

A Counter-Report + Proposal



NO COPS ON CAMPUS

Fall 2020





NO COPS ON CAMPUS COLLECTIVE

We are students, instructors and researchers at the University of Alberta. We demand that the university divest from policing and invest in non-carceral forms of safety and support. This includes severing all ties between the University and the Edmonton Police Service (EPS). Immediately, this means the end of the [police liaison officer program.](#)

We demand the University take concrete steps to transition towards more holistic approaches to public health and safety.

This includes the redirection of the \$590K allocated in the 2018-2019 budget for two additional peace officers, four private security guards, and the police liaison officer. To start, these funds should be given to a coalition of campus and community groups who share a commitment to non-carceral forms of public safety. We would like to have this coalition be governed by a mandate of transformative justice aimed at dismantling white supremacy on campus.

Where are we?

The University of Alberta is built on stolen land.

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When settlers came to Alberta, they designed legal systems that displaced First Nations and Métis people from lands they had lived on for a long time. This resulted in subjecting people to ways of living and working that were unfamiliar and harmful to them. Indigenous political, economic, and social practices were criminalized by the North-West Mounted Police with the threat of guns and imprisonment. At the same time, systems of education - most notably the Residential School system - were designed to enforce these laws through cultural erasure.

In the context of this history of settler colonial violence and Indigenous dispossession, trespassing laws not only criminalize unhoused people but upholds settler colonial claims to land and resources. **Simply put, what does it mean to trespass on stolen land, especially if that land is stolen from you and your ancestors?**

Canadian society and laws are not only structured in deeply anti-Indigenous ways, they are also foundationally anti-Black. In fact, Indigenous and Black people's struggles against police violence in Canada are interconnected. As writer Robyn Maynard (2017) writes in *Policing Black Lives*, "both historically and in the present, policing Blackness occurs alongside and as part of the policing of Canada's Indigenous communities." After slavery was abolished in the British empire in 1834, police played a central role in policing formerly enslaved people.

From the emergence of municipal police across Canada, Black people were subject to arrest and jailing at far greater rates than white people simply for the "crime" of being in public. One local example of this history, unearthed by local activist and scholar Bashir Mohamed, is the "morality squad" formed by the Edmonton Police Service in 1900, which overwhelmingly targeted Black women for "socially deviant behaviour." And, as Mohamed and others have repeatedly shown, anti-Blackness continues to plague the EPS through racial profiling practices like carding.

While the white supremacy of colonial and anti-Black violence is central to the function of police, these racialized dynamics are not the only ones at play in an analysis of systemic carceral violence. From their inception, the police were designed to discipline and punish the working poor, the under and unemployable, and other people whose lives were not oriented around the reproduction of normative social relations. This includes those who are, or are regarded as, disabled, sick, or unwell, unhoused individuals, and Queer, Two Spirit and Trans people.

Queer, Two Spirit, and Trans people experience devastatingly high rates of discrimination in the criminal (in)justice system, housing support, and other social services. Research tells us that somewhere between 30 and 50% of youth experiencing houselessness in Edmonton identify as members of the LGBTQ2S+ community. ("[Needs and Gaps in Services of Edmonton LGBTQ Population](#)," Jihan Sharifi, 2016).

For Trans and gender non-conforming people, the challenges of houselessness and poverty are compounded by disproportionate rates of family and domestic violence as well as the gender segregation of shelters, public washrooms, and other social service institutions. Within the prison system itself, trans abolitionist and educator Dean Spade reminds us that "gender segregation, gendered dress codes, gendered behavioral codes, and hierarchical systems of gender violence organize these spaces, under and through the work of various structures and agents of law enforcement." (Spade, Stanley, and Queer (In)Justice, 121 2012) On campus, police and UAPS officers are often the face the heteronormative and transphobic institution, though we recognize that instructors and professors are no less guilty of reproducing transphobic and homophobic violence.

Disability is also central to the logic of incarceration. Disability Justice [advocates](#) identify the different carceral infrastructures that do the dirty work of upholding capitalist white supremacy by committing people into medical institutions, treatment facilities, foster care, nursing homes and prisons to name a few.

Alarming statistics from a [CBC news analysis](#) of police deaths in Canada between 2000 and 2017 found that 70% of the 461 people killed by police lived with mental illness and/or used drugs. Black and Indigenous deaths were also over-represented in this report. This is not a coincidence. As Disability Justice and Performance group, [Sins Invalid](#) states: "disabled people who are Autistic, who are D/deaf, who live with mental health impairments or cognitive impairments, epilepsy or movement disorders, are at highest risk of being assaulted by police, and that this is deeply compounded when we are further marginalized by homelessness, violence against trans people, and white supremacy."

During the ongoing protest against anti-Black police violence this summer, many people sought [justice for Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Chantel Moore, D'Andre Campbell and Ejaz Ahmed Choudry](#) who were all killed by police during Wellness Checks, non-emergency situations when cops are called to respond to someone experiencing mental health crises. Campus is a place of tremendous stress and pressure for many and the UAPS and EPS are called to perform wellness checks on students. These experiences with law enforcement can be traumatizing and may very well not address the health or wellbeing of the individual. Wellness Checks can even lead people to being punished for seeking help.

Addressing the role of policing on our campus and in our city requires that we understand policing as an extension of settler colonial land dispossession, state sanctioned anti-Black racism, ableist ideas about how the body should function, and heteronormative gender violence that destroys communities that refuse the state's access to resources, land, profit, and total control over social life. It is vital that our call to abolish the police takes into account the particular histories of anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, ableist and anti-Queer violence in Edmonton.

How is safety imagined on campus?

Currently, safety on campus is imagined as an outcome of risk management practices that protect the University of Alberta's assets and create an insular university community distinguished from so-called "unaffiliated persons".

In fact, the University's campus security, University of Alberta Protective Services (UAPS), is part of Risk Management Services, and is modeled after a police department, with an investigative division made up of ex-cops. In a [2019 report](#), the Campus and Facility Safety & Security Working Group identified a growing trend of crimes on campus and the need for a multi-pronged approach to address security on campus:

"The working group concludes that University of Alberta safety and security staffing, processes, infrastructure and attitudes have not kept up with growth in antisocial, disruptive and criminal activity on and around its campuses, primarily its North Campus, and that efforts can and should be made to reduce campus crime."

While the report identifies sexual assault as the top "concerning incident" on campus, it fails to propose any meaningful response to the prevalence of gender-based and sexual violence on campus, instead focusing on property crime. Far from a survivor-centred approach to ending violence on campus, the report prioritizes profit over people, calling for more security and police presence. These carceral strategies of dealing with sexual assault fail to prevent violence or hold accountable perpetrators - especially faculty members; they risk criminalizing and retraumatizing survivors; and fail to acknowledge that cops are often perpetrators of violence themselves.

Instead of addressing, among many other pressing safety concerns, rape culture on campus, the working group identified the increasing dislocation of people from the downtown core southward through the river valley and onto campus as an underlying cause of this increase in criminalized activities. Despite identifying this trend, the working group did not identify intentions to meaningfully address these underlying concerns. Instead, by focusing on security personnel, physical barriers, policy and procedures, and technology and control systems, the working group aims to further target students and citizens who are vulnerable to race and class based discrimination at the hands of the police. This strategy reduces - and criminalizes - access to campus as a public space and its resources [as a public good](#).

Of the incidents listed in the working group report, 70% are incidents of trespassing. According to the [UAPS incident log](#), the majority of incidents responded to by the UAPS consist of trespassing, mischief and drug and alcohol use. ***If the U of A is a publicly funded institution that claims to work in the public's interest, how can it justifiably criminalize access to its resources?*** Because the U of A imagines safety as a risk management procedure designed to protect its assets. Ironically, these assets are made possible by the displacement of First Nation and Métis communities whose land the University of Alberta [illegally occupies](#).

The final report of the working group proposed a 2 million dollar plan to increase “safety” on campus. Safety, however, is unevenly distributed. The idea that some people on campus do not belong there is not only used to target those who do not have student, staff, or faculty status, but those who are perceived to not belong at the university. Who is perceived as “unaffiliated” is deeply raced and classed. As Juan Felipe Vargas Alba [wrote in *The Gateway* in 2019](#):

“The reality is that many racialized students already feel the gaze of officers on campus; our actions are patrolled, our humanities hinged on whether we’re seen as acting as ‘criminals.’ Giving more power to officers won’t increase security for campus, nor does it increase security for all students.”

And while students are often imagined as middle-class and affluent, the reality is that [many students experience houselessness, poverty, and food insecurity](#). These students are equally likely to be the targets of a designation like “unaffiliated person,” especially if they have lost or misplaced their school ID. Sleeping in public spaces, experiencing distress, or many of the other consequences of student poverty, can lead to interactions with the UAPS that infringe on student safety and wellbeing.

Despite these concerns the plan was accepted and implemented by the U of A Administration. It identifies four target investment areas:

PEOPLE: The plan extends the reach of UAPS by adding two officers to the payroll, four private security guards, and one EPS liaison officer. Approximately \$590,000 were spent on these payrolls and benefits. The EPS liaison position was a 2019 pilot project put in place to substantiate the relationship between EPS and the UAPS and increase information sharing between the two organizations. The program has been renewed for the 2020–21 academic year despite calls across the continent to defund and divest from policing. The University of Alberta and the EPS share the costs of this program.

PHYSICAL BARRIERS: The plan allocates the bulk of money towards creating physical barriers to campus, designed to keep students and unaffiliated people out of campus buildings.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES: The plan proposes policies and procedures designed to deputize university employees, encouraging surveillance and reporting of each other and individuals on campus. Suggestions including limiting building and office hours, requirement of identification and systems of reporting colleagues for not following the rules.

TECHNOLOGY AND CONTROL SYSTEMS: The report proposes increasing the scope of surveillance on campus, including video monitoring, swipe card access and alarm systems. A whopping 1.4 million dollars was spent on securitizing campus in this way. This not only includes cameras and swipe cards, but also decommissioning showers and removing accessible outlets.

Beyond this report, the university’s [Code of Student Behaviour](#) reproduces a carceral and retributive disciplinary structure that is modeled on the legal system. The processes outlined in this document do not have to be organized in this way. Instead, as it states at the very beginning of the code, The Post-Secondary Learning Act enables the university to define for itself what student accountability might look like. **What might it mean to reimagine the code and the university’s structures of safety, accountability, and justice in a way that prioritizes wellbeing over punishment?**

Why are we doing this right now?

Our interest in policing on campus began when new security gates were installed in the Humanities Centre building in 2019. These crude gates were reminders that while the university can be a site of powerful learning and social critique, it is not exempt from the culture of surveillance and policing that pervades our world.

In the wake of recent mass movements against systemic anti-Black racism and police brutality, we recognize that the university is also a site of struggle against white supremacy and policing.

With formal ties to EPS through the liaison officer program (including [“intelligence sharing between the EPS and the university, as well as focusing on chronic ongoing issues and prolific persons”](#)), the employment and deployment of Protective Services peace officers, carceral architecture and design, and surveillance technologies and policies, the U of A continues to demonstrate its investment in policing is meant to protect property.

We also write this counter-report during a time of tremendous austerity in the province of Alberta and at the University of Alberta, where cuts are being made that will impact the quality of education on campus, including the closure of two libraries. When money is tight, [financial decisions reveal the true priorities of an institution.](#)

In this case, the university’s decision to cut funding for essential educational and social resources for students, while leaving the robust security budget intact, reveals their commitment not to students but to protecting the property of the university. These decisions divert funding from programs that benefit students and promote safety, like the Campus Food Bank and Safewalk, the latter of which currently experiences long wait times that could be reduced with more funding.

Abolition is not an austerity measure. It is about investing in the world we want to live in, one where human life is precious and transformation is possible.

It is about recognizing that by redirecting the university’s resources towards alternative forms of justice that look to address the underlying conditions that lead to the criminalizing of people abandoned by the state, we make the need for police funding obsolete.

Our approach to the problem of policing is deeply informed by the work of [Black Feminists](#) who teach us that policing is a function of capitalist white supremacy and that criminal justice is a punitive tool used to manage people deemed disposable by the state: if you are poor, if you are black, if you are Indigenous, if you are an immigrant, if you are disabled, neurodivergent or unwell, if you are queer or trans, you are treated as if you are worth less than the property the police are meant to protect.

[Abolitionist feminism](#) argues that dismantling interlocking structures of oppression means investing in infrastructures of safety that view life as precious and seeking to transform the conditions that allow harm to occur, not reproducing punitive, state-sanctioned violence as a response to harm.

In Edmonton, public pressure forced City Council to hold a five day public hearing on systemic racism and the police budget this June. The following week, the Edmonton Public School Board held a [public hearing on removing school resource officers from schools](#). Unfortunately, officials failed to make the right decision in both cases, despite the chorus of people from all walks of life demanding that we radically rethink public safety in our city. We were inspired by these hearings to challenge the necessity of police on campus, the place we live, learn, work, and socialize.

We believe that a police free campus is not only possible, but necessary if the U of A is going to uphold its commitment to “uplift the whole people,” a commitment outlined in [For the Public Good](#), the U of A’s strategic plan.

As Critical Resistance reminds us, abolition is both a practical organizing tool and a long-term goal. As part of the larger Edmonton community, and as a university that serves more than 40,000 students, the U of A has a responsibility to address white supremacy in Edmonton, and eliminating a police presence on campus is one tangible step.

What are other universities doing?

Our campaign builds on the work of universities across Canada and the United States that are leading the call for universities to divest from policing and invest in alternative models of safety and accountability.

In recent months, various groups at universities across the United States have initiated campaigns to divest from policing. Many of these campaigns are the result of longer histories of activism and agitation against on-campus policing, which have gained momentum in the wake of societal-wide calls for defunding and abolishing the police.

In the days following the police murder of George Floyd, for example, the University of Minnesota committed to severing ties with the Minneapolis Police Department as demanded by the Minnesota Student Association. Similar calls have been initiated, often in the form of open letters, by community members at **Northwestern University, NYU, and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**, among others. While these campaigns each respond to their specific institutional contexts, they share an emphasis on divesting ties with city police departments and disbanding campus police units, as well as on shifting to restorative and transformative models of safety and justice.

In Canada, at **Ryerson University**, the Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy (CSSDP) chapter and the Black Liberation Collective called for an end to cops on their campus. These groups forged their demands in part as a response to the implementation of a **Special Constables program** on the Ryerson campus. This proposed program shares many qualities with the University of Alberta's liaison officer program. Some of the demands of these groups include the following proposals:

- + End the Special Constables program and make a commitment to never partnering with the Toronto police again;
- + Create a holistic campus safety plan that includes members who are well-versed in the practice and politics of abolition;
- + Hire trained Community Workers and Nurses to assist Ryerson Security in supporting community safety;
- + Oversight and transparency regarding complaints made against Ryerson Security;
- + Implement thorough crisis intervention, de-escalation, mental health first-aid, harm reduction, anti-oppression, and anti-racism training for existing Ryerson security - and directives to not call Toronto Police in response to incidents;
- + Create a transition strategy for alternatives to uniformed security on campus;
- + Forums where Ryerson members and members of the public can discuss the transition strategy and its implementation, ask questions, and provide feedback.



On June 2, 2020, Ryerson's President Mohamed Lachemi responded by canceling the Special Constables program and announcing the creation of "a working group to hold further consultations with students, faculty, and staff to discuss how we can develop a safety and security model that works for the Ryerson community." It still remains to be seen whether Ryerson will implement the other demands made by these groups or whether the working group will include members with experience in abolitionist practices. However, we can draw inspiration from many of these demands, which we believe could be implemented at the University of Alberta.

At the University of Alberta, there have also been steps towards reimagining safety and accountability on campus in alternative, non-punitive, ways. For example, the Director of Student Conduct and Accountability has designed a Restorative Justice Program for University of Alberta residences. At present, this approach seems to be confined to situations in which students breach their [Residence Agreement](#), such as by "causing disturbances or damage to the residential premises, including any common areas, as well as overdue rent."

There is already support for expanding the use of restorative justice on campus as an option and alternative to disciplinary measures. The 2018 "[Report from the Working Group on Restorative Justice Initiatives for Sexual Violence](#)" concludes that "the University should offer restorative justice as an option for victim-survivors in cases of sexual violence," that such options need not be

limited to students who have experienced sexual assault from members of the university community but should also include those who have experienced assault by people without formal university affiliation, and that the university could use restorative justice more widely in other instances.

Building on these recommendations, we would like to see the university expand and deepen the practice of restorative justice on campus.

In particular, we would like to see this model offered in cases where harm is caused by so-called "unaffiliated persons" too, as well as in more serious cases of assault and harm on campus. **Moreover, we believe that the university can go further and transition to a model of transformative justice that takes into account the broader oppressive structures that are the root cause of harmful activities and behaviors and that explicitly rejects working with police and the carceral state.**

We draw inspiration from [Brown University's decision to hire a Transformative Justice coordinator](#) whose role is to oversee the Transformative Justice Program at Brown, where students can learn the philosophy and practice of this approach.

Concrete Steps + Potential Pathways for Action

Part of our goal with this campaign is to demand that the university divest from policing by canceling the liaison officer program and divesting from UAPS. However, we also see this as part of a longer term project for inspiring conversations and a set of actions to reimagine what safety looks like at our university and in the communities that we are part of within and beyond the university.

Some of us were brought up with the idea that police, security guards, and surveillance systems make us safe. But these ideas of safety depend upon the violence that Black, Indigenous and People of Color experience at the hands of the police. These ideas of safety also depend on forms of psychological violence inflicted on all of us as we move through campus buildings where security gates block our pathways. We want to learn in a university, not in a prison. We believe it is vital to ask who existing structures of safety and security on campus are for and whom and what they protect.

Immediately, we demand the University of Alberta do the following:

- + **End the police liaison officer program**, cease all partnerships with EPS, and commit to no future partnerships.
- + **Redirect the \$590K currently allocated for this program and UAPS to a coalition of campus and community groups** who share a commitment to non-carceral forms of public safety, and who are governed by a mandate of transformative justice. This coalition will head a working group that will devise alternative solutions to safety and security on campus.
- + **Remove all security gates** implemented across campus during phase one of the Safety and Security working group recommendations.
- + **Stop any practices of asking people for student IDs on campus.**
- + **Ban military and police recruitment on campus.**
- + **Revise the Code of Student Behaviour**, in consultation with campus experts on restorative justice, to be less punitive and carceral.
- + **Implement proposals for a restorative justice approach to sexual violence**, as outlined by the 2019 Restorative Initiatives for Sexual Violence Implementation working group.

More broadly, we call upon the university to design systems of support, in partnership with community organizations, that build on already existing infrastructures to address the root causes of harm on campus.

Enshrined in the [University of Alberta's strategic plan](#) is a commitment to “seek, build, strengthen and sustain partnerships with local, national or international research agencies, governments, government ministries and agencies, universities, Indigenous communities, libraries, not-for-profits, industry, business, and community organizations.” We call on the University to uphold its commitment to the public good by doing the following:

- + **Implement all recommendations** from the aforementioned working group, and develop transparency protocols around their implementation.
- + **Create a transition strategy** for alternatives to uniformed security on campus.
- + **Fund a crisis response team** trained in harm reduction and suicide prevention to support students dealing with mental health issues on and off campus. Commit to never calling the cops for a wellness check.
- + **Invest in a more robust foodbank system/hub** that not only provides food baskets to students, but also to community members in need. This system should also centralize resources in and through the foodbank, making it a resource hub that includes computer, printer, and internet access; a cell phone program where community members can acquire donated phones; counselling services; housing support services; public health resources, and an open kitchen for anyone to use.
- + **Make significant contributions to the operating budget and scope of the Campus Safewalk program**, integrating it with other services on campus like the sexual assault centre, and the office of helping individuals at risk. Safewalk should also be equipped to support people with different mobility needs and have de-escalation, de-carceral, and trauma informed training. Instead of relying on UAPS or EPS officers to respond to calls, this team could provide a service similar to the Canadian Mental Health Association's 211 resource.
- + **Build on and deepen existing infrastructures for restorative justice**, with the consultation and support of non-campus community organizations, and make this available to everyone regardless of student status.
- + **Build community partnerships with organizations** like Boyle Street Community Services to design a space on campus to serve as a 24-hour social hub open to all members of the Edmonton community.
- + **Invest in a campaign that provides accessible information to individuals** regardless of a university affiliation, including members of Edmonton's unhoused community, about on-campus facilities that are publicly available for all.
- + **Invest in accessible architecture** that makes it easier instead of more difficult for everyone to move through the university.
- + **Hire a coordinator** to organize support for formerly and currently incarcerated students navigating campus.
- + **Mobilize the teaching and research expertise that exists at the university** to provide various workshops on how to live well with each other on campus. This could include, for example, how to recognize and disrupt our own assumptions about criminalized behaviour, how to recognize and interrupt harmful relationships and patterns between faculty and students, and in moments of crisis, what to do instead of calling the cops.

It is our hope that this will be a sustained and multi-faceted campaign that both pushes for a transparent transition away from policing on campus by the university, and initiates conversations with people on campus about alternative methods of addressing harm on campus. We know that the university will not undertake this work on its own, and while we welcome any official support, we know that real change never comes by way of institutional support.

These are only a few ideas, and we imagine engaging in more ways than one. Let's get creative!

Here are just some of the ideas we've come up with so far...

- + **Host a public forum of parties invested in this transition to discuss the implications for their work.**
- + **Critically and collectively re-writing the University of Alberta Student Code of Conduct.**
- + **Write an open letter to the University of Alberta with our demands.**
- + **Offer teach-ins for people to learn more about what we are advocating for and why.**
- + **Offer training in how to be a good neighbor and not call the cops, and other practical skill shares.**
- + **Partner with CJSR, The Gateway or some other public forum to host conversations with individuals and organizations with a stake in this campaign.**
- + **A sticker or poster campaign identifying the security and surveillance infrastructure on campus and reminders of alternative methods of redress to harm.**
- + **Workshops with those living and working in residence on accountability etc.**

Frequently Asked (and Often Difficult!) Questions

Do you share our desire for a police free campus? If so, one of the best things you can do is to talk to your friends, classmates, peers, and colleagues about the issue. But the idea of defunding the police is a hard one for many people to get their head around. You might run into some common questions or criticisms. We definitely have. We thought we'd share some questions that we often get, with the hope that you will find some of these talking points helpful.

But didn't students ask for increased security?

The short answer is yes. The 2018 Facility Safety and Security Working Group formed in response to concerns brought forward by students. Understandably, students were concerned when they noticed an increase in activities that they were not used to seeing on campus. Especially for students who work long hours, late into the night, seeing people resting and taking shelter in university buildings threatened their sense of security on campus. A number of high level conversations were had about how to address these concerns, and a survey was conducted to solicit student feedback. These conversations, however, were grounded in uninterrogated ideas of how safety and security can be implemented. As such, students were not given the opportunity to consider alternative models of safety and accountability.

We believe all students should feel safe on campus. However, we do not think that increased surveillance and policing accomplishes this. The reality is that the presence of police on campus does not impact everyone in the same way. Class, race, gender, ability and official affiliation with the university all intersect in ways that distribute the privilege of safety unevenly. For many, the presence of police is itself a site of potential harm, as people are often targeted and surveilled for the intersecting experiences mentioned above. This is true for both students and members of the public on campus. For example, [a 2017 report](#) on EPS carding practices compiled by Black Lives Matter Edmonton, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women and the Stolen Sisters Awareness Movement points out, Black Edmontonians are 3-5 times more likely to be carded than non-black Edmontonians, and Indigenous women are 10 times more likely to be stopped for no reason by police or by-law officers.

As we've been thinking through this issue, some questions we have had are:

- + Who feels safe/unsafe on campus and why?
- + What factors might lead to students feeling safe/unsafe on campus?
- + What do students actually mean by safety? For example, do they mean free from personal, bodily, and emotional harm? Or, do they mean isolation from discomfort associated with encountering criminalized populations and behaviours?
- + How do the assumptions we make about substance use shape our feeling of safety? For example, why is a culture of excessive drinking understandable for university students on whyte ave or in residence, but criminal when we assume the person is unhoused or poor?
- + What factors might lead students to trust university administrators or the police to ensure their safety?
- + What would a public health and safety response look like if people most impacted by increased surveillance and policing were meaningfully consulted? Would there be more police and security cameras or would there be more designated, accessible places to gather free from harassment of authorities?

Frequently Asked (and Often Difficult!) Questions

But isn't sexual assault rampant on campuses across North America?

It is. Rape culture is a pervasive problem on campuses around the world. Ending sexual and gender-based violence must be a central concern for any vision of non-carceral justice. In fact, many advocates of abolishing the prison industrial complex came to the project through survivor-centred anti-violence work.

It is well known by many doing anti-gender-violence work that the police are particularly dismal at solving cases related to sexual assault, even when they are reported. [According to the federal government](#), in 2014, 83% of sexual assaults went unreported, a trend that continues because having to deal with police officers and a lengthy legal investigation can further traumatize survivors. Not to mention, the very real possibility of the criminalizing of survivors, especially those already targeted by the state. And, let us not forget that police officers are often themselves the perpetrators of sexual assault. As [Mariame Kaba](#) reminds us, the current system is so bad, people would rather call no-one than call the police.

Further, most sexual assaults are perpetrated by someone the survivor knows. People are often hesitant to report their attacker for fear of what might happen to them. Sometimes people are dependent on their attacker, such as a personal care attendant or medical professional, and cannot risk more harm from someone they depend on for survival. On campus, assaults often happen in dorms where people will continue to live together, or other environments, like classrooms, where people will continue to come into contact with their attacker. Fear of retribution in shared communities can make reporting an assault to a punitive justice system a heavy decision. And, the unequal distribution of power in student / faculty relationships determine who is believed and protected by the university when concerns about consent are addressed.

I understand it is flawed, but what else do we have? Who will keep us safe?

Building a world where the police are obsolete is challenging work. It requires us all to shift the ways we think about safety and the collective values we prioritize. Police uphold systems of inequality and structures of violence which means building a world without them requires systemic analysis and structural change.

As the Facility Safety and Security Working group identified, the rise in calls to UAPS is largely attributed to the increase of so-called "unaffiliated" persons on campus. Displaced by the gentrification and development of the downtown core, many people moved south toward the river valley, the university, and whyte avenue. Looking at the data tells us that the majority of incidents the UAPS responded to in 2019 were incidents of trespassing. On the surface, this might appear to be an easy problem to solve: increasing police and security presence, surveillance technologies, and inhospitable architecture might keep people off campus, right? Viewed systemically, though, the problem is much more complex and an understanding of the root causes of the issue are needed. For example, poverty, houselessness, lack of effective resources, and safe day shelters all factor into why people are using the university and its resource as a place to rest and gather. If we are able to understand the root causes of these problems, our approach to addressing them shifts - we come to see justice as affirmative, providing people with the resources and support they need to live full lives, not the disappearing of people who have been abandoned by the state. Divesting from police and policing frees up money to invest in alternatives to policing. It also challenges us to imagine what public safety should look like in a world where everyone has dignity, water, food, and shelter on their own terms.

Frequently Asked (and Often Difficult!) Questions

What about my things? I am a broke student, I can't afford to replace my laptop.

We are broke students too, we get it. But let's get one thing straight: cops hardly ever get your stuff back. Having your things stolen sucks. Also, being in a position of having to steal things sucks too. This is a place where police abolition intersects with a critique of capitalism. Why, for example, do we accept that many students have to take on large amounts of debt or exhaust themselves in the hustle of working multiple jobs to be able to go to school? Rather than advocating for more punitive systems to protect our belongings, we can be advocating for a living wage, free childcare, and free university while we also advocate against tuition hikes and closing libraries. COVID-19 has shown us that federal and provincial governments can mobilize a ton of resources to relieve the economic challenges so many of us face and we can demand that these resources continue to flow in the direction of people who need them, rather than in the direction of corporate profit.

In the meantime, let's find ways to keep each other's things safe - ask your neighbour to watch your stuff if you go to the bathroom. Say hi to people, and get to know folks in your department and study spots. Make public all the incredible lending resources from the libraries on campus.

And yet, we know that theft will still happen. Let us use this frustration to continue to advocate for a world in which everyone has their communication and access needs met, and where the university, with its tremendous resources, can be a site of public communal luxury.

CONNECT WITH US!

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