UAPD has a new mental health officer and is planning a community academy, interim chief tells Staff Council

University Communications
August 2023

The addition of a mental health support team officer and the adoption of threat analysis software used at the highest levels of law enforcement were part of a busy first 10 weeks on the job for the new interim chief of the University of Arizona Police Department, Staff Council members learned at their latest meeting.

Chris Olson, who was announced as interim chief in May, said much of his focus has been on developing best practices on analyzing and understanding behavioral threats.

That process began with structural changes, Olson said. The department will have one lieutenant dedicated to overseeing the criminal investigations unit. Previously, a lieutenant managed the unit in addition to overseeing three patrol squads. Olson said the department plans to have that lieutenant in place by the beginning of the fall semester.

The department has also created a mental health support team officer position as part of a regional partnership with the Pima County Sheriff’s Department, Tucson Police Department, Oro Valley Police Department and other local law enforcement agencies. The partnership allows for regular collaboration among MHST officers in the various departments to get more information when investigating individuals who may live in one jurisdiction but work or attend school in another. UAPD officer John Guetersloh is named to the position.

“When we have a behavior that we’re investigating from a particular individual, this allows us to find out what’s going on at home, what kind of police reports are being taken there in another jurisdiction so we can have a complete picture of what is going on,” Olson said. “That will help inform us of what needs to be done. Is it criminal in nature, does the person have a mental illness or is the person in crisis?”

The department has also begun using MOSAIC, a computer-assisted threat analysis system. The system has been used by agencies including the Secret Service, the Supreme Court Police, the U.S. Capitol Police, the U.S. Marshals Service and the CIA.

Community Academy

To increase transparency, UAPD is planning to offer a community academy in which participants will take weekly, three-hour courses to learn about the operations of the department.

“You will spend 10 to 12 weeks with us here at UAPD learning every facet of the organization from the patrol operations to our criminal investigations to our regional partnerships,” Olson said. “We want to get feedback. This is our way to engage with you as we share who we are and tell our story.”

The department hopes to hold an academy each semester, beginning in the spring. Each cohort will have about 50 participants. UAPD plans to limit participation to faculty and staff at first, but the program could be expanded to include students, Olson said.

Blue Envelope program

Olson also detailed the Blue Envelope program, which UAPD is working to incorporate. The program, which is used by police departments throughout the country, helps officers when they are communicating with an individual with autism spectrum disorder during a traffic stop.

Under the program, which Olson said is still taking shape, people could sign up to receive a blue envelope through the department’s Community Engagement Unit or obtain it through the Arizona Department of Transportation when they receive or renew their license. The envelope would contain language about autism spectrum disorder and communicate that the driver may have trouble interacting with the officer.

“When a traffic stop occurs, that blue envelope contains the registration and the insurance,” Olson said. “They hand that to the officer, and that is how the officer becomes informed. Then we work to improve the communication between the officer and the driver and keep everyone safe.”

The department is partnering with the Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques Center and the Autism Society of Southern Arizona to develop a training for officers on how to communicate and act appropriately with those with autism spectrum disorder.

Other topics discussed at the meeting:

- The council’s communications committee is seeking submissions for the council’s monthly newsletter. Submissions can be offered online or emailed to Danielle Oxnam, project director with the Office of University Initiatives and Staff Council secretary, at dmoxnam@arizona.edu.
- The Staff Council will hold a retreat for all official representatives on Aug. 11 to discuss goal setting and planning for shared governance engagement, Oxnam said.
- The July meeting, held July 25, was the first to be attended by employees from the University of Arizona Global Campus, which officially became part of the University of Arizona on July 1. Council leadership is working on plans to recruit official representatives from UAGC.

The Staff Council is a shared governance organization that represents University Staff and Classified Staff. The council meets via Zoom the last Tuesday of each month throughout the year. Meetings are open to all employees. The next meeting is Aug. 29.

More information about the Staff Council can be found on the council’s website. Anyone interested in becoming a Staff Council representative can apply online. Those who want more information can contact Melanie Madden, Staff Council chair and program manager for curricular affairs for Academic Administration.