

How to Grow Abolition on Your Campus: 8 Actions

All educational spaces, including colleges and universities, are necessary sites in the work to abolish the prison industrial complex (PIC). Abolition movements take concrete steps to end reliance on policing, imprisonment, surveillance, and other forms of state violence while building practices and systems that sustain well-being and coalesce political power. Abolition is an immediate strategy and a long-term goal.

Histories of movement-building and action are responsible for our current focus on the violence of anti-Black policing. Policing in the U.S. originated in the colonial period with indigenous land seizure and slave patrols. Modern police departments were professionalized in the 19th century to put down worker rebellions and protect private capital, and police forces became militarized enemies of the people by the Civil Rights and Black Power eras. Designed to “protect and serve” a tiny minority, institutions of policing (whether border patrol or municipal departments) emerged from histories of colonization, racism, and the repression of social movements and rote reforms will not change the fundamental purpose of police. Current movements to end policing are happening in tandem with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has brought into sharp focus the everyday public health crises of racism, poverty, and incarceration.

To build abolition, we list strategies and actions that students and educators can take up on campuses. This list is not detailed or exhaustive. Many of these ideas and practices are already in motion! We share the following to highlight work that communities are doing, to generate more ideas, and to deepen existing movements.



* **Defund and eliminate campus police.** Examine, make transparent and challenge campuses' contracts and relationships with university-based police, local police forces, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and private security and surveillance entities. Formulate a plan to terminate contracts, while reallocating resources to Transformative Justice education and training. One strategy is to fight for funding to be reallocated to programming and education that fosters well-being through scholarships, counseling, food and housing access, and more. For one example, see the [scholars4blacklives](#) petition.

* **Mobilize with campus labor unions, student organizations, faculty and all other collectives to abolish police beyond our campuses.** During the recent uprisings in New York City and Minneapolis, transportation workers' unions supported members who refused to drive the buses that police departments attempted to commandeer to transport arrestees.

* **Build radical forms of community and interdependence.** Create, support, and amplify dialogues around what really makes us safer and build infrastructures for maintaining well-being without police. Leverage university resources to pay local abolition feminist anti-violence organizers to share resources, tools, and workshops. These could include, for example:

- * Train in Transformative Justice (TJ) processes and structures and funds to hire TJ practitioners with a clear abolitionist focus.
- * Create and offer feminist and queer affirming sexual health education.
- * Create networks of trained and paid peer mentors and peer health advocates.
- * Learn about and commit to using harm reduction frameworks and tools.
- * Build capacity to offer wide distribution of and trainings for administering naloxone / naran to counteract opiate overdose.
- * Create and / or sustain counseling, support, and political action groups on campus.
- * Offer deescalation trainings for students, faculty, and staff as part of classes, faculty service, and staff work.
- * Learn about and invest in structures for mutual aid, transformative justice and community accountability that address violence beyond punishment and criminalization.

- * Organize to create no-call plans/or alt-call plans that promote and maintain the agreement not to call police and to collectively develop and establish other means of conflict deescalation and intervention and emergency response. For example, the Arab Resource and Organizing Center; Build the Block's "Developing Alternatives to Policing"; and Showing Up for Racial Justice's (SURJ) organizing with houses of worship to create no-call plans.
- * Provide specialized training for groups to respond to crises such as interpersonal and intimate partner violence, sexual assault, mental health, addiction, etc. that does not involve the police, such as the Chicago-based Ujima Medics, The Audre Lorde Project's Safe Outside the System "Safe Party Toolkit," and the Oakland Power Projects Health Worker Cohort, who offer Know Your Options workshops aimed at de-coupling policing and medical and mental health care.
- * **Audit and change blatantly discriminatory policies for college access.** Demand an end to discrimination based on criminal and disciplinary records and immigration status in admissions, employment, scholarships and other funding, campus housing and more.
- * **Study with others. Teach and learn about organizing.** There is so much to draw from: contemporary and historical internationalist examples of abolitionist political and social movements including campaigns to challenge and shrink policing; Black, Indigenous, and Third World liberation movements; geneologies of feminist anti-violence organizations that do not rely on punishment; queer direct action networks, examples of anti-capitalist practices and experiments; projects that demand tech and big data divestment from surveillance, campaigns for de-institutionalization and more.
 - * Work in solidarity with organizations outside of the university to challenge how colleges and universities advance policing, displacement, and removal particularly in communities of color and poor and working class neighborhoods.
 - * Deepen and proliferate anti-PIC curriculum and resources beyond "naming the problem." Implement, teach, and advance curriculum across disciplines that centers abolition - for example, the work of the Public Health Justice Collective - and that dismantles oppressive systems that shore up the PIC, including white supremacy, racial capitalism, colonialism, ableism, and heteropatriarchy.
- * **Amplify the work of social and political movements and front-line organizations** (for example, Dream Defenders, Cooperation Jackson, Survived and Punished, The Red Nation). One way to do this is by strengthening and supporting the work of academic departments, programs, centers, labor unions, student networks, contingent worker groups, and other sites that hold strong lines of accountability to movements. See the recent CUNY faculty union statement that specifically names the potential of public education as central to racial justice.
- * **Challenge all ties with the PIC.** Make visible and dismantle the logics and myths of meritocracy that form the foundation of post-secondary education and that work to disqualify communities, knowledges and individuals. Push back on and cancel academic programs such as community policing, corrections, homeland security, or military studies. Challenge mandated reporting laws that do not produce safety. Make visible and end all economic ties that post-secondary education has with the PIC: contracts with food services companies like Sodexo, service learning projects in Departments of Child and Family Services or city offices of Criminal Justice, research budgets that produce and legitimate new technologies and methods of police reform, including predictive policing algorithms.
- * **Free education for liberation.** Organize toward, amplify, support and/or adopt the campaign for free public post-secondary education (in California and New York, public colleges used to be free) and student loan debt elimination - for everyone. Organize against funding cuts for education in your local or state budget process, and leverage education needs to defund prisons and police in your town, city, or state. As one example, California spends six times as much to lock up one person in prison than to educate one college student. Resist the politics of austerity: If United Airlines can get bailed out, public post secondary education can be free. Resources can be redirected to bail out people, not corporations, and we can transform university endowments into public resources that serve ALL people's education.

Critical Resistance Abolitionist Educators - a network of people who work in post-secondary education - including, Ujju Aggarwal, Shana Agid, Paula Austin, Melissa Burch, Laura Y. Liu, Erica R. Meiners, Dylan Rodríguez, Setsu Shigematsu, Laurel Mei-Singh
Illustration by Jaye Elizabeth Elijah (instagram @jayeliz)