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# Not your everyday police department

Campus police say community connections are key

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Special to the Chronicle

The day Donald J. Trump became president-elect last November, Eric Lopez and other University of Connecticut students organized an impromptu on-campus protest.

Hundreds of students and faculty gathered at noon outside Gampel Pavilion, near the beloved statue of Jonathan the Husky.

They carried banners and signs denouncing Trump. Lopez, an undocumented student, led chants like "Donald Trump is not our president," and "Black lives matter" as the protesters marched along Hillside Road, which was blocked off by police.

Members of the UConn Police Department stood by silently, aiming to ensure student safety.

It's part of the job and dealing with situations like that represents a key difference between law enforcement at institutions of higher education and those overseeing cities or municipalities.

And, given that Trump will officially be sworn into office Friday, there is a good chance UConn will have more protests.

The police department in Storrs is ready.

"Our first thought is 'how do we create a safe environment for people to gather and express their views?'" UConn Chief of Police Hans Rhyhart said.

The next step, while working with the event organizers in this instance, was providing the appropriate resources.

Officers were stationed at strategic locations along the protesters' route. "We don't want to be the story. We just want to support and help out in any way we can," Rhyhart said.

**Policing a university**  
While dealing with a public event such as this post-election protest isn't unusual for any police department, the number, scope and spontaneous nature of such events at UConn is one ingredient that makes campus policing unique.

In April 2014, for example, thousands of students flooded the center of campus to celebrate the men's NCAA basketball championship victory.

That celebration poured into the streets as it had previously in the championship years of 1999, 2001 and 2011 — and it represented something campus police had to deal with.

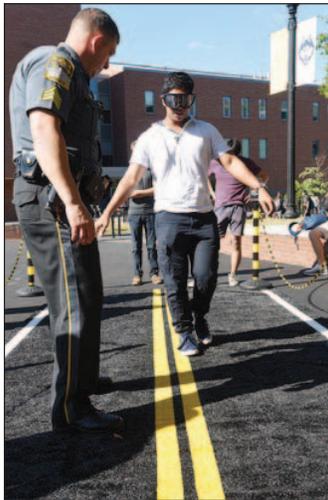
In short, campus police must know their community — perhaps more so than traditional municipal departments.

UConn police must positively relate to a campus community that often is different than the demographics of the area surrounding campus.

UConn, for example, is more diverse culturally, ethnically and racially than much of northeastern Connecticut.

In addition to numerous religious communities, the campus also houses five cultural centers representing the student population's diversity of race, gender and sexual orientation.

UConn police have specific liaison officers assigned to each center to help foster good com-



*Roxanne Pandolfi*  
Ben Paul, a University of Connecticut senior from South Windsor, tries to walk the yellow line with drunk goggles on during an educational program set up by the UConn Police Department on Fairfield Way last September. UConn police Sgt. Jason Hyland watches and holds out a hand in case the student falls. Such events with the school community are seen as a necessary means for campus police to better patrol the university with a politically volatile environment on campus since controversial Republican Donald Trump's election as president last November. UConn police say they're ready to handle anything and everything the student body throws at them.

munication.

According to university data, in the fall of 2016, 11,066 Storrs students identified as white, while 1,075 identified themselves as black and 1,803 identified as Hispanic or Latino.

This access to campus cultural centers is a resource not available to most police departments outside of a college campus.

They are places police can get to know specific segments of the campus population and tap to get diverse perspectives on issues.

The UConn Police Department has an entire Community Outreach Unit charged with connecting with the community.

Police keep in close communication with campus resources, such as the Women's Center and the office of Counseling and Mental Health Services, and can make referrals or seek assistance from these offices.

Not every municipal police force has such resources available within their communities.

"Here at the UConn Police Department, we embrace community policing strategies and model what we do based upon professional best practices. One distinct benefit of working with the UConn community, that some towns and cities might not have access to, are the dedicated resources that UConn provides as an institution," UConn police Sgt. Jason Hyland said.

"Officers here at all levels are empowered to work with the specialized resources at UConn to provide better service to the community," Hyland said, naming resources that include campus

victim services, mental health or medical resources and residential assistance.

**Community relations**  
Because of the diversity of the student population, a healthy community relationship with campus police is paramount to a safe environment.

UConn police Capt. Magdalena Silver has been the liaison for the Women's Center since 2009.

"Our goal is to establish and maintain a flow of information promoting the importance of communication," Silver said of her role of liaison.

At the Rainbow Center, UConn police officer Jacqueline Twiss serves as the liaison.

"Officer Twiss comes and hangs out here and makes a presence," said Julia Anderson, the Rainbow Center's graduate assistant.

"She really does an exceptional job."

Anderson explained Twiss' effort to meet students who frequent the Rainbow Center.

For example, she proposed the "Pizza with the Police" event in October to give LGBTQ students the opportunity to ask police questions, make requests or provide information.

It is important these students know officers are "on-board and accepting" and a person's identity is not a factor in policing, Anderson said.

Despite the efforts and training that emphasize friendly, face-to-face interaction around campus, not all interactions between the police and students are positive.

Last October, for example, the African American Cultural Center

hosted a panel of UConn police and firefighters who answered students' questions.

The Daily Campus student newspaper, The Daily Campus, later published an article written by student Haddiyah Ali, who was not satisfied by officers' answers to questions about police brutality and discrimination.

"When asked what else was being done, officers suggested students to make our own change," Ali wrote.

She also wrote that she felt officers asked questions about the Black Lives Matter movement, did not know enough about it and evaded any constructive conversation.

This left some students wondering if coming together with police is fruitful.

While incidents such as this represent bumps on the community relations road, Rhyhart said the department continues to strive to improve and reach out.

One longstanding program connecting students to the police is Husky Watch.

"Student employees act as sort of a neighborhood watch and conduct regular foot patrols to identify safety concerns such as lighting issues, broken windows and doors and help be the eyes and ears of the community," Hyland said.

"Many Husky Watch students are interested in careers in law enforcement or a similar profession and this gives them some basic concepts and a great job on campus. Several officers currently at UConn PD, including myself, started out as members of Husky Watch."

"Coffee with a Cop" also has been so successful and well-received nationally that the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services declared the first National Coffee with a Cop Day Oct. 7, 2016, Hyland said.

"It is an excellent informal venue for getting to know people as people rather than solely as officers and 'citizens,'" Hyland said.

**Eastern's PD**  
The unique nature of campus policing also extends to departments at other universities.

The Eastern Connecticut State University campus is located in an urban-like area where poverty and crime is common.

But the Eastern campus also has a population different than the area surrounding it and the crime rate on campus is low.

In order to maintain a safe environment, Eastern's Police Department Lt. Jeffrey Gareski said having a good relationship with the students is central.

"Most of our community know our officers by the first name and not because they have been in trouble, but because we are actively involved in our community," Gareski said.

"We perform programs in the residence halls, charity events on campus, health and safety talks. We assist our students with class projects."

One of the most attended police-hosted activities is the annual Open-Rec Night featuring board games, crafts, a basketball tournament, door prizes and free food.

Each year it attracts as many as 900 students.

ECSU also strives to maintain campus safety through the use of on-campus surveillance cameras.

"We have about 300 to 340 cameras on campus," ECSU police Lt. Thomas A. Madera said.

"People know if you come here do something (illegal), it is very likely you will be caught on cameras."

**Off campus**  
At UConn, police also strive to stay connected with the off-campus university community, where policing is the purview of the Mansfield resident state troopers and the Connecticut State Police.

UConn keeps the line of communication between departments open by meeting with state police every Tuesday.

At these meetings, they discuss trends and issues in the area and work to learn how the university can support the town and the troopers who police there.

Communication and face-to-face interaction before problems occur is also the community relations emphasis for state troopers who interact with UConn students off campus.

Lifestyle differences have sometimes caused tensions to rise between older Mansfield residents and UConn students who rent off-campus houses.

As a result, Mansfield Resident State Trooper Sgt. Richard Cournoyer said he strives to get to know students to help ensure an atmosphere of mutual respect between the divergent communities.

*Editor's note: The writers are University of Connecticut journalism students.*

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