as to require a proper form of ID.

Argument:

Columbia students have siblings under legal driving ages. As a result, many of them do not have appropriate forms of identification. They cannot enter university residence halls to visit family without identification. Family members should be able to visit Columbia students regardless of age. Such children pose no threat to the security or integrity of the building. Security guards are

intelligent people who have been comprehensively trained and should be given the discretion to admit children without IDs. Minors will still have to be accompanied by students or parents to enter, but they should not be denied access because of something that is out of their control.

Security on 113th and 114th Streets

Observations:

- a. There have been numerous break-ins and burglaries at the brownstones on 114th street.
- b. Students living in Greek residences and University residence halls on 114th and 113th Street often do not feel safe.

Proposal:

[1] Exterior lighting on buildings should be upgraded and enhanced.

[2] Street lights should be added and the brightness of those already in place should be increased.

[3] Large trash bins should be constructed in front of 114th and 113th Street brownstones.

[4] A security guard station, like the two at the 116th Street gates, should be placed at the John Jay gate on 114th Street.

Argument:

Residences along 114th and 113th Streets house a sizeable number of Columbia students. From the Residence halls of Carman, John Jay, Ruggles, Watt and McBain to the brown stones that currently house several fraternities and sororities as well as the Intercultural Resource Center, there is a strong student presence on both streets. Despite being largely student dominated, residents of these buildings do not feel secure. The brownstones do not have a security guard at their entrances like University residence halls. Access is much easier to obtain through forced entry and several have been burglarized.

One of the initial steps we believe should be taken toward allaying these security concerns is increased lighting on the streets. Right now, both streets are dimly lit. Improving the lighting would help to remedy a number of the security problems both of substance and of perceptions. Students, we believe, would generally feel and be safer in a better lit environment. This would eliminate darkened corners and alcoves where criminals could potentially hide. Better lighting would make identifying possible harms less difficult and more likely to occur. This would allow the recognition of potentially troublesome situations before they are realized. Dimness is an invitation to crime as perpetrators feel they are not likely to be caught. Lighting would further deter criminal activity by making it appear less likely of success. John E. Eck in an article in *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention* argues that simple and old forms of security measures, such as lighting, can significantly decrease rates of crime. Interestingly, Columbia already employs most of the other methods for location-based security he describes.³ Furthermore, a series of studies in *Justice Quarterly* found that improved lighting is statistically significant in reducing crime, contributing, on average, to a twenty percent drop in the crime rate. In fact, the study

³ John E. Eck. 2002. Preventing crime at places. In *Evidence-based crime prevention*, ed. Lawrence W. Sherman, David P. Farrington, et al.:241-294. New York: Routledge.

found that crime decreased both during the day and at night, indicating that improved lighting is a deterrent to criminal presence, not just activity.⁴ Finally, a study on crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) by the Los Angeles Police Department found that the cost of improving lighting was significantly less than the cost associated with crime in its absence. It further demonstrated that lighting decreased crime significantly by denying offenders easy access to targets and increasing their feelings of risk.⁵

We believe that an initial and immediately feasible step that should be taken is the improvement of external building lighting on the residence halls and brownstones. This is an action which the University can undertake independently and which would go a long way towards alleviating the problems that currently exist. Beyond that, the University should work with the City to improve street lighting along 114th and 113th Streets. While we recognize that this is not as simple of measure to undertake, we still believe it could be easily undertaken and would take yet a further step to enhance the security of students who live on these streets.

Another challenge on these streets is the accumulation of garbage along the curbside. This decreases visibility and again, as cited above, encourages criminal activity by creating visual obstructions. Several of the brownstones already have dilapidated trash receptacles that are not fully functional. By upgrading those that are already in place and adding more receptacles, trash can be removed from the curbside and visibility can be increased. Not only will this reduce crime or the fear of crime, but it will also aesthetically improve both streets and enhance their desirability for students as places to live as well as increasing overall student satisfaction with and appreciation of the Morningside campus.

Finally, locating a security guard station along 114th Street is essential to the areas security. Although the street is currently patrolled by Columbia security and although there are close-circuit cameras which monitor the street, neither provides a sufficiently effective method of preventing crime or decreasing the fear of crime. The closed-circuit cameras were indispensable in apprehending the people who broke into the brownstones, however, they do not provide an effective deterrent to burglary in the first place. Most potential offenders are unaware of their existence and even if signs, for example, on 114th Street were to inform people that they were being monitored, such warnings are often ignored. The primary need for security, especially in this circumstance, should be prevention and not apprehension. Even if the cameras were completely effective in rapidly apprehending burglars, there is a significant and frightening possibility that one of those persons may be armed in the future and could encounter a student or resident in the process of committing a crime. If prevention is not made a priority, then the physical safety of students residing on 114th street and passing through it is put at risk. While patrols of the street possibly improve deterrence, they do not have the clear impact that a permanent guard station would and they are not as effective in creating a sense of security for students.

⁴ David P. Farrington and Brandon C. Welsh. 2002. Improved street lighting and crime prevention. *Justice Quarterly* 19, no. 2: 313-342.

⁵ *Los Angeles Police Department crime prevention through environmental design month circular*. 2001. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Police Department.

The Broadway end of the street experiences much higher traffic and is much better lit than the Amsterdam end. Because the brownstones stretch most of 114th street, because of the location of Ruggles Hall at the Amsterdam end of 114th, and because of the large student population that uses the John Jay gate to access Hartley, Wallach, and John Jay Halls, the Amsterdam side of the street is still frequently used by students. Placing a security guard at the John Jay gate would still allow monitoring of the entire street; however, it would provide a greater degree of protection to the Amsterdam side of 114th where it is more needed.

Security Oversight Committee

Observations:

- a. Student complaints about security guards are currently handled internally by the Security Office and subjected to no form of independent oversight.
- b. Security guards interact with students on a constant basis and are often perceived by students as being rude or unresponsive.
- c. Many student events are required to have security personnel present, the cost of which is paid by student groups.
- d. The level of security required for events is often excessive.
- e. Student groups have been charged for event security without prior warning from any university official.

Proposal:

[1] A Security Oversight Committee should be created and convened immediately.

[2] The Committee should have significant student representation. Furthermore, student and administrative members of the Committee should have equal influence and voting rights as Committee members.

[3] The Committee should serve as an appellate body and have ultimate decision-making authority over matters brought before it.

[4] Students should be able to appeal the following decisions to the Committee:

- a. Decisions by the security office not to take action after a formal complaint has been submitted.
- b. Determinations about the level of security needed for student and student group events.
- c. Charges to student groups for security at events if a complaint is registered prior to the event or if the student group was not notified of the charge 72 hours prior to the event.

[5] The Committee should conduct an annual review of security at Columbia including, but not limited to, security procedures, lighting, and environmental factors effecting security at Columbia.

Argument:

There is currently no functioning form of external oversight of the security procedures involving students. Security, however, touches and affects students on a more constant basis than virtually

any other division of the University. This level of interaction makes student input vital. The University frequently recognizes that students have a much better perspective on many issues that directly affect them. In virtually every other administrative office student input is solicited and ideally impacts administrative decisions. A service that so intimately affects students should have a high level of student input. Most importantly, student members of the Committee should have the same rights and privileges as any administrative member. This will ensure that student members are able to have a meaningful impact on Committee decisions and confer legitimacy to the Committee in the eyes of students.

Any complaint about security brought by a student is currently handled completely by the Associate Director of Security. After conducting an internal review of the grievance, that one person then decides whether any further action is needed for redress. This leaves far too much room for a conflict of interest, at least in appearance, if not in substance. It allows for the perception, even if undeserved, of impropriety. Although these decisions are appealable, that process is not clearly advertised and most students are not aware of it. Furthermore, the process is closed at all levels, and for this reason can be very frustrating to students who believe they have legitimate complaints. Ultimately, there needs to be an open mechanism to adjudicate student concerns that includes student input.

The Committee will not be empowered to impose any penalties against security guards but rather to direct the security office to take further action it deems appropriate. In this manner, Security will still be afforded a needed level of autonomy but still be subject to a form of outside scrutiny. While the University is concerned that imposing any constraint upon the autonomy of security will restrict its effectiveness and ability to ensure student safety, an oversight committee, by operating reactively an oversight committee will simply provide an important customer service check. Harvard's *Commission of Inquiry* demonstrates that such a model can be applied to University security departments. The *Commission* serves to hear complaints regarding departments, divisions or offices of the University and then direct those complaints to the appropriate agency or take action on its own.⁶

Furthermore, allowing one person ultimate authority to decide the level of security necessary for student events is inappropriate. Although most decisions regarding security at student events are reasonable, there have been several occasions where, we believe, the level of security required has exceeded its need. A security guard seems to be automatically assigned too many events regardless of the need. Beyond that, the number of guard assigned to events can be excessive. A committee composed of several administrators and students will be able to identify instances of excess and give student groups a mechanism by which to formally address their objections.

Often, events requiring security are assembled in a short time frame. Convening a meeting of any committee of students and administrators can be difficult if not impossible in a short period of time. Consequently, the Committee should be given the power to forgive billing of security to student groups if the group registers a complaint prior to the event. By requiring the complaint to be made prior to the event, groups would not be able to claim after an event that security was not required simply because no incident occurred. We believe that some events do require security and the presence of guards can defuse potential problems in certain situations. This

⁶ *Handbook for Students*, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University: 2002-2003.

proposal would still preserve the integrity of that function, but it would allow for a reasonable degree of oversight that student groups deserve.

Unannounced billing to student groups for security is more problematic than unnecessary or excessive assignment of security guards. Although this problem has been very isolated, we affirm here that under no circumstances should student groups incur security costs without advance warning. The Committee's mandate to forgive in full security charges to student groups will alleviate this problem. Additionally, the Committee will be better able to recognize instances of spontaneous activities, such as protests and demonstrations, for which proper approval and security review was impossible. At the same time, the Committee will still have the ability to recognize student groups that skirt proper event approval in an attempt to avoid security charges. The Committee will have a more legitimate authority to levy penalties against student groups that engage in such deliberately deceptive behavior.

Lastly, by conducting an annual review of security at Columbia, we will ensure that recurring problems with procedures, lighting or environmental factors that impact safety are addressed. A standing committee which regularly deals with security issues will be more able to identify such concerns.

Security at Student Events

Observation:

- a. The expense student groups pay for security is a significant financial burden upon groups with already limited financial resources.
- b. The Speaker's Fund is only a temporary entity with limited resources and a very narrow mandate.

Proposal:

[1] The Speaker's Fund should be made permanent and its funding should be significantly expanded to pay for security at all student group events.

[2] The Fund should be reconstituted to pay for security for any student group event, not just speakers.

Argument:

Security charges place a large burden on student groups. Because of union contracts, groups are billed for a guard for a four hour minimum, regardless of the duration of the event. During standard business hours (Monday-Friday, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM) student groups are charged \$30 per hour for each security guard for a minimum of four hours. Most student events, however, occur during off-hours, when student groups are charged \$44 per hour for each guard, making the cost of security for a student group event minimally \$176. If four guards or more are deemed necessary for any given event, student groups must also pay for a security supervisor at \$65 per hour. Student groups' resources are already considerably constrained. Placing this additional burden significantly hampers potential activity, particularly among political groups whose events most frequently require security. These costs limit the potential range of speakers that student groups are able to bring to campus and they discourage potentially volatile, yet deeply meaningful events such as protest. For instance, an event hosted by Students United for America, for instance, featuring William Bennett and former CIA director James Woolsey required eight uniformed security personnel as well as three supervisors. These astronomical costs could never have been met by any one student group. Luckily, the central administration was willing to pick up the costs. Student groups, however, cannot currently rely on such one-time resources. The effect, however, is twofold. In diverting groups' funding to security costs, they are unable to engage in other activities that would promote their viewpoints to the larger Columbia community.

The Speaker's Fund only has a temporary mandate, expiring at the end of this year. The University needs to make a commitment to permanently sustain a fund to defer security costs at student group events if political dialogue, discussion, diversity and activism are not to be stifled. The fund needs to be expanded to cover security costs for all events. The Speaker's Fund was given a provisional budget of \$10,000. While this seems like a large amount, there are a plethora of political groups on campus whose costs have far exceeded that total. In addition, the fund should be expanded to cover security costs for all student events, not just speakers. Protests,

rallies, demonstrations, and performances are all valuable forms of student expression that should be promoted, not discouraged. By expanding funding to cover these events as well as speakers, there will inevitably be a much greater demand placed on the fund. While we realize that the University is currently under pressure to fiscally constrain itself, these student groups contribute an undeniable vibrancy to this campus that is one of the primary attractions for prospective students and an eminent component in the lives of current students.

Not only will this fund promote student expression and speech but it will also allow Security to more effectively function. By assuring student groups that security costs for events can be paid by this fund, they will be much more likely to inform security of upcoming events and not seek to evade the security review process for fear that their event will not be allowed to go forward. Security will have a better idea of all events happening on campus and will be able to provide better protection when it is needed.