



PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

**American Association of  
University Professors**

Promoting Quality Higher Education – An Investment in Oregon's Future

November 15, 2019

Stephen Percy  
Interim President  
Portland State University  
Email and CAMPUS MAIL

Dear President Percy,

We, the PSU-AAUP Executive Council, write this public letter in response to your new Campus Safety plan. We learned about this plan, after it was already in motion, from your October 7th email to the campus community. We share your stated commitment to public safety, the ethos of caring, equity and dignity for all, and to learning, continuous improvement, and candid assessment. We are skeptical, however, that this plan will achieve those goals. The plan is an unnecessary continuation of the administration's history of overriding student, faculty, and staff concerns and of the demonstrated lethality of campus police, for example in the killing of Mr. Jason Washington in July 2018 by sworn, PSU officers.

Herein we share our concerns with your plan, which builds on our history of active engagement over this issue. In October 2018, we shared a public statement with the PSU President and Board of Trustees, that we include below:

*We, members of the PSU AAUP Executive Council, join the broad campus call to disarm PSU Campus Public Safety officers. Our call to disarm builds on our past engagement on this issue. In 2014, about 70% of respondents to a survey of AAUP members indicated their opposition to arming campus security.*

*The killing of Mr. Jason Washington in July 2018 by PSU officers is a tragedy for the Washington family, and has adversely impacted PSU students, faculty, and staff. We as a community need to see this tragedy in the larger context of the systemic problem of police brutality targeting of People of Color and other marginalized communities. The presence of armed security on PSU's campus creates an ongoing traumatic environment for many of our colleagues and for the students we serve.*

Our call to disarm is an act of solidarity with other members of the PSU community.

Your new plan ignores the will of many campus constituencies--including the core groups of students, faculty, and staff who have studied and advocated for a campus policy transparently molded to the needs and security of diverse urban campus communities. 70% of AAUP members and over two thirds of Faculty Senate members opposed the original armament decision. Meanwhile subsequent surveys (including one implemented by Margois Healy, the consulting firm) showed that a majority of students are also opposed to

an armed campus police force. Numerous college departments, including Chicano/Latino Studies, Black Studies, and the entire School of Social Work, have also voiced their opposition.

In addition to the disregard for wide campus input on the issue, we have the following questions and concerns:

1. ***How do you justify ongoing armament?***

We are disappointed by the refusal to disarm campus sworn officers. Instead, the plan calls for hiring six additional sworn, armed officers to meet the plan's stipulation that safety on our campus supposedly requires a total of ten armed officers. This decision to continue armament directly contradicts the university's commitment to shared governance. It also does not address the real threat that armed officers represent to many of our campus community members, as demonstrated by the killing of Jason Washington.

2. ***Who will comprise the University Public Safety Oversight Committee and what will their powers be?***

We have concerns about the University Public Safety Oversight Committee's (UPSOC) composition, capacity, authority, and ability to provide real oversight. We also question the UPSOC's likely efficacy, given past research showing such oversight bodies tend to have little impact.

3. ***How will the effectiveness of new training be evaluated?***

The plan includes a strong focus on improving training. There clearly is a need for training on topics like unconscious bias and de-escalation. That said, better training is not sufficient in challenging the power dynamics of policing, in particular its inability to halt biased policing towards students, staff and faculty of color, people experiencing houselessness, and other vulnerable communities.

4. ***How will the plan help or reduce the number of people "experiencing dire physical, social, and emotional conditions or who lack basic shelter and food"?***

The plan includes minimum recognition that "many disruptions on our campus come from people who are experiencing dire physical, social, and emotional conditions or who lack basic shelter and food." However, it does not contain increased resources for free health care and mental health supports, emergency and long-term affordable housing, stable employment, or food security. Thus, it remains unclear that officers will be able to assist folks who are struggling in any meaningful way.

5. ***What specific roles and accountability will there be for the additional Campus Public Safety Officers and the new Student Safety Ambassadors?***

What responsibilities will they have? What "tools" will they have at their disposal to address safety concerns? Will they walk with someone to their car or the bus stop? Will they be able to respond effectively to survivors of sexual assault? Can they help a houseless person find shelter? Will safety officers remove houseless people from buildings and bathrooms? Will they carry provisions (food and water)? What checks will be on their authority such that bullying, harassment, corruption, and taking sexual advantage are discouraged? How are they going to avoid reproducing, and/or be held accountable for, racism, transphobia, homophobia, and ableism?

6. ***What are the trade-offs of channeling funding into campus security rather than into other university needs?***

We are concerned that a significant amount of funding is being channeled into the campus security safety plan at a time when tuition keeps increasing and when Portland State University employees face stagnant wages in an increasingly expensive city. The University has many times declared its inability to reduce tuition or to pay workers a fair wage: the administration paints a bleak picture of its intractable cash flow problem at the bargaining table with AAUP and before its recent capitulation to the threatened (statewide) SEIU strike.

7. ***What commitments and structures are in place to ensure transparency and rigorous oversight of this campus security plan?***

We expect and would like to know the plan for how the University will assess the direction and steps laid out in this new policy. How will you ensure this occurs at reasonable time intervals?

We believe, as you do, that public safety is an important goal for Portland State University. As shared above, we have outstanding questions and concerns with the new campus security plan. We would like to reiterate our expectation of a prompt, public response to this communication.

Sincerely,

PSU-AAUP Executive Council