

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the Spring of 2005, the Rowan University Board of Trustees made the decision to permit the arming of campus police officers beginning July 1, 2005. The Board's approval was conditioned on a review by an ad hoc campus committee to be created to examine the pros and cons of arming officers in light of actual facts and circumstances in the first year following the decision. The committee's charge was to examine any real or perceived changes to the campus culture as a result of having an armed police force.

The President's Ad Hoc Committee on Arming Police Officers was convened in February 2006 at the request of Rowan University President Donald J. Farish to complete this review. The committee was composed of the following members of the Rowan community: Albert Betts (Admissions), Chairperson; Jose Aviles (EOF/MAP); Aaron Bryan (SGA); T.R. Chandrupatla (Mechanical Engineering); Jay Chaskes (Sociology); Robert Fleming (Management/MIS); John Gallagher (Secondary Education); Allan Jiao (Law and Justice); Melissa Langan (SGA); Reed Layton (Public Safety); Matt Morgan (SGA); Joe Mulligan (Student Affairs); and Esther Mummert (Communications).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The committee gathered and reviewed information relative to the arming decision through review of documents provided by and an interview with Dr. Tim Michener, Director of Public Safety; conducting several focus groups with Rowan students, and surveying the Rowan campus community.

## SURVEY

The committee prepared the survey instrument that appears below and encouraged participation by the Rowan community in the survey. The following request for participation was disseminated to members of the Rowan community.

*The President's Ad Hoc Committee on Arming Police Officers is currently analyzing the pros and cons of having armed officers on the Rowan University campus. The committee is requesting the help of the Rowan community with this task. We hope that you will take a few moments to complete the following survey to aid us with this project. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. Your responses will be kept anonymous. Please do not put your name or other identifying information on the survey.*

The survey instrument included questions designed to solicit demographic data as well as survey participant perceptions and opinions regarding the arming of campus police officers and related campus concerns and issues.

### **President's Committee on Arming Police Officers Campus Survey**

1. Your age
2. Sex
3. Race
4. Marital status
5. Occupation/job (if any)
6. Number of children (if any)
7. Your status on campus
  - (1) Police
  - (2) Security
  - (3) Faculty
  - (4) Undergraduate student
  - (5) Graduate student
  - (6) Administration
  - (7) Staff

8. Your years of education
- (1) Less than 12
  - (2) 12 plus
  - (3) 14 plus
  - (4) 16 plus
9. Where do you reside?
- (1) On campus
  - (2) Off campus
10. Are you aware that there are both sworn police officers and security officers working on the Rowan campus?
- (1) Yes
  - (2) No
11. Are you aware that some officers on the Rowan campus are armed?
- (1) Yes
  - (2) No
- 11b. If yes, when was the first time you knew about it?
- (1) Fall 2004
  - (2) Spring 2005
  - (3) Fall 2005
  - (4) Spring 2006
  - (5) Fall 2006
12. Who do you think are armed?
- (1) Only sworn police officers
  - (2) Both sworn police officers and security officers
13. Have you ever had any personal contact with an unarmed police officer or a security officer on the Rowan campus?
- (1) Yes
  - (2) No
- 13a. If yes, how would you describe your experience?
- (1) Unfavorable
  - (2) Mixed feeling between unfavorable and favorable
  - (3) Favorable
14. Have you ever had any personal contact with an armed police officer on the Rowan campus?
- (1) Yes
  - (2) No

- 14a. If yes, how would you describe your experience?
- (1) Unfavorable
  - (2) Mixed feeling between unfavorable and favorable
  - (3) Favorable
15. Have any of your friends, classmates, or colleagues had any experience with armed campus police officers at Rowan that made an impression on you?
- (1) Yes
  - (2) No
- 15a. If yes, please describe that impression?
- (1) Unfavorable
  - (2) Mixed feeling between unfavorable and favorable
  - (3) Favorable
16. Do you feel safer personally with armed campus police officers?
- (1) Yes
  - (2) No difference
  - (3) No
17. How do you feel about the campus environment since we had armed police officers in September 2005?
- (1) Better
  - (2) No difference
  - (3) Worse
18. Do you feel armed campus police officers contribute to a better academic and learning environment?
- (1) Yes
  - (2) Makes no difference
  - (3) No
19. Do you feel armed police officers make the campus a safer place to learn and work?
- (1) Yes
  - (2) Makes no difference
  - (3) No

### **Survey Participants**

The committee was encouraged by the participation rate of the Rowan community in the survey with 574 respondents. The level of participation provided diverse

representation of the campus community in terms of gender (female = 56.1%, male = 43.9%); marital status (unmarried = 55.7%, married = 44.3%); campus status (undergraduate students = 42.1%, graduate students = 4.7%, faculty = 22.2%, staff = 20.6%, administration = 8.7%, public safety = 1.8%); education (16 plus = 50.8%, 14 plus = 21.9%, 12 plus = 18.6%, 12 = 7%, and less than 12 = 1.8%); and residence (off campus = 79%, on campus = 21%).

### **Summary of Survey Responses**

The survey responses with respect to the arming of campus police officers reveal that while the majority of participants are aware of the arming of sworn police officers on campus, it is important that we continue the ongoing educational initiatives in this regard.

Related survey responses are as follows:

*Are you aware that there are both sworn police officers and security officers working on the Rowan campus?*

Yes = 81.6%  
No = 18.4%

*Are you aware that some officers on the Rowan campus are armed?*

Yes = 65.1%  
No = 34.9%

*If yes, when was the first time you became aware of it?*

Spring 2005 = 32.3%  
Fall 2005 = 31.2%  
Spring 2006 = 13.9%  
Fall 2006 = 22.6%

*What type of Rowan officers do you believe are armed?*

Only sworn police officers = 93.2%  
Both sworn police officers and security officers = 6.8%

A number of questions on the survey were designed to solicit information regarding personal contact and interaction with members of the Rowan Public Safety staff. Related survey responses are as follows:

*Have you ever had personal contact with an unarmed police officer or security officer on the Rowan campus?*

Yes = 62%

No = 38%

*If yes, how would you describe your experience?*

Unfavorable = 6.4%

Neither favorable or unfavorable = 23.7%

Favorable = 69.8%

*Have you ever had personal contact with an armed police officer on the Rowan campus?*

Yes = 33%

No = 67%

*If yes, how would you describe your experience?*

Unfavorable = 8.3%

Neither favorable or unfavorable = 25.9%

Favorable = 65.8%

*Have you or any of your friends, relatives, classmates or colleagues had any experience with armed campus police officers at Rowan that made an impression on you?*

Yes = 20.4%

No = 79.6%

*If yes, please describe that impression.*

Unfavorable = 25.8%

Neither favorable or unfavorable = 17.5%

Favorable = 56.7%

A number of survey questions were designed to solicit reactions to the impact of the arming of campus police officers with respect to the campus climate and safety.

Related survey responses are as follows:

*Do you feel safer personally with armed police officers?*

Yes = 63%

No = 37%

*How do you feel about the campus environment since Rowan police officers were armed in 2005?*

Better = 34.2%  
 No difference = 55.8%  
 Worse = 10%

*Do you feel armed campus police officers contribute to a better academic and learning environment?*

Yes = 32.5%  
 Makes no difference = 43.1%  
 No = 24.4%

*Do you feel armed police officers make the campus a safer place to learn and work?*

Yes = 61.5%  
 Makes no difference = 15.9%  
 No = 22.6%

## **FOCUS GROUPS**

During the Spring 2006 semester, the committee conducted two focus groups under the direction of Jay Chaskes and Jose (Tony) Aviles, from the Sociology Department and the Martin Luther King Scholars Program respectively. Both focus groups were composed of student volunteers, fifteen participants in the first and twelve in the second. In both groups, students ranged from first-year through graduate school and had a representative number of males and females, minority students and commuters. Each session lasted approximately seventy minutes with both sessions being digitally recorded and transcribed. The written transcripts of these sessions are available for review.

### **Focus Group Protocol**

The focus groups gave the committee an opportunity to explore the issues with a depth that our survey did not permit. The students responded to each other's comments as well as the facilitator's comments, thus producing an exchange that generates a certain momentum. Also, unlike an interview where the interviewer sets the priorities of what

will be probed, a properly structured and conducted focus group creates a more permissive atmosphere in which the priorities and lived experiences of the participants can more freely emerge.

An orientation was provided at the start of each of the focus group sessions in the interest of ensuring that the participants understood the purpose of the session and the process that would be utilized. The articulated purpose was to understand the breadth and depth of student perceptions and opinions about campus safety.

Participants were informed that the Rowan University Board of Trustees had authorized some of our public safety officers, those who are academy trained and sworn police officers, to carry firearms while on duty and that at that time not more than two officers per shift were carrying side arms. Participants were further told that we wanted to know their concerns, opinions and experiences regarding public safety and security on this campus and to have them discuss their views concerning the impact of arming our public safety officers on student campus life at the University.

Participants were assured that the discussion would be treated as entirely confidential, that the participants would not be identified beyond first names in the transcripts of the sessions, and that subsequent comments would be attributed to persons identified only by sex, class rank and academic major.

The following rules were followed in conducting the focus groups:

1. Both positive and negative comments are welcome.
2. Every person's opinions and observations will be heard, respected and valued.
3. We will treat each other with dignity and respect.
4. Everyone's comments will be treated confidentially.

5. The facilitators are the persons responsible for maintaining the group process.
6. What you see here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here.

### **Focus Group Discussion Questions**

The following questions were used by the facilitators in conducting the focus groups:

1. What is your name, your class rank, academic major and hometown?
2. Where do you now live; on-campus, off-campus or at home? Have you always lived in the same location as a Rowan student?
3. Are you employed and, if so, is it on or off campus?
4. Do you regard this campus as a safe place to attend class, participate in out-of-class activities, and to reside?
5. What experiences have you had with your own security and public safety on the Rowan campus?
6. What contact have you had with our security and public safety staff?
7. Before tonight, were you aware that some of our officers were armed? How did you find out?
8. What are your thoughts about our officers being armed?
9. Think back to the time when our officers were not armed. Do you think anything is different now that our officers have side arms?
10. Do you have any other concerns about security and public safety on our campus you would like to share?
11. Is there any thing you would especially like us to share about our discussion tonight with President Farish or the Director of Public Safety, Dr. Mitchner?
12. Did we miss anything in this discussion?

### **Summary of Focus Group Sessions**

The data that emerged from both sessions were very consistent. In addition, there is a large measure of consistency between the data from the focus groups and the student data gathered from the online survey. The following are the major findings from the two focus group sessions:

- Most students know that some of our officers are armed but did not necessarily know they received the same training as all police officers.
- Students perceive that officers patrolling in Rowan University vehicles marked “police” are “real police officers” while those patrolling in cars marked “public safety” are not and do not command the same respect as the former.
- For the most part, students expressed the idea that they felt more secure knowing our officers were armed.
- Students appreciate the “Owl Alerts.”
- While not always perceived as fair or pleasant, most students did not define Rowan University police and public safety officers in a derisive or contemptuous fashion.
- Students unanimously expressed the idea that the visibility of campus patrols, particularly after dark, was inadequate.
- All students expressed the notion that some areas of the campus have inadequate lighting and thus present unnecessary risk after dark.

### **Findings of the Committee**

1. The decision to arm sworn and Academy trained police officers employed by Rowan University has not resulted in a detrimental impact on the campus culture or climate.
2. The fact that only sworn and Academy trained police officers have been armed is of significant importance.
3. Rowan police officers are required to meet the same continuing education (in-service) requirements as other sworn police officers within the State of New Jersey.
4. Initiatives to inform the Rowan community regarding the operations of the Department of Public Safety, including distinctions between armed police officers and unarmed security officers, have produced desired results.
5. The decision to clearly differentiate between campus police officers and security personnel through proper vehicle markings and distinctive uniforms has contributed to an accurate understanding of those personnel that are armed and those who are unarmed and has increased the visibility and awareness of a campus police presence by members of the Rowan community and other individuals.
6. The internal and external review processes that have been established and will be implemented in the event of (1) the drawing of a weapon or (2) the discharge of a weapon by a Rowan police officer are appropriate and will ensure that our police officers enact their responsibilities appropriately.

### **Recommendations**

1. Continue to only arm those members of the Department of Public Safety who have met the prerequisites of being Academy trained and a sworn officer within the State of New Jersey.
2. Expand the ranks of police officers within the Department of Public Safety in accordance with campus security needs.
3. Continue the participation of the Department of Public Safety in appropriate opportunities to educate the campus community.