



Spring 2015

Fear and Safety: Students use qualitative methods to explore the meaning of fear and safety among the University of Pennsylvania community

SWRK 781: Qualitative Research

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SWRK 781: Qualitative Research (2015, April 01). Fear and Safety: Students use qualitative methods to explore the meaning of fear and safety among the University of Pennsylvania community. Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/showcase_posters/26

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Please also see our [PennWIC blog post](#) for more description and photos.

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FEAR AND SAFETY

Students use qualitative methods to explore the meaning of fear and safety among the University of Pennsylvania community.

BACKGROUND

Photo elicitation was first named in a paper published by the photographer and researcher John Collier (1957). It involves a qualitative interview stimulated and guided by participant photographs. This method can help break down barriers between researchers and participants and can promote rich and collaborative discussions (Harper, 1994).

Each student in the Qualitative Methods Research Class (SW781), Spring 2015, recruited a study participant (n=25) (undergraduate students, graduate students, staff, and faculty from across the University) and trained them in the appropriate and ethical use of this method. Study participants were asked to define and explore the meaning of “fear” and “safety” in their daily lives and were instructed to use their phones to document their exploration over the course of one week. Using the participant-generated photographs to guide conversation, each member of the research team conducted an interview with a participant.

WHY EXAMINE FEAR AND SAFETY?

The topic for this project was determined using nominal group technique (NGT). NGT is a structured small-group discussion approach used to reach consensus. A moderator (in this case the professor) asks the group a question and gathers the responses (in this case potential project topics) from each group member.

Once all potential topics are shared with the entire group, each member of the group prioritizes the topics. This process prevents one person from dominating the discussion, encourages all group members to participate, and results in a set of prioritized topics that represents the group’s preferences. The class, by way of NGT, decided to investigate how the University of Pennsylvania community perceives fear and safety.

RESEARCHERS

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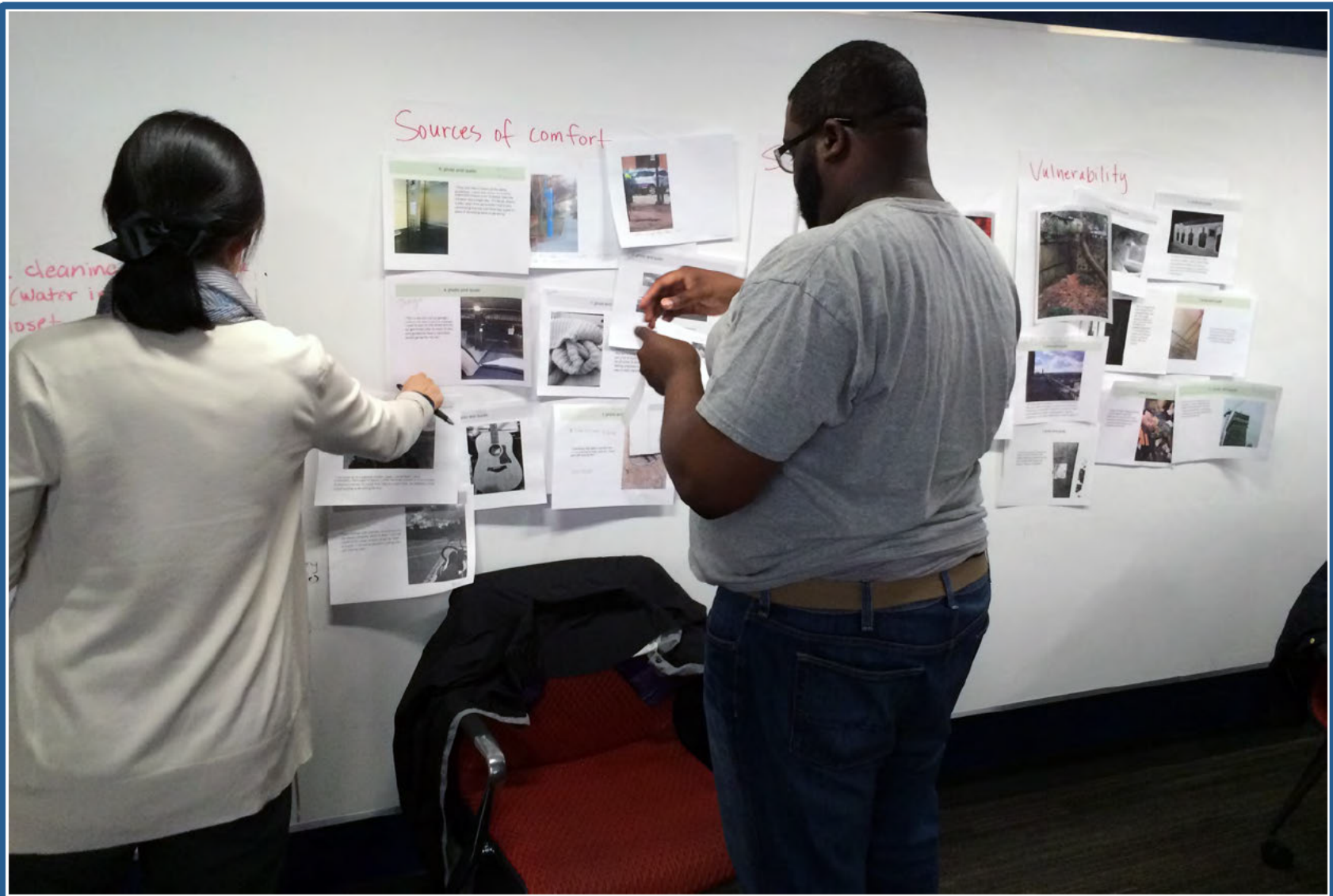
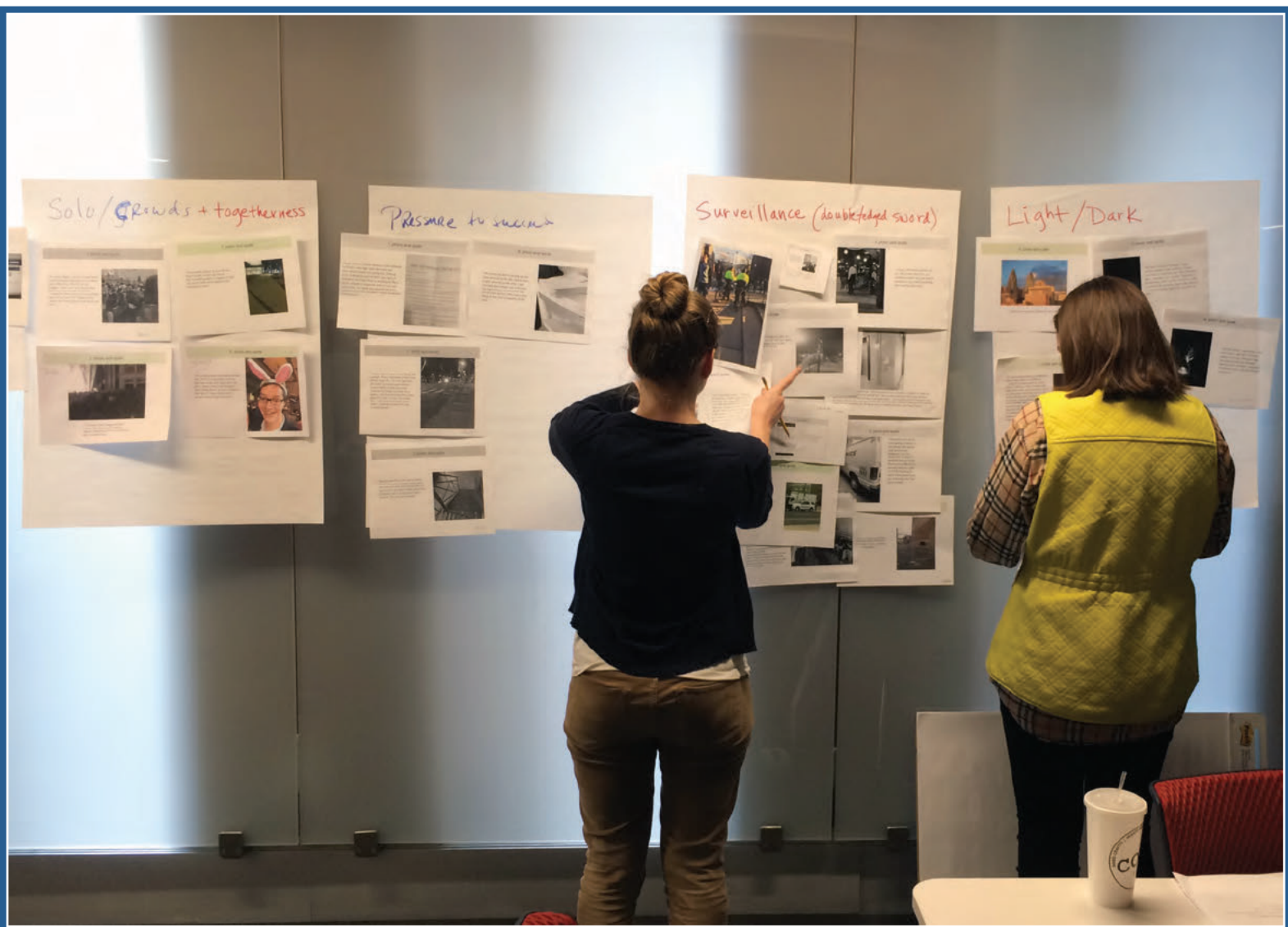
Erica Morse

SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR

Carolyn Cannuscio, Sc.D

SELECT PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Each student conducted a preliminary assessment of their interview and selected relevant quotes and images to potentially share in this exhibit. As a team, we decided which specific images to include in the exhibit, and organized images into thematic categories.



NEXT STEPS

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and will be analyzed by students. Thematic analysis will be facilitated by NVivo 10 software. Additionally, the research team will identify salient themes, summarize findings, prepare an abstract for presentation, and a manuscript for publication.



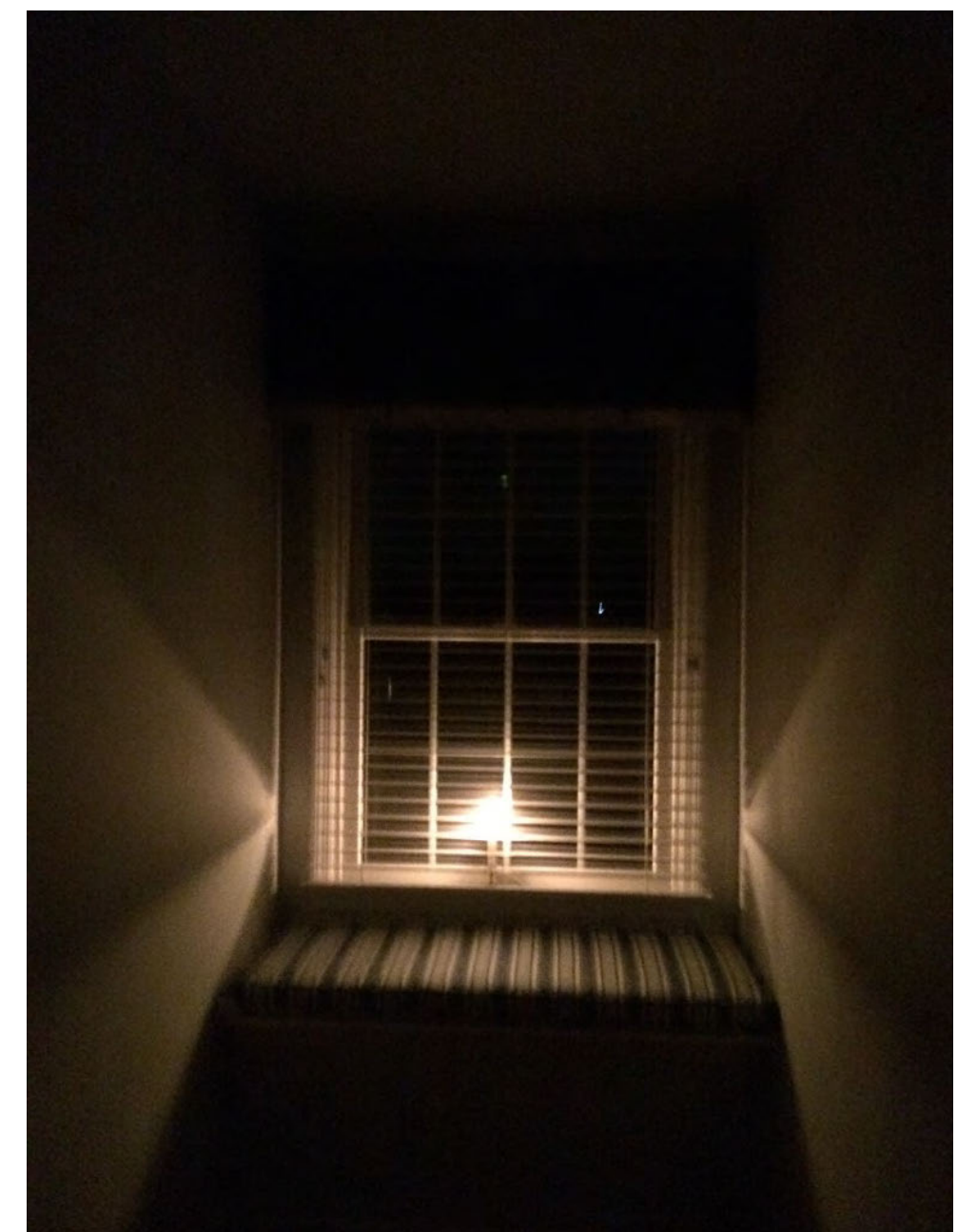
"Yes, you're going down stairs, but it's sort of like you don't really have an out. If there's something wrong, its just like, you have to keep going."

"It's power to kill someone very, very easily, and even by accident...You could miss the target and it could ricochet off of something. It's pretty scary."



"Well I went apartment hunting and I was so excited about this place, and I called my mom about it, and she said no because it had balconies, and she's afraid I'll fall off the balcony. So I wasn't actually thinking of fear when I took this picture, I was just excited about it until I called my mom later and told her about it."

"We have, like a lot of people, these electric candles in the windows...I feel like if someone tried to come in the windows, I would see. And, so it is kind of a safety feature for me with the lights."

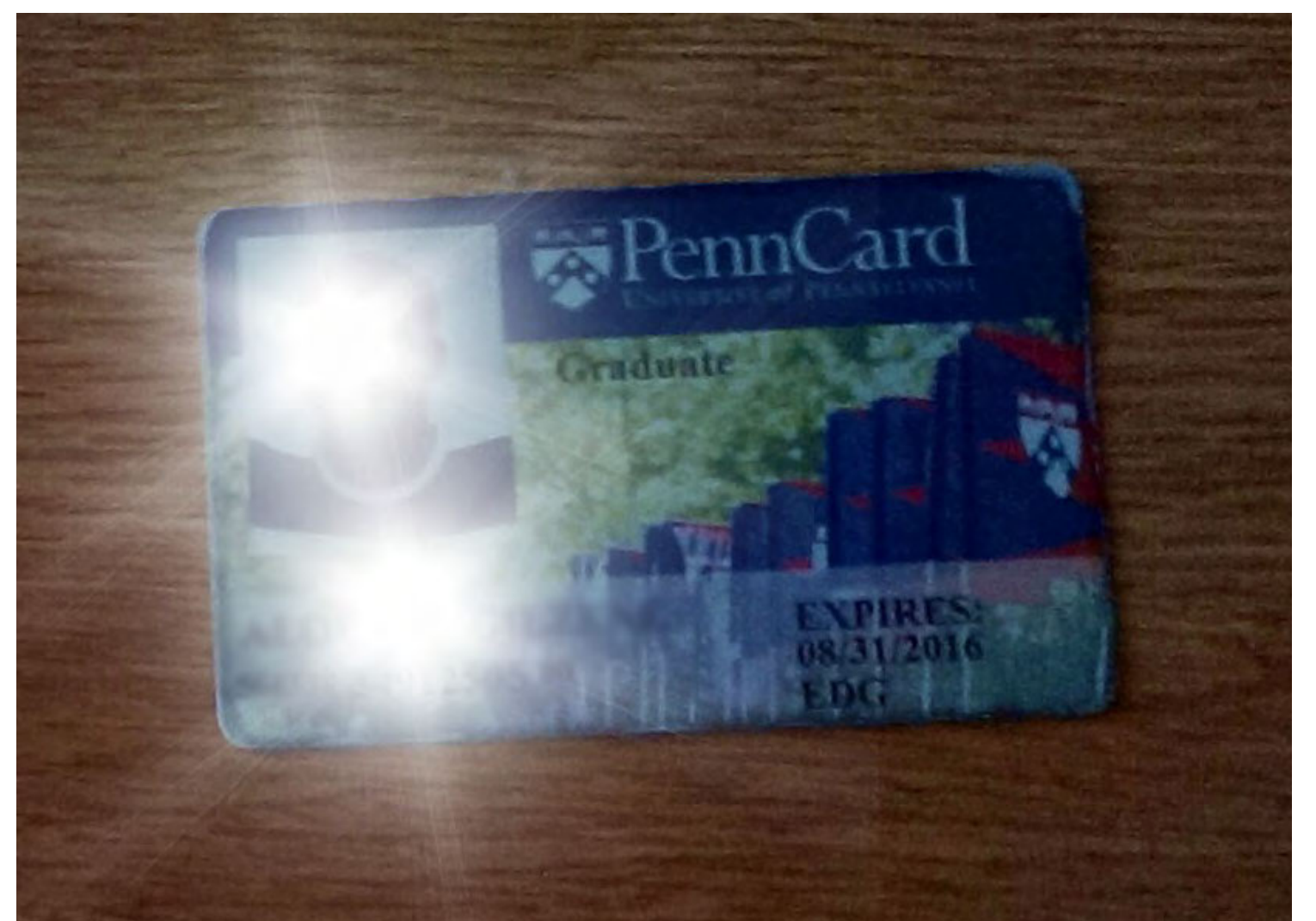


SENSE OF BELONGING



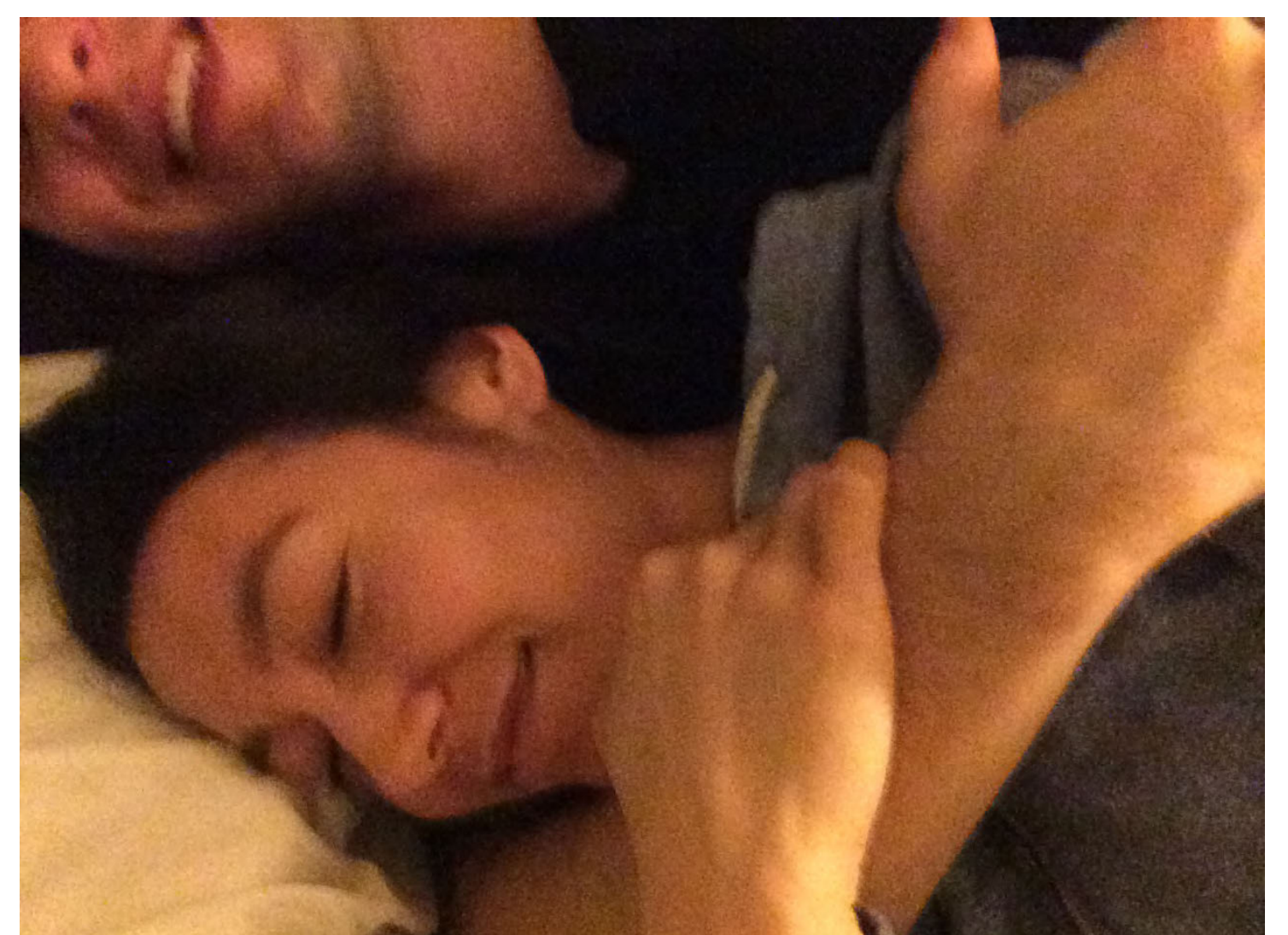
"It sort of pushes away any sort of any insecurities or something that you might have...as you're walking through the hallway to your room kind of thing, you see this on the wall and it's just like – ok! This makes me feel...very safe. It's a good place. I don't feel anxieties in this place."

"If there are ever any time that there might be the assumption that I'm causing trouble because I'm a Black man, I can sort of feel safe relying on my university ID...It's sad that it has to be this way...Being able to say that I'm a Penn student, and prove that with this symbol, is sort of a safety mechanism."



"I think I was appreciating the fact that I was in an Indian restaurant cause I am from India and it felt more comfortable. So there's different cultural stuff all over the walls that mean something to me from my family or from places I've been to. And also this is a restaurant we go to to celebrate a lot of big events in my family."

"I feel like there is no safer place than being with someone who I care about and who I love. And physically speaking, he is bigger than me...you can get out of your own head a little bit...focus some of my energy on him and not be so self-critical or too selfish...it's nice to be able to share some of life's burdens or problems with someone else."

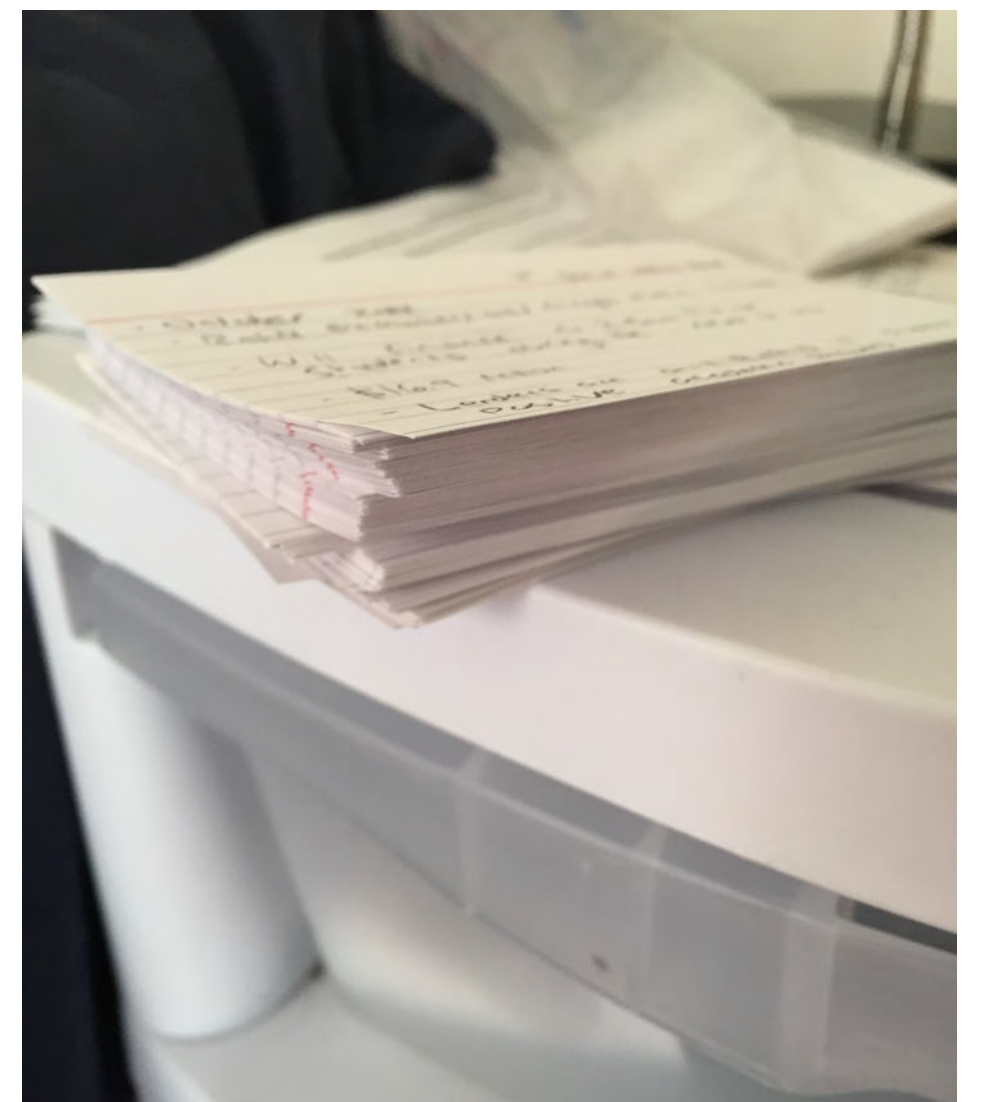


FEAR OF FAILURE



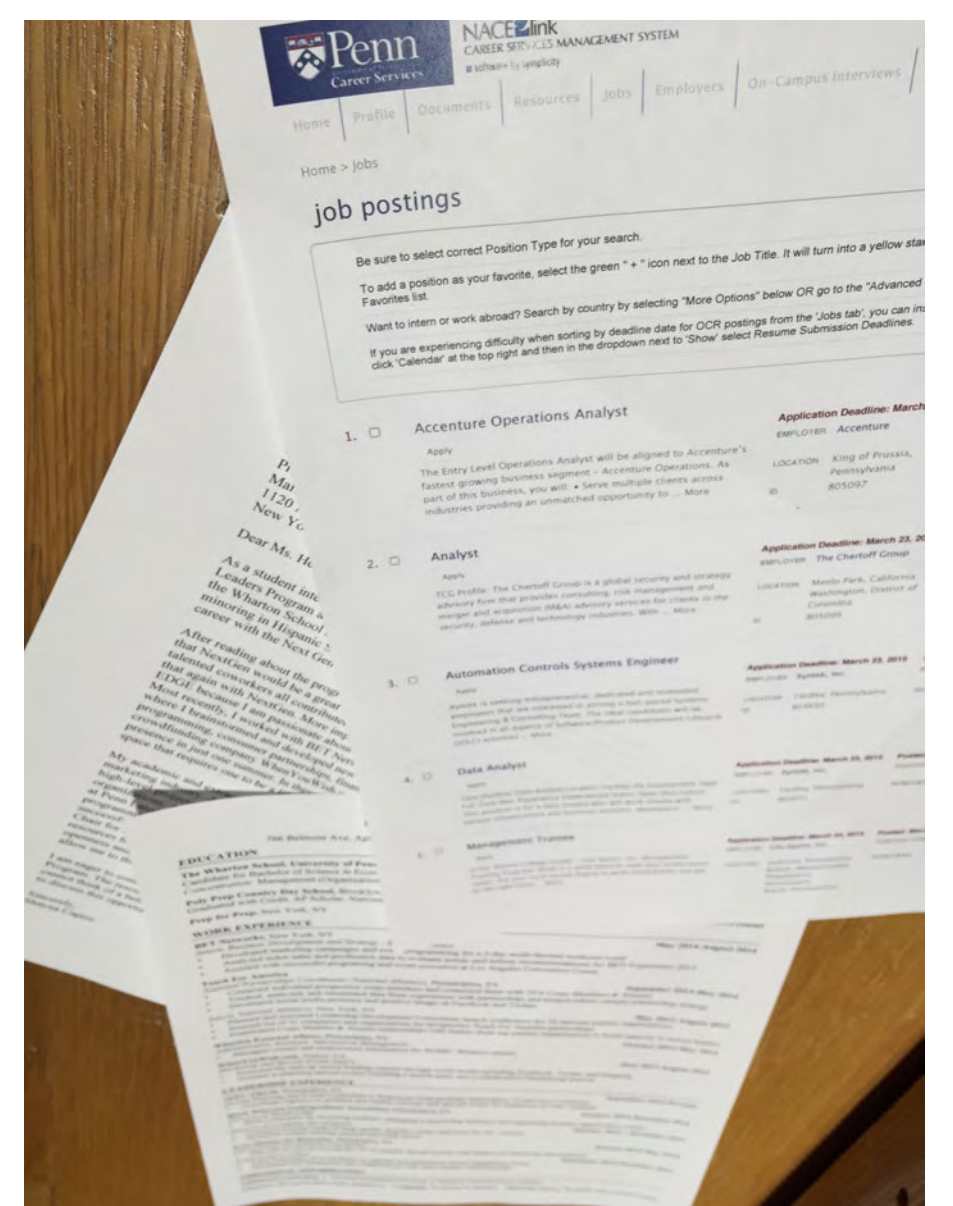
“So you have this environment where there is poverty a couple blocks away, but then you have this cultural idea [at Penn] that if you don’t make a boatload of money, like if I become an English teacher...it’s not good enough.”

“You know the test is coming up, you have so much to do, like I know there might never be a time when I get through every single card and know the right answer on the other side for the test, which is like a very scary thing to feel. And it happens all the time.”



“...the back of the SEPTA bus that I needed to take to get to the daycare to pick up my kids on time... I knew I would not be able to make that bus...For me, not being able to meet an expectation that I’ve set for myself, or complete a task that I know I need to do in the time that I allotted...knowing that there will be penalties if I’m not within the boundaries of what I need to do.”

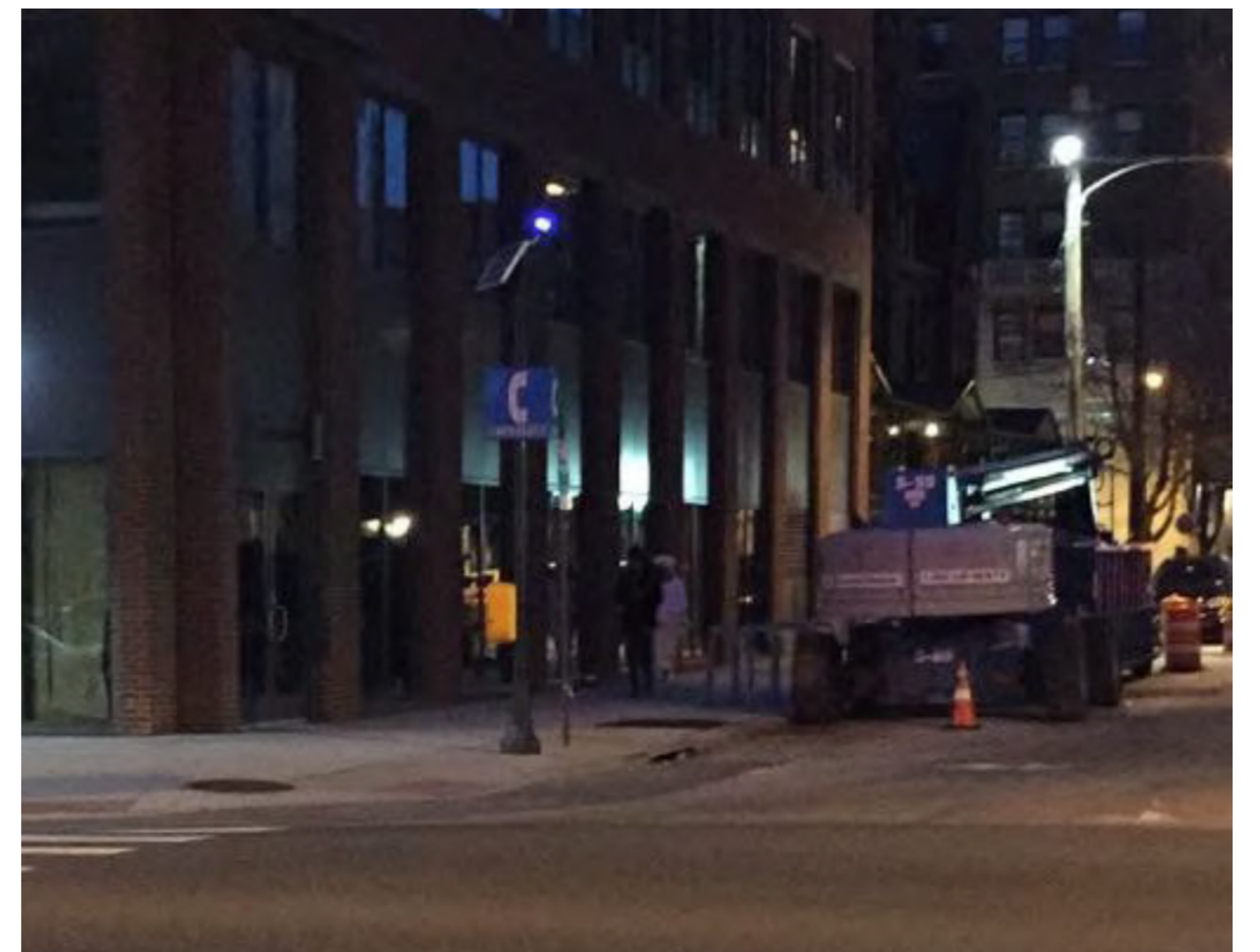
“I know people who didn’t find their first full-time job out of college until September, October after graduation. I think that’s being four, five months behind in your career.”





"It's just a Penn emergency light...it's just refreshing to know that even when I'm off Penn campus, they're still keeping an eye out on me. "

"Someone who is wanting to mug me might be less likely to do it in a place where there are cameras watching...It's not so much that they [Penn Police] would protect me, as deter other people...I feel like for the most part the Penn Police aren't really here to police the students...they're more just there to give some people a sense of safety."



"Every time I see this I am like, 'Wow, that is a lock down dormitory,'...I think they have done it in a way where you don't feel like you are walking into jail or a high security area...stylistically they have done a nice job. That way it doesn't look like barbed wire and bars...they have done a nice job making you feel secure but not that you are trapped."

"Especially with what's been going on lately in the media with police and community relations, just not being able to discern whether you can trust those police officers to actually keep you safe or if they're going to exert more power over you and make you feel more unsafe."

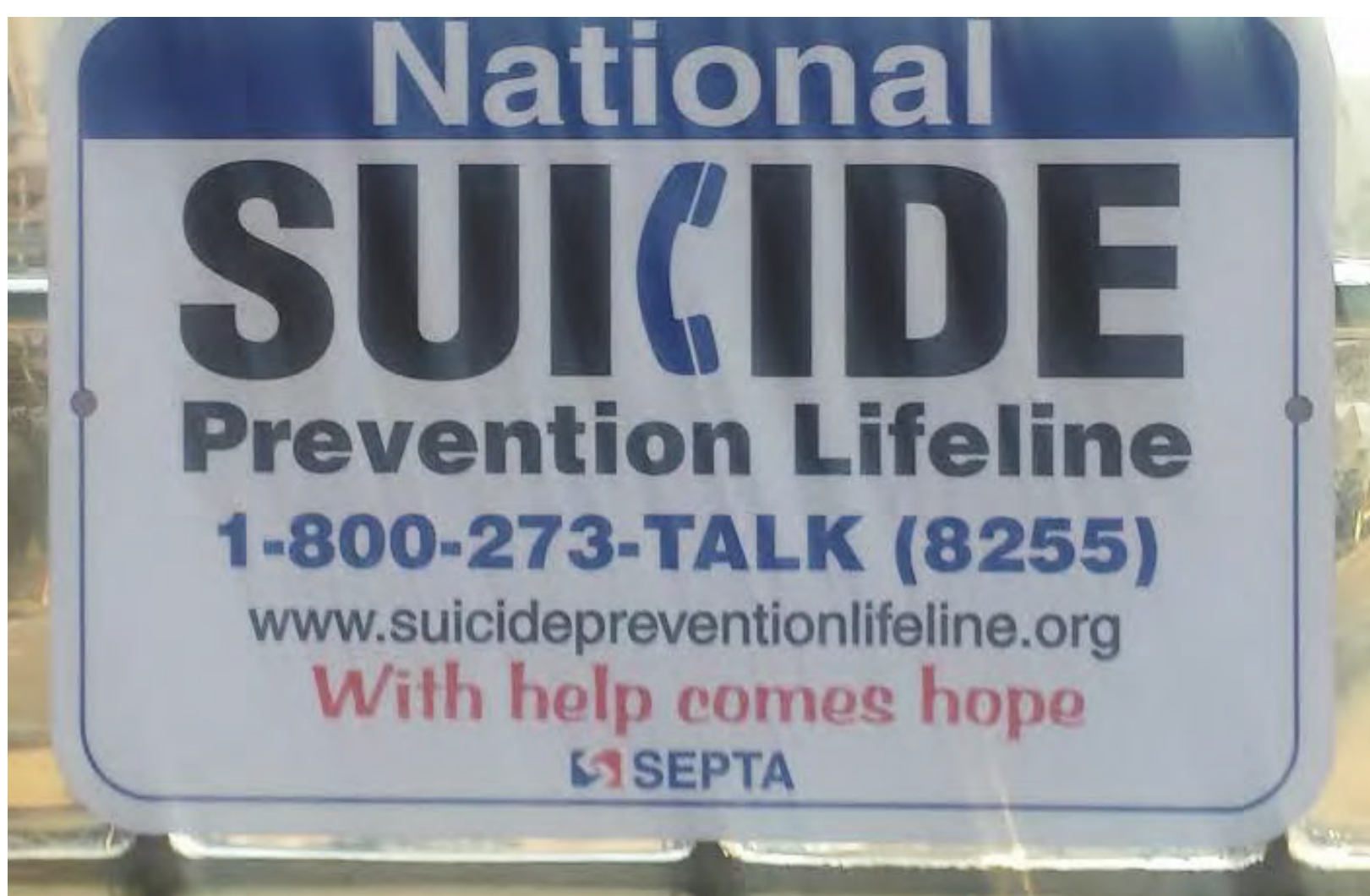


PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH



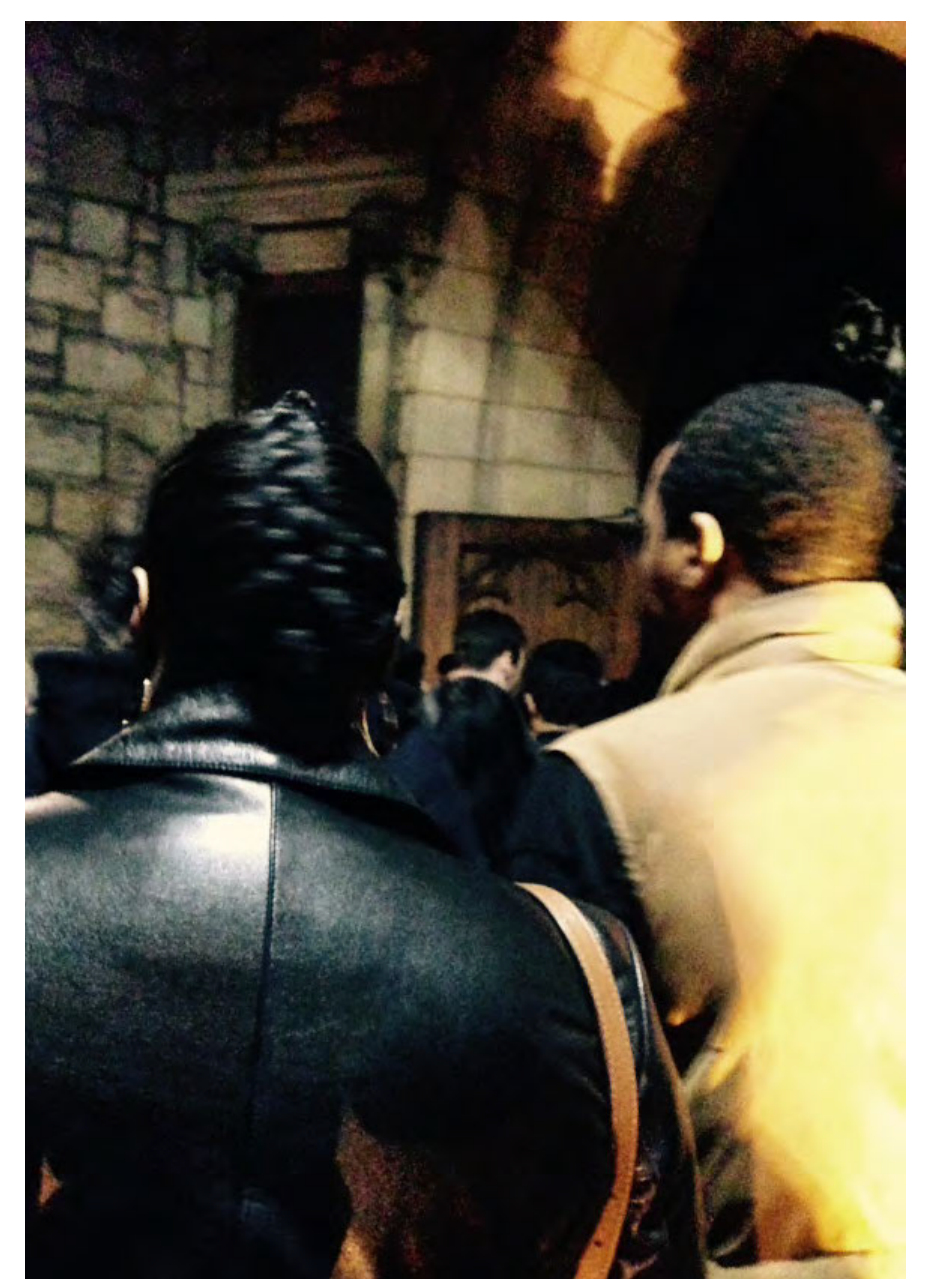
"We have to get so much smarter than we are about mental health...We are so smart about physical health, and we so under-attend to mental health, and to anxiety, and to depression, and how do you manage moods, and how do you manage your mood, other people's moods, swings, fears – I just don't think we spend enough time on that stuff. It's a cultural norm, it's a societal norm, it's a public health issue."

"...the fear exists to me because being in so much pain and there not being any medication, I know I have to get to work, and I'm wondering at what point can I get more medicine."



"Help in a new form. The whole mind, body, and soul."

"Things like stress management and dealing with fear are not really well addressed at all. And, like, that's a concern, because, you know, people get really stressed out, they get very apprehensive, they fear for their future. And they feel like there's nowhere to turn to. And I mean no one really wants to go to CAPS. That's just like...there's a bad stigma for going to CAPS. That's like oh...are you suicidal? You know?"



FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN / LACK OF CONTROL



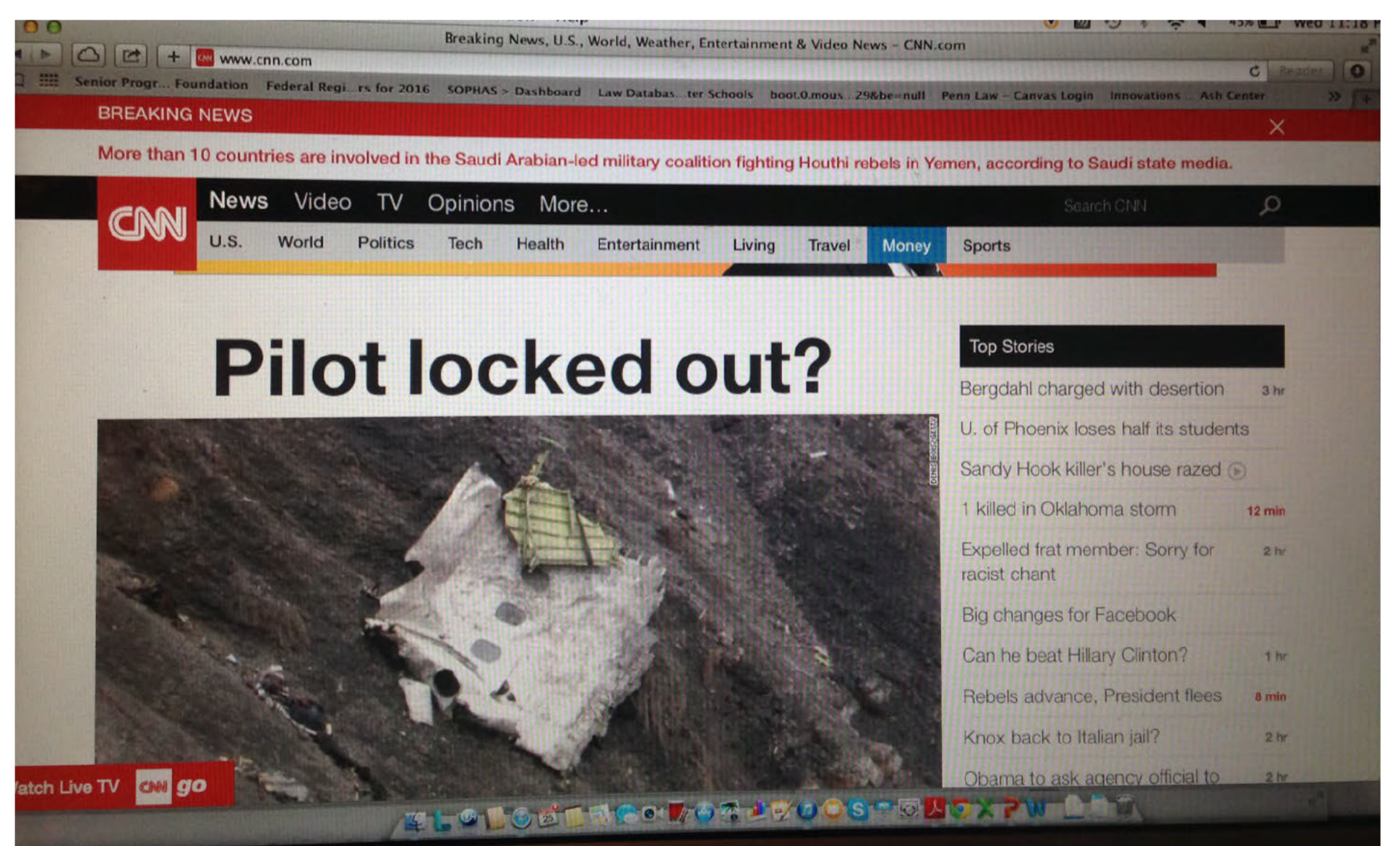
"I'm sure that there are lots of things within the college houses and buildings late at night. You can never really ensure security in a stairwell. So that leaves students and staff more exposed to something happening to them... whether it's just some sort of uncomfortable encounter or some sort of violence."

"It's more of the potential of getting hurt that is scary. It's like, dogs have teeth and claws so I think I fear the potential of him just breaking loose from...the girl was also having a hard time controlling him..."



"Some things are out of your hands. You have to just enjoy life while you can."

"I think that somehow we all have to get in touch with, 'We can't control everything,' and what does that mean... Somehow it's understanding, 'What's a risk I can control, and what's a risk I can't control? And where does my judgment come in on those things?'"

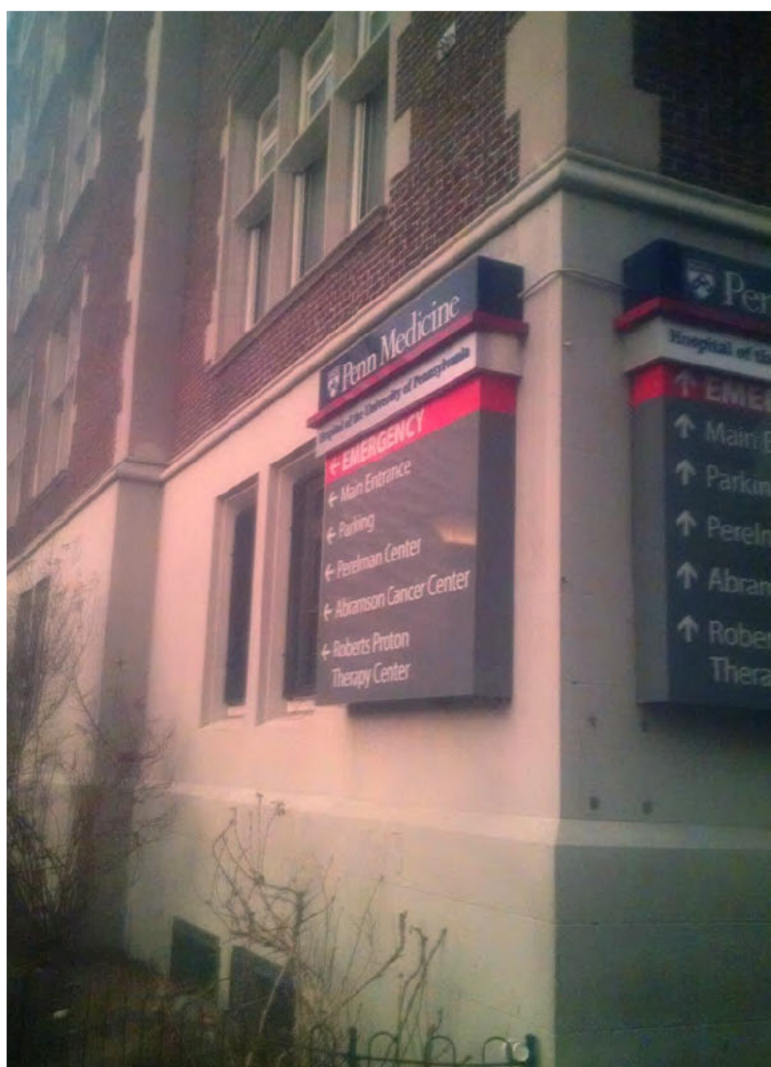


SOURCES OF COMFORT



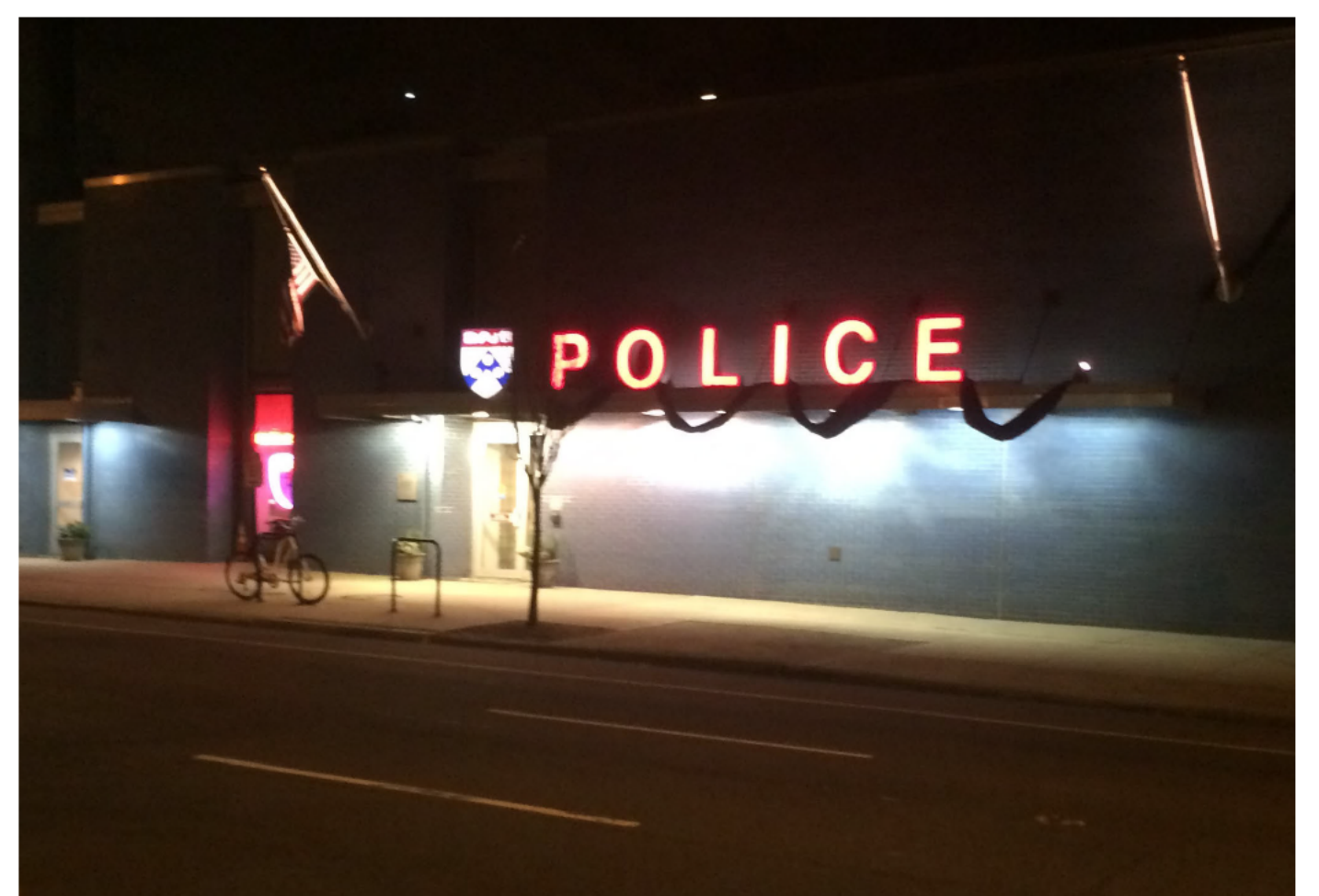
"I also know that when I am with her no one is going to mess with me. I feel very safe around her."

"Every time I see my guitar it just makes me feel...it's more of an emotional safety, but it's something that I feel very calm and very serene and not really so concerned about what's going on outside of me. I feel like listening to music and just like hearing myself play...it's specifically the sounds of the guitar and the twang, the warm quality of the music... It's a magical quality."



"If anything happens, there's at least somewhere to get care really quickly."

"It's good to know that the Penn Police are right there – not like a single officer but the whole Penn Police shabang – is right there and it's just a good reminder. Also, I went to a college that didn't have real police, it was just campus safety and it means the world to me to know that these are real cops that can really do something to help me should I need them."



SPACES AND PLACES



"That's the safest place on campus for me. I've made that place my home away from home. Whenever I have an issue or feel upset, I want to go there. I gravitate towards there. "

"One's home is a building, but it really has so much meaning to it...there's so many memories, like that I have attached to my childhood home right now...even the home that I live in now that my husband and I built, it has so many memories because we raised our kids there...I'm very cautious...I wouldn't want to lose my entire home to a fire."



"I can always go to Longwood Gardens...I feel like a part of nature. It is quiet...so I could think, be reflective."

"That's my home stretch. So seeing this view... lets me know that I'm almost home and it's my neighborhood so I feel safe. This neighborhood makes me feel safe."

