

**Improving Communication Between Students and the  
Department of Public Safety  
At Gallaudet University**

**Report of the Task Force on the HMB Student Takeover**

**Submitted by**

**Task Force Members**

**Olugbunmi Aina**

**Sgt. Wendy Armstrong  
Micah Brown**

**Bradley Dale  
Joel Garcia  
Hillel Goldberg  
Carolyn McCasskill-Henry**

**Edgar Palmer, Chair  
Andres Piedrahita  
Joshua Sherk  
Ethan Sinnott**

**Director, Office for International  
Programs and Services  
Department of Public Safety  
Adjunct Professor, Department of  
History and Government  
Student  
Student  
Coordinator, Judicial Programs  
Professor, Department of ASL/Deaf  
Studies  
Office for Students with Disabilities  
Student, SBG Representative  
Graduate Student, GSA representative  
Professor, Theater Department**

**March 5, 2007**

**Introduction:**

On Friday, October 13, 2006, the law firm Covington & Burling LLP was retained by the Gallaudet University Board of Trustees to perform an independent investigation into allegations that the university's Department of Public Safety (DPS) used excessive force when responding to a bomb threat on campus during the student takeover of Hall Memorial Building. The report focuses largely on, 1) the decision by the DPS to enter HMB on the morning of October 6, 2006 and, 2) the ensuing interactions between the security officers who entered the building and Gallaudet students who were met inside.

Following a review of several relevant incidents that preceded the student takeover and other developments that led to the student protest, interviews with more than 30 individuals, and an examination of a substantial amount of material and electronic communications that documented the events of last May, Eric H. Holder, Jr., Benjamin J. Razi and Robert A. Zink of Covington & Burling LLP submitted a detailed "*Report of Investigation, Gallaudet University, Events at Hall Memorial Building on October 6, 2006*" [hereafter Holder, Razi & Zink report] that concluded,

- 1) There was a bomb threat at Gallaudet on October 6 that required a law enforcement response.
- 2) DPS' primary purpose in entering HMB was to search for a bomb or other suspicious package(s).
- 3) DPS management did not adequately prepare and equip the officers for the HMB search.

4) The three officers directed to search HMB, for the most part, performed well under very difficult circumstances, and,

5) The student protestors' unconventional views of their rights and those of DPS officers created and aggravated the conflict in HMB.

The report further states that DPS management took the opportunity presented by the bomb threat to attempt to gain a better understanding of the student occupation of HMB, with an eye toward putting an end to the takeover. The report concludes by offering possible solutions that may help improve the existing relationship between students and DPS. The eight recommendations for the Gallaudet Community to consider are geared toward "humanizing" DPS' ability to:

- 1) Communicate with the student body,
- 2) Better understand the use of force and handling protests,
- 3) Improve relations between DPS and the student body, and,
- 4) Improve the division of responsibility between DPS and MPD.

On February 2, 2007 a Task Force comprised of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff that was established by university president Robert Davila to review the Holder, Razi, & Zink recommendations and to solicit community input, met for the first time to review its charges, begin deliberations and to devise strategy for developing transparent procedures for engaging university stakeholders in the review process.

## **Charges for the Task Force**

The purpose of the Task Force is to review the HMB Holder, Razi & Zink report and the rejoinder that was submitted by the Department of Public Safety (DPS) in response to the report. The charge stipulated that the Task Force should give primary focus to reviewing the recommendations included in both documents.

## **Task Force Goals:**

- 1) Provide members of the community an opportunity to comment or raise questions related to the HMB report and the DPS rejoinder.
- 2) Provide an opportunity for members of the community to make recommendations to President Davila in order that Gallaudet University can provide students and all members of our community with the best possible services in the area of safety and security.

## **Guidelines:**

- 1) The Task Force should schedule opportunities for members of the community to participate in this review/comment process.
- 2) The Task Force should provide an opportunity for email/on-line comments.
- 3) The Task Force can receive comments, questions or evidence not included in the report(s). [However] it is not the Task Force's responsibility to investigate or respond to allegations.

- 4) The Task Force can make additional recommendations and/or modify existing recommendations reports. [However] it is not the responsibility of the Task Force to conduct an investigation of the HMB or other related incidents
- 5) The Task Force should make a written report to President Davila by March 1<sup>st</sup>. The Task Force chair will then meet with the President to discuss these recommendations.

The Task Force met a total of eight times during the month of February and hosted two Town Hall-style meetings to secure input, reactions and feedback from the campus community with regard to the Holder Razi & Zink recommendations. The Task Force also reviewed a rejoinder, *Toward a More Secure Gallaudet University Campus: The Gallaudet University Department of Public Safety Response to the "Report of Investigation. Gallaudet University Events at Hall Memorial Building on October 6, 2006,"* that was submitted by DPS in which the department outlined its action plans in response to the Holder, Razi & Zink Report. The Task Force also welcomed feedback and/or responses via electronic means.

### **Community/Task Force Recommendations: Recommendation #1**

#### **Gallaudet Should Attempt to Hire More Deaf and Hard of Hearing Officers.**

##### **Issues addressed:**

1. Must Hire Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Officers
  - A) Revisit salary structure for entry-level officers.

Throughout Task Forces deliberations, during Town Hall meetings and through electronic correspondence, the prevailing sentiment among students at Gallaudet is that the

university *must* at long last give sincere and *honest* consideration to hiring more officers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing; are already skilled in ASL or are children of Deaf adults (CODAs). The underlying conviction is that given the current difficulties DPS is experiencing retaining and assisting new officers with acquiring ASL skills commensurate with the responsibilities of the department, that it is incumbent upon the university to address the communication, retention and safety issues *now*.

Feedback from stakeholders intimates that it would likely be more cost-effective, significantly less time-consuming and, quite possibly, provide the university with a better return on its investment if it were to train deaf and hard-of-hearing recruits in police work rather than continue to rely on the current practice which is to teach recruits the intricacies of American Sign Language and syntax, and the subtleties and traditions of ASL culture. With this in mind, the community recommended that Gallaudet advertise nationally whenever it posts vacancies in DPS and that it actively recruit and make provisions for training deaf and hard-of-hearing persons with backgrounds or an interest in law enforcement. Current DPS demographics indicates that only five of twenty current DPS officers are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

It is further recommended with a focus on recruitment and retention, that Gallaudet Re-visit the salary structure that currently exists for DPS entry-level officers and that DPS explore ways to provide incentives for retaining officers. Presently, entry-level DPS officers are paid only \$12.50 per hour. Given current retention issues, the responsibilities with which DPS officers are charged, and the perception that this pay rate is not competitive, there is considerable agreement among Task Force members and the Gallaudet community that this must be remedied and that it must be a priority.

Students interested in police-work and employment with DPS should enroll in criminal

justice courses offered by the department of social work as a prerequisite to working with DPS.

## **Community/ Task Force Recommendations: Recommendation #2**

### **Gallaudet Should Adopt Mandatory ASL Proficiency**

#### 2. Expand Student Employment/Involvement with DPS.

- A. Re-visit the Student Auxiliary Monitor Service (SAMS) concept.
- B. Establish a Student Advisory Board.
- C. Require a mandatory ASL skills level of 2.5 – 3 for all officers in order to maintain employment with DPS.
- D. Establish “vlogs” for communication with the campus community/campus alert bulletins.
- E. Establish student/faculty and staff/DPS “buddy systems” to help enhance DPS officers’ ASL skills development.
- F. Offer regular workshops.
- G. Add a “Police Blotter” to the DPS website

The Task Force applauds and strongly supports the above recommendation and the initiatives recently instituted by DPS as it endeavors to discover ways to enhance and improve its communication, relationship and image with campus stakeholders. However, in an effort to propose and establish a minimally acceptable standard of ASL skill proficiency that would be required for DPS officers and, after consultation with the Center for American Sign Language Literacy (CASLL), it is further recommended that all officers achieve a rating of level 2.5 to 3 or better in order to maintain employment with DPS. The underlying precept for this recommendation is that given the status of local and national security issues and the significant level of distrust that was exacerbated during the protest that DPS *must* be able to communicate

*directly* with university stakeholders. More cross-cultural training must also be provided.

In addition, it is recommended that DPS consider establishing “vlogs” on its website to assist with efforts geared at communicating important information to the campus community. Establishing a “police blotter” to keep the community informed and apprised of all crimes on campus and the surrounding community is strongly recommended. Indeed, students have expressed serious concern that a number of alleged rapes and other serious crimes have occurred on campus. They want to be assured that DPS is doing everything possible in terms of their safety and with keeping them properly informed and secure in that their safety is assured.

To further assist with ASL skills development for DPS officers, there is considerable support from the student body for the recommendation that DPS explore the possibility of establishing “buddy systems” with students, faculty and staff and that additional efforts be made that are aimed at increasing social interaction between DPS and the community. All of these efforts should be directed at fostering ASL skills development and building on community trust. Presenting at New Student Orientation (NSO) once or twice a semester, students believe, is hardly enough. DPS should therefore consider having meals on occasion in the university cafeteria and visiting the dorms for public awareness and safety workshops on a more regular basis.

Establishing other avenues that support increased interaction with its stakeholders that in turn, fosters the development ASL literacy would go far in terms of improving the current relationship of distrust harbored by students. Examples of other ideas designed at facilitating communication include the possibility of establishing a student/SBG liaison working with DPS to assist with communication development; establishing a student advisory board, and offering courses to DPS personnel on culture sensitivity (body language, eye contact, non-

manual signs, etc.) that would be taught by Deaf persons.

### **Community/Task Force Recommendations: Recommendation #3**

#### **Until Officer Signing Ability Improves, Department of Public Safety (DPS) Should Increase Use of Interpreters.**

##### 3. Advertising Vacancies.

- A. Advertise vacancies nationally with an emphasis on locating and hiring Deaf/HOH/CODA officers.
- B. Separate DPS/PPD organizational structure.
- C. Promote qualified Deaf and Hard-of-hearing officers to leadership positions whenever possible.
- D. Phase-out interpreters as more Deaf/HOH officers are hired

The Task Force supports this recommendation, but suggests amending it by *requiring* that the university broaden its advertising campaign when seeking to fill DPS vacancies and that these efforts include a good faith effort to search for qualified individuals who are deaf, hard-of-hearing or CODAs. Although it may not be realistic to expect all DPS hires to arrive at Gallaudet equipped with acceptable levels of ASL proficiency at the time of employment, attempts nevertheless to locate, hire and/or to train qualified students and other deaf and hard-of-hearing persons is mandated.

A supplemental recommendation emanating from the community that is related to this issue encourages the Gallaudet administration to re-visit the qualifications for person(s) serving as director/chief of DPS and that DPS and PPD be separate units under separate leadership. The underlying principle here is that given DPS' serious image problem - particularly

with regard to students – that it needs the attention of full-time administrator.

The Task Force further proposes that DPS promote deaf and hard-of-hearing personal into leadership positions whenever possible.

#### **Community/Task Force recommendations: Recommendation #4**

#### **DPS Officers Should Receive Increased Training Regarding Use of Force.**

##### 4. Training for DPS

- A. Offer ASL classes at flexible hours.
- B. Provide training workshops/courses in Deaf culture/Deaf Awareness.
- C. Hire full-time interpreters to work at DPS and develop a job description to cover other duties during “down times.”

Conversations with students at Town Hall meetings and through email reveals that an alarming level of fear and distrust of DPS exists among a significant proportion of students and other stakeholders on campus. This reality requires the immediate attention of the university administration . Indeed, as one “blogger”, Zunaug, recently noted in her “blog” during the protest: “Gallaudet is not a place where communication is effortless, due to the fact that many of the staff members lack the basic understanding and knowledge of sign language, including the campus security. Which [sic] led to a deaf student, Carl Dupree, being killed by a security officer.” In a large part, the distrust and fear that some in the Gallaudet community harbor toward DPS and the anger that is directed toward the university administration stems from what many believe was an egregious dereliction of its fiduciary duty to appropriately address the psycho/emotional stress and fear that reverberated throughout the Gallaudet following this unfortunate and untimely incident – particularly as it relates to DPS (formerly DOSS), its officers’ ASL literacy skills, *and* the use of force. It is recommended then, that a genuine, good

faith effort on the part of the university and DPS be made to address these residual concerns.

Sadly, Carl Dupree, in the opinion of some in our community and in the national and international Deaf community was, as another “blogger” MiskaZena Xanga opined, “...the ultimate victim of Audism.” Indeed, to quote a deaf Task Force member, “*No one wants another Carl Dupree situation.*”

### **Community/Task Force Recommendations: Recommendation #5**

#### **DPS Officers Should Receive Increased Training in Responding to Protests**

##### 5. Training in Responding to Protests.

- A. Consult with and include Deaf consultants who specialize in civil disobedience in any collaboration with MPD.

The Task Force wholeheartedly supports this recommendation as well as DPS’ campaign to address it. The Task Force recommends amending this recommendation by suggesting that DPS go further and include deaf consultants who specialize in civil disobedience management in any and all collaborations with MPD.

### **Community Task Force Recommendations: Recommendation #6**

#### **DPS Should Increase Outreach Efforts to Students.**

##### 6. Improving Student Relationship with DPS.

- A. Have DPS give workshops in the dorms.
- B. Have DPS increase interaction with students by having meals in the university cafeteria.
- C. Revisit the idea of offering courtesy rides or escorts for students residing near the university campus.

The Task Force supports DPS in its attempt to expand its outreach efforts to students and university personnel. At the Town Hall meetings students addressed safety and security concerns for the area immediately surrounding the university. During Task Force deliberations, it was noted that Gallaudet once offered courtesy car rides and escorted students who lived in the area immediately adjacent to the university to their homes during late evening hours. Citing “liability concerns”, the university discontinued this courtesy service. However, given the very real safety concerns raised by students, the Task Force recommends that Gallaudet re-visit this concept and give serious consideration to once again offering courtesy car rides for students who live within a radius of the university with specific boundaries to be determined by DPS.

Courtesy rides to the Gallaudet/New York Avenue Metro Station during late evening hours should also be considered.

### **Community/Task Force Recommendations: Recommendation #7**

#### **Students Should Show More Respect Toward DPS Officers.**

- A. Offer an introductory course relating to “What are the Limits of Student’s Rights?” offered by the Social Work, History Government or First Year Experience Departments

The Task Force endorses DPS’ effort toward addressing this recommendation and other residual concerns related to this issue on campus. As students have noted during the protest and during Town Hall meetings, respect is a two-way street and that it is earned rather than a given. Students counter that if they are to respect DPS’ authority, DPS must in turn respect the students’ communication needs by giving serious attention to improving the overall signing ability of its officers as well as showing more respect for Deaf culture, something students’

believe is sorely lacking.

As DPS endeavors to improve its image, it has also been further recommended by students that DPS consider changing or improving the design of its uniforms to give it a more polished and professional image. From a student perspective, the uniforms are intimidating. Indeed, as one student noted, “Why does Gallaudet have what look likes a ‘SWAT team’ on campus?”

It is also recommended that all undergraduate students be required to take an introductory course related to “What are the Limits of Student’s Rights?” A required freshman course perhaps offered by the Social Work department or First Year Experience would serve this purpose.

### **Community/Task Force Recommendations:**

#### **Recommendation #8**

#### **DPS Should Seek Clarification from Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) Regarding Plan for Responding to Bomb Threats and Similar Situations.**

The Task Force unanimously agrees with and supports this recommendation.