Graduate and Professional Student Senate
GPSS Resolution 2021-22M
Resolution to Repurpose the Threat Assessment Task Force and Reduce Student Surveillance

First Reading by GPSS: Sept. 23rd, 2021
Second Reading by GPSS: date
First Reading by Commission   date
Staff Senate Review: date
Faculty Senate Review: date
Undergraduate Student Senate Review: date
Approved by Commission   date
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Approved by University Council: date
Approval by University President: date
Approved by Board of Visitors: date
Effective: upon approval

WHEREAS, the threat assessment task force was developed by the Virginia State Assembly (code 23.1-805) and its role as part of campus security reinforced following the 4/16 tragedy to prevent further acts of violence on campus; and

WHEREAS, while well intentioned, the task force has not addressed the root of the issue and has the negative consequence of increasing surveillance of students with little oversight; and

WHEREAS, currently the task force is made up mostly of administrators with no undergraduate or graduate student input into the comportment of the task force (Appendix 1); and

WHEREAS, most students are entirely unaware of the task force because it is an opaque group with little to no accountability to the Virginia Tech community it surveills; and

WHEREAS, surveilling students negatively impacts already marginalized student groups and more specifically black students and other overpoliced populations (see Appendix 1, GPSS Resolutions 2021-2022D1, 2021-2022K, and 2021-2022L); and

WHEREAS, this equity issue is compounded by the central role VTPD plays in operating and carrying out task force recommendations; and

WHEREAS, there are no mechanisms in place for ensuring that the task force does not contribute to racial discrimination and the resources that guide the work of the threat assessment taskforce lack any consideration of racial surveillance in assessing threats; and

WHEREAS, the task force has primarily been beneficial by responding quickly to mental health crisis and this function is worth preserving; and

WHEREAS, we recognize that this task force was developed at the behest of the Virginia state government and as such there are additional obstacles for eliminating it entirely as well as specific provisions that require law-enforcement involvement; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the threat assessment task force should work internally to minimize police involvement as much as the law permits as well as diminish the opacity of it as a group by being open about any and all information that doesn't pertain to health or criminal records. It should also change its focus from policing and surveilling students to instead responding to mental health crises with non-carceral interventions. Its internal guidelines and best practices should change to match this new function and it should clearly and publicly outline its new values and processes in a transparent way. This should include, but is not limited to, regularly reporting to shared governance bodies on its function and duties; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Virginia Tech will work to decrease the surveillance of its students more broadly and make privacy a core value of campus planning, student affairs, and other offices that structure the lives of students. This value will be implemented by reducing surveillance, police presence on campus, and anonymizing student information whenever possible, even when not required by the law, in the interest of protecting student privacy.

Appendix 1: Threat Assessment Task Force Resources

The membership list can be found here: https://threatassessment.vt.edu/team-members.html

The list of resources that the threat assessment task force uses to guide its decision-making can be found here: https://threatassessment.vt.edu/resources/tat-info.html

You will notice that none of the documents that guide their mission or implementation tackle the issue of race or take a critical lens to policing. This is a problem given the large role police play in the threat assessment task force and part of the shift away from policing should be taken to be more intentional planning when it comes to addressing these systemic issues.

Appendix 2: Additional Resources on Racial Surveillance

Benjamin, Ruha. (2019). *Race after technology: Abolitionist tools for the new Jim code*. Polity. Cambridge, MA.

Browne, Simone. (2015). *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Duke University Press. Durham, NC.

"Proctoring Apps Subject Students to Unnecessary Surveillance"
https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2020/08/proctoring-apps-subject-students-unnecessary-surveillance

Privacy By Practice, Not Just By Policy: A System Administrator Advocating for Student Privacy
https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2017/03/privacy-practice-not-just-policy-system-administrator-advocating-student-privacy

These four resources offer alternative systems to surveillance that simultaneously ensure student's needs are being met and also do not perpetuate the racial harm endemic to mass surveillance systems and technologies.