

Police and Post-Secondary Partnerships

While many other members of the community have offered specific recommendations for how to reform specific policing practices, I contend that any consideration of reforming the police service must consider the educational expectations for incoming officers as an important mechanism for improving the overall quality of the policing service. The Police Services Act clearly outlines the needs for post-secondary education as a baseline requirement for police hires. However, simply having a university degree is not sufficient to really prepare prospective officers with the background knowledge and skills necessary to be an effective officer in a community policing model. Prospective officers must have a clear understanding of the social determinants of health as a precursor to crime and social inequality as well as an understanding of and the ability to identify and provide solutions for community based-social problems through experiential learning and through interdisciplinary studies. Most criminology and criminal justice post-secondary programs in Ontario do not do this well.

Trent University Durham is the only university in Canada that has a degree program specifically focuses on the elements noted above. As the Program Coordinator of the Policing and Community Well-being program at Trent University Durham, I am currently developing a unique undergraduate degree program that focuses on providing individuals interested in policing with the skills and abilities necessary to effectively collaborate and respond to the safety and security needs of diverse communities. Given the recent concerns expressed by Black Lives Matter and Indigenous leaders across Ontario surrounding how police officers interact with and respond to incidents, students who graduate out of my degree program will be well suited to be able to engage with community members using anti-racist, anti-colonial, and trauma-informed modes of interactions. The program I head at Trent University Durham focuses specifically on effective implementation of community policing, fostering collaborative problem-solving strategies to address social issues, and it highlights how social and economic inequality are the root causes of crime, including the social determinants of health.

I would like to suggest that if the Toronto Police Service is genuinely interested in reforming police practices then this is an ideal time to partner with Trent University Durham as a preferred post-secondary program so that the service is confident that people applying to be officers have the robust skills necessary to be effective community police officers. By partnering with Trent University Durham, the Toronto police service would not only be elevating the educational competency of police applicants, but it would also situate the Toronto Police Service at the forefront of shifting the organizational culture toward one that sees the community as a partner in crime prevention and safety rather than a recipient of practices that have not been serving the community as well as it could.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the nuances of the Policing and Community Well-Being Program at Trent University Durham with you in more detail. You are welcome to contact me at amyspendik@trentu.ca or at 647-567-45471.

Kind Regards,
Dr. Amy Spendik
Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator
Policing and Community Well-Being
Trent University Durham