Presidential Response to Reimagining Campus Public Safety Report

Last year, I began the process of organizing a campus committee to undertake a new round of exploration about advancing safety and security on our campus. This followed the reckoning of our local and national communities about racial discrimination and injustice in law enforcement agencies in several communities—demonstrating firsthand the injustice experienced by Black and other communities of color. The convening also recognized the tragic death of Jason Washington and the lingering concerns of many on campus about feeling safe in an environment where law enforcement members routinely operated with weapons.

Early in my presidency, we prepared a campus safety plan, the “Safer Together” initiative, based on a more holistic understanding of how we create safety. As I moved forward to organize and commission a Reimagine Campus Safety Committee (RCSC), I believed that this holistic approach with broad participation should be among the guiding perspectives of advancing campus safety.

I first appointed a five-member RCSC Steering Team—representing faculty, staff, students and academic administration—to form and set responsibilities for the full committee. My deep gratitude goes out to Jose Coll, Vicki Reitenauer, Motu Sipelii, Ed Washington and Zachary Mettler for their dedicated commitment to leading this important campus endeavor. They helped craft an inclusive self-nomination process by which other committee members were selected. I was pleased to support the RCSC work with the expertise of the PSU National Policy Consensus Center, which provided both project management assistance as well as expertise in organizing and conducting difficult dialogues aimed at finding consensus on challenging issues.

The Reimagine Campus Safety Committee persevered in its work through the COVID-19 pandemic and grounded its effort in extensive data gathering, solicitation of the perspectives of diverse campus communities, purposeful reflection, and consensus-building over a period of several months. The result of this conscientious work is a comprehensive and compelling report that outlines 35 recommendations that together represent a thoughtful and holistic approach to advance the safety and well-being of our campus community. It also outlined key principles to guide planning and implementation.

As President, I am both exceptionally pleased and impressed with the comprehensive vision and actions proposed in the report. They are appropriate to our campus mission and our location in the greater Portland community. While there are specific issues to be explored and determined in implementing some of the far-reaching changes, as a whole I endorse this report and its recommendations and am committed to moving forward beginning immediately with them.

In a separate document I outline an Implementation Plan to guide planning, action, assessment and oversight. This plan includes both “Action Tables,” organized around thematically similar recommendations, and a “Coordinating Team” to ensure holistic and impactful outcomes. I will seek to identify resources for those actions that will require some investment.

I wish to extend my deep gratitude to all of the members of the Reimagine Campus Safety Committee and all of those who provided insight, perspectives and experiences to the work of the committee. I strongly believe that the RCSC plan presented to me provides a compelling, feasible, and innovative pathway to a safer campus with a stronger sense of belonging to us all.