

CHAPTER SEVEN

Policing and Safety at the University of Chicago

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Imagine walking the same streets you have walked for the past three years. You could walk them with your eyes closed and still get from point A to point B; except, now you can't even look at that intersection: Woodlawn Avenue and 54th Street. It was just like every other night. You've been out alone so many times, even in the late hours. You've never feared roaming the neighborhood alone, night or day, and the thought of getting mugged seemed unimaginable. Regrettably, to my misfortune, it became a reality. A man ran out of the passenger seat of a parked car on Woodlawn Avenue, charging toward me. A handgun was pointed at my abdomen and the heavy metal touching my skin felt cold, sending shivers across my body. He aggressively snatched my bag from my shoulder and as I clung to my phone tightly, refusing to give it up, he waved his gun to my head in a shaking manner, and I gave up my phone. My body was in a state of temporary paralysis as he drove away, while my brain failed to process what had just happened. I crouched down to the ground in a state of shock. As I replayed the night repeatedly in my head, I was unable to fathom that so many students have experienced this trauma and continue to experience it.

Ensuring the safety of students, protecting them from this anguish, is a high priority for universities. The University of Chicago is located in Hyde Park, Chicago, within the South Side of the city – the South Side often known for higher levels of crime (as depicted, for instance, in the Chicago Data Portal's Crime Map).¹ Despite the resources devoted to crime control throughout the city, crime remains a major problem in Chicago: official statistics indicate an overall rise of 75% in crime in the city of Chicago since 2021.² College students across the city have fallen victim to this upsurge in the violent crime rate. In particular, the increasing frequency of muggings of UChicago students in Autumn quarter of 2023 compared to the previous school year has called for heightened safety measures and intensified patrolling both on and off campus. The University recognizes the need for robust policing and safety programs to address various concerns, including crime prevention, emergency response, and the establishment of secure environments for learning and living.

Considerable resources are invested in programs to promote student and community safety. Nevertheless, their effectiveness remains a subject of contention, and crime involving students is far from eradicated.

This chapter delves into the complex relationship between policing and safety initiatives on college campuses, shedding light on the factors contributing to their perceived ineffectiveness. By examining the resources and programs provided by the University of Chicago and its method of communication about incidents, I aim to better understand the challenges and limitations they face when tackling crime, as well as why the public's perspective of crime and anti-crime measures shifts. In conclusion, I seek to identify potential avenues for improvement in the administration's communication and transparency surrounding security, and how the University can better reassure students and address their safety concerns.

Recent Crime at the University of Chicago

Crime, especially armed robberies, is nothing new at the University of Chicago. “Mugging” is a term regularly circulated around campus: students fear being robbed while walking on campus and in the neighborhood, especially at night. The Associate Vice President for Safety and Security at the University, Eric M. Heath, delivers a daily e-mail summary of the previous day's serious reported neighborhood crimes to the community, in addition to occasional alerts concerning perceived ongoing security issues, such as a spate of seemingly related robberies.

In the first two weeks of October 2023, there were over fifteen [armed] robberies reported to the University of Chicago Police Department (UCPD). On October 19, 2023, UCPD relayed an email to the subscribers of its “University of Chicago Police Department Crime Bulletin,” describing four robberies that happened in a span of six hours. The Department of Safety and Security (DSS), which overlooks campus safety and investigates reports of crime on campus, suspected that (at least) three of the four robberies were conducted by the same people: three of the reports indicated that victims were approached by four or five suspects and the perpetrators' vehicle was a “black or dark sedan.”³ The suspects are still at large (as of December 2023) but the University has increased police coverage in off-campus areas where UChicago members reside and implemented more security technology to identify vehicles connected to crimes.

Between January 1 and October 31, 2023, UCPD received over 1500 crime reports, while there were 1254 reported crimes in 2022.⁴ Hyde Park and South

Kenwood have experienced a more than 20%⁵ increase in crime rates since 2022.⁶ The most common types of reported violent crime include armed robbery, theft, battery, and damage to property. There has also been a notable increase in fatal and non-fatal shootings in the last ten years, with four reports of victimizations in 2013, nine reports in 2022, and a jump to 18 reports in 2023.⁷ The available crime data for the University and its neighborhood provide justification for the heightened concerns about campus safety.

The University funds its own substantial campus police force (UCPD), while the City of Chicago police also patrol the campus and surrounding areas. Further, the university hires private security officers to guard intersections around the neighborhood.

The Clery Act of 1990

The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (or, the Clery Act) was enacted by Congress in 1990. After first-year Lehigh College (Bethlehem, Pennsylvania) student Jeanne Clery was raped and murdered in her campus residence in 1986, there was heightened awareness surrounding the lack of formal reporting and statistics concerning crimes on university campuses. As a layer of protection for student safety and crime awareness, the Clery Act requires colleges and universities (that receive federal funds, including the University of Chicago) to compile, classify, and report campus crime data, notify their constituencies via campus alerts, and publicly draft security and safety initiatives and policies.⁸

Failure to comply with the Clery Act can result in hefty fines, loss of federal funding and financial aid, and damage to a university's reputation. Perhaps most importantly, there would be less transparency surrounding campus crime, compromising the safety of the community.⁹ Additionally, non-compliance can hinder the ability of students and parents to develop accurate perceptions about campus safety, exacerbating the concerns and vulnerabilities that the Act was designed to mitigate.

In accordance with the Clery Act, the Department of Safety and Security (DSS) at the University of Chicago promulgates crime and safety information through their website via annual security and fire safety reports, a daily crime and fire log, and emergency notifications using the cAlert system.¹⁰ Differing from the e-mail summary delineating incidents, the cAlert system is the University's electronic mass notification

system via text message, which allows for the campus to immediately contact and relay information to University members in the case of an emergency.¹¹ The cAlert system is just one example of the University's numerous safety programs and strategies.

The University of Chicago Police Department

The University of Chicago Police Department (UCPD) is designated to serve the university and the surrounding neighborhoods. UCPD was formally established in the 1960s in response to requests from the University and members of the Hyde Park community to address public safety.¹² Its responsibilities include a safety escort program, patrolling, reporting daily crime incidents, and attending to the needs of the UChicago community.

The stationing of UCPD officers across campus buildings and throughout Hyde Park responds to crime hot spots. DSS and UCPD assign groups of police officers, referred to as "power squad missions," to areas and at times where there have been patterns of high levels of crime, and any suspicious activity is shared with the other police departments. Officers are also required to log any report of an incident through the UCPD's daily log, to ensure transparency surrounding crime data in Hyde Park.

Apart from these roles on and near campus, UCPD also cooperates with the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and the Metra Police Department (MPD) in investigating reports of crime in the neighborhood. (The MPD is a professional force responsible for the safety of the passengers of the Metra Metropolitan Rail, the public rail system for Chicago's metropolitan area.¹³) In an October, 2023 webinar discussing campus safety, Eric Heath describes UCPD as "a support to the CPD; we're kind of like an additional eyes and additional law enforcement function."¹⁴ Many students and campus members utilize the Metra and the Chicago Transit Authority buses. The UCPD works closely with the CPD and the MPD in patrolling surrounding areas to apprehend suspects and prevent crime. To better cooperate and assist one another with these investigations, the city and university have worked to make technological upgrades in their security systems around Hyde Park.

Safety Initiatives and Strategies

UChicago Campus Police and Allied Universal

Private security officers are dispatched across campus to provide additional coverage by safety personnel. These private officers, known as safety ambassadors, are a branch of the Safety Ambassador Program, an initiative aimed at increasing security by assigning contracted security authorities in exterior locations throughout the campus area.¹⁵ The University partners with Allied Universal as the contracted security and staffing company to facilitate the program.¹⁶

As an added safety measure following the recent robberies, the University has increased the number of campus police and security officers across Hyde Park and South Kenwood, and geographically expanded their beat.¹⁷ These officers patrol both by foot and by vehicles. The University's students and members may approach these officers at all times of the day, especially when they are experiencing an emergency or feeling unsafe.

P4 Security Solutions' Green Light Vehicles

Complementing the Safety Ambassador Program are the “green light” safety ambassador cars that patrol the campus and the Hyde Park area seven days a week, mainly during the afternoons and evenings. Green light vehicles are highly visible security patrol cars where the bright lights allow for easy identification in the case of an emergency. One of their responsibilities is administering safety escorts, which ensures safe transportation to students' or campus members' final destination in a case where they feel unsafe to get there by other means. As a supplement to Allied Universal, a second contract security provider, P4 Security Solutions, dispatches these officers and vehicles.¹⁸ Students are provided with safety escorts if they request them, and the green light vehicles will take them to their destination if it is within the UCPD patrol area. Although the use of these escorts is not common, students are offered this safe alternative option whenever they sense danger. The green light vehicles and officers also work closely alongside UCPD, serving as still another pair of eyes for reporting any incidents or suspicious activity.

Weekly Meetings

The DSS's leadership board and investigation teams meet weekly to address recent issues and develop ongoing strategies to ensure that safety protocols put in place are efficient and effective in combating crime. After the Autumn 2023

muggings, new strategies and procedures were implemented to try to apprehend at-large suspects. More officers have been placed in high-crime locations for heightened security presence, 32 more cameras have been installed by the City of Chicago to increase surveillance, and the deployment of shuttle buses is being re-evaluated for more efficiency.¹⁹ The University offers numerous free transportation programs that are convenient for many students and enhance security by providing a safe means of commuting.

Transportation Programs at the University of Chicago

Various programs provide affordable and efficient transportation from point A to point B and can serve as alternatives to walking during late hours. Three main transportation initiatives attract student and staff participation:

Campus Shuttle Service

The UGo Shuttle Program provides free transportation services to University-affiliated students, faculty, and staff. The shuttle schedules and routes differ based on the time of day: eight Daytime Shuttles operate with hours that range from 5 AM to 12:30 AM, while six NightRide Shuttles run from 4 PM to 4 AM.²⁰ All shuttles can be tracked on the web-based TransLoc application, which provides both shuttle locations on live routes and estimated wait times. UGo has been the most accessible service for students and staff when in need of transportation late at night as it serves as a safe alternative to walking the whole way home.

CTA Bus Route Partnership

The University has partnered with the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) for years to provide a safe and convenient mode of transportation in and around campus grounds. Upon the expiration of its former arrangement, as of August 2023, they drafted a new five-year contract with three main bus routes that service University-affiliated commuters around campus: the #171 U. of Chicago/Hyde Park, the #172 U. of Chicago/Kenwood, and the #192 U. of Chicago Hospitals Express.²¹ The first two routes circle the UChicago campus and areas most populated by students: the #171 passes through campus and into residential areas where most off-campus students live, while the #172 also passes through campus (on the same route) but branches off to commercial areas such as 53rd and 57th Street where students eat, shop, and spend time. The #192's main route connects passengers from the

University of Chicago Hospital to downtown transportation hubs stations such as Union Station and the CTA Roosevelt Station; however, the bus only operates southbound (downtown to campus) in the AM and northbound (campus to downtown) in the PM.²² These routes are available from August 20th to mid-June and run from 7:15 AM to 6 PM²³, in keeping with typical academic timetables. Anyone who is affiliated with the University of Chicago is exempt from ride payments on the #171 and #172, as long as they show a University-issued ID; on the #192, normal fare prices are applied to all riders.²⁴ The maps of the three CTA bus routes are shown in Figure 1. The abundance of CTA buses has allowed for a fairly consistent schedule that the community can rely on, whereas the shuttle service may be sporadic in its timeliness due to limited vehicles and unforeseeable delays from traffic.

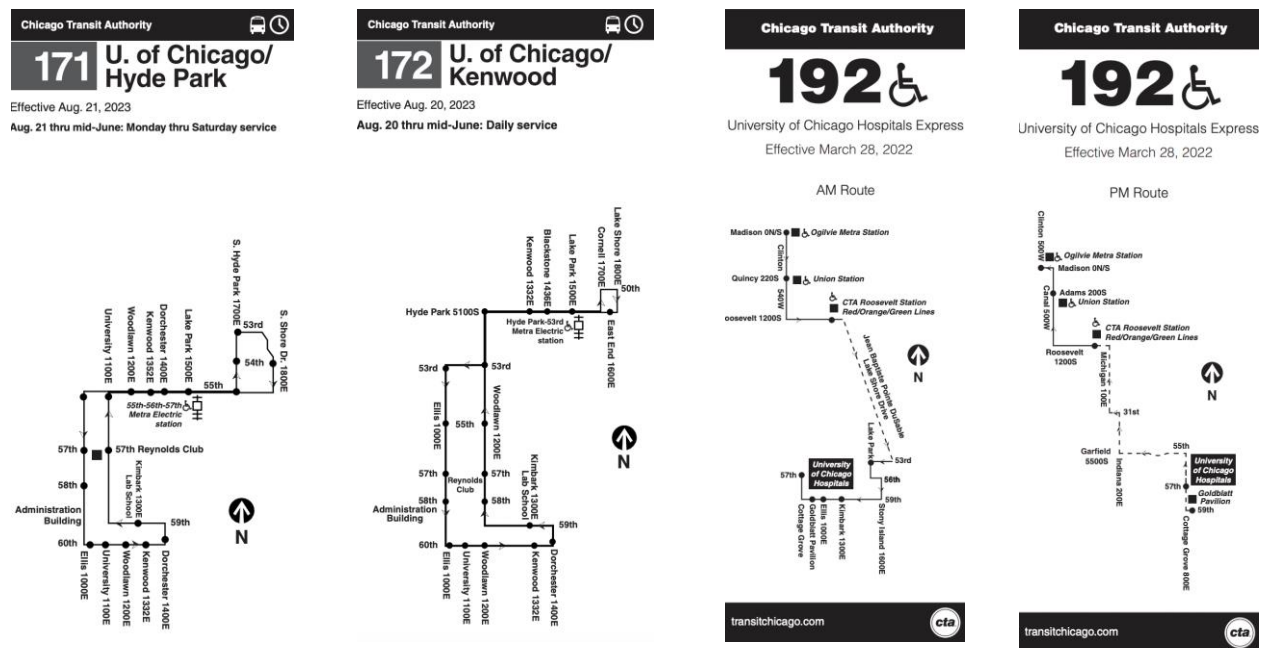


Figure 1: #171, #172, #192 Bus Routes by the Chicago Transit Authority

Lyft Ride Smart

In September 2021, the University announced the ride-share company *Lyft* as their exclusive ride-share partner in an Autumn Safety Message. In an email on September 21, 2021, DSS stated that “The Lyft Ride Smart at UChicago program allows students to take up to 10 free Lyft rides each month anywhere in the current UGo NightRide Shuttle service area on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings and

late nights during the academic year.” The maximum subsidy per ride was set at \$15, which generally is enough to fully cover a journey within Hyde Park and neighboring communities. Students have actively taken advantage of this program but have expressed concern via UChicago community social media applications and the safety webinar that ten free rides a month are not enough; not only was this concern unaddressed, in 2023, the number of monthly passes decreased to seven per-student with a decreased per-ride maximum subsidy of \$10.²⁵ Many students sought an answer regarding the puzzling contraction of Lyft passes while muggings were on the rise. No formal explanation was given for why this change was made, but Dean of the College Melina Hale²⁶ emphasizes that the Lyft program is a *complement* to the transportation resources provided by the University: it was never intended to be a standalone transportation system.

Improving Security Technology

Security technology plays a critical role in mitigating crime and complementing resources that promote student safety. Some of these systems can act as vigilant, unblinking eyes that monitor campus grounds around the clock, serving as a deterrent to potential threats while providing valuable evidence in the event of incidents. Security cameras enhance situational awareness for both campus police and the campus community, enabling quick responses to crime, emergencies, and suspicious activities. Furthermore, they can aid in investigations and evidence collection, which can be vital in resolving cases of crime or misconduct. The technologies noted below have expedited the search for vehicles involved in numerous student muggings on campus.

Security Cameras and CompStat Program

Security cameras have been a vital input into investigating campus crime. The DSS refers to the addition of more cameras to the campus and Hyde Park area as a key operational strategy.²⁷ The Computer Statistics program, better known as “CompStat,” involves analytic software that allows investigation teams to quickly review any information or footage. This software simplifies detecting crime patterns and speeds up footage review. According to Heath, the University has added new security cameras since the Autumn 2023 string of incidents in an effort to efficiently interface with local law enforcement.²⁸ The University announced that it would soon donate \$3 million to the city as part of a request for the installation of over 100 of

these enhanced cameras and license plate readers around the campus and surrounding neighborhoods.²⁹

License Plate Readers

License plate readers (LPR) can serve as a key technology for guiding the search for suspects. After a vehicle is identified and logged into the LPR system, the readers search traffic for the matching license plate; upon identifying a match, the police are immediately alerted. These alerts allow for the dispatching of patrols or police officers to apprehend suspects. In a case regarding some Autumn 2023 robberies, the LPR was able to detect the suspects' stolen vehicle within minutes and the Strategic Operations Center sent a series of locations to UCPD for the pursuit of the vehicle.³⁰ Although that pursuit was unsuccessful, LPR technology allowed for the detection of the car's license plate and CPD is continuing the investigation in collaboration with UCPD given this information. The city is in the process of installing more LPRs across the UCPD extended patrol area³¹; already, however, the functioning readers have proven to be a critical technology in arresting suspects.³²

Preparing Students for Crime Prevention

The University takes proactive measures to prepare its students for crime prevention around campus, recognizing the unpredictable nature of crime patterns. Incoming students are equipped with the knowledge and resources they need to help keep them safe. During orientation, first-year students are introduced to the university's safety and security resources through a mandatory safety module. Residence hall heads specifically address various aspects of safety, such as how to access the dean on call or contact UCPD if necessary, as well as providing guidance on safe navigation of the city using public transportation. Security protocols and safe commuting routines are discussed in house meetings and through regular dormitory house-wide emails. The UChicago Safe mobile app is described as a "Swiss army knife on your phone," by Dean Hale, offering features such as requesting a safety escort and reaching the dean on call or emergency services. Additionally, students are encouraged to subscribe and sign up for UChicago Safe's social media accounts and opt into the cAlert system to stay informed.

Student Perceptions of Campus Safety

The University devotes a significant amount of resources to providing a safer environment for the campus community. Despite the multiple programs and resources implemented by the university to mitigate the frequency of crime, some students at the University of Chicago have adopted a negative perception of how the administration is addressing certain incidents. Some students have been using Sidechat – an anonymous public forum app – to denounce the untimeliness of informing the campus community of muggings and the decision to prioritize sharing less serious crimes in school-wide emails, perhaps as a way to maintain a positive reputation.

Sidechat is an anonymous app where students can share their opinions on any issue. For the UChicago channel, students are required to log in with their UChicago email to guarantee that there are no strangers or non-University-affiliated members within the closed group. The app requires a college-issued email address or valid location data and asks one's age to join a certain college's community channel³³ to deter faculty and staff from utilizing the app.

Following the October 2023 webinar on campus safety, students used Sidechat to vent their frustrations: “Amazing how they have failed to answer a single question students actually care about” or, “the safety webinar is embarrassingly bad.” These two posts were upvoted by over 138 students as a sign of their agreement with the expressed sentiments. Students seem to feel that their safety concerns aren't being addressed. What many people considered to be a failure to notify the campus community about the chain of muggings in a timely manner led students to assume that the University prioritized its reputation over issues of safety. An email regarding the chain of multiple muggings that occurred during UChicago's Family Weekend was not forwarded until after the weekend came to an end; however, an email warning students of paintball attacks was sent that weekend, triggering angry posts across Sidechat. 624 students upvoted a post that claimed, “So I guess UChicago cares more about paintball guns than real ones!” and 285 students upvoted another post stating, “Thank you Eric M Heath for protecting us from paintball guns, so glad we only have to worry about armed robberies now.” Students seem to believe that the University's priorities in communicating about safety do not meet the students' priorities.

Perceptions are often shaped by personal experiences, and so students are adopting pessimistic perceptions because they are having negative experiences with the University and their responses to student concerns. A critical element of building trust between the community and the University is voicing concerns and giving and

receiving feedback. Students are feeling that their voices are being unheard, and some members of the community are not content with the responses to the recent crime wave. If the University hopes to gain support within its community, I suggest that it listen to the questions and concerns that are being raised by its students.

Unintended Consequences of Enhanced Campus Safety Measures

The University's campus safety measures, while essential for the protection of the community, can sometimes result in unintended consequences that merit consideration. Over the years, UCPD's actions have raised public concerns about profiling the mentally ill and racial minorities that reside in the neighborhood. Two separate UCPD-police-involved shootings occurred, one in 2018 and one in 2022; both incidents involved the same UCPD officer as the shooter. The victims – then-UChicago student Charles Soji Thomas in 2018 and 28-year-old Rhysheen Wilson in 2022 – were experiencing mental health episodes at the time of their respective incidents. The 2018 shooting triggered the ongoing “#CareNotCops” campaign at the University, where students and other activists demanded that UCPD be abolished.³⁴ A heightened police presence may lead to the unfair targeting of residents more frequently in the surrounding area, potentially creating more police-involved shootings of mentally ill individuals.

Another potential unintended consequence of enhanced safety measures concerns how the regularity with which a university delivers news about safety incidents can shape perceptions. Overemphasis on rare and unconfirmed occurrences can create unnecessary panic, while downplaying incidents can lead to complacency. The infrequency of alerts via the cAlert system led to some confusion and panic on April 25, 2023, when students were sent a text around 7:31 PM indicating police activity in the area of the main campus library. A follow-up was sent at 7:51 PM, stating that “Police received an anonymous report. No evidence of a shooting at this time. Continue to avoid the area.”³⁵ A third message was received by cAlert subscribers at 8:17 PM: “Police searched numerous buildings in response to an anonymous report and found no sign of threat. cAlert canceled.”³⁶ At the same time that these official alerts are being disseminated, social media also becomes active with messages from people near the scene. In this case, social media posts about a gunman appeared prior to the first official alert.³⁷

Rapid messaging is necessary and potentially lifesaving in the face of a report, even a plausible but unconfirmed report, of an active shooter. At the University of

Chicago, the April 25, 2023 alerts led to students seeking safety, some by staying in place and others by rushing out – perhaps with some increase in risk. This event (or what turned out, thankfully, to be a non-event) played out over about 45 minutes, and stoked some disruption and even some chaos on campus.

Frequent alerts with little distinction among their potential severity can cause avoidable disarray, while threatening to undermine prudent responses to more dangerous events via a cry-wolf effect brought on by numerous “false” alarms. Striking the right balance in communication is essential to keep the campus community informed and safe without unnecessarily causing alarm. But identifying and implementing that right balance in the face of incidents that are more-or-less random in their timing and severity is no easy matter. Transparent and frequent reporting of recent or ongoing incidents and timely follow-up communications will not only notify the community of the news but better prepare them for future situations that may arise.

Further Reforms

Responding to campus crime and improving the security infrastructure and strategies are productive steps toward protecting the University community and its neighbors; however, there are aspects of the University’s campus safety approach that could be improved by further reforms.

Transportation

The University of Chicago provides numerous transportation options. Those options serve as an element of the safety infrastructure as well as the transportation system.

There might be a case for fewer but better transportation options. In particular, the CTA routes and the shuttle routes possess a fair amount of overlap in terms of neighborhoods served – though the shuttles can operate on smaller streets. A more effective approach for both safety and efficiency could be to expand the shuttle system by purchasing more shuttles and providing a more frequent and accessible service on a regular schedule. By enhancing the shuttle network, students would have a reliable and sustainable transportation option that caters to their needs at all hours, day or night. This approach not only streamlines the transportation infrastructure, making it more convenient and cost-effective for the University and its students, but investing in eco-friendly vehicles can reduce the environmental impacts relative to the

current system. Consolidating transport resources into an enhanced shuttle system can lead to greater efficiency, improved commuting for members of the campus, and a more sustainable and cohesive approach to addressing transportation needs on campus.

Communication

The University of Chicago could achieve better results by being more transparent with crime-related incidents and issues around campus. The other side of communication would involve the University actively listening to the concerns of its neighborhood, especially its students who make up the majority of the campus community. For example, answering students' questions and addressing their concerns in the campus safety webinar – which is not what happened in the webinar, as interpreted by many students – may have opened a door for healthier discussions between the administration and its community members. Encouraging an open and responsive dialogue with University members and the broader, local community would provide valuable insights into the challenges and the needs of those it serves. Listening to which initiatives are valued by the community will also conserve funding, which can be allocated to the programs that are making the most impact. This approach not only allows for a more targeted, community-centered response but also promotes a sense of shared responsibility for campus safety and well-being.

Conclusion

Campus safety is a multifaceted and challenging issue. Although the University allocates a significant amount of funding to provide reliable security and transportation services, its perceived effectiveness lies in its community members and whether they place trust in the hands of the University's administration. High rates of muggings and other crimes will undermine trust. But irrespective of crime rates, transparency and proper two-way communication will instill greater trust in the security situation. Consistent communication will also alleviate students' doubts and fears of where the administration prioritizes safety, reducing misunderstandings.

Notes

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