



Meghna Chandra

Meghna is a member of Penn Student Labor Action Project, a non-hierarchical student group that stands in solidarity with workers for social justice. She has worked with students and workers for campaigns for ethical divestment and campus workers' rights. She co-founded the Penn Haven Housing Co-op with fellow Civic Scholar Penny Jenewein and the Penn Intentional Community for the purpose of creating a permanent activist community at Penn. She helped start the People of Color Contingent at Occupy Philadelphia to make people of color within the movement heard. She also participated in the 2011 PBS Student Freedom Rides to retrace the steps of the original Freedom Riders and worked with the sex workers union in Calcutta with Professor Toorjo Ghose in 2012. Meghna has won several grants to travel to Latin America to study the politics of NGOs through the Penn Program in Democracy, Citizenship and Constitutionalism. She is currently a Grassroots Fundraising and Event Planning Intern at Philadelphia-based Media Mobilizing Project, a group committed to building movements with the telling of untold stories. She would like to be a social worker in the long tradition of radical social work. She loves reading critical theory, biking around the city, traveling via couch surfing, writing, and playing guitar.

CAPSTONE PROJECT

“Policing the Town and Gown: Making Sense of Contested Narratives of Security, Surveillance, and Power”

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The University of Pennsylvania prides itself on its engagement with West Philadelphia and vocally seeks to break down barriers between West Philadelphia and the campus community. In the name of safety for its faculty and students, Penn employs one of the largest private police forces among Universities nationwide. Despite being largely acclaimed by staff and students for keeping the campus safe and making efforts at community policing, this police force has not been immune to criticism by minority students and community members. This paper brings the two strands of thought together in order to answer the question “What effect does Penn’s use of a private police force have on community relations?” Through interviews with various stakeholders of the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Pennsylvania Police Department (UPPD), employees of the University, and members of the surrounding neighborhoods – as well as surveys collected at a “border zone” between West Philadelphia and Penn’s campus – this paper sketches the complex and often surprising relationships between the University, the UPPD, and the community. It uses theories of spatial analysis in order to understand the ways that people’s lived experiences and spatial configurations within the city have shaped their interactions with institutions and with each other. In doing so, this paper hopes to illuminate the discussion around university and community relations.