



## **Community Policing Task Force Final Report**

February 6, 2025

In April 2023, President Wohlpert called for the formation of a richly diverse and broadly representative shared governance work group of students, faculty, and staff to assess the current best practices and opportunities for growth in assuring CWU is a model for community-based approaches to public safety. The work group identified the strengths CWU employs to uphold equity-centered public safety policies and practices and any potential areas of growth that will further elevate the commitment the CWU Police Department (CWU PD) demonstrates to assure a care-centered approach to campus safety. Task force members were nominated through spring quarter 2023, and the selected task force members began meeting in late Fall 2023 to discuss the objectives and determine which campus groups could be consulted for their feedback.

The initial community policing task force charge included a review of the CWU PD's policies and procedures. This is a 403-page document that is continually updated based on amendments to the law; as a result, review of these policies and procedures was determined to be beyond the purview of the task force. Additionally, our task force did not have other guidelines to compare CWU PD's policies and procedures to; the multiple variations of national guidelines rarely reflected policies specific to community policing.

Due to the sensitive nature of the content and the ongoing national and global headlines of police behavior concerns, the task force developed thoughtful interview questions (Appendix A) and sent requests to both on-campus and off-campus entities. The task force requested time on their next meeting agendas, and selected two facilitators and one note-taker from the task force to attend the meetings.

### **Meetings with Campus Groups**

The task force inquired about gathering feedback from all student groups in the Equity and Services Council (ESC) and the Residence Hall Association. They received four (4) approvals to attend group-specific meetings between February to May 2024. Please note the task force completed outreach to ten groups multiple times. In an effort to protect the student groups who allowed the task force to consult with them, those groups will not be listed here, and instead the general comments and concerns will be combined into the below section title **Interview Results and Patterns**.

### **Meetings with Off-Campus Groups**

The task force inquired about meetings with three (3) off-campus entities: the Ellensburg Police Department, the Kittitas County Sheriff's Office, and the City of Ellensburg. The task force received only one response and task force members attended a presentation and tour of the Ellensburg Police Department (EPD) in March 2024. During this presentation, the task force learned about how the EPD was funded, about their hiring process, and their available resources and training facilities. The task force learned how municipal policing differs from community policing, and Chief Ken Wade spoke highly of CWU PD in their ability to community police.

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## **Interview Results and Patterns**

From the four (4) campus groups meetings, the task force has been able to identify common patterns and themes with regard to the perception of the CWU PD on campus.

### **Positive Feedback:**

- *Friendly and Approachable:* Many students find CWU PD friendly, professional, and supportive, especially in emergencies. Archie, the campus dog, has notably improved police-student relations.
- *Community Engagement:* Some students appreciate the efforts of CWU PD to engage with the community and be approachable, even stepping out of uniform to connect with students. There is a desire for stronger connections between campus police and non-traditional students, and more engagement through community outreach programs.
- *Safety and Support:* Many students feel safe due to the visible police presence, such as blue lights, patrols, and the CAT team offering safety escorts late at night. Many students see CWU PD as essential to campus safety and value their helpful nature in both emergencies and non-criminal issues like assisting with lost items.

### **Concerns:**

- *Perceptions of Over-Policing:* Some students feel intimidated by officers or believe that police focus too much on issuing citations rather than fostering safety. Concerns include excessive presence in residence halls (especially Barto Hall) and during late-night patrols.
- *Cultural Competence:* Some students feel uncomfortable with police interactions, particularly around race. They believe the police could benefit from increased cultural competence and diversity training.
- *Property Focused:* Some students feel that the police prioritize protecting university property rather than ensuring student safety. This has led to concerns that CWU PD's presence is more about institutional protection than community care. Concerns were also raised about high-cost purchases like the Tesla.
- *Racial Profiling:* A number of students, especially from marginalized groups, expressed discomfort with what they perceive as racial profiling by officers, citing experiences where they felt unfairly targeted or treated with bias.

### **Suggestions for Improvement:**

- *Improved Communication:* Better communication during emergencies could help alleviate confusion and anxiety. Follow up conversations post-incidents when possible would be helpful.
- *Trust Building:* Focusing on cultural competence and increasing direct engagement with the community would continue to foster trust and enhance the good work being done.
- *Balancing Enforcement with Support:* There's a need to reduce the perception of being constantly watched and balance enforcement with more supportive, community relationship-type interactions.

### **National Issues and The Impact:**

National concerns about police behavior, such as racial profiling, excessive force, and misconduct, have had a notable impact on student perceptions of CWU PD. While some students appreciate the contrast between CWU PD and broader national issues, others remain wary due to the broader climate surrounding police conduct.

- *Positive Impact:* For many students, especially marginalized students groups, CWU PD are seen as a safer, more supportive presence compared to city police, and they appreciate the understanding shown by officers.
- *Concerns:* National incidents of police misconduct can heighten anxiety, particularly among students from marginalized groups. Some students feel that when national police misconduct is in the spotlight, CWU PD become less visible, which can unintentionally increase anxiety.
- *Comfort in Emergencies:* Many students, especially those with past negative experiences with law enforcement, expressed greater comfort in ointeracting with CWU PD during emergencies.

### **April 2024 Campus Incident**

In April 2024, an incident on campus sparked a community-wide discussion. In a presidential email to campus regarding the incident, it was announced that the Community Policing Task Force would investigate the situation to determine if proper protocols were followed. The members of the task force felt this request and charge went beyond what the task force could accomplish; the content reached beyond each task force member's scope of practice and knowledge, and as the individuals involved were members of the community, the task force members felt like they would be put in an unfortunate position if they discussed the situation. Based on those factors, the Community Policing Task Force did not investigate the incident.

### **Summary**

Regarding the concept of Community Policing (developing community partnerships, engaging in problem solving, and implementing community policing organizational features through education and relationship-building), CWU PD has successfully worked to build the trust and relationships with the Wildcat community and have clearly defined themselves apart from municipal policing in the Ellensburg area. The Community Policing Task Force struggled to get campus involvement that would lead this task force to fulfill the objectives set forth in April 2023; this indicates to the task force that the task at hand was too broad and deep to fully address the concerns or perhaps concerns regarding CWU PD may not be widely shared. The task force disbanded by the end of June 2024.

Thank you for the opportunity.

Sincerely,

Dania Cochran  
Cody Stoddard  
Mal Stewman  
Teresa Divine  
Tricia Rabel  
Malik Cantu

## Appendix A

### Open Forum Discussion Guidance

#### Description:

We are serving on the Community Policing Task Force, a group dedicated to gathering your stories and experiences to learn about the strengths and growth opportunities related to campus' relationship with CWU police and our equity-centered public safety policies and practices. We are working on a listening tour and thank you for joining some of our members for this conversation. Your experiences and thoughts, along with our other data collection and learning opportunities, will help us build a final report regarding the strengths and actionable growth opportunities that will go to President Wohlpart and Chief Jason Berthon-Koch. All stories and experiences shared with us will be presented to the CWU community in a summary, and we will not be using direct quotes or sharing identifiable information. By doing this, we really want to encourage everyone to speak freely to create an honest and inclusive picture of policing on campus. There are no right or wrong answers; this is all about your perspective. We appreciate your help and assistance in understanding our campus.

#### Questions:

1. What is your impression of CWU Police?
2. What do you believe is the role of campus police at CWU?
3. How is your feeling of safety at Central impacted by CWU Police?
4. What have you experienced while at Central that impacts how you feel about CWU Police?
5. What have you experienced outside of Central that impacts how you feel about CWU Police?
6. How do national concerns regarding police behavior (e.g. misconduct, use of force, profiling, unethical behaviors, etc.) impact how you feel about CWU Police?
7. What have we not discussed that you were hoping to speak about today?