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University Police and Public Safety Survey Findings

December 2019

# Executive Summary

In Fall 2019, 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). Nearly 30,000 community members were invited, and 2,671 usable responses were received, yielding a nine percent response rate.

Nearly half of all respondents (46%) 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. Among these respondents, perceptions of University Police were very positive – 89% indicated that the UPPS employee’s knowledge was sufficient to assist them and 87% indicated that the employee handled their issue professionally. Overall, 90% of respondents rated UPPS performance as “good” or “very good.”

Fifteen percent of all respondents indicated that there were places on campus where they felt unsafe, most often on campus at night, either in general (22%) or in specific locations (14%), and their primary safety concerns were crimes against people. Fear of the possibility of an active attacker came up across comments provided in relation to multiple questions.

Most respondents (71%) were aware of the emergency public phones (71%). Eighty-six percent were signed up for the PSU Alert emergency system (86%) and 68% were 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. Only 77% of transgender, nonbinary, and genderfluid respondents (as a group), for example, indicated that they felt comfortable contacting University Police for assistance, compared to 86% of women and 83% of men. Similar gender differences were observed in terms of respondents’ feelings of safety on campus 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 2019

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

**Survey response rate:** 9%

**Overall perceptions:**

* 90% rate overall UPPS performance as good or very good
* 89% believe officers are professional
* 87% believe officers are courteous
* 79% believe officers are fair
* 24% find officers intimidating
* 87% believe officers are respectful to “people like me”

University Police and Public Safety Survey Findings for   
Penn State University Park

# 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. The results will be used to improve University Police services for all community members.

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 University Park, Abington, Altoona, Berks, Behrend, and Harrisburg, as well as all students and employees at the smaller campuses—29,713 people—were invited to complete the survey. Current and former employees of UPPS were excluded from the target population and sample, and a screening question was used to direct any current or previous employees inadvertently included in the sample out of the survey. University-wide, the survey response rate (not including those directed out of the survey) was nine percent. At University Park, 6,570 people were invited to take the survey; 579 did so. The University Park response rate was nine percent.

The survey asked students and employees about University Police, the police department that provides services to 21 campuses[[1]](#footnote-1), regarding:

* overall performance;
* overall competence of agency employees;
* perception of officer attitudes and behavior;
* community concern over safety and security within University Police’s jurisdiction; and
* recommendations and suggestions for improvements.

The findings will be used to improve services for all community members. The survey, which is part of the police department accreditation process, will be conducted biennially.

This report summarizes the findings for Penn State University Park. Participant responses to the survey are confidential. Although the data were collected in an anonymous fashion, some respondents provided identifying information. For this reason, OPAIR provided UPPS with aggregate findings only. Response breakdowns representing groups with fewer than five respondents are either combined into aggregate categories or not reported. 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 the proportion of overall responses to that question. A summary of open-ended responses is provided where applicable.

Many of the analyses presented in this report compare the responses of demographic groups. It is important to note that some of these demographic groups (e.g., transgender, non-binary, genderfluid and LGB) contain only a relatively small number of respondents (see Respondent Demographics, p. 19) that answered the relevant questions. Respondent groupings commonly used in this report include:

* Minority respondents are those that self-reported as Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or as two or more races including one of the previous. Non-minority respondents are those that identified only as White.
* LGB respondents are those that self-reported as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Complete findings for The Pennsylvania State University are available in the overall report, *University Police and Public Safety Survey Findings*.

# Findings

## Interactions with Police

Figure 1. Interacted with Penn State Police officer at your primary campus in the past two years

Table 1. Respondents who reported interacting with Penn State Police:   
Nature of contact(s) (check all that apply)

| In what ways have you had direct contact? | Responses |
| --- | --- |
| Called University Police/911 | 4% |
| Called University police for non-emergency assistance | 18% |
| Victim of a crime | 2% |
| Witnessed a crime | 2% |
| Interviewed about a crime/incident | 5% |
| Received warning/citation | 7% |
| Pulled over | 8% |
| Requested service/information for myself | 4% |
| Request information/presentation for others | 4% |
| Attended an event where officers presented | 15% |
| Officer spoke to me | 9% |
| Officer questioned me | 5% |
| Arrested, involved in a traffic accident, required medical/crisis assistance, or utilized Police services[[2]](#footnote-2) | 3% |
| Other[[3]](#footnote-3) | 14% |

Figure 2. Respondent’s interactions with University Police officers and staff

## Campus Safety

Figure 3. Respondents’ agreement with statements about their comfort contacting police and sense of safety on campus

Figure 4. Feel comfortable contacting University Police for assistance – by gender

Figure 5. Feel comfortable contacting University Police for assistance – by minority status

Figure 6. Feel comfortable contacting University Police for assistance – by LGB status

Figure 7. Feel a sense of safety on my campus – by gender

Figure 8. Feel a sense of safety on my campus – by minority status

Figure 9. Feel a sense of safety on my campus – by LGB status

Figure 10. Are there places where you feel unsafe on campus?

Table 2. Respondents who reported feeling unsafe:   
Campus locations perceived as unsafe (check all that apply)

| Where do you feel unsafe? | Responses |
| --- | --- |
| Anywhere at night | 22% |
| At a specific location at night[[4]](#footnote-4) | 14% |
| Academic building | 3% |
| Athletic facility | 6% |
| Parking lot | 15% |
| Parking garage/deck | 17% |
| Walking between locations on campus | 14% |
| Arts/entertainment, dining, library, my office, res. hall, union, and/or UP Airport[[5]](#footnote-5) | 9% |

Table 3. Primary safety and security concerns

| Which are your primary safety concerns (select up to 3)? | Responses |
| --- | --- |
| No concerns | 8% |
| Alcohol violations | 10% |
| Bicycle law violations | 8% |
| Building design | 4% |
| Crimes against people | 26% |
| Crimes against property | 9% |
| Drug violations | 4% |
| Emergency phone access | 4% |
| Landscaping | 1% |
| Outdoor lighting | 9% |
| Pedestrian law violations | 8% |
| Traffic law violations | 8% |
| Other[[6]](#footnote-6) | 3% |

## Perceptions of Police Officers

Figure 11. Respondent’s positive perceptions of University Police officers

Figure 12. Respondent’s negative perceptions of University Police officers

Figure 13. University Police officers are respectful to people like me

Figure 14. University Police officers are respectful to people like me - by gender

Figure 15. University Police officers are respectful to people like me – by minority status

Figure 16. University Police officers are respectful to people like me - by LGB status

Figure 17. University Police officers are respectful to people like me - by international status

Figure 18. University Police officers are respectful to people like me - by disability status

Figure 19. I know someone that has been stopped, pulled over, watched or questioned by University Police when they had done nothing wrong

Figure 20. I have been stopped, pulled over, watched or questioned by University Police when I had done nothing wrong

Figure 21. I have felt targeted by University Police due to my gender identity – by gender

Figure 22. I have felt targeted by University Police   
due to my racial/ethnic identity - by minority status

Figure 23. I have felt targeted by University Police   
due to my racial/ethnic identity - by international status

Figure 24. I have felt targeted by University Police due to my LGBQ status (or perceived status)

Figure 25. I have felt targeted by University Police   
due to my disability status (or perceived status)

## Awareness of Campus Safety Services

Figure 26. Emergency public phones (blue light phones)

\*Only asked of respondents who indicated that they were aware of the emergency public phones.

Figure 27. Percentage of respondents that are signed up for the PSU Alert emergency system

\*Among respondents that were not signed up for the Alert systems, reasons for this included not wanting to receive the alerts, not having gotten around to it, and it not being useful (e.g., no alert sent about a local shooting).

Figure 28. Perceptions of the PSU Alert system (only respondents that indicated they were signed up for the alerts)

Figure 29. Percentage of respondents that were familiar with Timely Warnings

Figure 30. Perceptions of Timely Warnings   
(only respondents that indicated they were familiar with Timely Warnings)

## Overall Police Performance and Respondent Recommendations

Figure 31. Overall performance rating for University Police and Public Safety

Table 4. Police programming attended by respondents

| Which types of University Police sponsored programming have you attended? Select all that apply. | Responses |
| --- | --- |
| Educational program | 74% |
| Ride along | 3% |
| Table event / general safety information distribution | 11% |
| Social event hosted by police officers | 6% |
| Other[[7]](#footnote-7) | 7% |

Table 5. Programming respondents would most like to see

| Type of programming | Employees | Students | All Respondents |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| None – no additional programming needed | 4% | 6% | 5% |
| Alcohol abuse education | 5% | 4% | 4% |
| Active attacker response/education | 11% | 10% | 11% |
| Bike safety | 7% | 5% | 6% |
| Driving safety | 4% | 4% | 4% |
| Drug abuse education | 3% | 3% | 3% |
| Civilians’ rights education | 9% | 11% | 10% |
| Pennsylvania law education | 7% | 9% | 8% |
| Pedestrian safety | 9% | 4% | 7% |
| Personal safety | 8% | 7% | 8% |
| Scam awareness/education | 7% | 7% | 7% |
| Self-defense | 11% | 14% | 12% |
| Sexual assault education | 10% | 10% | 10% |
| Theft awareness/education | 5% | 5% | 5% |
| Other[[8]](#footnote-8) | 1% | 1% | 1% |

Figure 32. Perception of University Police compared to law enforcement nationally

Table 6. Recommendations to improve University Police

| Type of programming | Responses |
| --- | --- |
| Alternate patrols (foot, bike, etc.) | 9% |
| Hire more officers | 4% |
| Increase bicycle traffic enforcement | 11% |
| Increase crime prevention/educational presentations | 5% |
| Increase diversity among police officers | 13% |
| Increase engagement with the community | 14% |
| Increase pedestrian traffic enforcement | 9% |
| Increase vehicle traffic enforcement | 6% |
| Be more personable/approachable | 12% |
| Have a more visible presence on campus | 12% |
| Other[[9]](#footnote-9) | 5% |

Respondents were also asked to provide their perceptions and opinions of University Police. A thematic summary of these open-ended responses is provided in the overall report, *University Police and Public Safety Survey Findings*.

# Respondent Demographics

The following section presents key demographics describing the survey respondents. Where comparable data was available for the target population, it is presented.

Table 7. Primary affiliation with Penn State

| Affiliation | Target population  % | Survey Respondents  N | Survey Respondents  % |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Employee | 23% | 213 | 51% |
| Student | 77% | 208 | 49% |
| Unknown (not included in percentage calculations) | -- | 158 | -- |

Table 8. Gender

| Gender identity[[10]](#footnote-10) | Target population  % | Survey Respondents  N | Survey Respondents  % |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Woman | 47% | 243 | 57% |
| Man | 53% | 175 | 41% |
| Transgender woman/transgender man/non-binary/genderfluid[[11]](#footnote-11) | -- | 5 | 1% |
| Other or unknown (not included in percentage calculations)2 | -- | 156 | -- |

Table 9. Age

| Age range | Target population  % | Survey Respondents  N | Survey Respondents  % |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 24 or under | 69% | 181 | 43% |
| 25—34 | 11% | 63 | 15% |
| 35—44 | 7% | 56 | 13% |
| 45—54 | 7% | 70 | 17% |
| 55—64 | 5% | 43 | 10% |
| 65 or older | 1% | 7 | 2% |
| Unknown (not included in percentage calculations) | -- | 159 | -- |

Table 10. Racial and ethnic identity

| Race/ethnicity category[[12]](#footnote-12) | Target population  % | Survey Respondents  N | Survey Respondents  % |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Asian | 5% | 12 | 2% |
| Black or African American | 4% | 21 | 4% |
| Hispanic or Latinx | 6% | 9 | 2% |
| Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander | <1% | 0 | 0% |
| Two or more races | 3% | 14 | 2% |
| White | 65% | 307 | 53% |
| Unknown, American Indian, or Alaska Native[[13]](#footnote-13) | 4% | 170 | 29% |
| International | 13% | 46 | 8% |

Table 11. International status

| International student or employee? | Target population  % | Survey Respondents  N | Survey Respondents  % |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Yes | 13% | 46 | 11% |
| No | 87% | 374 | 89% |
| Unknown (not included in percentage calculations) | -- | 159 | -- |

Table 12. Sexual identity

| Sexual identity[[14]](#footnote-14) | Survey Respondents  N | Survey Respondents  % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Straight/heterosexual | 373 | 93% |
| Lesbian/gay/bisexual/asexual/not sexual/questioning/not sure/other[[15]](#footnote-15) | 29 | 7% |
| Unknown (not included in percentage calculations) | 177 | -- |

Table 13. Disabled as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act

| Disability status[[16]](#footnote-16) | Survey Respondents  N | Survey Respondents  % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Disabled | 29 | 7% |
| Not disabled | 378 | 90% |
| Not sure | 11 | 3% |
| Unknown (not included in percentage calculations) | 161 | -- |

Table 14. Years affiliated with Penn State in all capacities (student and employee)

| Years[[17]](#footnote-17) | Survey Respondents  N | Survey Respondents  % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 0—5 years | 94 | 75% |
| 6—10 years | 9 | 7% |
| 11—15 years | 7 | 6% |
| 16—20 years | 6 | 5% |
| 21 or more years | 9 | 7% |
| Unknown (not included in percentage calculations) | 38 | -- |

1. Abington, Altoona, Beaver, Behrend, Berks, Brandywine, Carlisle, DuBois, Fayette, Great Valley, Greater Allegheny, Harrisburg, Lehigh Valley, Mont Alto, New Kensington, Schuylkill, Scranton, Shenango, University Park, Wilkes-Barre, and York [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Combined for reporting due to fewer than 5 responses in any individual category. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Other types of interactions included public events, being accused of a crime, casual interactions with officers, Clery reporting, requests for investigations, lost and found, wellness checks, human resources interactions, and work interactions. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Where respondents indicated specific locations, these included outside of Willard where people are permitted to be “hateful or aggressive toward students.”, Hammond, Nittany Apartments, outside of Katz Building, E. Park Ave., Innovation Park, the stacks in the library, tennis courts by East Halls, and Old Main lawn. Other more general locations included where drunk people are gathered, between buildings, dense pathways, dark areas, and fraternity houses. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Combined for reporting due to fewer than 5 responses in any individual category. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Other concerns included fear of police, exterior spaces at night, bicycles and motorized transportation in pedestrian areas, student lack of rights to bear arms to protect themselves, event traffic, hazing/bullying, open spaces as a target for attackers, alcohol/drugs, not being taken seriously when a crime occurs, unsafe older buildings, phishing, and snow/ice hazards. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Other events included interactions related to special events, meeting K9 units, using the “drunk goggles” and attending an event where a police officer was the featured speaker. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Other types of programming included information about what goes on “behind the scenes”, construction safety, traffic safety, more active Run/Hide/Fight training, and sexual assault programming focused on not being a perpetrator. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Other recommendations included improving campus lighting, increased traffic assistance, increase pedestrian and traffic enforcement, antibias training, diversity training, de-escalation training, increase transparency to public, enforce no smoking/vaping areas, focus less on drinking, sexual assault prevention workshops, increase focus on education, alternatives to lethal force, and increase presence. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Penn State records do not track gender identity beyond the traditional binary categorizations. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Combined for reporting because there were fewer than 5 respondents in at least one of the categories. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. These categories are based on those used in Penn State’s Fact Book, <https://factbook.psu.edu/Factbook/> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Combined for reporting because there were fewer than five individuals in at least one of the categories. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This information is not available for the population. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Combined for reporting because there were fewer than 5 respondents in at least one of the categories. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This information is not available for the population. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This information is not available for the population. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)