

Dear President Alivisatos and Provost Lee,

We are a group of faculty at the University of Chicago, all shocked, saddened and frightened by the ruthless murder of our recent graduate Shaoxiong “Dennis” Zheng on November 9, 2021, while we are still mourning the loss of Ph.D. student Yiran Fan in a shooting rampage 10 months ago as well as undergraduate student Max Solomon Lewis to a stray bullet 4 months ago. These tragedies have been happening right on and around campus, and we are hearing of gun robberies on a weekly basis! As educators, parents, and community members, we are deeply disturbed and outraged. We are no longer certain if our campus allows students, staff, and faculty to study, work, and live safely. We are experiencing an existential crisis.

These recent tragedies have had a negative impact on the reputation of our university. They have also severely affected our capability of attracting and retaining talented students and researchers. In fact, UofC is being depicted as one of the most dangerous campuses in the United States by several international news outlets. Even more concerning, the repeated gun violence on and around campus has started to affect our students’ willingness to go to classes in-person. With the recent surge of violence and crime on and around campus, it is upon us to take concrete actions. **Anti-violence should be made TOP priority at the University.**

We urge the University to take the following actions immediately, together with our local community, to address the serious problem of violence around our campus:

1. **Enlarge the borders of UCPD territory to Hyde Park neighborhood.** Off-campus is not an excuse to undermine University’s efforts in protecting its students, staff, and faculty to any degree. We specifically request:
  - 1) **increasing surveillance and monitoring systems in Hyde Park.** Surveillance camera systems are a simple and effective approach to enhance safety and reduce violence around campus. The University should work together with the local government to dramatically increase surveillance camera systems in the entire Hyde Park community, making sure that every block and every street is covered by surveillance cameras.
  - 2) **increasing the number of live security guards off-campus.** Security guards need to patrol every road crossing in the neighborhood.
  - 3) **increasing routes and frequencies of University shuttles.** The University should arrange more bus stops to guarantee that there is at least one stop within every two blocks of major off-campus apartment buildings.
2. **Re-build accountability.** Improve transparency and demonstrate accountable police policies. Designate a new committee to address the serious violence and security issues in Hyde Park. The University should establish and release quantifiable goals about the new safety measures it is taking. The designated committee should oversee the implementation of all security strategies and should communicate plans and any progress in achieving these goals on a regular basis. Every gun robbery or other crime that has occurred on campus requires attention and a final report. We cannot afford to let these slip away, begetting eventual further loss of life as we have witnessed repeatedly

in the last few years. Criminals need to be identified, arrested and sentenced -- this is essential to rebuild public trust.

3. **Bring justice to the Dennis Zheng incident and support the family of Dennis Zheng at this difficult time.** Dennis came to us from abroad but attended most courses for his master degree online in his Hyde Park apartment, right near where he was robbed and murdered. He was not only a promising scholar but also a wonderful and kind person. Dennis should not die in vain. The University should help bring his family to the US to attend funerals and memorials and compensate them financially by returning his tuition fee. The University should urge local law enforcement to capture the murderer and bring the person to justice as soon as possible. A timeline and plan should be provided to the university community and we should be periodically updated on all progress with the criminal case.
4. **Engage with the South Side community to come up with a long-term plan to tackle violence.** Gun violence crimes in the Chicago South Side have deep social and economic roots. We urge the University leaders to further engage with the city and the local community and promote quantifiable long-term plans to mitigate criminal activities, particularly those targeting University students, staff, and faculty members.

The recent surge in violence has reached a threshold where it has deeply impacted our entire community. We are afraid that without concrete action and notable changes, we will continue to see loss of talented students and faculty from this great university.

Sincerely yours,

(The order of the signatories is chronological. It does not reflect the order of authorship for this letter.)

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==== Below signatures are submitted after presenting the letter to President and Provost ====

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