

December, 2021

# Tufts University Arming Status

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**FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS**



# Process

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Participant groups were invited to participate by Tufts University officials.

Participants were grouped by demographics/identity and included the following:

- Tufts Police Department- all campuses
- BIPOC student groups by campus and faculty/staff
- Administrative Council
- Academic Council
- Faculty Senate
- Tufts Action Group (TAG)
- DSDI
- DOSA
- University Relations Staff
- Athletics
- Office of Residential Life and Learning

A Task Force member offered an overview of the Arming Study to date and introduced the facilitators.

Facilitators explained the focus group process and format, providing community agreements as guides for expectations in the focus group space. Facilitators also referenced support services available to participants should they need them.

Groups spent a minimum of 60 minutes with facilitators D.A. Graham and Tabitha Moore along with notetaker Dawn Lyon. Participants were asked a series of 4 questions using a semi-structured format that allowed for follow up/clarification as dialogue progressed.

# Noteworthy Observations

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A general feeling of tension and frustration was apparent across groups:

- About the process
- About the subject (feelings of fear by and for BIPOC community members; feelings of betrayal & bewilderment for others, including TUPD)
- Concern that Tufts administration had already made a decision and this was a "checkbox" exercise

More time would yield deeper data as participants were interested in and willing to share

Participants closer to the poles of the continuum of arming/disarming had similar ideas and reasons for their positions (i.e. The national discourse regarding policing and racism, local experiences with police, TUPD's history with use of firearms, the "Tufts Bubble")

Many participants described arming as a smaller component of campus public safety and thus the conversation about arming was discussed as inextricably related to the larger concept of policing as a facet of public safety

# Demographics

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- Total # of participants: **138** unique participants
- Total # of students: 9
- Total # of staff & faculty (including TUPD): 129
- Representation from all campuses
- 15 Focus Groups
  - In Person: 8
  - Zoom: 7

# Approach to Data Presentation

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- Data from all cohorts is woven into the presentation: TUPD, Faculty, Staff, and Student perspectives are represented as part of a single community
- The data is presented in 4 sections: Arming Status, Experiences, Themes and Considerations

# Arming Status

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# Themes related to the arming decision

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There was no consensus regarding whether TUPD should continue to carry a firearm.

Responses were varied across demographics

Rationale for positions on arming most often cited

- Safety
- Trust
- Fear
- Historical data related to use

# Concerns with Disarming

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- Reliance on municipal departments
- Diminished capacity to provide public safety
- Fear for safety

# Concerns with Remaining Armed

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- Diminished and further-fractured sense of trust and community

# Experiences

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# Experiences

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- Reveal patterns of thought & experiences
- Differentiated by campus
- General data across groups and campuses

# Experiences: Boston/Grafton

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Boston & Grafton Campus students, faculty and staff described a stronger relationship with TUPD.

# Experiences: Medford/Somerville

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Medford/Somerville campus students, faculty, and staff described a more strained relationship with TUPD and reported a sense of concern for TUPD presence, especially because officers are armed.

# Current Experiences

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- TUPD as professional and supportive
- TUPD as a potential threat
- TUPD as intrusive/overstepping

# Major Themes Across Focus Groups:

Differentiated Response

Relationship Building

Education and Training

Communication & Transparency

The "Tufts Bubble"

Approach and Appearance of TUPD

Campus Public Safety Committee  
Report

TUPD and Change Management

**Theme 1: Differentiated Response:** By campus & nature of call

**Theme 2: Relationship Building:** Need to foster connection & repair harm

**Theme 3: Education and Training:** Lack of understanding of roles and experiences

**Theme 4: Communication & Transparency:** General consensus around a lack thereof in process and sense of exclusion

**Theme 5: The "Tufts Bubble":** Sense of exceptionalism/lack of understanding

**Theme 6: Approach and Appearance of TUPD:** How they are in space is as important as what they do

**Theme 7: Campus Public Safety Committee Report:** Focus group themes consistent with report

**Theme 8: TUPD and Change Management:** Inconsistencies of experiences and the desire for change

# Theme 1: Differentiated Responses & Alternative Models

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**Regardless of whether TUPD remains armed with a firearm, there was clear and consistent agreement that call responses can and should be handled differently.**

# Theme 1: Differentiated Responses & Alternative Models

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TUPD Responses should be differentiated by:

- Campus
- Nature of the Call for Service
- Lockouts and escort services can be provided by another service provider

Can Tufts have campus security instead of a police department?

# Theme 2: Relationship Building

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**Regardless of arming status, there is a clear need for relationship building.**

# Theme 3: Education & Training

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**Groups do not know or understand each other's expertise or experience. This is contributing to tension and fear.**

# Theme 3: Education & Training

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Need to educate faculty, staff & students.

- Non-police community members are unsure of how TUPD are trained and what their procedures entail. Some expressed not understanding use of force.
- Some TUPD officers are unclear what anti-racism is or how/why racism affects their interactions with people on campus

# Theme 4: Communication & Transparency

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**There is consensus across groups that a lack of communication is compounding the tension, fostering a sense of disconnect, and eroding trust in people & process.**

## Theme 5: The "Tufts Bubble"

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**The idea that Tufts University operates independently without regard to or influence by non-Tufts community, national, or global events came up across demographics.**

# Theme 6: Approach and Appearance

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**The way that TUPD officers present makes a difference in the level of trust and connection. Current practice is straining relationships.**

# Theme 7: References to Campus Public Safety Committee Report & Recommendations

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The themes that arose in focus groups confirm findings & recommendations of the Campus Public Safety Committee Report & Recommendations.

This fostered a sense of frustration and devaluation, and may have influenced student decisions to participate in the Focus Groups.

# Theme 7: References to Campus Public Safety Committee Report & Recommendations

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- Many of the report recommendations were themes of the focus groups:
  - Need for better/different training of TUPD, intra/inter-departmental communication
  - Inconsistent internal relationships with constituencies
  - Swift, consistent & fair address of officer violations of professional standards
  - Cross pollination for department leaders & TUPD
  - Recruitment & retention of TUPD officers

# Theme 7: References to Campus Public Safety Committee Report & Recommendations

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- Arming is important to address, but it is not the most important part of Tufts becoming an anti-racist community.
- Multiple expressions of frustration about focus on arming over other aspects of the report and recommendations.

# Theme 8: TUPD and Change Management

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## Community view

- Inconsistency in the experiences of community members in their interactions with TUPD
- Strong desire for TUPD to become something other than what it currently appears to be

## TUPD view

- Some members of TUPD are frustrated in their inability to be more collaborative campus partners
- Other members strongly support a municipal policing model
- Some feel unwanted and on edge, strengthening the disconnect felt in the community

# Considerations

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- If Tufts University removes firearms from TUPD, it will be necessary to create greater connection to and relationship with local police departments about Tufts University culture, campus, and needs
- Consider differentiated response model for campus public safety that is specific to campus, and nature of contact as a mechanism for tailoring the level of policing to the needs and preferences of each campus and reducing the presence of firearms in interactions with community members.
- If Tufts University does remain armed, ensure the rationale is clearly communicated and that an intense community building effort follows.



Q&A  
and  
Thank You

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