



## Moving forward, arming options

By HENRY ROME

SENIOR WRITER

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Called to campus in summer 2009, Borough police officers readied their patrol rifles and began searching the campus for a gunman. Walking alongside the Borough officers were the University's Public Safety officers. But instead of carrying the handguns and assault weapons as did the Borough officers, Public Safety officers were unarmed.

The gun in question turned out to be fake, but the incident has raised an important question in the debate over whether University Public Safety officers should carry guns: Even if Public Safety officers are not constantly armed, what if they had guns locked away in Public Safety headquarters or in patrol cars so they could have the guns in the event of a crisis?

These options may have the potential to alleviate one of the administration's greatest concerns about arming: that student-officer relationships would suffer if the patrol officers who interact with students in daily incidents had guns strapped to their belts.

The question stems from the potential for an active shooter scenario, in which police experts say officers should confront a shooter rather than form a perimeter or wait for backup. Because Public Safety officers are unarmed, they are not permitted to engage any shooter.

### **The armory alternative**

Different arming approaches at universities across the country "run

the whole gamut” from a single locked-up shotgun to SWAT-trained campus officers, said Robin Hattersly Gray, the executive editor of Campus Safety magazine.

Locking guns in armories — either in patrol cars or at Public Safety headquarters — is one such approach.

Paul Krzewinski, a Public Safety officer and the secretary of the Princeton Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police — which is lobbying to allow officers to carry guns — said the FOP would respond positively to approaches like these. “If [the University] were to make that decision, [there would be] no complaints from the FOP at all,” he said.

However, President Shirley Tilghman said that the University has seriously reviewed the arming issue and does not feel that officers need to be armed in any form.

She added that there are serious concerns with locking guns away.

“[The Borough and the Township] have armed officers who are on a very regular basis practicing with those firearms, so that when the very rare instances where they are actually going to need that firearm happens, they are comfortable and well prepared,” she explained.

“We just don’t see any evidence that the response of those community officers is slow and therefore puts us at risk,” she added.

Still, Krzewinski said, having an immediately available sidearm at all times is most critical to be able to respond to the rare instance in which a gun would be necessary.

“For an effective ability to respond to any type of incident that’s

occurring on our campus and to stop any violence that's occurring, we need to have weapons immediately available," he said.

Doug Wyllie, a senior editor for the website PoliceOne who has reported on the Princeton arming debate, said that an armory approach would be a step in the right direction.

"If that level of preparedness sullies your good relations you have with your students," Wyllie said, referring to University administrator's fears that arming would negatively affect officer-student relationships, "you have bigger problems."

However, several police experts said, such a plan carries an inherent risk to officers — it is of course not up to them when, where or if a shooter strikes, so an unarmed officer away from an armory is no better off than one without an armory.

"I guess it's better than none," said John Gnagey, the executive director of the National Tactical Officers Association. But he compared keeping guns locked away to keeping bulletproof vests on standby. "That's a moot point if bullets are flying at you ... It's a little late to run back to your car [and tell the gunman], 'Hold on,'" he said. "It doesn't work that way in real life."

But administrators said the University is not considering armory alternatives, because conditions on and around campus that would necessitate any form of arming simply do not exist, Public Safety director Paul Ominsky said.

## **Roots in Columbine**

The necessity for a quick response to an active shooter was most prominently highlighted as a result of the shootings at Columbine

High School in Colorado, where two students killed 13 people in 1999. While the gunmen were shooting, police officers followed their protocol: They stayed outside, created a perimeter and waited for a SWAT team to face the shooters. It took 45 minutes before SWAT units were ready to enter the school building, and by that point, the shooting was over.

The nationwide attention garnered by Columbine prompted police officials to rethink the long-held idea to wait for a SWAT team while shots are fired. Instead of waiting for a SWAT team, patrol officers nationwide are now instructed to shoot back — in some cases, even if they're the only officer on the scene.

Police academy graduates learn these lessons in school, but when sworn police officers arrive at Princeton, this training is revised. Officers are told not to intervene, Krzewinski said. Instead, they are told to set up a perimeter and wait if there were to be a shooting on campus.

Krzewinski said this “disengagement” policy puts the campus at a “considerable safety disadvantage.”

But, he said, “I can't tell you for sure that everyone's going to follow the policy of disengagement [in the event of a shooting] and not feel compelled to do more than that.”

A report commissioned by Brown University when it was examining the arming issue said that this “disengagement” policy runs contrary to the basic instincts of a police officer.

“By training, instinct and character, they want to help victims and protect people,” read the report by The Bratton Group, which

concluded officers at Brown should be armed. “By policy, they are supposed to stand back when they are needed most.”

### **At Virginia Tech, response likely saved lives**

The lessons from Columbine were put to the test at Virginia Tech in April 2007. The police response to the shootings then not only highlighted new tactics used by the campus’ officers, but also demonstrated how armed campus police can respond to a crisis.

Virginia Tech campus police were armed and were unable to prevent the shooting, but some experts believe that had they not been armed, the toll may have been significantly worse.

According to the commission that investigated the shootings, the gunman at Virginia Tech blocked the three main doors of the building with chains and padlocks, and the first teams of responding officers — including both town and campus officers — couldn’t get inside. However, the campus and local police realized there was another entrance to the building and proceeded to shoot off the door’s lock.

Soon after, the shooting stopped. The report concluded that the gunman likely shot himself when he heard the police moving in. In other words, the tactical readiness and building knowledge of both the campus and local police at Virginia Tech likely saved lives.

The report also praised the coordination between the Virginia Tech and Blacksburg, Va., police departments and formally recommended that schools take note of the departments’ coordination. The first recommendation in the chapter detailing the shooting was, “Campus police everywhere should train with local police departments on response to active shooters and other emergencies.”

Princeton does not conduct that type of training, said Treby Williams '84, the assistant vice president for safety and administrative planning, who oversees Public Safety. But, she said, the University is fully confident in the capabilities of the Borough and Township police to respond in the event of a shooting on campus. Indeed, the University is in constant contact with the departments and has conducted detailed tabletop drills with local authorities to prepare for a coordinated response.

### **An independent review?**

The FOP is currently asking the University to hire an independent consultant to examine Princeton's campus safety, a move that, Krzewinski said, could increase transparency on the issue of whether to arm the sworn officers. "A more honest and real look at it from an outside source would be very valuable," he explained.

Tilghman said in an interview this week that the University administration already draws on the law enforcement expertise of professionals in Public Safety.

"I think the notion that these decisions are made in a vacuum without knowledgeable people is simply wrong," she said.

Ominsky said the potential for the University hiring a consulting firm is "an open question," but he said that the school is not currently considering it.

For Ominsky — who is in his second year at Princeton — working with consultants is not a novel proposition. When he was the director of public safety at Smith College, the school hired a Texas security consulting firm to assess the campus' need for guns. The consultant's

report, issued in December 2007, recommended that Smith — an all women's college in Northampton, Mass. — should arm its officers. Smith ultimately decided against arming.

He maintained that Princeton's current policy of not arming any of its officers does not need to be revised.

In February 2008, during the arming discussions at Smith, Ominsky told The Daily Hampshire Gazette in Northampton that whether to arm or not was the college's call. "I'm not a fan of guns," he said. "But as a law enforcement person, I see the necessity for them."

*This is the last in a [three-part series](#) about the debate over arming University Public Safety Officers. For feedback or tips, please e-mail [investigations@dailyprincetonian.com](mailto:investigations@dailyprincetonian.com).*