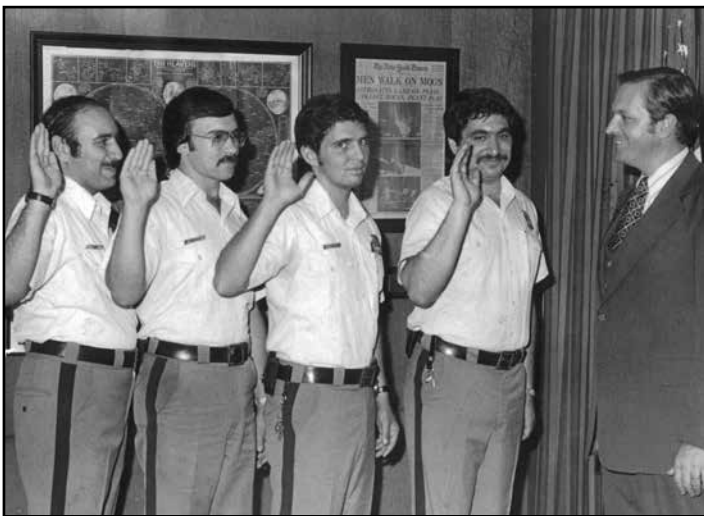


# University Police of the State University of New York: The First Fifty Years

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Throughout this year, University Police Departments of the State University of New York are celebrating 50 years of service. According to Commissioner Paul Berger, since 1968 the men and women of then security and public safety, and now police, strive to make our campuses safe for academic, social, and research endeavors. The development of today's University Police evolved over time beginning with a security model that transitioned to full-service policing. Today, University Police departments are found at 29 locations staffed by over 600 sworn personnel. This article gives a brief overview of the changes that have occurred over time.



*Security Officers getting sworn in at SUNY Farmingdale 1972, with Marvin Fischer, current NYSACOP Zone 1 Representative and Police Chief of SUNY Farmingdale, at the beginning of his career.*

## THE STATE UNIVERSITY AT A GLANCE

The State University of New York was created in 1948 under legislation signed into law by Governor Thomas Dewey to serve the needs of returning World War II veterans. Up to this time, public higher education in New York consisted of vocational training and teacher's colleges that were eventually combined under the SUNY flag (Clark et.al. 2010). Today, University Police Departments are found at doctoral degree institutions (Albany, Buffalo, Binghamton, Stony Brook) and comprehensive colleges of arts and sciences and technology (Alfred, Brockport, Canton, Cobleskill, Buffalo State, Cortland, Delhi, Farmingdale, Fredonia, Geneseo, Morrisville, New Paltz, Old Westbury, Oneonta, Oswego, Plattsburgh, Purchase, Potsdam). Additionally, departments are located at the College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse University, two teaching hospitals (Upstate Medical Center – Syracuse, Downstate

Medical Center - Brooklyn), and three specialized colleges (Polytechnic Institute- Albany/Utica, Maritime College, College of Optometry in New York City.) There is also a department at System Administration located in downtown Albany.

Additionally, the system has 30 community colleges, which are county or regionally sponsored and have various levels of security including armed peace officers. The statutory colleges at Cornell University and Alfred University are served by their respective police or security departments. Each institution of the State University has a unique history which plays an important position in the political, economic and social life of their respective communities. Campuses are strong economic engines in every region of the State for jobs, consumer goods, and real estate, including off-campus student housing.

In its first year of operation, SUNY only had a combined enrollment of 32,000. Within a decade, this number would almost double. Today the system has a combined student enrollment of approximately 600,000 students in credit bearing courses and just under 3 million alumni (Fast Facts, 2018).

## ROLE OF THE CHANCELLOR AND THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Overseeing the SUNY system is the Board of Trustees consisting of 18 members, of which 15 are appointed by the Governor. Among the important activities undertaken by the Board is the appointment of the Chancellor and senior staff at System Administration, who oversee daily and strategic operations for the University. By statute, the Board approves tuition rates and program curricula, allocates state funds for campus and system operations, administers labor contracts, and approves and drives major educational policies.

Since the beginning days, the SUNY system was developed on a de-centralized operational model. Unlike many state agencies, campuses have a great deal of discretion for daily operations and hiring. On the campus level, presidents continue to be chosen by local college councils and recommended to the Board of Trustees. Campus presidents remain responsible for academic and support staffing within their mission and budgetary perimeters set by the Board of Trustees. As with campus administrators and faculty, the hiring of University police chiefs and personnel is no different. Each job title is hired by the local campus through the authority delegated to campuses by the Board of Trustees. Line personnel, such as dispatchers, officers, investigators, and supervisors, must first be selected from regional civil service lists created through state-wide tests and then appointed by the individual campus. Thus, one must view System Administration and its operating officials as the coordinator for University operations under what is termed a shared governance management model.

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## EARLY LAW ENFORCEMENT

From 1948 to roughly 1960, SUNY law enforcement consisted of campus safety departments that worked with local police departments to deal with criminal matters. The main mission of these departments was to provide general security and fire prevention services, and enforce parking regulations. By 1958, the Board of Trustees created the job title of Institutional Patrolman, who had the legal title of “Special Policemen” through the New York State Education Law (Campus Security Services, 1975). These special policemen were designated as peace officers and could make arrests for felony and misdemeanors offenses, and issue traffic summonses within the geographical confines of the campus. At this early stage, the Board of Trustees prohibited these security officers from bearing firearms unless approval was obtained through the campus president.

Organizationally on campus, the chief of security generally reported to the director of the physical plant. It was common practice at the time for the dean of students to handle most disciplinary concerns involving students; the “outside police” were only called for very extreme cases involving violent crimes or serious emergencies. Compared to today’s regulations, it was a much different era. Residence halls were separated by gender and either sex was not permitted to enter areas and private rooms outside of common areas. Women often had curfews; for example, at Oswego, the curfew was 11 pm during the week and 1 am on Friday and Saturday and this was not changed until 1967.

As outlined by various writers in *SUNY at Sixty* (2012), the period from 1965 to 1975 was a major decade of dramatic development for the University under the administration of Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Chancellor Samuel Gould. Post-World War II “baby boomers” entered SUNY in great numbers and often many campuses found that they had more students than they could handle. There were, however, other national and international trends that were occurring, which together would have an impact on the University. By 1963, the United States was increasing its involvement in Southeast Asia in what ultimately came to be known as the Viet Nam War. In addition to the questions regarding American involvement in this conflict, the focus of student attention for the war was on the draft through selective service system, military recruitment and research on campus, and the recruitment of students as potential employees for military vendors. America was also experiencing a new movement called the “Civil Rights Era”, which was focused on addressing national racism and segregation policies initially in the southern states but also informal segregation policies throughout the United States. Students were demanding more decision-making power on campus as it related to governance, grading, the curriculum, student life issues, and tuition costs. Alcohol remained the drug of choice as the legal drinking age in New York State was 18. It was not uncommon for campuses to have sponsor beer parties and operate pubs which sold alcohol. However, many residence hall regulations forbade the use and storage of alcohol. By 1967, new substances were becoming common on SUNY campuses including marijuana and LSD.

Throughout this period there were many on- and off-campus demonstrations against the war and the need for national civil rights legislation that were generally peaceful. In April 1970, President Nixon announced that American troops were in operation

in Cambodia thus officially expanding the geographical confines of the war. This prompted a dramatic increase in the number of student demonstrations, including the shooting deaths of four persons by National Guardsmen on May 4th. The Kent State shootings resulted in a sudden increase of campus protests, sit-ins, and building takeovers, and the virtual national shutdown of many campuses and cancellation of classes and final exams.

## RESPONDING TO CRIMINAL INCIDENTS

Against this background from 1968 to 1972, general violence and property crime also became important matters as it became clear that campuses were not immune to crimes occurring both on-campus and in adjacent off-campus neighborhoods, the most common being property crimes, loud parties, and increased drug use. In 1968, the New York State Joint Legislative Committee on Crime undertook a study to review campus security operations on State University campuses. This study concluded that the University had a responsibility to supervise its own affairs and not depend upon local or state law enforcement for law and order maintenance. It recommended the creation of a law enforcement department on campus under university control which must be professional and supportive of the educational activities and that campuses should not be sanctuaries for illegal activities. Based on this report, in 1968, the University’s Board of Trustees endorsed a resolution entitled “Proposal for University Security”. The resolution recommended the creation of a central office for security to function in a coordinating role at Central Administration headquarters. As in many other operational matters, each president was given the responsibility for, and authority over, the security program through an appropriate administrative officer which in due time became the campus director of security.

Platt Harris, a retired member of the New York State Police, who had risen through the ranks to the position of Inspector, was appointed Coordinator and eventually Director of SUNY Campus Security Operations in 1969 and charged to create a law enforcement program.

During the 1970’s, various initiatives were completed under the leadership of Director Harris including the first civil service entrance examination for campus security officer, which was developed and held in April 1971. Additionally, job descriptions were also designed for directors and assistant directors. An educational requirement of completion of an associate’s degree in criminal justice was established for all new employees under the rationale that educated officers would be better prepared to serve in an educational environment, and have better communication and analytical skills. This was later changed to completion of 60 credit hours based on the small pool of potential job candidates. Thus, the State University became one of the first agencies to require a college education for new officers. Other developments included a common uniform, general operational policies, and development of training standards. Assisting Director Harris in these endeavors was the newly formed SUNY Security Directors Association, composed of campus directors and assistant directors. This would eventually become the organizational framework for the SUNY Police Chiefs Association, which continues to advise the Commissioner and System Administration on state-wide policies and programs. ►

## MAJOR ISSUES

By the mid- 1970's, 28 campuses had adopted the SUNY Campus Security model for operations. There were three major issues that were always on the forefront. The first was that the legal authority of SUNY officers was not often recognized by local criminal courts as their peace officer powers were derived from the Education Law. This changed in 1980, when all peace officers in the state became listed in the Criminal Procedure Law. The second main issue was jurisdiction, which was limited to campus property under the control of the University and adjoining roadways. In short, SUNY officers lost their authority when they ventured off-campus for investigations or transports. Ironically, during this time additional powers were granted to SUNY peace officers including the power to apply for and execute arrest and search warrants on campus property.

The third major issue was arming. As discussed above, campus presidents were given the authority to arm their officers. As recounted by former Oswego Chief Larry Jerritt, it was common practice for most SUNY officers to perform vehicle and traffic stops, respond to dangerous calls, and make arrests of violent criminals without a firearm. In the early days of SUNY Security, few if any officers, supervisors, and directors, predicted that sworn personnel would ever be allowed to carry firearms on duty.

In the mid-1970's, the Director's Association advocated for changing the name of SUNY law enforcement from security to police since the public regarded security officers as having no law enforcement powers. At the same time, many departments were heavily involved in fire safety, parking, and environmental safety. Based on this trend, the term "public safety" became the adopted term used to embody all the responsibilities performed by security departments. In 1977, the Board of Trustees endorsed the public safety model as an appropriate mechanism for campus departments to deliver a wide range of safety and security services, and within two years, "Public Safety" replaced campus security on job titles, car decals, uniform patches, and department headings.

Throughout this time, training for new officers at the beginning was often completed at local police academies. Based on changes in state training policies, the University and the Public Safety Directors Association embarked on a new program whereby all officers were centrally trained at the New York State Police Academy in a University sponsored program that focused on basic police training topics and dealing with campus issues.

In 1986, Platt Harris retired and Bruce McBride, a faculty member at Utica College who had directed the first training program at the State Police Academy, was appointed Executive Director of Public Safety and eventually Assistant Vice Chancellor. Dr. McBride began his law enforcement career at the College at Oswego and then transferred to the Baldwinsville Police Department. From the very beginning of his appointment, McBride and the Directors Association agreed that SUNY officers should be police officers. From 1987 to 1996, many changes occurred which included increasing training hours to reflect police standards, changing the color of the uniforms from taupe brown to blue gray, and embarking on legislative changes to define officers as police in the Criminal Procedure Law.

In the 1990's, there were increasing national and state concerns on the rise of violent criminal events on campuses including a number of high profile cases at SUNY campuses. After extensive



*University Police Honor Guard at the funeral for fallen Virginia Tech Officer, Deriek Crouse, Dec 2011.*

University-wide debate including two major tasks forces, the Board of Trustees on November 18, 1997 approved a legislative initiative to change the status of SUNY peace officers to police officers in the Criminal Procedure Law and the Education Law. This action followed a period of lobbying by System Administration, the Directors Association, and Council 82, the collective bargaining unit for officers and supervisors. On July 22, 1998, Governor Pataki signed the measure, which became effective January 1, 1999. What drove the march to police status were concerns for campus safety and the need for expanded jurisdiction to allow for off-campus investigations, transports, and to assist area police departments particularly those in rural areas of the state.

In 2000, Dr. McBride retired and Roger Johnson, who had also served as training director and was formerly a New York City detective, was appointed Assistant Vice Chancellor for University Police. The main initial challenge that Director Johnson and the newly minted SUNY Police Chiefs Association faced was obtaining legislative changes that would allow officers to participate in the New York State Fire and Police Retirement System. At this time, sworn officers were placed in the State Retirement System. This effort was temporarily diverted when on April 16, 2007 a student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) killed 36 people and wounded many others before committing suicide. Up until this time, these killings were the deadliest peacetime shooting incident by a single gunman in United States history, on or off a college campus. Virginia Tech would have a significant impact on campus safety throughout the country in terms of responding to active shootings and emergency warning programs to alert the campus community if a serious event were to occur. For University Police Departments, critical attention was focused on developing Emergency Response Plans (ERP) and communication processes to notify the campus community of a major incident or emergency event through active alarms and electronic notifications. Response training for active shooters and other emergencies became an immediate priority. The other consequence that occurred was closing the arming argument. Up until this time, a few campuses did not allow arming for their police officers and that stance ended within months after the Virginia Tech incident.

Another important development were legislative changes to the New York State Executive Law which would allow SUNY departments to take part in the Police Accreditation Program. In 2006, the University of Buffalo became the first SUNY department to achieve accreditation followed by Stony Brook University and

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the College at Cortland. Today there is a University-wide policy to have all departments accredited.

In October 2012, Dr. McBride was asked to return to head University Police in the newly created position of Commissioner. His re-appointment came the evening before Hurricane Sandy arrived wreaking havoc in the metropolitan New York City area. For approximately one month, all state agencies were under the authority of the State Police in the event of a major mobilization of law enforcement resources. Mobilization of University Police for short-term assignments at other campuses was not a new procedure as it had already taken place at major athletic and controversial speaker events starting in the 1980's.



***The Michael J. Bailey II award for Passion in Leadership, given in memory of former SUNY Police Deputy Commissioner Michael Bailey, is presented by Dep. Commissioner Bailey's wife and son to this year's recipient, Chief Dayton Tucker of SUNY Purchase, at the 2017 SUNY Police Awards Ceremony. SUNY Police Commissioner, Paul Berger, is pictured in the background during the award announcement.***

The need for the retirement bill was a primary goal for Commissioner McBride and the Chiefs Association. Up until this time, despite vigorous efforts by the University, the Chiefs Association, and collective bargaining groups, and with support from the New York State Association of Chiefs of Police, the measure had been vetoed several times due to cost considerations. In July 2015, Commissioner McBride retired and Paul Berger was appointed Commissioner. Berger was initially appointed to the then titled "Public Safety" department at SUNY Delhi before transferring to the University at Albany where he served as officer, investigator, and assistant chief. He was also president of the SUNY Police Chiefs Association just before his promotion to Commissioner. Michael Bailey was also appointed Deputy Commissioner later that year. Bailey had retired from the Utica Police Department as deputy chief and was appointed chief at SUNY Purchase in 2016.

On December 22, 2016, Commissioner Berger was informed that a revised version of the retirement bill had been signed into law by Governor Cuomo; members would have two weeks to decide whether to stay with the Employee Retirement System or to switch to the new plan. In July 2017, tragedy struck the University Police community with the untimely death of Deputy



***SUNY Purchase Police Chief Dayton Tucker speaking after receiving the Michael J. Bailey II Award for Passion in Leadership at the 2017 SUNY Police Awards Ceremony held in November of 2017 in Saratoga Springs, NY.***

Commissioner Baily due to surgical complications. He was buried with joint police honors by the University Police and the Utica Police Department.

## THE FUTURE

University Police today are well positioned to provide high quality service to all community members. Training in areas of sexual assault, personal safety, mental health, active shooter, implicit bias, age of responsibility, and drug and alcohol abuse, to name a few, is ongoing. The system is well on its way to have all 29 departments accredited through the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services.

The philosophy of community policing will continue to remain an important part of the law enforcement mission as well as continued strong relationships with all police departments that serve SUNY communities. Marvin Fischer, Chief of University Police – Farmingdale reminds us that the 1998 change to University Police allowed SUNY police executives to join the New York State Association of Chiefs of Police. Fischer, who today serves on the Board of Governors, writes that strong relationships between University Police and various police departments have been forged with inclusion of SUNY in NYSACOP. "Now having had the pleasure of being on the Board of Governors and representing my Zone, I have realized how important the New York State Association of Chiefs of Police is in representing all of our members and departments. NYSACOP's voice is heard throughout the state and by our members, our peers in federal, state and local law enforcement as well as our elected officials" (Personnel Communication, 2018).

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