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## A relationship in the balance?

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Lewisburg, Pa. — Separated from the nearest city by 50 miles of winding roads, Bucknell University is dotted by brown-brick buildings and encircled by snow-capped mountains.

The small liberal arts school is much smaller in size and population than Princeton, is markedly farther than Princeton is from any major metropolitan area and has much less crime than Princeton does, according to crime reports filed with the U.S. Department of Education.

By all accounts, then, Bucknell's is a safer campus. But Bucknell's public safety officers now carry guns, and Princeton's do not.

Bucknell's choice to arm its officers was controversial when the school first formally considered arming in 2007, following the shootings at Virginia Tech that April. However, in less than a year, the school analyzed the issue, held public meetings and chose to give guns to its officers.

What is perhaps the most striking part of the Bucknell example is how apathetic the school's students are now. One of the Princeton administration's main arguments against arming its Public Safety officers is the potential to harm the relationship between officers and students, a relationship critical to dealing with the routine campus incidents that are far more likely to take place than is a shooting.

But several police experts and Princeton USG president Michael Yaroshefsky '12 suggested that the University's concerns may not prove relevant. "The publicity of the disagreement is likely to negatively impact relations more than the weapons would," Yaroshefsky said in an e-mail.

Of course, Bucknell is a different campus in a different location with different students, so a direct comparison with Princeton is not possible. Nevertheless, examining what happened at a similar school three hours away may lend insight into whether student-officer relationships would be harmed at Princeton.

Bucknell shares many aspects with Princeton that several of the University's peer schools — such as Harvard, Yale and Penn — do not. Violence from Cambridge, New Haven and Philadelphia sometimes spills onto local campuses, a situation exemplified in Philadelphia in November when an alleged carjacker shot at Penn police on campus. Penn officers shot and killed the man.

Bucknell's decision to arm reflects a move numerous other schools nationwide took after the Virginia Tech shootings. While no hard data exist, several schools nationwide have moved to arm since the shooting — from Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa., to Brandeis University outside of Boston to the Iowa state school system.

### **The Bucknell debate**

When Bucknell first considered the question of arming in 2007, students there expressed many of the same reservations that some Princeton students express today.

“Bucknell is perceived as a safe environment, and students believe that the addition of weapons would destroy that sense of small-town community,” members of the Bucknell student government wrote in a November 2007 report. “This level of force is excessive and unwarranted for Bucknell.”

The move to arm officers threatened to “undo” what were perceived as improved ties between students and public safety officers, the report added. But the report never took a side on the issue because the student government felt it needed to learn more about the issue before making a recommendation.

After a public presentation and discussion by the chief of the school's public safety department, Bucknell's board of trustees decided in January 2008 to arm the officers.

“[Bucknell] enjoys a rural location where safety and security are quite freely enjoyed,” a university report said. “There are many who are concerned about the impact to the campus of our public safety officers being armed, including the effect this decision could have on the sense of community the campus enjoys.”

However, “after some reluctance and considerable deliberation, the board has taken the step that it has concluded ensures it is doing everything it can to protect the safety and security of the campus community,” the university announced.

The university's president at the time, Brian Mitchell, and its public safety chief, Jason Friedberg, declined through a spokesperson to comment for this article.

After the Bucknell board of trustees' unanimous decision, the officers went through additional training and were equipped with guns before the start of the 2008-09 school year.

Roughly half of the undergraduate student body is too young to know a Bucknell pre-arming, and several students said debate over arming is nonexistent on campus now.

"Since I've been on campus, I have not heard one iota of it," said Charlie Kreitler, a junior and president of the Bucknell student government, in an interview last year.

When asked whether having armed officers has made students hesitant to call for help, Kreitler responded, "Definitely not."

"If anything, it makes kids feel safer," he said. "As far as going to public safety for help, I can't imagine anyone backing away from that because they have a weapon."

Several students interviewed on Bucknell's campus on a recent Sunday afternoon agreed. It's "not really something I think about, to be honest," said senior Collin Berry, as he stood outside the school's library, a structure similar in appearance to Nassau Hall. Officers were unarmed during Berry's freshman year, but he said the arming transition hasn't changed the campus.

Freshman Tyler McLamb agreed. "It doesn't affect us at all," he said.

### **Challenging 'tradition'**

Would Princeton students react differently?

That appears to be the critical question, and Princeton officials said they believe the answer may be yes. That judgment is based off a 2009 survey conducted by the USG, which polled 15 percent of the campus population, including both undergraduate and graduate students.

The survey results indicated that 49 percent of respondents would be either "very uncomfortable" or "somewhat uncomfortable" contacting Public Safety if the officers were armed. On the other hand, 47 percent said they would be either "very comfortable" or "somewhat comfortable."

At the time of the survey, 86 percent of respondents said they were presently comfortable contacting unarmed officers.

President Shirley Tilghman said in an interview this week that the University's campus culture is at stake in the debate.

"We have a long tradition of having unarmed Public Safety officers, many of whom I think are seen as truly public safety as opposed to police officers," she said. "And I think when you put a gun on somebody's hip that person becomes a police officer, not someone who is focused primarily on safety but on policing."

"Right now, we have great relationships with students," Princeton Public Safety Director Paul Ominsky said, noting that the USG survey suggests that "arming officers could impact that relationship."

Connor Diemand-Yauman '10, the USG president who presided over the survey and subsequently recommended to the University that officers remain unarmed, said in an American Whig-Clivosophic Society debate last year that these data are crucial.

"In my opinion, whether or not this fear is justified or rational is irrelevant," he said. "This is how students feel."

He explained that students could be hesitant to call for help and it would taint relations during routine calls.

"If you arm Public Safety, you aren't just putting a gun on their hip during times when there's an active shooter on campus," Diemand-Yauman said. "You're putting a gun on their hip when you're playing music too loudly."

Yaroshefsky also said that "guns change the dynamic of interaction."

"Perhaps some feel the risks of having loaded weapons on campus outweigh their potential benefits," he added.

Michael Westrol '07, the cofounder of Princetonians for a Safer Campus — a group formed to support arming officers — said he believes that misconceptions about the officers are partly to blame for the survey results.

“The biggest hurdle we have is that most students don’t realize the qualifications of our officers that we have on campus,” Westrol said in an interview last year.

Public Safety’s sworn officers receive the same training and have the same authority as local police officers, in addition to further University-specific training they receive once they arrive on campus.

“There have been many arguments [against arming], some of them sort of silly, like they’re going to be shooting people at dorm parties,” Westrol added. “They’re often seen as rent-a-cops and security guards, and the reality is that [they are] fully certified.”

“Your campus police are your guardians,” said Lynne Honickman, the founder of Moms against Guns, a Pennsylvania-based organization that advocates against illegal handguns and assault weapons. “I feel if anyone should carry a gun, it should be the guardian.”

Several common questions raised by students highlight concerns about the training of the officers, should they be armed. For example, what would stop a drunk student from wrestling a gun away from a Public Safety officer?

Paul Krzewinski, a Public Safety officer and the secretary of the local Fraternal Order of Police, responded that officers are taught techniques in the police academy for preventing so-called “holster grabs,” and that police officers nationwide are equipped with specially-designed holsters that limit unauthorized access to a gun.

“All of these things are safe and effective,” he said. “None of this is brand new. The officer’s able to protect that resource confidently and prevent things like that from occurring.”

### **Peer differences**

There are no nationwide statistics available about accidental shootings at colleges, but a 2002 report by a police consulting group indicated that such events are rare.

The report, produced by The Bratton Group, was written for Brown University while the school considered arming its officers.

The group surveyed 14 schools with armed officers in the Northeast, and only one school reported one “minor accidental discharge” when the survey pool was asked to cite “any

negative incidents related to firearms, including accidental shootings, improper displays of a gun” and other similar scenarios.

Only one actual shooting was reported, a situation in which an officer stopped a robbery.

As a result of the report — which went on to recommend that officers should be armed — and campus discussions, Brown decided in late 2003 to arm its officers. Brown police officers were given guns in early 2006.

“To be more effective against crime, Brown campus police would need to take on additional policing roles, including arresting armed perpetrators, pursuing fleeing suspects and making car stops,” Brown President Ruth Simmons said in a statement at the time. “None of these functions can be performed safely by police officers who are not armed.”

Nationwide, 65 percent of colleges and universities arm their sworn officers, and several police experts said that the student discomfort Princeton officials predict apparently does not represent situations at other schools. “We’ve got thousands [and] thousands of campuses nationwide where the cops do carry guns and no such thing” happens, said retired Army Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, a school safety expert, referencing any discomfort with contacting campus officers.

But Princeton officials cautioned against drawing any comparisons between arming debates at Princeton and those at other schools.

“Every institution ... establishes policies and procedures and thinks about its campus in a way that’s unique to itself,” Ominsky said. “And there’s a wide variety of campus police [agencies] out there in sort of the landscape of colleges and universities.”

Ominsky pointed to Columbia University and Dartmouth College as examples of schools that choose not to arm their officers. But both Columbia and Dartmouth departments exclusively employ officers who are not sworn officers in their respective states — meaning they do not have the authority that local police do.

Indeed, Princeton is the only one of the Ivy League schools with sworn officers — a list composed of the University, Brown, Cornell, Harvard, Penn and Yale — that has chosen not to arm them.

*This is the second part of a [three-part series](#) about the debate over arming University Public Safety officers. Tomorrow, a look at potential arming options for Princeton. For feedback or tips, please e-mail [investigations@dailyprincetonian.com](mailto:investigations@dailyprincetonian.com).*