When City Parks Are Your Quad
Urban Campus Planning for Safety and Well-Being

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ABOUT THE SOCIETY FOR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PLANNING (SCUP)

SCUP is a community of practice that undertakes research and creates learning opportunities to share perspectives, resources, best practices, and forward-thinking ideas to advance institutional resilience through the integrated planning approach.

WHAT IS INTEGRATED PLANNING?

Integrated planning is a sustainable approach to planning that builds relationships, aligns the organization, and emphasizes preparedness for change.
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Society for College and University Planning SCUP Fellow Research Project Final Report

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Joel Pettigrew, MA, (he/they) SCUP Fellow 2022–2023

MEET JOEL PETTIGREW

Joel Pettigrew, MA, is a former higher education business development manager for Shepley Bulfinch. There he led the coordination and development of their national higher education strategy and research, including engagement with professional organizations like SCUP, the Association of College Unions International (ACUI), and the Journal for Campus Activities Practice and Scholarship (JCAPS). Prior to that, he worked at Emerson College and Massachusetts Institute of Technology in various roles across student life and auxiliary services. Joel’s work centered the student experience within student leadership and employment while maximizing the use of the urban fabric surrounding the campuses.

Joel received a master’s degree from The Ohio State University in higher education and student affairs and a bachelor’s degree from Texas A&M University in history. He has presented often at SCUP, ACUI, and National Association of Campus Auxiliary Services (NACAS) conferences throughout his career. His husband, Eugene, is an accomplished designer and architect, and Joel can often be found slinging beers at his neighborhood brewery, curling over the winter months, or at the ceramics studio as a novice wheel thrower.
THE PROJECT

SCUP FELLOWS PROJECT BACKGROUND AND GOALS

In 2015, a couple of years into working at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in student life, I had the opportunity to present at the Association of College Unions International (ACUI) Annual Conference on “Urban Unions and Student Life” with my colleague from New York University (NYU), Pascha McTyson. That presentation, a combination of our direct experience at MIT and NYU, mixed with my fledgling interest in architecture and urban design through books like Jane Jacob’s *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and Alain de Botton’s *The Architecture of Happiness*, was an examination of the student experience at urban institutions and our role as student life practitioners in using the city as a teaching and community-building tool.

That presentation and the research that came before and after, the conversations I had with fellow urban student life professionals (we went on to create an Urban Unions Community of Practice within ACUI) and the architects who attended, were the genesis of this research idea and process that made up my fellowship with SCUP in 2022–2023. I had the great honor to have Pascha back as a coach and guide throughout this year as she continued to work in urban student life and now at the Bloomberg Center for Cities at Harvard (University).

My original research idea was more ACUI than SCUP: How does the urban fabric influence community building and student sense of belonging at urban campuses? With academic demands cranked to 11 at MIT, it was my mission to introduce my student leaders from all over the world to what the cities of greater Cambridge and Boston offered them outside the proverbial “MIT bubble.” With some guidance from Kathy Benton (SCUP’s former associate director of strategic alliances), I shifted my research idea to one that remains timely and essential for planners: How can urban campus design address student safety and sense of security, thus improving student wellness? Amidst mid-term elections where anti-city rhetoric was at its highest, crime in urban centers became a constant focus despite statistics that told a story of decreasing crime rates as the pandemic wore on. According to a Brookings survey in 2023, crime and
“disorder” were identified as the top barriers to preventing a return to office work in urban cores (Love & Loh 2023). This rhetoric sensationalized rather than truthfully analyzed the lived city experience, which leads to the need for an analysis of how urban campus edges are designed and can influence student sense of security.

To better understand campus edge dynamics and student sense of security, I brought my student development theory background together with design principles like Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) to inform my research idea and path forward. This combination of different theories aimed at similar goals, the well-being of and opportunity for growth for students/occupants, led me on a fascinating exploration of several different campuses to see these ideas play out in the built environment.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH TRYING TO ADDRESS?

Campus security is a foremost concern for every member of the campus community. The need for a campus focus on student security dates well back to the early days of American higher education where institutions acted *in loco parentis*, which formed the foundation of the student affairs outlook on providing safe learning environments for students, granting them supervisory rights but not necessarily imposing obligations for protection (Henning 2007). This expectation, both culturally and legally, has shifted significantly in recent decades, with reporting requirements and instant emergency communications acting as a baseline for our understanding of campus safety.

According to the 2022 Student Voice survey, nearly one-third of students responding looked for improved lighting on sidewalks, while a similar ratio of students had a “great deal” of trust in their campus safety and security staff (Ezarik 2022).
How urban campuses represent security via campus maps was an area of interest in my research here at Georgetown University Law Center.

Given that student safety and well-being are significant concerns for campus communities, architecture and planning and student affairs speak two different languages but have essentially the same end goal: How can the campus best support student development in a safe but open environment? On an urban campus, this problem becomes even more intensified because many more stakeholders and parties are controlling how the institution can assert itself in its environment, and there is much more localized activity for students to engage with in their city environment. So, how these two languages best inform student security and well-being collaboratively was the challenge I sought to address through my research, utilizing both planning principles and student development theory to understand how design influences student sense of security.
With my background of working at urban institutions that handled campus edge design and security very differently and my work in business development for architecture, this topic was of great interest. It utilized my operational understanding of campus life with a design understanding of how planners and architects approach campus edge and security design.

- Campus security and urban safety are growing in attention (maybe wrongly), which led to this examination.
- CPTED principles can help explain opportunities for design improvements for security for extremely landlocked urban campuses.
- Student ecology can help us determine how to center student wellness in that process.
HOW DOES THIS RESEARCH SUPPORT SCUP’S DEFINITION OF INTEGRATED PLANNING?

As we continue to navigate the pandemic, cities and universities still undergo rapid shifts in business models and physical footprints. As offices remain unoccupied, retail struggles, and housing shortages continue to trouble urban centers, designers and planners are seeking alternative solutions to reconsider the urban fabric to better serve this new reality. Both cities and campuses are considering or are currently renovating office buildings into multiuse spaces and housing. However, this will alter the dynamic of the areas with new considerations for what security is needed. When evaluating how to design for a sense of security, the sustainability of an approach that is built for flexibility and change is vital, because urban change is not stopping anytime soon. This is best expressed by the first-generation CPTED principle of “image and milieu,” which connects the physical condition of a place with a perception of comfort and safety (International CPTED Association 2022).

On the student development theory front, campus ecology theory sets a standard of guidelines on which to evaluate how the built environment may influence the sense of belonging and engagement among student communities. At the base of a student’s sense of belonging and security, Strange and Banning make the case that a sense of ownership of space increases their willingness to defend and protect that space (2001). Ease of navigation and legibility increase equity of belonging across the student population while also making the campus feel safer. As students mature, their ability to navigate complex urban campus dynamics grows as their own psychosocial and moral development paths help them better place themselves in the world around them.

Balancing this with design principles like CPTED, a set of design categories that evaluate how secure an area appears and functions according to several factors, serves as a contextual baseline. Subsequently, multiple factors can be considered in supporting a more secure design.
The Little Building—renovated by Elkus Manfredi—Emerson College’s largest dorm, includes retail, dining, and student spaces.
One fascinating area where these theories seemed to be in conflict was the first generation of the CPTED concept of territoriality, paired with Strange and Banning’s exploration of the assumption that high-density, vertical residence halls would interrupt social networks and lead to “less positive attitudes toward people and places (2001).” But thinking on my own experience at Emerson College, the key to building community and creating spaces where students could informally own their own spaces and exert a positive influence over them was in creating neighborhoods and nooks within the vertically built environment of our residence halls. Whether it was small performance spaces, a community kitchen, or common rooms for every two floors that had incredible urban views, these spaces created an opportunity for students to make their environment legible and create community among what Strange and Banning would have predicted would have been a cold, vertical environment.

In my SCUP Annual Conference 2022 presentation, I referenced Boston’s push, in 2014, for area colleges to build more on-campus housing, which resulted in the towers at Emerson College (see photograph). It’s now 10 years later, and the city and state have called for colleges to do the same again at an early April 2024 Bisnow real estate development event. Except now, public-private partnerships (P3s) are guaranteed to factor into the equation, which invites an opportunity to explore and think about how these buildings are secured with a less formal connection to the campus experience.

**HOW WAS CONTEXT CONSIDERED WHEN APPROACHING THIS RESEARCH IDEA?**

What happens when you want to visit every city and every campus possible? You listen to your coaches and the SCUP director of research. You evaluate the best possible cross-section of campuses to analyze the commonalities and differences across them, effectively translating the information into research results.

According to the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU), urban-serving institutions represent 68 percent of colleges and universities (APLU 2024), so they play an outsized role in the story of higher education in the United States. This research gathered information from a variety of campuses to help understand how the context of size, specialty, and setting influences their approach to designing for student wellness and security.
In consultation with my team, I determined six unique institutions, each with different elements of urban higher education, to visit and connect with that aligned with my planned work and curling (yes, curling) travel during my 2022–2023 Fellowship period. They were:

- Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – private, Catholic 4-year institution
- Richard Daley College, City Colleges of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois – public, 2-year institution
- McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada – public, international 4-year institution
- Emerson College, Boston, Massachusetts – private, specialized 4-year institution
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts – private, 4-year research institution
- Georgetown University Law School, Washington, DC – professional school

**WHAT METHODOLOGY, IF ANY, WAS APPLIED TO THIS RESEARCH?**

With limited time and budget, my research revolved around the schools that were accessible and available for more intensive investigation, with each providing a unique element with which to explore their urban context. Their variety in type, size, and location provided a range of experiences and urban conditions to analyze through the lens of CPTED while discussing student life and safety with campus colleagues. Visits to Duquesne, City Colleges of Chicago, Georgetown Law, and McGill featured meetings with either campus planners or student life professionals and administrators on campus. They toured me around campus, providing insight into the daily lived experience and operations at their institution. Emerson and MIT were analyzed from my own professional experiences on those campuses as well as from the perspective of an urban campus tour program I had led for the ACUI Region VIII in 2017.

This variety of campuses was a key discussion point between my SCUP advisors and coaches and me. We tried to find different opportunities to test how CPTED and student development theory may shift based on different contexts or how their principles may apply similarly across different campus types. The demographics of student
communities they serve and the type of campus do inform their relationship with the city—even though the city around them and its changes over time exert significant influence on the look and feel of their campus edges.

Architectural rendering of McDonough Hall at GULC offered a unique combination of urban design, design for law programs, and campus edge conditions.
As plans and intentions for the research continue, additional insights should be gained from the student experience on these campuses. Using live interviews on-site and surveys, future research should include an analysis of the student experience of the campus edge. Additionally, group discussions with student interviewees on topics of equity and inclusion regarding campus security are vital in evaluating CPTED as a design principle for campus safety.

These two directions forward are necessary for the continuation of the research, although they will take different paths. The student experience, central to my original research idea but complex in achieving without more time and ability to be on campus for longer periods, will take a qualitative focus based on the stories and lived experiences shared by students with researchers. The other research path to follow concerns equity within CPTED and an evaluation of it as a tool for a diverse campus community; it will require a qualitative and quantitative focus. As this past year on campus can confirm, protest as a form of expression is as strong as ever at colleges, and this evolution of “the marketplace of ideas” must inform how CPTED principles fare in conversations around equity.

For planners, I think there is an additional interesting path of exploration that SCUP covers often but could benefit from this lens of student sense of security: town/gown relations when it comes to security coverage and public permeability at the campus edge. Urban campuses face an additional hurdle in their planning efforts, often constrained significantly by the power dynamics of their urban landscape. How do the politics of town/gown influence the overall development of the campus edge, and, particularly, its permeability and service to the urban public? As we saw at Emerson College, the addition of a Trillium Brewing beer garden, in collaboration with Emerson’s vast arts and radio academic and student programs, on the Boston Common, was a further blending of the campus edge. It softens Emerson’s verticality while offering a unique public space during the busy summer months in this section of Boston.

In my SCUP Annual Conference 2022 presentation, I introduced this beer garden in an assessment of the CPTED first-generation principles of image and milieu; however, it can also inform our assessment of CPTED’s second-generation principles of connectivity and threshold capacity. Considering town/gown relationships, CPTED principles can inform ways to improve campus edge security and relations with the surrounding urban fabric. These activities, which may soften the campus edge, contribute to the connectivity between campus and city. They also diversify activities in the area, making for a safer campus edge dynamic.
Emerson College, ‘The Campus on the Common’ and inspiration for my research title, featured new collaborations with local businesses to bring more activity to the campus edge.

**WHAT ARE THE TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS RESEARCH? WHAT COMES NEXT?**

**Security for Whom**

As I conducted my research throughout my fellowship, I struggled with moving forward with CPTED as a baseline set of principles on which to analyze campus edge design from an equity viewpoint. I had paid close attention to the growing Design as Protest movement and organization that grew in response to the murder of George Floyd in 2020 and grappled with how to reconcile a sense of security with ensuring equity and justice in the built environment. As of February 2024, Design as Protest’s second demand for the architectural field is “Cease the Implementation of Hostile Architecture & Landscapes,” which includes CPTED design guidelines and certification.

During my presentation at SCUP’s annual conference, I made a note of this. I also discussed the First Generation CPTED principle of Natural Surveillance and the numerous instances of students and community members of color being harassed
on campuses by those saying they don’t belong. According to Cabrera, Watson, and Franklin’s 2016 analysis, because campuses and cities remain seemingly white environments, “ownership” of a space and place takes on a white viewpoint, othering and having a “predatory effect” on people of color.

This planning effort also requires our field to continue to explore beyond the idea of a traditional college-age student—an 18–21-year-old away from home for the first time—and evolve to serve the wide demographics of today’s students. My visit to City Colleges of Chicago was a vital reminder of this need to expand our views and approaches. Daley College’s building featured a significantly sized child care and education center used by Daley students with children; this factored into the design and application of CPTED principles. The children’s play area was at the front and busiest part of the building, with clear sightlines that allowed for threats to the most vulnerable campus community members to be seen early and clearly. I detailed this experience as a positive example of natural surveillance, a first-generation CPTED principle that calls for maximizing casual observation of semi-public spaces through enhanced visibility. As campus demographics and life circumstances continue to shift, our institutions must be ready to shift in design to better define a campus edge that provides security for as many campus community members as possible.
This discussion also continues in the digital realm as technology supplements or replaces physical security measures. However, technology and AI mechanisms do not treat all humans equally. Articles in *Nature* and *Scientific American* in 2022 and 2023 detail how women with darker skin are still the most likely to be misclassified, with a maximum error of 34.7 percent in one study. As campuses grapple with staffing concerns and attempt to cut costs, these digital tools will become even more prevalent. However, without further analysis of their impact on marginalized communities, the danger remains that they could keep only part of the campus community safe, while further harming communities that are being targeted on campus already.

*During the design process at the University of Houston (UH) for the new John M. O’Quinn Law Center, Shepley Bulfinch worked closely with Dean Leonard Baynes on all aspects of the design, including security. During a particular session that involved the chief of police for UH, they mentioned that they were exploring a facial recognition surveillance system for the new building. Dean Baynes pushed back on this idea, citing study after study that had shown the software incorrectly identified people of color like himself in many cases.*

Photograph courtesy of Shepley Bulfinch.
The anecdote from a design project at Shepley Bulfinch stuck with me as I explored this aspect of my research: security for whom? As urban campuses seek to improve student sense of security through environmental and digital design, planners must be at the forefront of these difficult discussions to center equity in the decisions.

**Green v. Concrete Security**

Green architecture has been a central theme in conversations around urban planning and architecture for some time: Green roofs and the integration of landscape and buildings are now a baseline consideration in projects. Initiatives like the American Institute of Architect’s 2030 Commitment and the COP26 Communique are centering on the role of carbon and material waste in architecture as a contribution to climate change. “Research shows that adding trees to cities can lower temperatures between 2C to 10C depending on local conditions (Euronews 2023).” As previously discussed, as urban campuses contend with town/gown relations and urban politics, how can the campus edge design enhance those relationships and dynamics—and do sustainability, health, and resiliency have a role to play?

During my conference presentation, I received a few excellent questions, but one threw me for a loop in a good way: “What would be your recommendation for improving campus edge security—green security or concrete security?” I enjoyed thinking this through in the room, and have wanted to explore the concept more in depth since. My answer then and still is green security. It serves a dual purpose: it addresses sustainability and the natural ability to provide security and opportunities for surveillance.

Throughout my visits, and in analyzing campuses through the lens of CPTED afterward, the opportunity for green security to play a role in student sense of safety requires additional exploration.

I talked quite a bit about the uniqueness of Georgetown Law’s campus, particularly McDonough Hall, which was built on a podium. This fits the law school dynamic: Placing this law education building on a pedestal signifies the importance of education and its role in society. However, the building’s surrounding tree line and grassy plazas offer important cover to the building in some views and allow students to find pockets of respite on campus while feeling sheltered from the busy DC traffic that surrounds the campus.
Shot from the Podium of McDonough Hall at Gulp Showing the Use of Greenery for Security and Differentiation from the Urban Fabric
Wayfinding and Branding

An additional insight from my visits and analysis is the way wayfinding, placemaking, and branding all play a role in creating a permeable but secure campus edge that allows students to feel safe but experience life as urban citizens.

This was one element that interested me in the topic from the beginning: the differences in how two urban institutions handled permeability and security by way of wayfinding. MIT made The Infinite, a hallway that features research labs on display, and Gehry’s Stata Building cornerstones of tourist engagement. While Emerson College’s permeability was limited to its theater spaces, most campus buildings prohibited guests and tourists from entering buildings beyond the lobby and initial security desk. How a campus presents itself and engages tourists or its local urban community is an important consideration in how secure it may feel for campus community members.
The Many Bridges and Pedestrian Pathways around the Vertical Urban Campus of Duquesne University
At Duquesne, I was fascinated by the verticality of the campus, not by density but because of the topography in Pittsburgh. This campus, which travels up a steep hill, features multiple branded bridges, overpasses, and walkways that serve for internal circulation as well as connections to local neighborhoods. Part wayfinding and part branding, this practice ensures guests and campus community members understand they are circulating through the campus landscape. This legibility gives a sense of secured boundaries, territoriality, and community culture.

One direction I had hoped to head in during this process was an analysis of campus maps and how they present security information for campus community members. The way a campus designs its maps to guide community members through the space and how it integrates security measures into those visual guides can speak volumes about how campuses may approach their understanding of what a secure campus edge looks like or how it may function. During my visits, I sought out these maps and guides. This is a worthy future examination: explore the visual language of campus maps and security information to complement the physical security network, including blue light systems, call boxes, and campus security presence.
Campus Maps from Georgetown University (top left), McGill University (top right), and Duquesne University (bottom). I was interested in how these maps and campuses depicted, or did not, their relation to the urban edge.
Directional Signage at Daley College That Spans a Major Roadway in Chicago
Interestingly, Pascha and I covered this topic during our 2015 urban student union-focused presentation, discussing tactical urbanism, placemaking, and urban wayfinding that encouraged walking or biking rather than car travel to popular sites. These early explorations aligned well with creating permeability and security at the campus edge, aligning with CPTED principles, and offering students the chance to recreate their urban environment in positive ways, which is endorsed by Strange and Banning’s campus ecology analysis.

Snip from Pascha McTyson and My ACUI 2015 Presentation, “Urban Unions and Campus Community”

WHAT WAS THIS FELLOWSHIP LIKE, AND WHERE DO I THINK IT CAN GO?

I came into my Fellowship with eyes bigger than my research stomach. This was a topic I’ve been exploring since 2015. I had wanted to pursue a higher degree to research it further (I still do) when I was working in higher education; it blended two parts of my life so well. And I did have fun: I enjoyed researching, reading articles, seeking out resources, visiting campuses, and walking and talking with friends and practitioners.

But, having been away from a research mindset for so long, choosing a topic a bit outside of my day-to-day work and diving into an ambitious topic that I never fully wrestled into a more manageable format or size, was a tough experience. We have talked about the experience as a small group of this latest cohort of Fellows with SCUP staff: the year timeline is compressed so that ideation, research, and production happen very quickly, and any imbalance can hinder the project moving forward. I’m grateful for the
opportunity and think this program is so important. The insights coming out of it are vital. I'm excited for the evolution of the SCUP Fellows Program.

My research on this topic does not stop here: There are so many threads to follow that are just as interesting as the initial idea. The subtopics of urban design, student development theory, and campus security principles are rich for research with a commitment to equity and justice throughout the process. In my methodology and takeaways sections, I explained where I fell short in time or content and laid out what I think are the best paths for additional exploration of new or similar topics. There is still much research to be completed, particularly deep engagement with student communities on campuses. I look forward to the opportunity to be involved in that work in the coming years.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank Kathy Benton for her guidance and trust in my idea as this process started. Her excitement over my topic got me even more interested in it, and she helped ease me into this Fellowship and offered me great insight into the larger SCUP experience. I also want to thank DJ Pepito, SCUP’s senior director of research and innovation, for her guidance, sense of humor, gut checks, and, most of all, patience. (She inherited my Fellowship at its most difficult time.) I’d also like to thank the guides I had on my campus visits, including:

Emily Lottes – Duquesne University
Greg Klass – Georgetown University Law Center
Douglas Geiger – City Colleges of Chicago
Paul Guenther – McGill University

JOEL’S SCUP COACH

My primary coach, Pascha McTyson, has been a friend and colleague for quite a few years. She’s one of those special friends you most often see annually at a professional conference. But our shared passion for cities, their dynamics, and their magic made her an excellent coach and confidant in this process. From introducing me to dynamic professionals who pushed my research and ideas to new levels to pep talks and continued ideas for exploration, I can’t think of a better coach to get me through the last couple of years of this project.

PASCHA MCTYSON, Program Director, Student Engagement, Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative

Pascha McTyson is a skilled student affairs professional who brings expertise in student program design, equitable governance, and managing stakeholder collaborations. Pascha previously held directorships at Barnard College, New York University, and Manhattanville College, where her experiences encompassed leading teams, implementing a global online tool for student engagement and advisor support, creating leadership development programs.
and using assessment data to inform organizational strategies and student programming. Pascha has a master's degree in economic and social development of regions and a Bachelor of Liberal Arts from the University of Massachusetts Lowell, where she began her career in higher education.

SCUP fellow coaches are volunteers who are experienced in an area of higher education or thought leadership that is aligned with the ultimate goals of the SCUP Fellow Research Project. They bring fresh perspectives and insights over the course of the fellowship year. We thank Joel Pettigrew’s three SCUP coaches for their generosity of time and perspective.
REFERENCES


