



## **Community and Police Response to Graffiti, within the Mosse Humanities Building**

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Lower Campus Community  
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### **Scanning:**

During her time as Community Officer for the UW Madison's lower campus, Officer Landrie has adopted a strategy of determining the problems of specific buildings, in addition to solving problems according to category. For example, she has learned that graffiti on the exterior of various buildings is a separate problem from graffiti within specific buildings in her community.

This documents her efforts aimed at curtailing graffiti at a single building, while allowing the community to take responsibility for its self. The Humanities building is prominent on the eastern edge of the University of Wisconsin campus, adjacent to a pedestrian mall that connects to State Street, a busy pedestrian and retail area that stretches between the university and the state capitol building. It is a large, blocky building with long hallways and very few windows. A sense of privacy is conveyed by the layout of the building, especially on the upper floors. The upper floors house classrooms and studios for the art department. The continued occurrences of graffiti/criminal damage to the interior walls in the elevator known as the "art2 elevator", and nearby elevator foyers and hallways in the art department on the sixth and seventh floors has been an issue for at least the past 15 years.

Staff in the art department took complaints from students and discussed among themselves the inappropriate, sexually graphic drawings and profanity written on the walls of the elevator and hallways. There was also concern from the staff and police as the building is also used for community outreach. Adolescents taking music lessons and families with young children attended social functions within the building. These visitors to the building were unable to avoid being subjected to the adult themed drawings and messages when using the only elevator mentioned to gain access to the art's department upper floors. A lesser amount of the graffiti was of an artistic nature,

sometimes complete with autographed signatures of the artists. Some of the graffiti was also actually advertisements written or pasted on the walls notifying students of events in or around the campus and interest to art students. Clean up is done by the university's paint shop every 3-6 months, costing the university over \$20,000.00 yearly.

### **Analysis:**

Students attending classes at the Humanities building are the primary offenders. Art students waiting for the elevator or riding the elevator, use the walls as an impromptu drawing board, not knowing or caring about the legal aspects of criminal damage or the impact that the "art" had on others. Clean up costs were not considered because they did not perceive a need for anything to be cleansed. Officer Laundry was able to locate two such offenders because the artist's had signed their work. When these offenders were questioned, they told officer Laundry that they were unaware that using spray paint or markers through out the building was considered graffiti or criminal damage, as this was an art building, and what they were doing they considered art. These offenders also said they thought it was an excepted practice to draw on the walls, and post advertisements as it was so prevalent through out the building.

Officer Laundry became a daily fixture in the building and personally spoke with students and staff as they rode the elevator and wandered the halls asking their opinion as to what they thought of the graffiti on the walls and how they thought it could be stopped. Officer Laundry estimated that she spoke with over 50 students and 10 staff members and suggestions ranged from allow the students to continue or to give them all tickets. Everyone questioned stated they disliked and wanted the sexually graphic drawings and written profanities to stop. Almost everyone questioned thought as Officer Laundry did; that some of the impromptu art was beautiful, showed school spirit and was even whimsical at times. It was this spirit of "art" officer Laundry wanted to preserve within her community. So Officer Laundry opted to "educate" the art students and went to the maintenance department (paint) and the buildings art chairman to get their opinion on the graffiti matter.

### **Response:**

After officer Laundry met with the art chairman Jim Escalante, and Escalante agreed that something needed to be done and he also agreed that because this was an art building, we needed to still somehow allow the students to express themselves artistically. The first on the agenda was to have the hallways re-painted to give a fresh start and better track when the graffiti was occurring and who might be responsible. Officer Laundry then brought up the idea of chalk boards being installed in the elevator, like the ones she had seen in alcohol establishments near the campus. These small chalk boards with colored chalk were placed inside bathroom stalls in an attempt to stop persons from writing messages on the stall doors and walls causing the establishment to clean up unwanted graffiti.

Escalante supported officers Laundrie's plan of placing chalk boards inside the art2 elevator and liked the idea that if someone found something offensive it could be easily wiped away. Escalante also took this a step further and employed a student to immediately clean up graffiti that appeared on the walls in the hallway or elevator and to report it to officer Laundrie in a timely manner so she could follow up. (This employed student would start clean up after the walls were professionally done by the maintenance department.)

Officer Laundrie then brought the idea of chalk boards to the university's maintenance department (paint). It was here she learned the state held strict guidelines as to what can and can not be put into elevators, and chalkboards couldn't be placed inside. Officer Laundrie then requested green chalkboard paint, however this also brought scrutiny. While the paint department researched the possibility of using green chalkboard paint in the art2 elevator it was agreed the painters would start the task of re-painting the hallway on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor to give the art department a much needed do over. Officer Laundrie continued her daily patrol's of the building, stopping and talking with the students and staff. She learned a lot from the painter who was the one responsible for the Humanities building and the one responsible of painting over the graffiti. Officer Laundrie learned that students were tired of the dark brown paint the state deemed appropriate for elevator use and "someone" had taken control of the elevator one night re-painted it neon pink. The painter stated he understood why someone repainted the elevator, as brown was dark and made the small six person elevator seem smaller. The painter also told officer Laundrie that he felt for the art students as he repainted the elevator brown again (state approved fire retardant paint) many students voiced their complaints to him and asked that the neon pink be brought back.

This same painter also reported to officer Laundrie as he painted the 6<sup>th</sup> floor hallway, that students thanked him for giving the school a fresh look.

The paint department informed officer Laundrie that green chalkboard type paint was located with the appropriate chemical properties and painting would commence immediately. The painting was complete during the spring semester of 2005, and now students, staff and visitors were given a legal outlet to express their artistic abilities. If anyone using the building was offended by a specific buildings in her community. Any sexually graphic drawings or profanities, they now had the ability to easily erase it. The Lower Campus Community Police Office provided an initial supply of chalk for the elevator and elevator foyers in empty paint buckets and the excess chalk was given to the art department to distribute later as needed. A general message was placed in the three locations, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> floor elevator foyers and inside the elevator in chalk. The message read, "Please use me, draw, doodle, or write a message to a friend."

### **Assessment:**

The initial response to the chalkboard paint and chalk was very positive. Officer Laundrie spent several hours a day each week in the elevator and hallways talking with

students and staff in an impromptu survey as they rode the elevator. This was done in tandem with officer Laundrie's daily patrol of the building over a two month period after the paint and chalk were put in. An estimated 40 students and five staff were questioned during different hours of the day as to what they liked and disliked about the chalk. Students who officer Laundrie spoke with stated they liked the idea of being able to write or draw as they rode or waited for the elevator. The giant chalk boards brought an array of different messages from love notes to political agendas. Drawings consisted of everyday household items to funny cartoon characters to detailed abstract drawings. Notes were even written in chalk asking others not to use other types of mediums on the walls.

Student and staff who officer Laundrie spoke with told her they liked viewing other student's impromptu art and reading the messages they left for one another. Staff told officer Laundrie they liked that the chalkboards kept a supportive atmosphere for the students, and officer Laundrie like the idea of giving the students a legal and non-destructive way to show their talents.

The hallways on the sixth and seventh floors continued to be graffiti free and the chalkboards remained almost completely effective from approximately spring semester 2005 through spring semester 2006. This represented a savings of about \$1800 dollars per month for the past year.

As the 2006 fall semester was coming to an end, the chalk that had been provided disappeared several times. New chalk was brought in, however it soon disappeared again, and notes were left on the art2 elevator walls in black magic marker stating that someone was allergic to chalk and how much some hated chalk or how it rubbed off on their clothes. Again sexually explicit drawings and profanity began re-appearing inside the elevator, while the hallway walls and elevator foyers still remained unmarked by any graffiti. Officer Laundrie reasoned that in the elevator persons had time to cause damage without being seen, and once the graffiti started it again provided an incentive for others to join in.

**This project has reduced overall graffiti by 75% at this location. and reduced instances when students and community members are subjected to sexual graffiti substantially, while also saving the university a substantial amount of money and time with clean-up costs. In addition the project has also reduced police calls and art department staff time spent reacting to this problem.**

Officer Laundrie will continue to monitor the graffiti and working with the art and paint departments. Officer Laundrie plans to step up enforcement with new signage indicating the criminal aspect of the graffiti and cost of clean up and possible issuance of citations for offenders. Office Laundrie will also continue to confer with patrol and security officers within the police department to revisit the problem on a bimonthly basis in an attempt to problem solve.

Inside the art2 elevator prior to re-paint



After paint, 6<sup>th</sup> floor elevator foyer

