

Producing Radio Documentaries and Podcasts: Public Safety Script (Project #3)

Opens with a montage of student voices:

“Public Safety keeps the campus safe. It’s a necessity that everyone needs.”

“It’s a joke.”

“It’s not a joke — hardworking people who need their money.”

“Public Safety is the *illusion* of safety.”

“They take their job too seriously. You’re not police officers.”

“I actually don’t think they take their job seriously enough sometimes. Like, when you come onto campus, the gate’s always open, they don’t even ask, anyone can come on this campus, but then, when they know they’re dealing with students, they sometimes go way overboard.”

“I think that they’re good to keep the campus safe but they need to like, let up, and let us kind of live our lives.”

(Crossfades into the song “We Can Work It Out” by Stevie Wonder, then crossfades out)

Try to see things my way

Do I have to keep on talking

Till I can’t go on?

While you see it your way...

I’m Keri Ann Flacomio, and I’m Elyse Toribio, WRPR News.

There are 32 officers in the Public Safety department at Ramapo College. Though that number pales in comparison to the 6,000 students who are part of the campus community, Public Safety has maintained a strong presence at the school over the years.

In recent times, new policies and procedures that Public Safety has had to enforce have resulted in an ongoing battle between the student body and the unit.

The dominant stance among students on campus is that Public Safety is actually Public Enemy No. 1. So, is there any truth behind this potentially damaging reputation? And more importantly, who are the people behind the “blue polos?” We decided to go behind these so-called “enemy lines” to find out.

(Crossfades into the “Mission Impossible” theme music, then crossfades out)

A few years ago, the school made some changes in an effort to boost the department’s positive image. Known as “Campus Security” since its inception, the department took on a new name — “Public Safety.” President Peter Mercer sat down with us to talk about how this simple adjustment was meant to showcase the true purpose of the unit.

Tape: Mercer

Runs: 19 secs

Outcue: “even the president himself”

“To call something ‘Campus Security’ adds a, a tone that may be a little bit militaristic or institutional, in a way that ‘Public Safety’ doesn’t, and Public Safety, I think, has a better connotation anyway because that’s what we’re really oriented towards. I’m not as concerned, for example, about property as I am about people.”

Dr. Mercer noted that the role of Public Safety goes beyond that of constant patrolling and policy enforcement. Members of the department have also impacted the personal lives of students, faculty, and even the president himself.

Tape: Mercer

Runs: 79 secs

Outcue: “they can kill ya”

“I came in on a Saturday morning one summer — I think the second summer I was here — and I was thinking of having the walls painted and rearranging the furniture, and I had a friend with me who was an interior decorator. So we decided we were gonna move the desk. And I said, ‘Oh it’s no problem, it’s actually fairly light. I can move it myself.’ So I picked it up and dragged it, and there was so much torque on the two legs that I was dragging, that they snapped off and the entire desk fell over, and everything fell out of it — all the drawers emptied — and I just missed her foot by about six inches. She yelled and I thought, ‘Oh God, what am I going to do now?’ And I thought, ‘Well, Saturday morning — there’s nothing I *can* do.’ So we talked a bit about the color, we left. My wife and I went into the city. When I came back there was a message on my answering machine, and it was from Remy, who was then the associate chief. And he said, (*laughs*) ‘Something terrible’s happened sir! Somebody’s vandalized your office, but don’t worry, we’ll catch them!’ So I thought, ‘Oh, I’ve made it worse now!’ So I had to phone in and confess. They’d already figured out it was me. So, the next Thursday — because we’re closed on Fridays in the summer — I’m leaving and I go up past the main gate, and the person who was on duty said, ‘Have a good weekend, sir! But stay away from those desks — they can kill ya!’”

Relationships and moments like these are what give people such a lasting impression of Ramapo’s Public Safety officers. And the feeling goes both ways. Leroy Blash—

Tape: Blash

Runs: 6 secs

Outcue: “‘H’ as in ‘hotel’”

“‘B’ as in ‘boy,’ ‘L’ as in ‘Larry,’ ‘A’ as in ‘apple,’ ‘S’ as in ‘Sam,’ ‘H’ as in ‘hotel.’”

—assistant chief of Public Safety, has worked here for 24 years, and said that his lively personality allows him to be more effective in his leadership position on campus.

Tape: Toribio

Runs: 4 secs

Outcue: “learned over the years”

“Do you have any, any tips or tricks that you have learned over the years?”

Tape: Blash

Runs: 18 secs

Outcue: “to really lose my temper”

“With me, I’ve always been a people person. It’s like, uh, that came naturally with me. I have no problems talking to people, I can go in a group of like 2 or 300 people, and uh, I can gain control, uh, ‘cause I’m usually calm, cool and collected. It takes a lot for me to really lose my temper.”

(Natural sound from on-scene narration at the front gate information booth)

We caught up with Officer Vincent Tomaselli, who’s been with the college for 16 years, here at the front gate information booth, just as he was getting off his lunch break. Tomaselli agreed with Blash, adding that making an effort to talk to Public Safety officers might prove to students that they’re people too. In between giving visitors directions, and keeping an eye on the traffic flow in and out of campus, Tomaselli told us more.

Tape: Tomaselli

Runs: 27 secs

Outcue: “this is my home away from home”

“You know, when you don’t know someone, you formulate an opinion in your mind, whether it be good or negative. But sometimes, if you go up to that person and you talk to them, you come away, you walk away with a different feeling. We’re human too. We don’t wanna hurt anybody, we wanna be friends with everyone. This is a great place to work. When the day comes that I’ll retire, I really don’t look forward to that because ... this is my home away from home.”

But even with the positive attitudes of these and other officers, hostile relations continue to exist between the student body and the department. Chief Vincent Markowski, director of Public Safety, wants students to understand that circumstances are often out of the department’s control. He feels that his officers shouldn’t be villainized for carrying out their job duties.

Tape: Markowski

Runs: 18 secs

Outcue: “as being the problem”

“One of the biggest challenges that exist is that the officers are the enforcer of college policy, whether they agree with the policy, whether they don’t agree with the policy, their job is to enforce it. And a lot of the times, the student looks at them as being the problem.”

Mercer agrees.

Tape: Mercer

Runs: 32 secs

Outcue: “Public Safety and the student body”

“I think one of the difficulties that arose this year — and it persists still in the relationship between the student body and Public Safety — is that we had some really serious incidents of alcohol abuse. And so, in turn, we increased penalties and gave it to Public Safety to enforce those, and put them in a spot where they almost inevitably became, as I said before, ‘bad guys.’ And I think we have to try and retrench from that a little bit, both for their sake and the students’ sake, and to try and lower the temperature of the relationship between Public Safety and the student body.”

Carol Atkins, senior Public Safety officer, gave us her ideas on how to improve the camaraderie between the department and Ramapo students.

Tape: Flaccomio

Runs: 6 secs

Outcue: “and the student body”

“How does Public Safety try to minimize the disharmony between the officers and the student body?”

Tape: Atkins

Runs: 6 secs

Outcue: “just for show”

“Communicating with them, talking with them, letting them know that we’re here for *them* and not just wearing the uniforms just for show.”

Tape: Flaccomio

Runs: 2 secs

Outcue: “do this yourself”

“Have you tried to do this yourself?”

Tape: Atkins

Runs: 2 secs

Outcue: “to serve and protect”

“Most definitely, here to serve and protect.”

For Tomaselli, the best part of the job is being able to see how much the students grow and mature throughout their college careers, whether or not they realize it while they’re here. Tomaselli recalled a run-in he had with a once-troublesome student who came back to visit the campus eight years after he’d graduated.

Tape: Tomaselli

Runs: 41 secs

Outcue: “turn their life around”

“I walked by him, I wouldn’t have recognized him, except he said, ‘Vince! How are you?’ And you know, I had to do a double take on him. I looked at him, he was dressed in a suit, he had cut his hair. And I said ‘How are you? What’re you doin’ with yourself?’ Here, he was a teacher in Paterson. When people are young, sometimes they do things they shouldn’t. Then they realize, as they start to get older, and they make a terrific comeback. And *that* is fulfilling, to know that I was *here*, okay, and saw this person just turn their life around.”

In the end, no one group is really at fault for the disharmony. Students will be students. The administration will continue to develop new procedures to protect the campus. And the Public Safety department must do its job to enforce these policies. The key to making these relationships work is a combination of communication, compromise and understanding. In the words of Tomaselli, “Sometimes people make mistakes. That’s why they put erasers on pencils.”

Public Safety is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Whether or not your car is stuck in a snow bank, you’re locked out of your room, or you’re on the hunt for that textbook you left in the Atrium, Public Safety officers are always on hand to help, or quick start a friendly conversation. No matter what, you’ll work it out.

I’m Keri Ann Flacomio and I’m Elyse Toribio, WRPR News.

(Crossfades into the song “We Can Work It Out” by Stevie Wonder, then crossfades out)

*We can work it out and get it straight
Or say good night*

*We can work it out
We can work it out*

*Life is very short
And there’s no time
For fussing and fighting, my friend*