

Public Safety Advisory Committee Survey: Summary Report of Findings

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Executive Summary:

Fielded between February 8 and February 21, 2021, and open to all members of the Cornell community (e.g., students, faculty, and staff), the survey finds that there is both broad, general support for the Cornell University Police Department (CUPD) within the Cornell community, as well as large segments within the Cornell community who are dissatisfied with the CUPD, express preferences over public safety policy that challenge the status quo, or both. Policing, and the role of police in American society, has risen to become a contentious issue atop the political agenda over the past decade, and particularly so since the killing of George Floyd last May. There is little doubt that this larger national debate shaped the responses and comments that were received on the PSAC survey, on both sides of this issue. With this broader lens coloring how many respondents interpreted and responded to the survey, it is impossible to disentangle the community's perceptions of the Cornell police *in particular* from perceptions of police *in general*. Taking this broader context into account, key takeaways from analysis of the survey results include:

1. Most members of the Cornell community do not interact regularly with the CUPD and lack accurate knowledge about even fundamental CUPD policies and procedures, such as whether CUPD officers carry a gun.
2. Although a majority of respondents expressed that they are “generally” or “very satisfied” with the CUPD, deeper analysis reveals that Black, American Indian, Latinx, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Cornellians who are under-represented on campus, and in particular Black Cornellians, are much less likely than White Cornellians to be satisfied with the CUPD. Qualitative comments collected in the survey highlight distrust between members of the Black community at Cornell and the CUPD.
3. Nearly one in three (30%) survey respondents expressed that they are made to feel “uneasy” or “frightened and anxious” by armed CUPD officers. Cornell's Black, American Indian, Latinx, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander community members are more likely to express that they are uneasy or anxious around armed CUPD officers, as well as around armed officers outside of Cornell's campus.
4. The current policy of asking CUPD officers to conduct personal safety checks lacks support from survey respondents. Just 7% of respondents expressed a preference that armed CUPD officers conduct personal safety checks; a plurality of respondents (40%) prefer that mental health professionals conduct personal safety checks and have the ability to call CUPD officers for assistance if necessary.

Methodology:

Design of the survey instrument began in late November 2020, in consultation with PSAC Chair Joanne DeStefano. Throughout the instrument design process, PSAC committee members including those representing the CUPD, Student Assembly, and Faculty Senate were consulted individually as well as collectively about the structure and content of the survey. Based on input from committee members, feedback on the instrument was also solicited from members of the Division of Student and Campus Life as well as the Dean of Students Office.

The survey was administered anonymously. No identifiers were attached to respondent answers, and all data analyzed in association with the survey was volunteered by respondents. No university data resources were utilized as part of the analysis of the survey results. After the survey had been fielded, the survey administrator and PSAC received suggestions that we include questions pertaining to respondents' physical and mental disabilities, religious beliefs, as well as their status as a veteran so that we can better understand how these groups view the public safety landscape at Cornell. These demographic categories should be considered for inclusion should the decision be made to run another public safety survey in the future.

In total, 34,646 Cornell community members received invitations to participate in the survey. After the survey closed on February 21, we had received 7,615 fully completed surveys, representing an overall response rate of 22%. Of these more than seven thousand responses, 3,685 came from students (17% response rate), 2,889 came from staff members (34% response rate), and 1,041 came from faculty members (representing a 25% response rate for faculty). During the two-week period when the survey was open, respondents who had not replied to the initial survey invitation received reminders to participate on February 11 and February 17. Beyond the invitation emails, PSAC and the survey administrator worked with University Relations to advertise the survey via email newsletters that are regularly distributed to students, staff, and faculty, including the CUPD's own "Blue Light" weekly email message.

In addition to the quantitative data collected by the survey, three open-text response questions included in the survey yielded more than eight thousand qualitative responses from survey respondents. Every single one of these responses was reviewed by an IRP staff member, and those responses were also made available to PSAC committee members via a secure Tableau Dashboard, which enables them to review responses by question, and to filter responses by a respondent's gender, race, role on campus (e.g., student, faculty, or staff), and by their overall satisfaction with the CUPD as they reported on the survey.

Interactions with CUPD and CUPD Priorities

26% of respondents reported having had an interaction with the CUPD since January 2019. For those respondents who have had multiple interactions with the CUPD during that time, they were asked to answer with the "most significant" interaction in mind. The most common interactions listed by respondents were "Other" (e.g., not well characterized by other response options offered by the survey, 27%), "random public interaction" (18%), "non-emergency call" (16%), "Cornell event" (12%), and "emergency call" (5%).

Those respondents who indicated that they had an interaction with the CUPD were then asked two follow-up questions about a) the extent to which they agreed that they were “treated professionally and with respect” and b) the extent to which they agreed that they came away from their interaction with “a positive impression of the Cornell University Police.” Overall, 89% of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were treated professionally and with respect, while 84% of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they came away from their interaction with a positive impression of the CUPD. Asian, Black, American Indian, Latinx, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander respondents were more likely to disagree that they were treated respectfully by the CUPD than White respondents. 12% of respondents from those groups “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that they were treated respectfully, as compared to 9% of White respondents who “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed.” Students, relative to faculty and staff, were more likely to disagree that they were treated with respect by the CUPD. All groups of students expressed similar levels of disagreement, with 18% overall “disagreeing” or “strongly disagreeing” that they were treated respectfully by the CUPD.

All respondents, whether they had previously interacted with the CUPD or not, were next asked to rate the importance of a variety of police functions. **Figure 1** below, sorted by the number of respondents answering “very important” to a given item, reveals that survey respondents overall rated the CUPD’s investigative functions as their most important duties. Investigating “assaults or robbery,” “racially motivated crimes,” and “Title IX sexual harassment crimes” were all considered to be “very important” by more than 80% of respondents, while safety and information services including “other community policing initiatives,” “mentorship of Cornell students,” and the “lost and found” were among the items considered to be of lowest importance by respondents.

Figure 1

Importance of CU Police functions

	Not important	Somewhat important	Moderately important	Very important
Assaults or robbery	1%	3%	11%	85%
Racially motivated crimes	2%	4%	10%	84%
Title IX sexual harrasment crimes	2%	4%	11%	83%
Responding to medical calls	5%	9%	15%	70%
Property crimes or thefts	2%	6%	23%	69%
Other (investigative)	20%	4%	12%	64%
Personal safety checks	8%	15%	24%	53%
Cornell alert notifications	4%	15%	30%	51%
Crime prevention	6%	16%	31%	47%
Crime alert emails	5%	17%	32%	46%
Event security	4%	18%	34%	44%
Other (safety and information)	27%	14%	15%	44%
RAVE Guardian app	12%	25%	31%	32%
Vehicle and traffic safety enforcement	10%	26%	35%	29%
Blue Light emails	12%	27%	32%	29%
Property checks on buildings	10%	29%	32%	28%
Response to quality of life issues	11%	29%	33%	27%
Attending community service events	14%	30%	32%	25%
Other community policing initiatives	11%	33%	32%	24%
Mentorship of Cornell students	22%	29%	27%	22%
Lost and found	12%	38%	30%	20%

Further analysis of the function-importance questions yields two additional insights worth noting. First, although the order and level (i.e., number of respondents answering “very important”) of importance is stable across groups including race, role on campus, gender, etc., the order and level changes considerably when we examine the responses solely of those respondents who are “generally dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with the CUPD. For these respondents, investigating racially motivated crimes and Title IX sexual harassment crimes are viewed as the two most important functions, but each of those functions are considered “very important” by just 61% and 60% of dissatisfied respondents, respectively. This suggests not only that respondents who are satisfied and dissatisfied with the CUPD have differing views as to what the most important CUPD functions are, but that those respondents who are dissatisfied are less likely to consider any individual function to be “very important”.

Second, and relatedly, among the qualitative responses that we received, numerous individuals mentioned that they found this question to be problematic or misleading. Their criticism of the question stems from the inability for respondents to indicate that they feel that a function is important, but that they would prefer for an entity other than the CUPD to oversee that function. As a result, for some respondents, and particularly for those who are dissatisfied with the CUPD,

responses to this question may reflect a respondent’s sense that this function is important for public safety at Cornell, but not necessarily that it is important that CUPD performs that function.

Satisfaction with the CUPD

Figures 2 and 3 below summarize responses regarding how satisfied respondents are overall with the CUPD. **Figure 2** summarizes the data across all respondents, while **Figure 3** sorts responses by respondents’ role on campus.

Figure 2

Overall Satisfaction with Cornell University Police

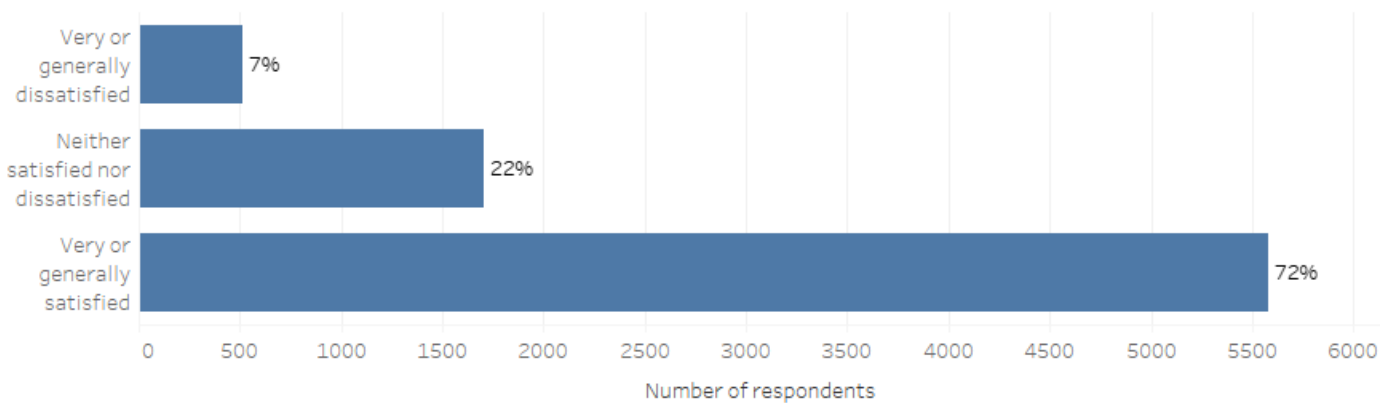


Figure 3

Overall Satisfaction with Cornell University Police (by campus role)

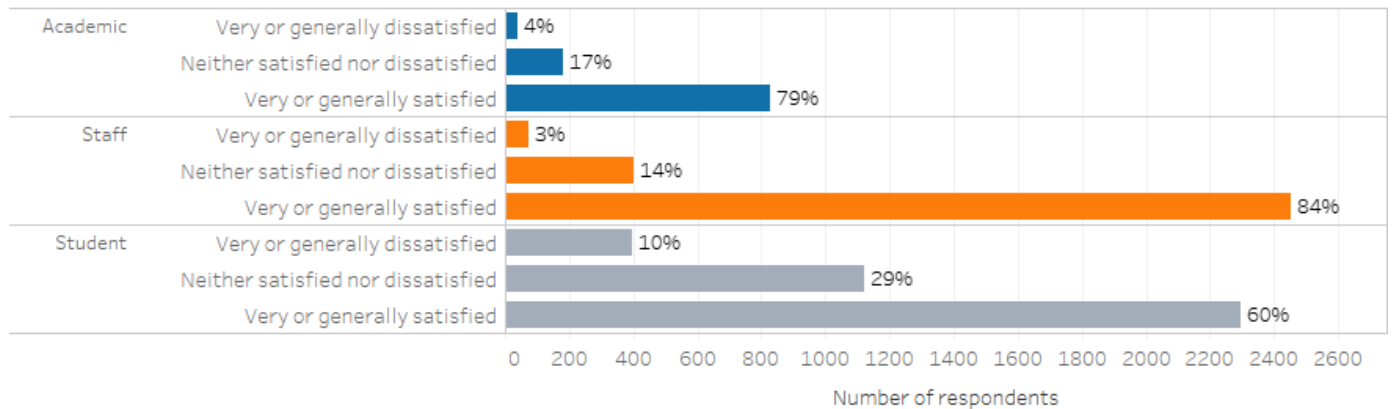


Figure 2 illustrates that 7% of respondents overall are “generally dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with the CUPD, but this figure varies considerably depending on the segment of campus that you are asking. As can be seen in **Figure 3**, 10% of student respondents are dissatisfied with the CUPD, as compared to 3% and 4% of staff and academics (faculty) respectively.

Black students are among the segments of the Cornell community with the greatest dissatisfaction with the CUPD. 20% of Black students are dissatisfied with the CUPD, making them nearly three times as likely to express dissatisfaction with the CUPD as the average survey respondent. More broadly, 14% of Black, American Indian, Latinx, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students overall expressed dissatisfaction with the CUPD, making them twice as likely to express dissatisfaction as the average survey respondent.

Gender expansive respondents (e.g., respondents who gender identify as transgender men and women, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and questioning) also express high rates of dissatisfaction with the CUPD, with 32% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction. LGBTQ+ identifying respondents also expressed dissatisfaction with the CUPD on a higher-than-average basis, with 15% expressing that they are dissatisfied with the CUPD.

Taken together, these results demonstrate that although most survey respondents are “generally” or “very” satisfied with the CUPD (72% overall), under-represented groups within the Cornell community by race, gender, and sexuality are consistently more likely than the average survey respondent to express dissatisfaction with the CUPD.

Do armed officers make community members feel safe?

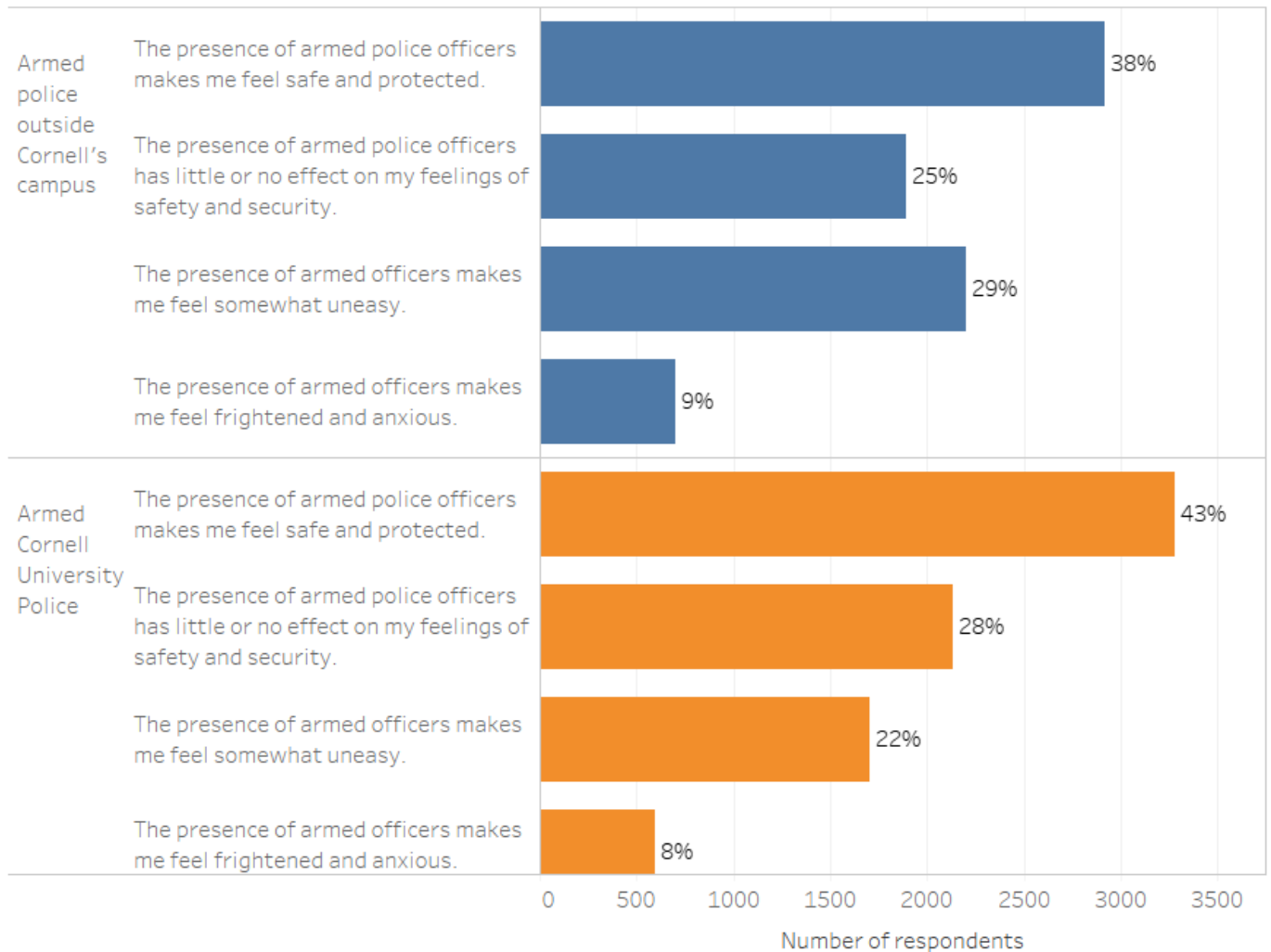
Survey respondents lack a clear understanding of the CUPD’s firearms policy. Although all sworn CUPD officers carry a firearm, just 30% of respondents were able to identify this as the current practice. 30% inaccurately responded that “some CUPD officers carry firearms,” 9% responded that “CUPD officers carry firearms only when they believe they may need them,” 3% thought that CUPD officers do not have access to firearms, and 29% did not know whether CUPD officers carry firearms or not.

Beyond this lack of knowledge of the CUPD’s firearms policy, survey respondents expressed a broad range of views over whether officers carrying firearms makes them feel safe. The survey interrogated respondent perspectives on this issue in two ways. First, the survey asked whether armed officers outside of Cornell’s campus make them feel safe and protected. Second, the survey followed-up to ask whether armed *CUPD* officers make them feel safe and protected.

Figure 4 below summarizes responses to these two questions.

Figure 4

Do armed officers make you feel safe?



Although respondents consistently indicate that CUPD officers make them feel safer and less “frightened and anxious” than armed officers outside of Cornell’s campus, 30% of respondents answered that the presence of armed CUPD officers makes them feel “somewhat uneasy” or “frightened and anxious.” Students are more likely than faculty or staff to feel uneasy or worse around armed CUPD officers, with 35% of students responding that they are made to feel “somewhat uneasy” or “frightened and anxious” around armed CUPD officers. Black, Latinx, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students are especially likely to express unease around armed CUPD officers, with 45% stating that they are made to feel uneasy or worse, and 69% of Black students responding in the same way.

Figure 5 below provides another look at the data across all respondents broken down by race or ethnicity. The figure illustrates that unease around armed police officers, including CUPD officers, is widespread across racial and ethnic groups. Indeed at least 25% of respondents from each racial or ethnic group indicated that they were made to feel uneasy or worse around armed CUPD officers. The figure also illustrates that respondents of color, and in particular Black and

Latinx respondents, are more likely to feel unease around armed CUPD officers than White respondents and respondents overall.

Figure 5

Do armed officers make you feel safe? (by race or ethnicity)

		They me feel safe and protected.	They have little or no effect on my feelings of safety and security.	They make me feel somewhat uneasy.	They make me feel frightened and anxious.
Armed police outside Cornell's campus	American Indian or Alaska Native	45%	16%	29%	10%
	Asian	36%	27%	30%	7%
	Black	18%	20%	36%	26%
	Hispanic or Latinx/o/a	31%	22%	31%	16%
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	50%	25%	25%	
	Race or ethnicity not listed	41%	20%	30%	10%
	White	38%	25%	29%	8%
	Total	36%	25%	30%	9%
Armed Cornell University Police	American Indian or Alaska Native	56%	16%	14%	14%
	Asian	42%	30%	22%	5%
	Black	23%	27%	28%	22%
	Hispanic or Latinx/o/a	36%	25%	26%	12%
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	50%	25%	25%	
	Race or ethnicity not listed	47%	26%	19%	9%
	White	42%	28%	23%	7%
	Total	41%	28%	23%	8%

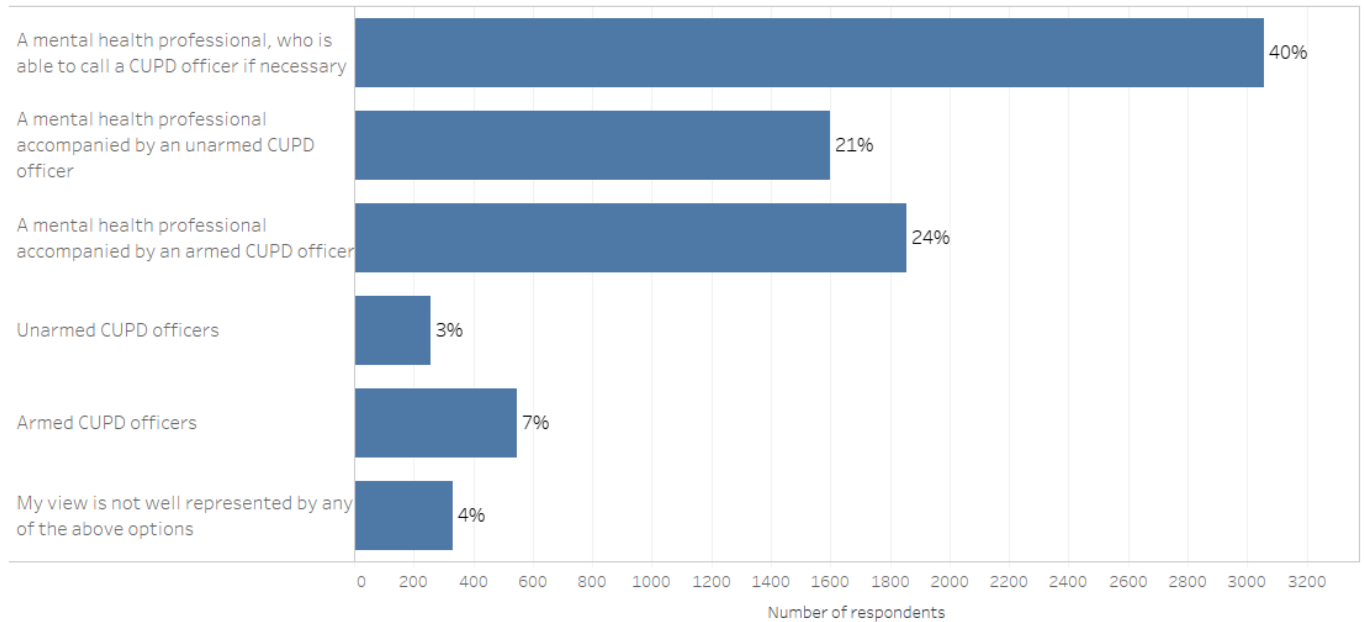
Personal Safety Checks

Under current policy, CUPD officers respond to personal safety check requests that they receive through CUPD dispatch; mental health professionals do not participate in these personal safety checks. Here again we observe another area of public safety policy that the Cornell community lacks concrete knowledge about. 42% of respondents answered that they do not know who conducts personal safety checks on campus.

In a follow-up question asking who should conduct personal safety checks, 85% of respondents overall (88% of student respondents) believe that personal safety checks should be conducted by a mental health professional. Further, 40% of all respondents (48% of student respondents) believe that CUPD officers should only be called by a mental health professional if necessary. **Figure 6** summarizes these results and shows that just 7% of respondents believe that personal safety checks should be conducted by armed CUPD officers, as is the current policy.

Figure 6

Who should conduct personal safety checks?



Among the segments of the campus community most opposed to the CUPD conducting personal safety checks are LGBTQ+ and gender expansive students. 55% of LGBTQ+ students believe that personal safety checks should be conducted by a mental health professional, who is able to call a CUPD officer if necessary, with 72% of gender expansive students also expressing this view.

Personal safety checks were an issue that received attention in open-text survey comments as well, particularly amongst students, who expressed concern that fellow students who are psychologically or emotionally unwell might have to respond to questions from armed officers who are sent to check on them. In commenting on the vision of the future of public safety at Cornell, one student wrote:

“I believe that no CUPD officers should be armed, except maybe for tasers. Funding mental health support services is more important than a police presence on campus. I don’t know how much funding currently goes to CUPD, but I would like to see proportionally less funding going to police, especially regarding responses to student mental health crises.”

Qualitative responses: impressions of the CUPD, vision of CUPD in the future, and final thoughts or comments

Survey respondents submitted 8,126 qualitative responses across three open-text response questions on the survey. These three questions asked respondents about their overall impression of the CUPD, their vision of what the CUPD should strive to be in the future, and to provide any

final thoughts or comments that could help guide the recommendations that the committee will ultimately make.

One prominent theme that emerged across these open-text questions is the “...*general distrust between police and BIPOC students...*” with many students sharing that they do not feel comfortable around CUPD officers, and that they find interacting with armed officers on campus to be particularly uncomfortable.

“CUPD officers make me feel uncomfortable anytime I see them following me or staring at me as a Black student.”

“I do believe that there are some instances where CUPD needs to be able to respond accordingly but given the infrequency of situations where they would need to use weapons of any kind the open carrying of weapons is very intimidating to me as a person of color.”

“Cornell Police disproportionately target students of color and Black students. It’s not a secret that there is fractured relationship as a result of historical policing of these communities. Assigning specialized workers in fields that do not need police officers will significantly alleviate stress and the distrust between communities of color and the police.”

White respondents also expressed that “it is our duty to listen to the most disenfranchised students to support their learning environment.”

“Please prioritize BIPOC voices regarding policing (ie, not me) as their grievances tend to be more well-founded and personal.”

“The police force scares our most marginalized groups, and I don’t think that they should be here.”

“While I have not personally had any keenly negative interactions with CUPD, I have also not have any positive ones. I believe the campus police serve no purpose other than to intimidate those on campus and make many students, especially POC and Black men targeted for police brutality at higher rates, uncomfortable. Overall, I am dissatisfied that Cornell needs police officers with guns to do jobs better left to unarmed investigators, medical professions/EMS, social workers, and other professionals.”

“Many students are prioritizing very extreme and improbable circumstances over the violence Black students feel every day. I really hope Black students' voices are being highlighted in this conversation.”

A second theme that emerged throughout comments is that police should not be involved in handling mental health concerns, as they do now as part of the personal safety check process.

“I don't think the CU Police should be the first called to do a mental health check but having personal experience with a young person of color with mental health issues, I worry. The university should 1) have a mental health team that can respond to those calls, and 2) Cornell should train, or continue to provide training if they already are, to CU Police on how to deal with individuals with mental health issues.”

“The Cornell Police should not have a place in intervening in sexual assaults, hate crimes, mental health crises, or other health crises. Specially trained--especially with respect to race, gender, and disability--and trauma-informed individuals and networks must do so. We need to be investing in building those resources for our most marginalized students. I don't believe that the police should be armed. There is real harm and trauma for our students of color in being policed by weaponized instruments of the state.”

“Personal safety check response requires evaluation of the situation and an assessment of the potential risks so the correct resources can be sent to check on the individual. There are numerous models of modified mental health response in communities across the country and they should be evaluated for options that can best support and serve our campus community.”

“I really would like to see us move to an innovative model where trained mental health professionals are the primary points of contact for wellness checks and that there are liaisons to and who serve on CUPD with that training as well (preferably plain clothed and unarmed). Cornell has an opportunity to be a national leader in this space.”

A third prominent theme that emerges in the comments concerns police disarmament. The survey collected a wide range of views on this issue, with some respondents stating that they would not feel safe on campus without armed CUPD officers present. For those respondents expressing their preference that the CUPD be disarmed, two variants on that preference emerged from the comments. The first is that the CUPD should not carry or have access to firearms, while the second prefers that the CUPD should only be able to access firearms as a means of responding to an “active shooter.”

“No guns on campus!”

“I think that if there is no gun present in an interaction then there is no chance of anyone being shot by a gun.”

“Guns are not necessary in most situations. An officer has the right to be safe and protect themselves as well as others. Maybe a stun gun or a night stick would be sufficient on campus.”

“Anyone with a firearm makes me uncomfortable. I'm guessing, though, I would be very happy to see a police person with a firearm if there was a active shooter on campus. I also don't think it's fair to ask someone to knowingly put themselves in dangerous situations without some protection. I assume Cornell has a separate police force as Ithaca could not handle the work alone. I believe the Cornell police should help ensure

anyone can get an education in peace (no biases allowed). Emergency medical support is also very necessary.”

“I think CUPD should focus on being an agency of positive change as we reckon with the role of policing in America. There is no reason not to lead by example. Focusing on community relations and accountability, especially with regard to students of marginalized backgrounds, must be paramount. Additionally, I don't see a place for CUPD officers to have lethal weapons except in storage for emergencies such as active shooter scenarios.”

Comments also highlighted preferences for change in how the CUPD presents itself. For example, numerous respondents cited that the CUPD presents as quite “militarized-looking”, and that changes to their uniforms (e.g., making them lighter-colored), having more CUPD officers patrol campus on foot and by bike, and driving less-intimidating vehicles (including calls for “greener vehicles”) could help CUPD officers to be seen as more approachable. In addition, some comments called for CUPD officers to be more willing to share information about themselves and their backgrounds. One respondent noted that communications from the CUPD could highlight profiles of officers, “so that folks have a sense that they’re real people who have families, educational backgrounds, and interests outside of work, just like the rest of us.”

Lastly, comments underscored a desire for CUPD officers to better reflect the diversity that they observe within the Cornell community. While these comments were often also quick to acknowledge the difficulty of attracting and retaining officers of color in central New York, having a more diverse CUPD is a priority that was noted by respondents.