

Throughout the day, students who were already sleep deprived, dehydrated, and fearful were exposed to excessive sunlight and heat. In response to these conditions, students erected two canopies to provide some refuge from the sweltering heat, especially given that students reported feeling ill and faint. Shortly after setting up a space of relief, Dean of Students Matt Clifford arrived and demanded that students remove the canopies. As the situation escalated throughout the day, including threats by Associate Dean Jim Settle to spray students who were protecting chalk art with power hoses filled with chemicals like sodium hypochlorite which is used to remove spray paint from surfaces.

Later that evening, administration and campus facilities set up two large stadium floodlights and a surveillance camera aimed directly at students in the encampment. The generator was so loud that the sound of the generator prevented already exhausted students from the ability to rest. Students who were awake hid behind umbrellas and other covers to protect their eyes from the brightness of the stadium lights.

By the witching hour, there were less than 10 students, 8 faculty members, and 7 administrators present. That night, students and faculty had a meeting with Provost Michelle Gillespie. Students shared concerns with Provost Michelle Gillespie, directly stating multiple times that “Black, Brown, Indigenous, queer, and disabled students will never, ever be safe on Wake Forest University’s campus.” Students told Provost Michelle Gillespie that the actions of Associate Dean Jim Settle and other administrators like him have made, and will continue to make, this campus unsafe for those who are in the most marginalized and vulnerable positions, and oftentimes face higher consequences for low level conduct violations. Students demanded the immediate termination and removal of Associate Dean Jim Settle, to which Provost Michelle Gillespie responded defensively and attempted to exit the conversation. After several faculty members voiced concerns about Provost Michelle Gillespie’s exit, she remained for the rest of the conversation. She reluctantly and ambiguously stated that she would see what she could do to advocate for students on behalf of their demands.

At 3:48 AM, students and faculty members noticed a drone that had passed over the encampment several times throughout the night. Provost Michelle Gillespie assured us that neither the university nor Winston-Salem PD were responsible for the drones.

Around 4:45 AM, Dean of Students Matt Clifford arrived at the encampment with a prepared document to share. After reading a single line, that we were all ordered to leave the encampment immediately, a student got up and began dancing and declaring that we would not be leaving the encampment. Shortly after, campus facilities arrived at Manchester Plaza and joined campus police with 6-7 pickup trucks and several dumpsters. The intense presence of campus facilities and campus police was tantamount to viewing a small army of 20 ready to clear the encampment and awaiting Dean Matt Clifford’s call.

At 4:55 AM, Dean Matt Clifford then returned and read the entire document stating that there would be new interim policy enforced from today until commencement regarding chalk policies stating that no chalking was allowed anywhere on campus, and that students who wished to protest could move to a designated area of potato field from 8am to 8pm with no amplified sounds, no tents, and no other structures. They did not define what the term structure meant. When asked about the conduct process, Dean Clifford stated that it would be handled on a case by case basis, and that the bare minimum response would be a 15 day suspension. We asked for an hour of time to meet to discuss what student action would be in response to the new interim policy, to which Dean Matt Clifford refused. He then stated students would be given 20 minutes to plan, but were only given around 5 to gather themselves.

At 5:15 am, 50 police officers came and blocked the entirety of Gulley Dr., and drove onto the green of Manchester Plaza, nearly running over faculty members. This response was unprecedented and one of the largest police responses organizers in the city had ever seen in response to such a small number of unarmed organizers. Dean Matt Clifford then offered facility help to move their belongings and pack up the encampment, to which students refused out of fear for the safety of their personal belongings. Students then began to frantically search for their valuables to pack and flee the encampment. Students, with the things they had gathered in their hands, began to move to the edge of the green. Dean Matt Clifford then ran over to apprehend them, under the impression that students were not complying despite them packing their things and getting ready to flee. Dean Matt Clifford then demanded all students share their IDs to which students refused. Students then agreed to provide their names, but not their IDs.

Then, faculty members attempted to do their best to get students away from the encampment safely. Once students had cleared the area, Winston Salem PD pulled onto the lawn to prevent people from gathering at the encampment site. There were so many police present on the green that students had to avoid the area completely to prevent interactions with the police when attempting to safely exit and search for places to sleep. Many students had not slept in several days, and were very fearful of any interactions with facility workers or police officers present.

Throughout the evening and night, faculty were in repeated conversation with Provost Michelle Gillespie and Dean Matt Clifford pleading for police to not be brought on campus to arrest students. They were assured on multiple occasions that police had not been called, and would not be called, so that students would not be arrested. Provost Michelle Gillespie did not uphold her end of this verbal agreement, as students feared for their lives and safety at the mass presence of police.

To be clear, this level of police force posed grave danger to all students and faculty present. We are very aware of the violence police impose onto Black, Brown, Indigenous, queer and disabled students, many of which students and faculty present were. This was a blatant attempt by Wake Forest University to place their most marginalized students in direct danger, risking their lives and freedom, indicating what we already know to be true: the Black, Brown, Indigenous, queer, and disabled students of Wake Forest University will never, ever be safe on this campus.