

TOH@UTC Fall 2024 Progress Check: Campus Security and Public Safety Findings and Recommendations

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Overview

This report presents a summary and interpretation of data gathered from UTC staff and faculty, pertaining to their perceptions of campus safety and security. These data were gathered through the Fall 2024 Total Organizational Health (TOH@UTC) progress check evaluation for our campus. Supplemental questions were added at the request of Chief Sean O’Brien to gain a more complete understanding of the prevailing safety and security concerns among UTC employees.

As a reminder, since January 2023, the TOH@UTC initiative has been focused on understanding and improving the experience of all UTC employees and the overall resilience and adaptability of our institution. A crucial building block of this process is Protection from Harm, which involves considering faculty and staff’s perceptions of physical and psychological safety and security while working on UTC’s campus. This means addressing environmental and interpersonal risks of physical harm, as well as working to ensure that all employees have a voice, opportunities to use that voice, and a reasonable expectation that their voice will be heard and responded to by their colleagues and leaders. Closely related to feeling safe while working is the need to feel secure in one’s work and ability to provide for their own needs and the needs of their dependents.

Protecting employees from harm is a complex and challenging objective that requires the involvement of multiple units and many employees across campus. Progress toward this objective is being made, but to see real gains, we need the committed involvement of all campus leaders and units. So, as you review and hopefully share and discuss the information below with your employees and colleagues, please note that this information comes from confidential employee responses that reflect their honest and real experiences at UTC. As such, please fight any urge or inclination you might have to try to associate patterns of findings to any specific employee. Instead, focus on how to move forward with this information. There are TOH-related strengths and opportunities for improvement in every division, college, area, and department on campus; our challenge now is to continue working together toward improving and sustaining TOH for each other. If you would like assistance developing action steps or making sense of any of this information, please reach out to me directly at chris-cunningham@utc.edu or 423-425-4264.

Data Collection Methodology

Nearly 400 staff and faculty responded to this round of the recurring TOH@UTC progress check survey. Approximately 160 of these employees responded to at least one of two open-ended questions pertaining to perceptions of campus safety and security. The first open-ended campus security item asked respondents to “share an example or two” that explains why they reported disagreement with preceding evaluation items regarding positive physical and/or psychological safety perceptions and experiences while working at UTC. The second open-ended campus security item asked respondents to, “[D]escribe one or two ways in which you believe UTC Public Safety could help to improve your overall sense of safety and security at UTC.” We reviewed and coded the responses to both of these questions into individual ideas, or “response elements,” which were then grouped into broader, recurring themes. Then, we quantified these data to highlight key trends. To provide a more accurate relative assessment of employees’ concerns regarding physical and psychological safety and security, the overall number of response elements was used to calculate the percentage breakdowns in the following visuals.

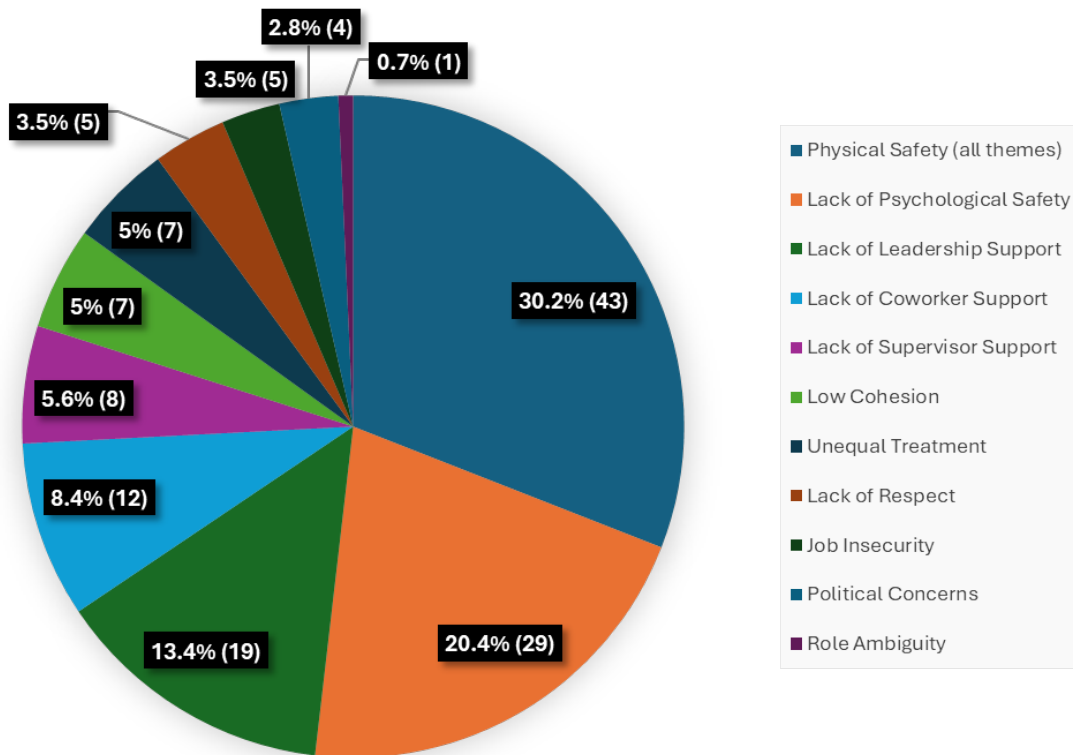
General Psychological and Physical Safety Concerns

Employee responses to the first-open ended item regarding general feelings of low physical and/or psychological safety while working at UTC came from 62 individuals. Analyses of these responses identified 142 separate response elements, which were coded and organized into thematic groups or categories. The majority of these response elements (70%) indicated a perceived lack of psychological safety within their work unit (*lack of psychological safety*), meaning respondents generally feel unable to or unsafe when speaking up, taking risks, or making mistakes at work.

[Figure 1](#) displays the frequency of each psychological safety theme, alongside the proportion of general physical safety themes and according to the total number of response elements. This information is presented with additional detail in [Table 1](#), which summarizes respondents’ perceptions of psychological safety, including each theme’s definition, prevalence, and an example corresponding de-identified open-ended response. There are many related, interconnected factors that can contribute to and develop from someone’s sense of psychological safety at work. Considering the responses to this item specifically, one major contributor or outcome of this phenomenon at UTC appears to be respondents’ general perception of a lack of social support, whether from upper administration, direct supervisor(s), or coworkers (*lack of leadership support; lack of supervisor support; lack of coworker support*). Similarly, many respondents reported that they perceived an absence of unity in their workplace (*low cohesion*); inconsistent and unfair standards and behaviors (*unequal treatment*); and an overall absence of consideration for themselves or others (*lack of respect*). Less frequent but nonetheless related responses indicated fears over losing positions or departmental funding (*job insecurity*); concerns about the changes that may arise from recent political events (*political concerns*); instances of unchecked sexual harassment (*sexual harassment*); and unclear or insufficient knowledge regarding job expectations or responsibilities (*role ambiguity*).

Figure 1. Distribution of reported psychological safety concerns (% and prevalence counts)

These data are in response to a prompt asking respondents to “share an example or two” that explains why they reported disagreement with items indicating positive physical and/or psychological safety while working at UTC. These themes have been divided by the overall number of response elements.

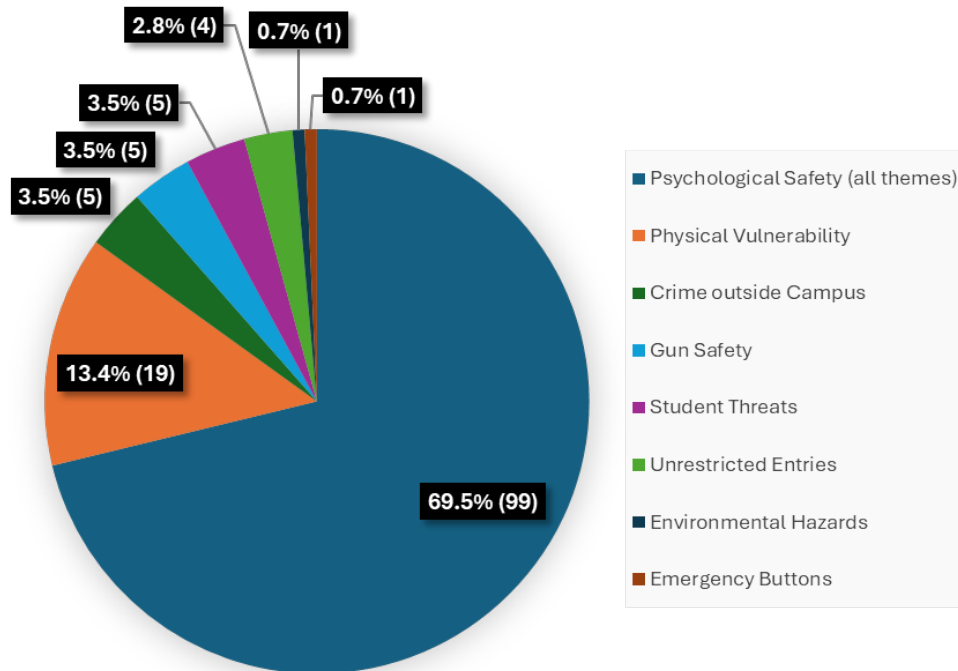


Concerning respondents’ perceptions of physical safety, the most predominant issue appears to be a general feeling of being physically exposed to danger or risk while working on UTC’s campus (*physical vulnerability*). Again, there are many associated factors and circumstances that may lead to such perceptions. Based on these recent employee responses, a primary reason may be the instances of crime that occur just outside UTC’s campus (*crime outside campus*), which has the potential to spill over and negatively impact them. Relatedly, some respondents expressed concerns about gun safety on UTC’s campus, citing perceived inadequate regulation of firearms and/or the potential risk of active shootings (*gun safety*). Others reported: fears over students who pose a potential physical threat to them (*student threats*); concerns over entryways that may allow unauthorized persons to enter buildings without proper screening (*unrestricted entries*); a perceived insufficient benefits package (*inadequate benefits*); broken sidewalks and construction on campus (*environmental hazards*); and an inadequate number of emergency buttons (*emergency buttons*).

[Figure 2](#) illustrates the relative prevalence of these physical safety themes, alongside the overall proportion of responses to this survey prompt that highlighted psychological safety concerns. More details are summarized in [Table 2](#), which classifies respondents’ perceptions of physical safety, including each theme’s definition, prevalence, and an example corresponding de-identified open-ended response.

Figure 2. Distribution of reported physical safety concerns (% and prevalence counts)

Distribution of physical safety themes across all responses to the first campus security open-ended item, which asked respondents to “share an example or two” that explains why they reported disagreement with items indicating positive physical and/or psychological safety while working at UTC. These themes have been divided by the overall number of response elements.



As you review these tables and figures, it is important to keep in mind the interconnected nature of these issues. One rarely feels psychologically safe without first being physically safe and secure. Similarly, even when physical safety is strong, frequent experiences of poor psychological safety can still leave employees feeling incredibly vulnerable. As such, though this report presents these phenomena as separate ideas, examples or concerns regarding them are often interlinked and can seldom be addressed in isolation from each other. This is one of the main reasons for the ongoing TOH@UTC initiative and its efforts to engage campus leadership in improving employees’ working experiences regardless of their assigned division, college, area, or department on campus.

Opportunities for UTC Public Safety

The second open-ended campus security item asked respondents to “describe one or two ways in which you believe UTC Public Safety could help to improve your overall sense of safety and security at UTC.” Overall, there were responses from 163 employees to this item, with 204 total response elements identified. Responses to this prompt were quite varied and generally highlighted strengths or weaknesses that employees perceived about the functioning of UTC Public Safety across campus. Thus, these responses were categorized as either positive or negative in form, before consolidation into the themes reported in the following subsections of this report.

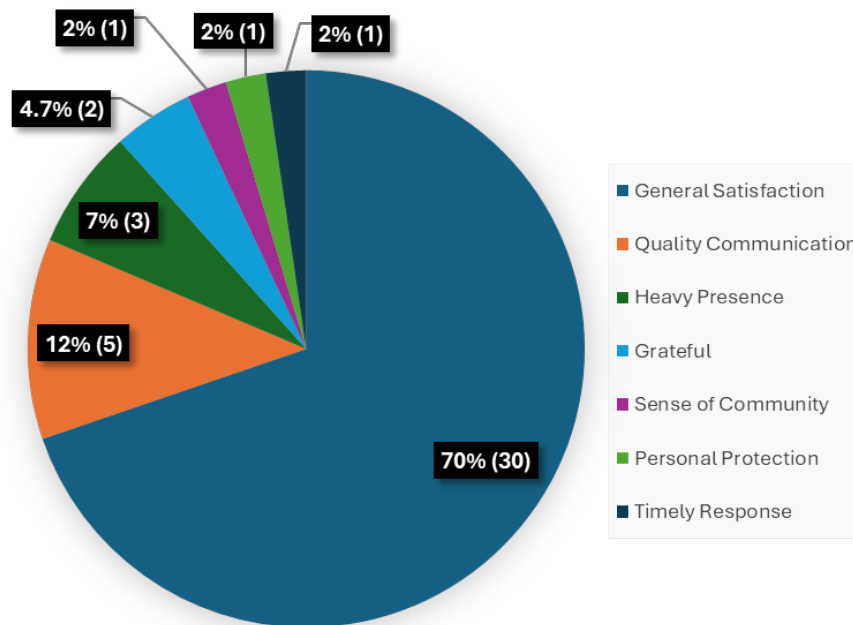
Strengths

Of the 163 employee responses to this item, 36 were categorized as positive, containing 42 total positive response elements. These comments were categorized as positive because they indicated a sense of approval or contentment with the current efforts of UTC Public Safety (*satisfied*). Many elements appear to influence these respondents’ sense of satisfaction, including the type and frequency of UTC Public Safety’s campus communication (*quality communication*);

the number of officers visible or available at a given point in time (*heavy presence*); the amount these officers engage with the UTC campus community (*sense of community*); and the timely nature of UTC Public Safety's response to potential threats on campus (*timely response*). Correspondingly, there does appear to be a sense of appreciation for the efforts of UTC Public Safety (*grateful*), though one respondent did report that their perception of physical safety on campus is also due to their own protection measures (*personal protection*). [Figure 3](#) shows the frequency of each theme according to the total number of response elements. For more detail, [Table 3](#) displays respondents' positive perceptions of UTC Public Safety, including each theme's definition, prevalence, and an example corresponding de-identified open-ended response.

Figure 3. Employee-identified current strengths for UTC Public Safety (% and prevalence counts)

Distribution of themes across all positive responses to the second campus security open-ended item, which asked respondents how UTC Public Safety could improve their perceptions of safety and security at UTC. These themes have been divided by the overall number of response elements.



Areas for Improvement

Of the 163 employee responses to this item, 127 were categorized as negative, including 161 total negative response elements. These comments were categorized as negative because they highlighted specific area(s) of improvement for UTC Public Safety and/or generally expressed perceptions of UTC Public Safety that appear adverse.

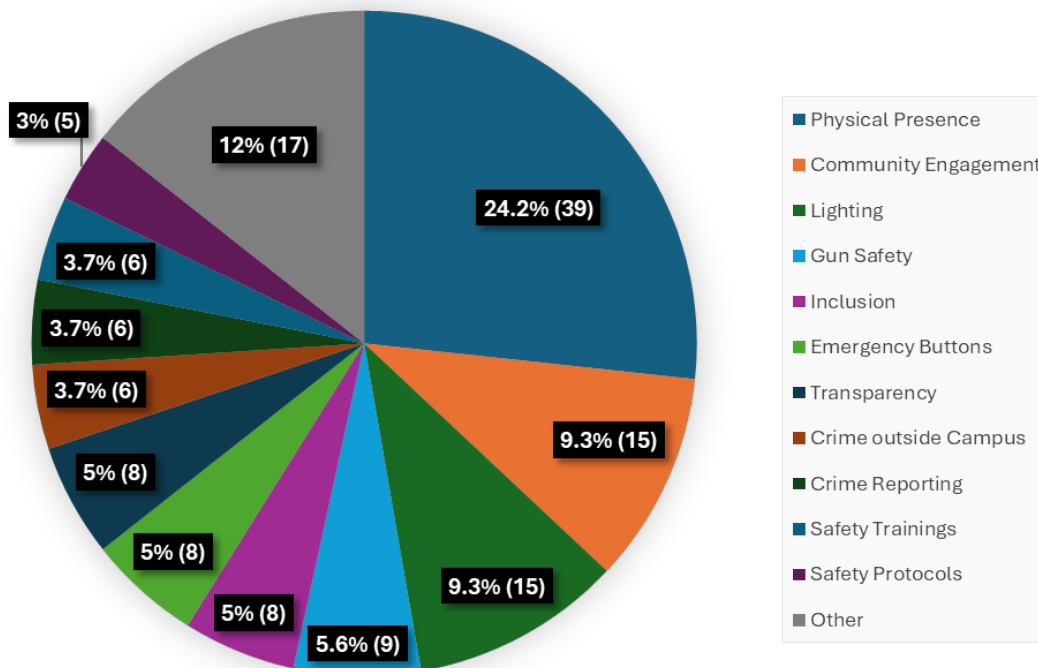
Among these responses, the most prevalent theme was a desire for increased visibility or awareness of officers on UTC's campus, including during the evening and around more remote areas (*physical presence*). This was followed by respondents' preference for greater engagement and involvement from campus officers within the UTC community (*community engagement*), as well as a need for more or better lighting around UTC's campus, specifically at Chamberlain Field and Lupton Hall's parking garage (*lighting*). Many respondents also expressed concern over the use and/or regulation of firearms on campus (*gun safety*) and wished for campus officers to intentionally engage more with students or groups of minority backgrounds (*inclusion*). A similar number of respondents reported a need for more accessible and effective emergency buttons on campus (*emergency buttons*) and greater transparency within UTC Public Safety's communication and crime reporting (*transparency*).

Other respondents highlighted their fears regarding the crime that occurs outside of UTC's campus, citing instances where such incidents have either directly affected them or seemed like they could impact them at work (*crime outside campus*). Relatedly, some responses indicated a preference for higher quality crime reporting from campus police, as well as more efficient methods for faculty and staff to report potential safety hazards (*crime reporting*). A few respondents also called for enhanced safety training from UTC campus police, especially regarding potential shooters (*safety training*), and the need for clearer or more visible safety protocols for faculty and staff regarding active shooters or natural disasters (*safety protocols*).

The final responses indicated a need for more proactive measures to create a safer, more reassuring campus environment (*mitigation of general fear*); more effective training of security officers, especially regarding building layouts (*officer training*); an increased number of effectively trained campus security officers (*additional well-trained personnel*); and more available and accessible ways to contact campus security (*easier to contact*). Concerns about students who pose a potential physical threat to the UTC community were repeated in these responses (*student threats*), and some respondents explicitly asked for more speed bumps around Vine Street (*speed bumps*) and repaved sidewalks around campus (*sidewalks*). [Figure 4](#) displays the frequency of each theme according to the total number of response elements. For more detail, [Table 4](#) showcases respondents' negative perceptions of UTC Public Safety, including each theme's definition, prevalence, and an example corresponding de-identified open-ended response.

Figure 4. Employee-identified areas for improvement for UTC Public Safety (% and prevalence counts)

Distribution of themes across all negative responses to the second campus security open-ended item, which asked respondents how UTC Public Safety could improve their perceptions of safety and security at UTC. These themes have been divided by the overall number of response elements.



Summary and Recommendations

Out of nearly 60 responses regarding perceptions of physical and psychological safety on campus, most response elements highlighted employees' feelings and perceptions of being unable or unsafe in contributing ideas or disagreeing at work (psychological safety). A chief contributor or outcome of this absence of psychological safety appears to be a lack of social support from essential individuals, which is related to perceptions of low cohesion, unequal treatment, lack of respect, job insecurity, political concerns, and role ambiguity. These issues are major focal areas for the broader TOH@UTC initiative, but there are elements to this that UTC Public Safety may be able to facilitate and support. In particular, perceptions of physical vulnerability while on UTC's campus can be attributed to and intensify concerns of crime outside campus, gun safety, student threats, unrestricted entries, environmental hazards, or an inadequate number of emergency buttons.

Out of nearly 160 responses concerning perceptions of the functioning of UTC Public Safety across campus, a notable proportion indicated a sense of satisfaction and appreciation for the efforts and resources already available to campus. A large proportion of responses, however, highlighted areas where UTC Public Safety may find it impactful to increase its focus and allocation of resources. Areas in which "more of the same" is recommended include UTC Public Safety's quality communication, generally strong physical presence on campus, and sense of community. Opportunities for growth include improved or increased physical presence across all areas of campus, broader community engagement, better lighting, clearer and stronger gun safety protocols and guidance, more inclusive behaviors, more emergency buttons, more transparent communication, more complete crime reporting, additional safety trainings, broadened safety protocols, continued and expanded officer training, more speed bumps to slow traffic on campus, and better sidewalks for pedestrian safety. Respondents also expressed a desire for assistance mitigating generalized fear and concern for safety, easier methods of contacting Public Safety personnel, and more assistance in managing potentially threatening students.

Overall, the data from the most recent TOH@UTC progress check highlight fundamental psychological and physical safety and security factors that are affecting UTC employees' feelings and experiences while work on campus. Responding to these concerns in a clear and focused manner is strongly recommended, given that employees cannot fully engage in their work if they feel that their institution does not prioritize their safety.

Appendix: Detailed Data Tables

Table 1. Psychological safety themes, descriptions, distributions, and examples from employees elaborating on why they reported disagreement with items indicating positive physical and/or psychological safety while working at UTC.

Theme	Theme Description	Distribution across Response Elements	Example Comment
Lack of Psychological Safety	This theme describes a work environment in which respondents feel unsafe or unable expressing ideas, taking risks, or making mistakes without consequences.	29 (20.4%)	"There have been several instances where people have been shunned or ostracized for speaking their minds in meetings because people disagree with them - not because they were rude or unprofessional."
Lack of Leadership Support	This theme reflects respondents' concerns about insufficient support, guidance, or resources provided by UTC's upper administration or senior leadership.	19 (13.4%)	"Very reactive rather than proactive leadership. Too many things go unchecked and then suddenly it is a catastrophe."
Lack of Coworker Support	This theme conveys perceived insufficient support or collaboration from the respondents' colleagues.	12 (8.4%)	"I don't feel that there is an acceptable amount of shared ownership of work within my team... I cannot count on my co-workers to offer support."
Lack of Supervisor Support	This theme highlights insufficient guidance, feedback, or assistance from the respondents' direct supervisor(s).	8 (5.6%)	"Dangerous work environment, abusive behavior...department head witnesses such behavior and doesn't respond."
Low Cohesion	This theme captures respondents' perceptions of disunity within their team, department, or UTC as an entity.	7 (4.9%)	"I feel like everyone in my department is mainly out for themselves. There is very little collegial support, appreciation, or interest in what each other does."
Unequal Treatment	This theme reflects perceptions of favoritism, where respondents feel that certain individuals are treated better or given more attention and consideration by UTC administration.	7 (4.9%)	"It appears that those excelling are not necessarily the most accomplished but rather those who align closely with departmental leadership. The hierarchy and instances of sexism are pronounced."
Lack of Respect	This theme reflects respondents' concerns about a perceived absence of respect in their workplace, including instances of dismissive behavior or unprofessional interactions with their colleagues and/or leadership.	5 (3.5%)	"[I feel] underappreciated and undervalued by my department, College, and the University as a whole, and that encourages me to step back and do less."
Job Insecurity	This theme expresses respondents' concern over losing their position for various reasons, including recent political events or perceived lack of support.	4 (2.8%)	"I am consistently concerned about potential retaliation in my department...openly expressing an opinion can jeopardize one's job security."
Political Concerns	This theme captures respondents' fears about recent political events, including concerns that their position, funding, or academic freedom may be jeopardized.	4 (2.8%)	"There is a war on science, knowledge, education, and progress in this country -- and I need to see more aggressive action taken."
Sexual Harassment	This theme encompasses respondents' concerns over incidents of sexual harassment in their work unit, including those that have been reported but not adequately addressed.	3 (2.1%)	"There has been lewd behavior that was hidden from us and not disclosed in a timely manner. One colleague regularly makes sexist or harassing remarks to both students and faculty."
Role Ambiguity	This theme reflects respondents' unclear or insufficient knowledge about their job expectations or responsibilities.	1 (.7%)	"The absence of clear guidelines and shifting expectations create psychologically unhealthy spaces."

Table 2. Physical safety themes, descriptions, distributions, and examples from employees elaborating on why they reported disagreement with items indicating positive physical and/or psychological safety while working at UTC.

Theme	Theme Description	Distribution across Response Elements	Example Comment
Physical Vulnerability	This theme addresses respondents' concerns about feeling physically exposed to danger while working at UTC, stemming from factors such as unregulated entry points and perceived insufficient security measures.	19 (13.4%)	"I think in general the reports of crime on campus make me feel uncomfortable walking to my car alone."
Crime outside Campus	This theme expresses respondents' concerns about safety and security issues occurring in the areas surrounding UTC's campus.	5 (3.5%)	"I have been accosted by homeless persons multiple times...and followed when I both ignore or state that I do not have anything to give."
Gun Safety	This theme captures respondents' concerns related to gun safety on UTC's campus, including issues such as the perceived lack of regulation around firearms and the potential for school shootings or other gun-related incidents.	5 (3.5%)	"I am always concerned about gun safety on campus...it would be very easy for a student to bring a gun to my office."
Student Threats	This theme expresses respondents' concern over students who pose a potential physical threat to them and/or have unregulated access to UTC staff or faculty.	5 (3.5%)	"There are many times that I meet with students who seem very mentally unstable. They make me feel unsafe and make others on campus feel unsafe."
Unrestricted Entries	This theme refers to respondents' concerns over unregulated access points, where unauthorized persons can enter buildings without proper screening or regulation.	4 (2.8%)	"Most doors [in my workplace] are unlocked during the day which makes me feel vulnerable that anyone can walk into the building and have access to the entire thing."
Inadequate Benefits	This theme highlights respondents' perceptions of an insufficient benefits package at UTC, especially compared to their counterparts.	3 (2.1%)	"The healthcare plans are expensive and grossly inadequate, and there is no paid parental leave for 9-month employees."
Environmental Hazards	This theme refers to respondents' concerns about environmental hazards at UTC.	1 (.7%)	"Lots of construction. Poor condition of facilities. Broken sidewalks."
Emergency Buttons	This theme encompasses respondents' desire for more accessible emergency buttons on UTC's campus.	1 (.7%)	"There are not emergency buttons to use to call for support, if needed."

Table 3. Themes, descriptions, distributions, and examples of perceived strengths for UTC Public Safety (in response to a question asking for ways that UTC Public Safety could improve their personal perceptions of safety and security at UTC).

Theme	Theme Description	Distribution across Response Elements	Example Comment
Satisfied	This theme reflects respondents' sense of approval or contentment with the current efforts of UTC Public Safety.	30 (70%)	"I think they generally do a good job, and I have no real concerns about safety."
Quality Communication	This theme encompasses respondents' approval of the type and/or frequency of UTC Public Safety's campus communication.	5 (12%)	"I appreciate the updates that our campus alerts provide, as they keep us informed and aware of important developments."
Heavy Presence	This theme expresses respondents' contentment with the number of officers visible or available on campus at a given point in time.	3 (7%)	"I feel safe on campus. There is quite a bit of police driving around the campus."
Grateful	This theme highlights respondents' expressions of appreciation for the current efforts of UTC Public Safety.	3 (7%)	"UTC Public Safety does a great job. Thanks for all that they do!"
Sense of Community	This theme reflects respondents' approval of how much UTC Public Safety officers engage with the UTC campus community.	1 (2%)	"Most people look out for others. I see people walking in groups always."
Personal Protection	This theme refers to positive comments that convey a sense of physical safety but also report personal protection efforts or measures.	1 (2%)	"I feel pretty safe on campus, but that's also because I carry a safety alarm."
Timely Response	This theme captures respondents' satisfaction with the timely nature of UTC Public Safety's response to potential threats on campus.	1 (2%)	"I feel that they do a good job. They show up really quickly when we call them."

Table 4. Themes, descriptions, distributions, and examples of areas for improvement for UTC Public Safety (in response to a question asking for ways that UTC Public Safety could improve their personal perceptions of safety and security at UTC).

Theme	Theme Description	Distribution across Response Elements	Example Comment
Physical Presence	This theme expresses a desire for increased physical presence of officers on UTC's campus, including during the evening and around more remote areas.	39 (24.2%)	"If possible at all, more patrols around campus, especially during the evening hours."
Community Engagement	This theme emphasizes respondents' desire for greater engagement and involvement from campus officers within the UTC community.	15 (9.3%)	"More cops walking around or on bikes or golf carts to be seen on the interior of campus or in the dorm spaces. Just a simple "Hey, how's your day going?" can soften interactions between officers and students and build some trust."
Lighting	Responses under this theme highlight the need for more lighting around UTC's campus, including specific areas like Chamberlain Field and Lupton Hall's parking garage.	15 (9.3%)	"There are still places on campus that could be better lit for moving between buildings in the early mornings or late evenings."
Gun Safety	This theme highlights respondents' concern for gun safety, emphasizing the need for stricter measures and awareness.	9 (5.6%)	"The UT system could actively push back against efforts to increase the number of firearms on campus."
Inclusion	This theme reflects respondents' call for campus police officers to help foster inclusion by engaging respectfully with students from all backgrounds.	8 (5.0%)	"I would appreciate reminders that hate crimes will not be tolerated, and that campus police and UTC public safety are committed to ensuring minorities feel comfortable on campus."
Emergency Buttons	This theme reflects respondents' desire for more accessible and effective emergency buttons.	8 (5.0%)	"They could add more of those kiosks with the blue button that calls campus safety around campus."
Transparency	This theme emphasizes respondents' call for greater transparency in communication and crime reporting.	8 (5.0%)	"Important communication coming at times during the day when the information could be discussed with others in the department."
Crime outside Campus	This theme expresses concern about safety and security issues occurring in the areas surrounding UTC's campus.	6 (3.7%)	"The homeless population around UTC has been growing and not all of them are just passing through. People resting and/or begging on campus is an issue."
Crime Reporting	This theme reflects respondents' call for higher quality crime reporting from campus police, as well as more efficient methods for faculty and staff to report potential safety hazards.	6 (3.7%)	"More useful information in the 'timely reports,' and having those reports sent out sooner than 2 days after an event happened."
Safety Trainings	This theme emphasizes respondents' desire for enhanced safety training from UTC campus police, especially regarding potential shooters.	6 (3.7%)	"They could send a representative to come to one of our departmental meetings to explain the different ways in which they seek to provide safety and security on our campus."
Safety Protocols	This theme emphasizes the need for clearer and more visible safety protocols for faculty and staff.	5 (3.1%)	"Having more security protocols in the buildings is important."
Mitigation of General Fear	This theme stresses the need for proactive measures to create a safer, more reassuring campus environment.	4 (2.5%)	"More focus on minority safety, like Black, POC, and LGBTQ+ centered safety."
Officer training	This theme encompasses respondents' desire for more effective training of security officers, especially regarding building layout.	3 (1.9%)	"Better training of officers in dealing with different genders and cultures."

Theme	Theme Description	Distribution across Response Elements	Example Comment
Additional Well-Trained Personnel	This theme calls for more campus security officers, especially those who have been effectively trained.	3 (1.9%)	“People make the difference. Continue to hire the best, train effectively, and hold high expectations for all UTC Public Safety employees.”
Easier to Contact	This theme asks for more available and accessible ways to contact campus security.	3 (1.9%)	“Make ways to call them easier or more available.”
Student Threats	This theme highlights concerns about students who pose a potential physical threat to the UTC community.	2 (1.2%)	“They could do more to help vulnerable students (women, students of color) to feel safe. Women, in particular, are too often victimized by their fellow students with little apparent justice for them.”
Speed Bumps	This theme refers to respondents that ask for more speed bumps around campus, especially around Vine Street.	2 (1.2%)	“Putting speed bumps on Vine St. to get people to slow down in a heavy pedestrian area. So many people speed on this street with heavy foot traffic in the area because of the academic buildings.”
Sidewalks	This theme highlights respondents’ desire for repaved sidewalks around campus.	2 (1.2%)	“The sidewalks are VERY dangerous. Holes and cracks are everywhere.”