2021 UNIVERSITY POLICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNITY SURVEY

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Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research

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University Police and Public Safety Community Survey Findings
Executive Summary

In Fall 2021, Penn State conducted a University-wide anonymous survey of students and employees to determine their attitudes, opinions, and experiences related to University Police and Public Safety (UPPS). Approximately 27,000 community members were invited, and 2,950 usable responses were received, yielding a roughly 11% response rate.

Nearly half of all respondents (44%) reported interacting with a Penn State University Police officer at their primary campus in the last two years, most commonly when they attended an event where officers were present or when they called University Police for non-emergency assistance. Among these respondents, perceptions of University Police were positive – 87% indicated that the UPPS employee's knowledge was sufficient to assist them and 90% indicated that the employee handled their issue professionally.

Fourteen percent of all respondents indicated that there were places on campus where they felt unsafe while 17% were unsure; the most often cited places included anywhere at night (60%), a specific location at night (24%), a parking lot (36%), parking garage/deck (21%), or walking between locations on campus (28%). The primary safety concern that respondents held was crimes against people (36%). Comments provided in relation to multiple survey questions expressed that police could be more visible on campus (including increasing foot patrols).

Most respondents were aware of the emergency public phones (68%) and believe that they are an essential part of campus security (74%). Most respondents were signed up for the PSU Alert emergency system (91%) and 69% reported being familiar with the University's Timely Warnings.

While most survey respondents held very positive perceptions of UPPS, it is worth noting that the perceptions of historically marginalized groups were often less positive. For instance, only 64% of transgender, non-binary, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, genderfluid, or respondents who selected "other" as a gender identity (as a group) indicated they felt comfortable contacting University Police for assistance, compared to 88% of women and 86% of men. Similar differences were observed in terms of respondents' feelings of safety on campus as related to gender identity and between minority and nonminority respondents. Likewise, historically marginalized groups less often agreed that officers were respectful to "people like me."

SURVEY AT A GLANCE

Survey timing: Fall 2021

Target population: students and employees at 22 campuses with University-provided police services

Survey response rate: 10.9%

Overall perceptions:

- 90% rate overall UPPS performance as "good" or "very good"
- 86% believe officers are professional
- 87% believe officers are courteous
- 77% believe officers are fair
- 20% find officers intimidating
- 87% believe officers are respectful to "people like me"

Background

In fall 2019, the Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research (OPAIR) conducted an anonymous University-wide survey on behalf of University Police and Public Safety (UPPS) to gain an understanding of student and employee attitudes and opinions related to police services and programs. In fall 2021, the OPAIR administered the survey again to capture current attitudes and opinions.[1] The results will be used to improve University Police services for all community members. The survey, which is part of the police department accreditation process, is conducted biennially.

This voluntary, online survey is intended to be used as a platform for organizational learning, and by asking specific questions about the quality of policing in the community, to measure how policing in the Penn State community affects public trust. The survey was distributed via email to selected students and employees at the 22 Penn State campuses where University Police provides services. A random sample of students and employees at Penn State Abington, Altoona, Berks, Behrend, Harrisburg, and University Park as well as all students and employees at the University College campuses—27,090 people—were invited to complete the survey. Current and former employees of UPPS were excluded from the target population. University-wide, the survey response rate was roughly 11%.

The survey asked students and employees about University Police, the police department that provides services to 22 campuses[2], and covers topics including:

- overall performance;
- overall competency of agency employees;
- perceptions of officer attitudes and behavior;
- community concerns over safety and security within University Police's jurisdiction; and
- recommendations and suggestions for improvements.

Participant responses to the survey are confidential. Although the data were collected in an anonymous fashion, some respondents provided information that could threaten their anonymity. For this reason, OPAIR provides aggregate findings only. Reported percentages often do not add to 100% due to rounding. Many of the questions asked respondents to "select all that apply." The findings for these responses are presented as a proportion of overall responses to that question. A summary of open-ended responses is provided where applicable.

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[1] Aspects of the survey that differ between the fall 2019 and the fall 2021 administrations are noted in the Appendix.
[2] Abington, Altoona, Beaver, Behrend, Berks, Brandywine, Carlisle, DuBois, Fayette, Great Valley, Greater Allegheny, Harrisburg, Hazleton, Lehigh Valley, Mont Alto, New Kensington, Schuylkill, Scranton, Shenango, University Park, Wilkes-Barre, and York

Respondents

Table 1 provides the number of respondents and response rates by primary campus location. Table 2 presents the demographics of the target population in comparison to that of the survey respondents. Representativeness of the survey respondents cannot be accurately calculated, however, due to the substantial number of respondents that chose not to provide their affiliation (22.5%), gender (23.9%), age (24.1%), and/or race (26.4%).

Table 1. Number of respondents by campus

Campus location	Survey Respondents	Sample Size*	Campus Response Rate
Abington	157	1,754	9.0%
Altoona	144	1,592	9.0%
Beaver	78	686	11.4%
Behrend, Erie	181	2,008	9.0%
Berks	159	1,244	12.8%
Brandywine	152	1,445	10.5%
Carlisle, Dickinson Law	37	334	11.1%
DuBois	93	542	17.2%
Fayette, The Eberly Campus	84	643	13.1%
Great Valley	80	401	20.0%
Greater Allegheny	80	523	15.3%
Harrisburg	302	2,687	11.2%
Hazleton	78	671	11.6%
Lehigh Valley	80	1,059	7.6%
Mont Alto	96	829	11.6%
New Kensington	104	609	17.1%
Schuylkill	89	715	12.4%
Scranton	99	1,097	9.0%
Shenango	38	411	9.2%
University Park	669	6,570	10.2%
Wilkes-Barre	49	399	12.3%
York	90	871	10.3%
Unknown	11	--	--
Total	**2,950**	**27,090**	**10.9%**

* Because of the large disparity in campus sizes, campuses were not proportionately sampled. For more information about the sampling design, contact OPAIR.

Table 2. Respondent demographics compared to the target population

Demographics	Target population	Survey Respondents
Affiliation		
Employee	20.7%	35.3%
Student	79.3%	42.2%
Missing	--	22.5%
Gender identity*		
Women	46.6%	45.7%
Man	53.1%	28.8%
Transgender woman	<1%	<1%
Transgender man	<1%	<1%
Non-binary, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, or genderfluid	<1%	1.3%
Agender	<1%	--
Different identity	<1%	--
Other	--	<1%
Unknown or missing	<1%	23.9%
Age		
Under 18	1.1%	<1%
18—24	69.3%	36.6%
25—34	10.6%	7.8%
35—44	6.6%	8.0%
45—54	6.1%	10.4%
55—64	5.0%	10.4%
65 or older	1.3%	1.9%
Missing	<1%	24.1%
Race/ethnicity**		
American Indian/Alaska Native	<1%	<1%
Asian	6.4%	3.7%
Black/African American	5.1%	3.4%
Hispanic/Latinx	6.8%	2.0%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%
Multiracial/Two or more races	2.9%	3.2%
White	65.3%	54.6%
International	9.7%	5.7 %
Other	--	<1%
Unknown or missing	3.7%	26.4%

-- Option not provided.

* Gender identity was limited to male or female in University employee records when the target population was captured.

** These categories replicate those used in Penn State's Data Digest: https://datadigest.psu.edu/.

Respondent comparison categories in the *UPPS Community Survey* dashboard include:

- Respondents who self-reported their gender identity as transgender male, transgender female, non-binary, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, genderfluid, or other are reported as a single category.[3]
- The *LGBQA or other* report filter is comprised of respondents that self-identified their sexual orientation as asexual/not sexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, queer, questioning or not sure, or other.[4]

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[3] The survey did not offer *gender nonconforming* or *genderqueer* as gender identity options in fall 2019, although respondents did have the opportunity to self-identify.
[4] The survey did not offer *asexual/not sexual*, *pansexual*, or *queer* as sexual orientation options in fall 2019, although respondents did have the opportunity to self-identify.

Perceptions/opinions about the University Police

Nearly one-third (30%) of all respondents offered comments related to their perceptions of University Police. These comments were analyzed using an emergent coding approach to identify common themes (Figure 1). Two-thirds (67%) of these comments focused on the professionalism, friendliness, trustworthiness, and usefulness of campus officers or characterized University Police as better than other police. A small percentage of comments (3.8%) concerned the perception that University Police are too focused on trivial offenses like parking infractions or alcohol violations while 1.7% of comments expressed that the University Police should be more vigilant, particularly with respect to sexual assaults on campus.

Figure 1. Thematic analysis of respondents' comments
on their perceptions and opinions of University Police
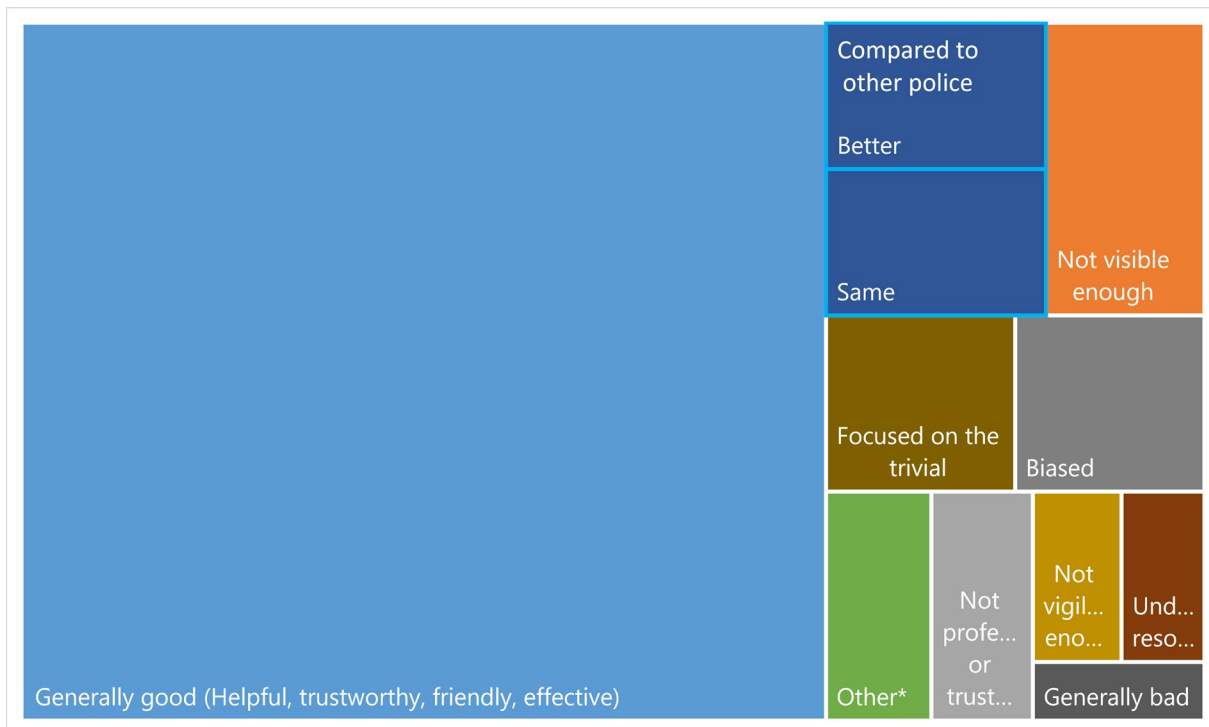
* Other comments included being undertrained, slow to respond, intimidating or dangerous, not diverse, and constrained in their ability to do their jobs.

Many respondents (13%) indicated that they did not have any perception of the University Police as they had not interacted with them. Some respondents (1.3%) expressed that they respect the University Police since they more broadly respect law enforcement and first responders. Several respondents (1.1%) stated that they had no opinion of the University Police or were indifferent. There were several responses concerning police policies and perceived differences in security needs related to campus location, as well as concerns that University Police do not act in the best interest of students.

'Select all that apply' – *Other* option

The UPPS Community Survey contained several questions instructing respondents to "select all" that apply, including an 'Other' option. Selecting 'Other' provided respondents with an opportunity to clarify their perspective with written text. General themes to these are summarized below.

- "In what ways have you had direct contact with Penn State University Police officers and/or staff at your campus? Please choose all that apply." *Other (please describe)*
  - The most common types of other interactions were related to casual conversation and parking permit/vehicle registration. Other types of interactions included: checking in with individuals in buildings as part of police daily routine/safety checks, business/work-related interaction(s) (including unlocking doors), events with officer(s) present, lost items, fire alarms, request for assistance, and wellness checks.

- "Where do you feel unsafe at your campus, campus-related facilities, and University-owned properties? Please check all that apply." *At a specific location at night (please specify)*
  - The most common other locations that University Park respondents cited included specific buildings or areas (e.g., East Halls, Pollock Halls, near Beaver Stadium and tailgating areas during home games), as well as more general areas, particularly under specific conditions (e.g., walking to parking garages/decks/commuter lot at night, poorly-lit areas, near wooded areas, and walking alone to a dorm room).
  - The most frequent specific locations that Commonwealth Campus respondents cited included: walking paths, near or through wooded areas, walking on campus at night, poorly lit parking lots, and areas without cameras or an emergency (blue light) phone.

- "Which of the following are your <u>primary</u> concerns regarding safety and security on your campus? You may select up to 3." *Other (please describe)*
  - The most common other primary concerns included: Unavailability of police after hours/during non-peak hours, buildings that are open-access, not enough cameras and/or lights in parking lots, walking to a vehicle alone, damage to vehicles in parking lots, UPPS misuse or excessive use of power, COVID-19 guideline violations, careless driving, bike/skateboard/scooter law violations (especially on sidewalks), pedestrian safety, individuals who do not appear to be affiliated with Penn State on campus property, and racial profiling/discrimination.

- "Which types of University Police sponsored programming have you attended? Please select all that apply." *Other type of University Police event (please specify)*
  - Other reported events mostly fell into the category of educational programming and included active shooter training, guest lecturers in class, informal and work-related meetings, student orientations, residence hall meetings, and various meet-and-greet activities.

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- "What types of programming would you most like to see Penn State police offer at your campus? Please choose all that apply." *Other*
  - Other types of programming included first aid and CPR, sexual assault, bike/skateboard safety, and parking rules.

- "What recommendations do you have to improve Penn State University Police? Please select all that apply." *Other (please describe)*
  - Other recommendations included increasing police visibility and coverage, increasing foot patrol, more officer training (especially concerning bias, DEI), increasing the number of officers, increasing police resources, decreasing police presence, installing more blue lights (and repair existing blue lights), and decreasing police visibility and coverage.

Appendix: Survey changes across administrations

- The following question was asked in the fall 2019 survey with the intent of using the responses to exclude current or former UPPS employees: "Do you currently or have you ever worked for Penn State University Police in any capacity?" [Options: *Yes*; *No*; *Prefer not to answer*].
  - This question was not included in fall 2021 survey as, based on the fall 2019 response pattern, there is evidence that the question was often interpreted as "worked for Penn State" by the fall 2019 respondents.

- "Which term best describes your gender identity?"
  - Fall 2019 option: *Non-binary or genderfluid*
  - Updated fall 2021 option: *Non-binary, gender nonconforming, or genderfluid*

- "Which term best describes your sexual orientation?"
  - Options introduced in fall 2021: *Asexual/not sexual*; *Pansexual*; *Queer*