

Who is Protected and Who is Served?

The Gap Between Massachusetts Campus Police Authority and Action

A Guide to One Method of Interrogating the Institution of Campus Police as Law Students

Over the past two years, students at Northeastern University School of Law (NUSL) have engaged in a project of researching and thinking critically about Northeastern University Police Department (NUPD), a unit of private police employed by the school but appearing to operate in a manner nearly indistinguishable from the public Boston Police Department. Using developing skills as law students, we sought to find the legal justifications for campus police's existence and actions. We also analyzed publicly available information about NUPD's activities, and considered the harms of campus policing at Northeastern guided by abolitionist principles. This document briefly describes the process we followed in compiling our research into the report "Who is Protected and Who is Served? The Gap Between Massachusetts Campus Police Authority and Action." If any students are interested in engaging in similar work at their schools, we would be thrilled to assist in any way possible. We can be reached at nuslcriminallawproject@gmail.com.

Steps We Followed to Critique Our Campus Police:

1. Research statutory and case law justifying the creation and action of campus police
 - a. We started with the basic question "what statute allows schools to create their own private police forces?" In Massachusetts, campus police are authorized as "special state police officers" through the Massachusetts State Police. They are also commonly deputized by county sheriffs.
 - b. We then conducted full legal research into the statutory authority (finding, e.g., that campus police are authorized under the same statutory provisions as security for the Public Health Department and the State Lottery Commission, completely separate from the authorization of public police), and relevant case law, analyzing the scope of campus police's authority based on jurisdiction, the scope of their authorized actions, and their ability to carry guns. We generally concluded that campus police were likely acting outside the scope of their legal authorization.
2. Gather publicly available data about our school's police force
 - a. We found through our legal research that, in Massachusetts, private police forces are not subject to public requests for records (i.e., FOIA requests). Private police forces are required to make small amounts of data available to the public, so we sought that data.
 - b. We found that NUPD was not meeting the requirements for data sharing, and found the most comprehensive data about NUPD's activities from the school's newspaper.
 - c. We went through one year of newspapers, and coded each report based on different attributes, such as the type of "criminal" activity reported, the possible parties involved, and what actions, if any, that NUPD took in response. That analysis showed that NUPD almost exclusively responded to property and "quality of life" issues, situations that do not justify the existence of a militarized police force.
3. Situate the analysis in the context of police and campus police violence nationwide
 - a. The framing of our report illustrated that NUPD is not an isolated force, but that campus police are extremely common throughout the country, and wherever there are police, there is police violence.
 - b. We were particularly concerned with increased militarization of police, and how police have become synonymous with race-, class-, and gender-based violence.