

The Student Voice

Subject: Safety at NDSU

Listening Session: 10/11/2021

Four prompts were given students to start the discussion for this topic:

Prompt 1: *What does it mean for you to feel or be safe at NDSU?*

Prompt 2: *Is there a difference between feeling safe and being safe? Feeling unsafe and being unsafe?*

Prompt 3: *What is NDSU able to protect students from?*

Prompt 4: *What could NDSU do to make this a safer place for all students?*

A seemingly common definition of what it means to be safe at NDSU is “being able to thrive without fear of physical, mental, or emotional threats”. In general, students viewed safety in primarily two forms – physical safety and emotional safety. While these two forms of the terms are certainly interrelated, they were most often considered separately and had differing impacts and implications.

In terms of *physical safety*, people seem to feel less safe as spaces become larger, less controlled, and less familiar. Safety is directly tied to our physical surroundings and the people in them. Students noted that they “feel safer inside the buildings”, while parking lots feel dark. Parking lots in general and the distances needing to be walked were a common theme. Community spaces around campus feel even darker and less safe. Smaller, more familiar groups of people also increased feelings of safety, while encountering large groups of unfamiliar students, particularly at night on campus, decreased those feelings. Some students reported feeling safer when there was a male physically present in their group. Specifically related to the likely presence of alcohol, weekend nights feel the least safe on campus. Students felt that the blue security lights around campus are ineffective. Students reported not feeling safe calling for help for other students in cases in which they might get into trouble. They were unaware that campus policies are already in place to provide amnesty when safety is at stake.

In terms of *emotional safety*, clear differences emerged in what makes students feel safe or unsafe in any given situation. These differences were largely personalized and based in lived experience. Students talked about feeling more safe as they developed more connections across campus, and said that the first weeks on campus felt less safe. Students said their feeling of safety increased when they weren’t the only person of color in a class. Another student discussed not feeling comfortable talking about her religion as it is no longer the norm in society. Others mentioned stigmas about sexuality and intentionally keeping that part of themselves quiet until they felt safe with others to avoid uncomfortable situations. One student wished there were more private, small spaces for working out as they feel watched and objectified often at the gym. A current perception of lack of accountability in sexual assault accusations also reduces the feeling of safety. Having like-minded

people around increases feelings of safety. Negative stereotypes and narratives are seen as prevalent on campus, and make students feel unsafe when they come to light.

When asked about what NDSU can protect them from, some students recognized that in truth the institution can not completely protect students from anything. However, a common theme was that the institution should still actively try to protect and defend students, taking continuous steps to reduce risk. A few students felt that NDSU can and should protect them from racism, sexual harassment, and discrimination.

To improve physical safety, students would like to have University police be more visible at random times, increasing some patrol time. Improving lighting, particularly in the parking lots, and increasing transportation options would also be appreciated. Students did mention the Pathlight app and their appreciation of it. To improve emotional safety, students focused on climate-related improvements such as anti-racism training, increasing staff and faculty numbers who hold an underrepresented identity, adding cultural events, and providing programs like Bison Bridge. They want NDSU to find ways to help empower students to speak up. Students also wish that more information about safety issues, events, and campus announcements would come from their instructors rather than through campus-wide emails.