



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Carceral Geographies of the University

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Abstract

This paper brings together Mad Studies and studies in carceral geography to examine university responses to student suicidality, including defensive architecture, use of chemical and physical restraints during hospital transfers, and involuntary leave policies. I argue these responses are part of the carceral turn in many Canadian universities - intent on the control, containment and exclusion of mad and racialized bodyminds (Moran, 2015; 2017; Moran et al., 2018). Together, these new carceral measures are justified through ideologies of risk and safety that, through the application of psy-knowledges, construct the mad body as out of bounds. These efforts shape the affective experiences of students' madness, distress, and suicidality. They reinforce the notion of the mad and suicidal subject as pathological and criminal, leaving little room to consider the historical and socio-cultural conditions shaping students' everyday learning experiences.

Keywords

Higher education, carceral, security, defensive architecture, mandated leave policies, physical restraints

History

Received 7 Jun 2024

Revised 28 Nov 2025

Accepted 11 Jan 2026

The Canadian university has become a carceral zone with more investments and reliance on securitization, technology, security, and police personnel all linked to the management and operations of larger police and military institutions.

– Beverly Bain, *Beyond the Capitalist, Colonial, Carceral and White Supremacist University: Radical Abolitionist Imaginings and Activism*

Content Warning: This article discusses sensitive topics, including student suicides, experiences of distress, and methods of suicide that some readers may find distressing.

The Carceral Geographies of the University

On the morning of April 14, 2024, the Alberta Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) responded to a mental health call at Red Deer Polytechnic (RDP). According to local news reporting (Red Deer Advocate Staff, 2024), an RDP student had driven to the university entrance near the venerated RDP logo monogram statue (Hall, 2024), where RCMP officers “...located a small fire and upon further investigation, a deceased individual was located”¹. Later that day, RDP informed their community of a student death on campus. Since then, several RDP procedures and policies have been marked as “under review” on their website. Relevant policies include: “Death of Polytechnic Community Member” and “Accident-Incident Reporting and Investigation Procedure”.

These kinds of ‘mental health’ incidents are on the rise at universities across Turtle Island, and students who survive them may be increasingly subjected to protocols and practices that may be characterized as carceral – that is, ‘relating to, or of prison’ (Moran et al., 2018, p. 667). Students may be surveilled and restrained, as in other cases in Ontario and BC (King, 2019; Strachan, 2023). They may be subject to mandated leave policies (Myles, 2021) and forced out of the university – removed from their courses, their student residence, and cut off from their social and educational networks.

In this piece, I examine three interrelated examples of this increased carcerality on campus: 1) defensive architecture and design, 2) use of chemical and physical restraints, and 3) involuntary or mandated leave policies. I argue that as university spaces and geographies are becoming more carceral, they construct madness as internalized, pathologized, depoliticized, and ultimately as a criminal and dangerous state of being, threatening both reputational harm and budgets.

Carceral measures such as compliance, surveillance, and discipline provide institutions with access to surveillance and security tools, extending their ability to control, contain, and remove differences (in various forms) from their campuses before experiencing any undue hardship (Aubrecht, 2012; Bain, 2023; Dolmage, 2017; Price, 2011; 2024; Khúc, 2024). Ultimately, sanist discourses underpin the evolution of carceral measures and geographies on university campuses. They are justified through ideologies of risk and safety, underpinned by psy-knowledges that construct the mad body as out of bounds and in need of confinement, containment, or exclusion.

Dizon et al. (2022) argue that carceral practices are best explained by comprehending the relational risk active in the dynamics between educational institutions and students – predominantly racialized students in their assessment – who pose a threat to the institution because, fundamentally, they do not or cannot conform to the institution’s values, interests,

¹ RDP and the Alberta RCMP have refused to disclose details related to this incident, citing the student's and their family's privacy (Hall, 2024).

and “cultural or social order” (p. 1328). I contend that mad students and their many intersecting identities equally run the risk of sparking this dynamic, as they are also constructed as unable to meet the narrow conventions imposed in post-secondary education. New carceral logics, increasingly embedded within an institution’s infrastructure and bureaucracy or its geographies - “...serve as a way to mitigate harm to the institution by removing the student...” (Dizon et al., 2022, p. 1329). Preventing reputational harm is prioritized over supporting mad or otherwise different bodyminded students, students who are already navigating the interlocking systems of oppression like ableism, sanism, racism, and colonialism in higher education. The carceral turn in higher education shapes the affective experiences of students’ madness, distress, and suicidality. It reinforces notions of the mad and suicidal subject as pathological and criminal, leaving little room to consider the historical and socio-cultural conditions shaping students’ everyday learning experiences (Marsh, 2010; White et al., 2015).

Literature Review: The carcerality of the university

In its participation as an active beneficiary in the dispossession of Indigenous lands, eugenic and scientific racism, as well as chattel slavery, the university is an extension of the carceral state (Grande, 2018; Dolmage, 2017; Wilder, 2014). Conceptualizing universities as carceral is not new – although much of the extant literature defines the field as “in its nascent stage” (Johnson & Dizon, 2021, p. 6). Certainly, the expansion of the carceral apparatus on campuses has intensified. Grande (2018) emphasizes universities “...never stood apart from genocide...” (p. 48) and thus cannot be conceptualized as outside the carceral logics and geographies of a settler colonial state. Simultaneously entangled in genocide and “gradations of carcerality” – i.e. fluctuations in an institution’s enactment of carceral logics – the university is a site of both sedimented and evolving carceral conditions. We might refer to it as a “transcarceral continuum” to borrow from Palacios (2020) and her analysis of white settler nations like Canada and the US - including their construction of violent educational and therapeutic projects that “blur[s] the boundary between prison’s “outside” and “inside”” (p.528). The shifting carcerality in higher education invites analysis that contends with this evolution, making room to acknowledge the histories and contemporary effects of the university’s origins while examining the changing geographies that mirror the old and employ new, far more advanced technologies.

Unlike literature on the carceral university, there is considerable research on the school-to-prison pipeline that conceptualizes schools as sites of state-enforced disciplinary power. Scholars have paid significant attention to the interconnectedness of the K-12 sector and the carceral state. Also known as the school-prison nexus (to articulate the entangled, non-linearity of this phenomenon), marginalized students – many of whom are streamed into special education, resource classrooms, or remedial programming – become increasingly criminalized and disciplined through various state-sanctioned policies and practices that have the effect of funnelling them into carceral spaces (Annamma, 2017; Hall, 2020;

Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011; Mallett, 2016; Meiners, 2007; Nance, 2015; Nocella et al., 2018; Noguera, 2003; Turner & Beneke, 2020; Wald & Losen, 2003; Weisburst, 2019).

Although intimately tied to the broader themes explored here, higher education's expanding carceral apparatus requires additional attention from scholars – especially from mad scholars, as sanist and racist discourses are employed to justify increasing securitization and surveillance on campuses. Bain (2023) calls it the “university carceral complex,” which she argues “institutionalizes programs and mechanisms of technology, surveillance, biotechnologies, and policing” (p. 212). Johnson and Dizon (2021) have introduced the concept of the “college-prison nexus” to better explain the connections between prisons and postsecondary institutions. This is particularly relevant as surveillance technologies, law enforcement, and crisis management structures are increasingly prevalent. Additionally, new or evolving policies and practices aimed at controlling primarily racialized students, staff, and faculty are further entrenching “coercive technologies of behaviour” across the sector (Dannells, 1997; Dizon et al., 2022; Randazzo & Cameron, 2012).

As an example, scholars have examined campus digital surveillance technologies (Melgaco, 2015; Mangan, 2020) and negative interactions with campus police (Jenkins et al., 2021; Johnson & Dizon, 2021). In the US, scholars have reviewed Title IX policies – designed to support the reporting and investigation of gender-based violence – that take up carceral logics (Shepp, et al., 2023) as well as considered the risks associated with being an undocumented college student given the current climate on campuses (Buenavista, 2018; Muñoz, 2016).

On the other hand, there is a paucity of Canadian research on the carceral logics in higher education. In my search of the available literature, I have found that most of it falls into three broad areas. The first focuses on the roles and responsibilities of campus security units. This includes literature examining the complications of policing a porous space like the university (Brunschof, 2022); issues around public perception and the legitimacy of campus police (Wilkinson, 2016); and the opaque nature of Canadian campus security forces' roles and responsibilities, especially following *Charter* violations (Cheong, 2023). However, the role campus security services should play appears contradictory even within this group. For instance, Brunschot (2022) argues that, unlike their American counterparts, Canadian campus police roles are limited to responding to emergencies on campus, providing security, and patrolling parking. On the other hand, Cheong (2023), in their substantial examination of 54 Canadian campus security offices, found that among at least 12 universities, special constables have the authority to enforce and lay charges under either all or parts of the Criminal Code and various provincial offence acts. These are two distinct sets of responsibilities that may alter campus culture and affect the relationships between students, faculty, and campus security officers.

The second area of literature focuses predominantly on the surveillance of digital campus spaces, especially following the pandemic, as proctoring services inevitably transformed students' offices, bedrooms, and workspaces into surveilled spaces and their personal technologies into an extension of the university's surveillance infrastructure (Beetham, 2022; Hébert, 2021). I anticipate this area of research will continue to grow as universities integrate artificial intelligence into all areas, including its security arm in the form of "smart campuses" (Dener, 2020).

Sexual violence at universities is the third, and by far, largest area within Canadian literature that interrogates the security mechanisms of academic institutions. The data is unequivocal. Tavcer and Dobkins (2023) conclude, "The prevalence of sexual violence in Canada has not changed in more than 30 years and the reporting of victimisation has only waxed and waned over that same time" (p. xii). Rape culture persists at Canadian universities, and it appears that the expansion of security forces has done little, if anything, to address the unsafe studying, living, and working conditions on campuses. This conclusion should prompt a re-evaluation of the true purpose and effectiveness of these security enhancements in fostering a safe campus environment.

For all these reasons, Canadian scholar-activists Beverly Bain and Min Lee Sook, aligned with similar movements in the US, started Scholars Strike in 2020. Their first demand was:

We must support the demands for defunding the police and redistributing those resources to Black, Indigenous, racialized, queer and trans communities for the creation of sustainable and healthy communities (Scholars Strike Canada, 2022).

The strike mobilized more than 3,000 university workers to pause teaching and administrative labour in solidarity with movements against anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and colonial violence. Teach-ins continue to be organized by the group (as of 2026), pushing back against the university's active role in profiting from ongoing state violence, in Canada and abroad.

Carceral Geographies

Over the past decade, research has increasingly focused on the role of higher education within the expanding school-prison nexus. Foucault's theories on institutional power and carcerality are central to many scholars' conceptual frameworks. His books *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and the *History of Sexuality* (1978) both chart the genealogy of prisons in their compact (within institutions) and diffused states (across broader society). Additionally, Mad Studies engages Foucault's critique of psychiatry and psychiatric spaces – i.e. asylums – for their close resemblance to prison systems, as mad people were confined, punished, and tortured in both similar and unique ways from those housed in prison institutions (Scull,

1991; LeFrançois, et al., 2013). However, Moran et al. (2018) take issue with Foucault's broad definition of carcerality, which includes "all the disciplinary mechanisms that function throughout society" (Foucault 1977, p. 298). Moran et al. (2018) contend that it is Foucault's later works on biopolitics that offer clarifying distinctions on the different carceral mechanisms that influence individuals and institutions beyond the prison. With this positioning in mind, Moran et al. (2018) offer the concept of *carceral geographies* to guide analytical work examining carcerality as it is incorporated into different non-prison spaces.

In defining carceral geographies, Moran (n.d.) argues that it is a "geographical engagement with spaces, practices and experiences of confinement and coercive control" (n.p.). While much of the field's attention has focused on the "carceral turn" in broader cultural and social contexts, scholars also recognize that particular technologies of confinement are increasingly being incorporated into other institutions, including those one might historically associate with care (Ben-Moshe, 2020; Tremain, 2020).

Undoubtedly, universities – or educational spaces more broadly – as Palacios (2020) argues, are transcarceral and engage carceral measures on a fluctuating spectrum – from surveillance cameras to on-campus police brutality – that warrant further examination. However, in recent years, the university may have shifted from being a *transcarceral* space to a *carceral* one – bolstered by racist and sanist discourse masquerading as calls for less risk and more safety.

Moran et al. (2018) help clarify this point by providing a list of three conditions that non-prison spaces must meet to be considered carceral: detriment, intention, and spatiality. First, *detriment* refers to considerations of the lived experience of harm by those who are experiencing it. In the context of universities, this refers to mad, racialized, and otherwise marginalized students, staff, and faculty who experience and are affected by the carceral apparatus on campuses. This could involve students handcuffed when in distress or mandated to leave the institution and their residence after self-harming. Secondly, intention pertains to the agent intending to harm, such as the university and, to a large extent, the state (through ministries and departments of education), who confirm the carceral condition of intention by following through on policies they know cause harm.

Finally, spatiality is the harm as it relates to some bordered space. Moran et al. (2018) argue, "Carceral spatiality, however manifested, seems characterized by a technology of confinement: (intentionally) keeping-in, (detrimentally) containing, those 'within'" (p. 679). Canadian universities are public institutions on private property, and they act in ways that suggest only certain bodyminds are acceptable inside, surveilling, restraining, excluding, or expelling those they deem do not belong. For example, institutions have removed unhoused

people from their properties^{2,3}, intimidated activists (Armiento, 2021), and racially profiled black students (CTV Ottawa, 2019; Larsen, 2019). The universities' supposed porous quality contradicts a traditional definition of confinement. However, the universities' capacity to contain is not only in how they keep in but also in how they accept, monitor, and expel, or keep out. Lewis (2013) articulates a similar sentiment when arguing, "...the [university] layout and design bears some striking resemblance to another influential institution in our nation – take away the classic architecture and the manicured lawns and you are left with a minimum security prison (except, of course, that the purpose of a prison is to keep people in, not out)" (p.135). I contend these capacities are made even further possible through the institution's expanding carceral apparatus. As it implements the carceral conditions outlined above, the university becomes a space governed and reordered by carceral measures intent on the exclusion of non-traditional variants and, equally important, by containing madness and its epistemology outside higher education. This trend follows the institution's close-to-millennium-long history of exclusion of marginalized communities and their knowledges.

Acknowledging this epoch of exclusion is vital to understanding the rationalizations underpinning the increased carcerality on campuses. Some might contend that these new measures are a response to numerous crises unfolding on campuses – gun violence, student protests, massive cuts to funding and a rise in distress and suicidality among all community members. These undoubtedly all play a role. In addition, scholars have asked similar questions in the literature and pointed to the correlation between more racialized bodies on campus and the expanding securitization and surveillance infrastructure.

I argue that the new carceral conditions are thus a response to all of these factors, as well as one other, more recent development in higher education. That is, the now unprecedented number of disabled and mad students, staff, and faculty working, studying and living on campuses. According to some experts, the number of disabled students, the majority of whom are registered with disability services offices for mental health support, account now for 30% of many institutions' entire student population (Dolmage, 2022). Research has shown a significant increase in the utilization of psychological services on university campuses in Canada (Ng & Padjen, 2019), and institutions across Canada are facing challenges in meeting the rising demand for these services (De Somma et al., 2017).

Earlier in the century, disabled students accounted for 5% to 7% of student populations (McCloy & DeClou, 2012). In Ontario alone, the number of disabled students registered

² The Yale Police Department, founded in 1894 with just two officers, was the first university police force in the United States. Their primary responsibility at the time was to prevent unhoused individuals in New Haven from taking refuge in university buildings (Wiser 1914; Powell 1994; Schwartz-Weinstein 2016).

³ In 2024, an unhoused person died in the School of Education building at Syracuse University. The man had previously been charged with trespassing (Hayes, 2024). For many members of the community, it was impossible to ignore the contradiction of a building dedicated to human development and growth also functioning as a site of carceral enforcement—and, ultimately, as the site of a vulnerable person's death.

between 2009-2010 and 2019-2020 increased by more than 132%, while total enrolments only increased by 8.3% (Colleges and Universities, 2021). According to one survey of 15,000 Canadian graduating students, 27% report having a disability (Canadian University Survey Consortium, 2021). This does not account for all the disabled students who do not make it to graduation, which, according to the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC), might be close to 10%. Jay Dolmage (2025) argues that CHRC's figure is quite modest and the failure rate amongst disabled students might be as high as 30% if, as he argues, "we extrapolate from the numbers of students with self-declared disabilities who never seek help." Thus, the number of disabled students currently attending universities may be much higher than reported figures indicate.

It should come as no surprise that with more disabled and mad students at universities, institutions have incorporated measures of control and containment not too dissimilar from the prisons and asylums that have historically housed and currently house mad folks. According to Reynolds' (2021) reading of Michael Rembis' (2017) work, the history of madness is one where "the move from asylum to jail to prison...is the direct result of increasing medicalization and biologization of madness..." (p. 627). The psychiatrization of madness functions similarly in higher education through the expanding psy-regime as "punitive (carceral) solutions". Rembis (2017) writes that it "show[s] no signs of abating largely because politicians on both the left and right continue to support neoliberal fiscal policies that slash domestic spending on health, *education*, and welfare, while leaving fiscal support for law enforcement nearly untouched (emphasis added, Reynolds, 2021, p. 627). In the last two decades, we have witnessed the application of psy-knowledges in nearly every instance of social, cultural, economic, and interpersonal distress among students – some of which I will explore later in the paper. This is the medicalization and biologization Rembis (2017) refers to. It follows that with the increasing pathologization of difference comes new measures of social control, many of which reflect the logics and geographies that govern carceral spaces – the university, now, increasingly becoming another one on this ever-growing list. It is from this positioning that I will now examine three interrelated examples of the increased carcerality on campuses: 1) defensive architecture and design, 2) use of chemical and physical restraints, and 3) involuntary or mandated leave policies to illustrate the shifting geographies on campuses towards the carceral.

Surveillance and Securitization

Undoubtedly, the 2024 spring and summer encampments in support of Palestine on campuses across Turtle Island and elsewhere brought into sharp focus the increasing surveillance and securitization of university campuses writ large. This moment in student protest has also uncovered a long history of deepening ties and investments between universities and the arms industry – a strong indicator of the shift towards militarizing university campuses (Canary, 2024). In response to the pro-Palestinian encampments, universities have permitted militarized police forces (StudentNation, 2024) onto their

campuses, escalating tensions to violent levels reminiscent of the 1970s anti-war protests that led to the murder of four students at Kent State University (Lexier, 2024). In the US, police and campus security forces have arrested hundreds of students, released students' photos, failed to protect encampment protesters from harassment or stalking, delayed medical intervention, and visited students' homes to collect technology and DNA (StudentNation, 2024). To prevent encampments, some institutions pre-emptively installed 6-foot-tall metal fencing around campus quads (CBC News, 2024; Mendes, 2024). These acts of containment had the affective quality and resemblance of prisons. The fencing also benefited police who used kettling – a police tactic for controlling large crowds – and other techniques of confinement in attempts to deter, harass, and intimidate student activists and allies. Efforts to dismantle encampments were effective in part because universities had already spent years building the physical, technological, and tactical infrastructure necessary to surveil and contain their own members.

In fact, over the past two decades, many institutions have significantly expanded their securitization and surveillance infrastructure. In the US, this growing infrastructure can include “body-worn cameras, drones, automated license plate readers, social media monitoring, biometric identification, gunshot detection, and video analytics” (Maass, 2021). While the scale of the security apparatus may be smaller in Canada, it certainly is expanding. For example, according to a Canadian security firm, universities are advised to install surveillance equipment in the following locations on campuses: parking lots; dormitory entrances; remote areas of campus; athletic fields and facilities; libraries and study halls; campus stores and cafeterias; administrative buildings; event venues; campus entrances and exits; laboratories; and public transport spots (Solink). Unmonitored spaces seem to be limited to bathrooms, personal offices, private dorms, and classrooms. However, even large lecture halls and vending machines may be monitored (Duhatschek, 2024).

In the US, the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the Reynolds School of Journalism at the University of Nevada, Reno, collected and collated data on police surveillance technologies as part of the ‘Atlas Surveillance’ project. They mapped the increased security spending at US universities nationwide. They “...documented more than 250 technology purchases, ranging from body-worn cameras to face recognition, adopted by more than 200 universities in 37 states” (Maass, 2021). They conclude, “As big as these numbers are, they are only a sliver of what is happening on college campuses around the world” (Maass, 2021).

No comparable data exist for Canadian institutions. One notable difference between Canadian and American universities is the diversity of campus security services in Canadian institutions, which may include private in-house units, outsourced units, special constable units, or combinations thereof, further complicating direct comparisons (Cheong, 2023). For instance, 75% of public and private colleges in the U.S. employed armed officers, 90% had the authority to make arrests in areas surrounding the campus, and 70% had formal

agreements with local law enforcement agencies outlining their off-campus responsibilities (AAUP, 2021). Thus, US campus police's duties and responsibilities far exceed those of their Canadian counterparts, who are unarmed and restricted to operating on campuses.

Nevertheless, across both countries, institutions share the same fundamental security and surveillance principles and strategies, grounded in safety and risk, which precipitate carceral conditions on campus. More importantly, the justification for their expansion is the criminalization of madness – the construction of madness as an unallowable experience, a state of being that, through discourses of risk and potential harm, is now subject to increased monitoring. It is the making of mad people, individuals with bodymind differences or psychiatric differences, into criminal and punishable states of being. Some of the consequences of this transformation of madness on campuses include changes to the architecture, which I detail below.

Defensive Architecture

Canadian campuses are undergoing physical transformations that extend beyond the installation of cameras and other security and surveillance technologies to include defensive architectural features designed to prevent student suicides. Universities have installed physical barriers (Currie, 2023), including capture nets, temporary gates, blockade fencing, and new permanent installations of iron bars. It is important to note that suicide prevention literature refers to physical barriers as “means restrictions,” which can include restricting access to weapons, poisons or specific infrastructure. In most cases, universities are installing means restriction measures after a student suicide has already taken place. According to one US study, universities that fail to install these prison-like barriers may face liability (Bradley, 2012).

Defensive architecture has appeared across campuses in both Canada and the US. In the US, one university installed transparent Lexan plastic barriers following several students using the library infrastructure to complete suicide. After similar events in 2010 at another university, metal chain-link fences were erected along the railings, and eventually, permanent capture nets were installed (Bradley, 2011; CBS News, 2012). In Canada, more recent student suicides (Paddon, 2020; Wong, 2023) have promoted similar architectural changes. Universities have installed temporary capture nets and permanent steel bars.

Currie argues these means restrictions are “...a natural successor to hostile architecture” (Currie, 2023, p. 33). These measures are used as forms of disciplinary control in public spaces (Schindler 2020; Chellew 2022). Hostile architecture in the built environment expresses values and beliefs steeped in “...white supremacist capitalist ableist cis/heteropatriarchal assumptions about living, working, and being” (Martina 2017, n.p.). Although research around means restriction does show that they eliminate or reduce suicides—especially for sites with a recorded history of use (Yip et al., 2012; Berman, et al., 2022), they also come at a cost.

Ultimately, these changes confirm the carceral turn scholars describe in their examinations of public institutions and spaces. At the university, this turn is spearheaded by campus security services' investment in new security and surveillance technologies and by the installation of defensive architecture that transforms campuses into increasingly hostile spaces for those with bodymind differences. As a result, the institution benefits more from increased surveillance and barriers than its students, faculty, and staff. Indeed, proper preventive measures would involve recognizing the various factors that contribute to students' experiences of suicidality, including the harms of sanist policies and practices (in the form of academic and financial stress caused by outdated teaching methods, rising tuition fees, housing and living costs, and other interrelated conditions).

Chemical and Physical Restraints

Beyond hostile architecture, universities routinely respond to student distress through practices of physical restraint, medical sedation, and involuntary transfer to hospitals or psychiatric facilities. Students are frequently restrained either medically, with sedative drugs, or physically, using restraints like handcuffs, zip ties, or flex-cuffs with hands positioned in front or behind the body⁴ (Desloges, 2021). They are then escorted to the hospital by police, university health clinicians, or non-clinic staff, either on foot, by vehicle, or by ambulance for psychiatric evaluation (Chittle et al., 2022).

These interventions are not exceptional. With an increase in the number of students seeking mental health support on campus, the number of mental health transfers, according to a recent study, has increased by 30-50% since 2014 (Desloges, 2021; Neilson, Chittle and Zaheer, 2019). According to a 2021 report reviewing the role of campus police at one Canadian university, the number of Form 1s (that is, a document that allows for the involuntary admission of an individual to a psychiatric facility) rose by 36% in just three years (75 in 2017; 94 in 2018; 102 in 2019) (Desloges, 2021). A separate study found that police were commonly involved in transfers from 7 of 11 university clinics, and in nearly all or all transfers from 5 of the 11 clinics studied. The same study found that handcuffs were "always or almost always used during transfers" from 2 of the 11 clinics (Chittle et al., 2022, p. E557).

Policies governing police involvement and physical restraint vary across institutions, but many universities formally authorize or normalize these practices. In 2009, an Ontario university implemented a policy requiring the use of physical restraints for any student who had received a Form 1 referral. The policy was implemented after only *one* student attempted to escape during a transfer (Neilson et al., 2019). In 2017 alone, a university transferred 15 students to the hospital and placed 14 on a Form 1, and therefore, under

⁴ Alice Wong (2020) describes the harmful effects of handcuffing on d/Deaf people, noting that it can effectively silence individuals by preventing them from signing when their hands are restrained.

institutional policy, received police escorts in handcuffs following disclosures of mental distress or visible distress behaviours (Neilson et al., 2019).

Far from neutral safety procedures, these transfers often produce profound experiences of criminalization and physical harm. Students who undergo these transfers have reported lasting trauma from being handcuffed in public, led through busy campus areas, and placed into a police car (Schwalb, 2021; Treleaven, 2022) before being taken to a hospital for psychiatric assessment. One student reported they felt “criminalized” by the experience.

The involvement of police in transfers or even wellness checks can also result in significant violence. At a university in BC, a RCMP officer responding to a request for a wellness check found a semiconscious student in their dorm. Security camera footage showed the officer handcuffing, dragging, and stepping on the student (Charlebois, 2023; Strachan, 2023). The student sustained extensive injuries, including “... bruises to the face, broken blood vessels to the left eye, swollen right eye and bruising to the right temple” (Matassa-Fung, 2020). The officer involved in this incident received a two-year probationary sentence for these actions (Charlebois, 2023).

In these instances, expressions of distress are not treated as care needs but as risks requiring containment and removal. Students experiencing emotional or psychiatric crisis are met not only with physical restraint, but also with the possibility of involuntary confinement within psychiatric facilities. Universities essentially criminalize forms of distress deemed dangerous to the individual and the institution, mobilizing police (not only campus security), physical restraints, and psychiatric detention as technologies of containment. Carcerality reorders the institution such that police presence is framed as a necessary condition of safety, and a mechanism for managing, containing, and removing madness through violent apparatuses.

Although studies on campus restraints and crisis intervention rarely report demographic information, broader evidence demonstrates that racialized and Indigenous people are disproportionately surveilled, restrained, and harmed in police interactions, both on and off campuses (Mental Health Crisis Response on Campus). This is an area that requires more study. Notably, both students who filed Human Rights Complaints in the cases discussed here are racialized (Buckley & Fiaoni, 2021; Charlebois, 2023).

Involuntary or Mandated Leaves of Absence

Involuntary or mandated leave of absence policies are the clearest example of the carceral turn in universities. Involuntary or mandated leave policies forcibly remove students from the institution - keeping them out in ways that contain the madness and the mad body outside the institution. The forcible removal of mad bodies from higher education has a long history. For example, Aubrecht (2016) tells us that in addition to being the temporary site of

Parliament, King's College at the University of Toronto (now demolished) was also once part of the Branch Lunatic Asylum, which housed mad female patients. Also known as the "Temporary Asylum for Female Lunatics," as well as the "University Asylum," the women housed here were eventually removed, and the building was returned to the university. Aubrecht (2016), who uncovered this history, contends that the forced removal of bodies and the repossession of land by the university is a figurative demonstration of which bodies and minds are allowed onto campuses. Aubrecht (2016) writes,

Through their removal the natural order could be restored. Only in moving beyond its troubled past, and away from its roots, could the University start over. By treating this situation and experience as a referent of how *not to* proceed, the University could recover the possibility of a future free of madness (and mad women) (p. 195, emphasis in original).

The University of Toronto, like so many institutions, was ultimately reconstructed as a place devoid of insanity and madness—a place, Price (2011) suggests, that upholds the notion that institutions of higher education are a "bastion of reason" (p. 8). Through this process of disavowal, the University pronounced who is welcome and who is not.

Approximately 150 years later, the same act of removal is being implemented across institutions of higher learning through new policies known as mandated or involuntary leaves. One Ontario university's mandated leave policy received notable public attention following its release in 2018. The policy in question was initially designated to address mental health issues among students in professional programs, as suggested in the Ombudsperson's Annual Report (Office of the Ombudsperson, 2015/16). Instead, the university constructed the University-Mandated Leave of Absence Policy (UMLAP), which now takes effect when a student 1) "pose[s] a risk of harm to themselves, others, causing significant disruption to the educational process or the University community in general; and 2) is unable to engage in activities required to pursue an education" (Office of the Governing Council, 2018, p. 3). The policy covers *any student* whom the university and its delegates in chairs, department heads, supervisors, teaching assistants, and even fellow students deem is not or cannot meet the demands of the academic learning environment, regardless of diagnosis, disclosure of mental health concerns, or signs of distress. This new level of carceral surveillance turns every institutional representative into a potential subject or informer. We may conclude from this that Bentham's panopticon (Foucault, 1977) no longer relies solely on the watchtower, the guard, or even the round structure of the prison to control its subject but is now effective in its diffused state. One is being observed, and the potential repercussions are everywhere.

The new policy received unprecedented opposition from community and legal organizations. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (Mandhane, 2018) expressed concern, requested the university delay implementing the policy, and cited the university's

failure to consider its duty to accommodate (the legal test used to determine if the conditions to accommodate up until undue hardship have been met) as the primary reason further revisions were necessary. The Commission's response points to an underlying and erroneous assumption held by the university: the policy is constructed with the assumption that current mental health supports on campus meets students' needs. The Commission stipulated that the policy "raises human rights concerns" and "appears to allow the University to immediately put the student on leave and withdraw essential services (housing, health, and counselling services) at a time when the student is in crisis and most in need of support." The university rewrote certain sections in response to the Commission's concerns (although much remains the same), and the policy was eventually passed on June 27th, 2017. On March 1, 2023, a new version of the policy, renamed "Supportive Leaves Policy," was released (Office of the Governing Council, 2023). It matches the spirit of the first iteration in all but the name.

These policies can be found across Canada, the US, and the UK (where they are called fitness-to-study policies). Green et al. (2022), in one of the first studies in Canada on mandated leaves, examined 94 mental health policies from English-speaking Canadian universities. Their search concluded that 11 publicly funded universities across five Canadian provinces incorporated involuntary or mandated leave policies as part of their mental health response. Other universities may bury pseudo-mandated leave policies in their residence rules, using them to evict students (at a minimum). Similarly, one of my own students mentioned after class that he had been evicted from his residence but was allowed to return a week later, offering anecdotal evidence of this experience. This leaves students to fend for themselves during a crisis, often in a new or unfamiliar city, where they may not have family or extended networks to support them. Returning home, especially for such short durations, might be cost-prohibitive for students, especially for interprovincial or international students. This example underscores the changing geographies of higher education, such that even without a formally mandated leave policy, the authority granted by the psy-regime enables institutions or their representatives to engage in harmful practices under the guise of benevolence, while simultaneously reducing risk and liability. The climate in institutions is now one where they can exert carceral forces with little oversight or accountability.

Moreover, the various "return-to-study" plans or "return to campus" procedures are also concerning. These returns involve required documentation and reports on the student's mental health status, to be completed by the student and others, to support the case for their return. Psychiatric interventions or assessments are not mandated by the institution because such requirements are prohibited. However, the language used in the return to campus protocols stresses the importance of medical or behavioural assessments as part of the student's return; "Such expert external assistance may include, for example, seeking the student's consent to undergo a risk assessment such as a psychiatric risk assessment, or medical or behavioural assessments, at the University's expense and with the Student's

consent to disclosure of the information obtained” (Office of the Governing Council, 2023, p. 9). This approach to a student’s return to school is coercive and oppressive and assumes that psychiatric intervention is humane. Coercing students into medical and psychiatric treatment is unacceptable by all standards, but it follows trends in carceral spaces, including new rules in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA) that mandate a mental health assessment be completed upon admission to a correctional facility (Cameron, et al., 2021). Moreover, what constitutes treatment and who decides this threshold is unclear in the policies. Such requests for risk assessments or medical intervention ignore the violence of psychiatrization that can include involuntary stays and forced psychopharmacological interventions. Entrenched within these policies is an underlying assumption that drugs and other forms of therapy will be an expectation for students who plan to return.

Finally, these policies are enforced without any oversight. Rarely are student unions, student groups, or legal representation for students part of the case management team. Appeals may go through the Provost’s office without any external body or third-party independent reviewer of the university’s actions related to the student’s physical removal and potential expulsion.

At one institution, no policy was needed to temporarily mandate a student in distress to leave. In 2016, a student was evicted from their residence following their second suicide attempt. The letter they received from their university, which they selected to publish with the CBC, stated, “The type of example your actions support have no place in an academic learning environment” (Fournier, 2019). Concluding that individuals in distress or who experience suicidality not only do not belong but are fundamentally incongruous with the imagined tenets of an educational environment perpetuates affective violence against mad folks whose knowledge and expertise are not only peripheral in this case but are contained outside the confines of the university space. They - and their knowledge, including ways of being - are constituted as risky and dangerous to the order and standards of educational environments. It follows that the most efficient removal techniques are those already present in spaces designed to contain, confine, and control. The carceral landscape in higher education thus functions the way it was designed and intentionally and detrimentally keeps in and out particular bodyminds to ensure the sanist status quo.

Ultimately, the decision to evict the student was overturned just two weeks later by the same administrator who had declared this student’s actions as “having no place...” in higher education (Fournier, 2019). The carceral conditions and violations enacted by the university create a border between what and who fit within university geographies and what and who must be kept out. In the end, the student told the reporter, “I just felt like I needed a safe place to stay where I could try to work this out in my head, where I can feel comfortable. They took that away from me” (Fournier, 2019).

The dimensions of the involuntary and mandated leave policies demonstrate that confinement takes different forms in higher education. The agent of harm is invested in keeping out what is considered incongruous with the qualities it associates with an academic learning environment, more so than keeping in any particular subject. It is not confinement in the traditional sense, but a newly constructed border wall that prevents the subject from entering, even though their home, social and cultural life, future goals and dreams lie just beyond this figurative wall. The experience of eviction can be likened to a state of being betwixt and in-between – caught. Individuals must grapple with this transitional period in this liminal space – no longer a student but still possessing all the characteristics and desires associated with being one. Liminality, in many respects, can be its own form of confinement.

Conclusion

Examining mental health protocols and practices in universities reveals that the geographies of these institutions are changing and taking on qualities that enact carceral logics. Rather than focusing on supporting students in distress, examining sources or stress in the university experience itself, or developing informed suicide prevention practices, these measures and protocols are designed to control, contain and remove individuals who deviate from institutional norms, thereby protecting the university's reputation and minimizing legal liability. This approach is particularly evident in the treatment of racialized and mad students, who are often seen as threats to the status quo.

By integrating insights from Mad Studies and carceral geography, this article highlights how university responses to madness, distress, and suicidality create new carceral conditions in higher education. The rise of defensive architecture, the use of chemical and physical restraints during hospital transfers, and the implementation of involuntary leave policies contribute to a hostile environment for mad and otherwise marginalized community members. These measures, justified through risk and liability ideologies, are underpinned by psy-knowledges that construct the mad body as out of bounds, reinforcing the notion of mad and suicidal individuals as pathological and criminal.

In sum, the adoption of carceral logics that reorder university geographies underscores a prioritization of institutional reputation over genuine student support. This approach, while protecting the institution, fails to address the real needs of students in distress, particularly those who are racialized or mad, thereby perpetuating harmful stereotypes and neglecting the socio-cultural conditions that contribute to experiences of mental anguish.

Integrity statement: I declare that I have sought to adhere to ethical standards throughout the research referred to here, including submitting original work, accurately reporting data, and disclosing any conflicts of interest.

Conflict of Interest statement: To the best of my knowledge, this article does not raise any conflicts of interest.

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