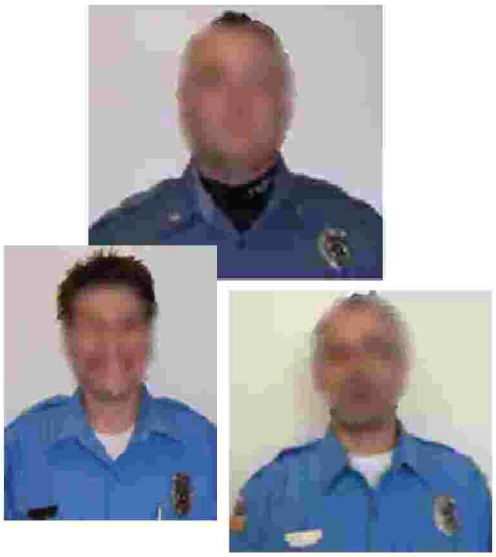
# COUNTY Outlook

by *Lancaster Post* Staff

## Phony Police, Phony Plates

**They wear a uniform** and even have an official looking metal badge. The problem? Three people listed as Franklin and Marshall's Public Safety Officers are not eligible under Pennsylvania law.

"We are very concerned," said Nancy Collins, Franklin and Marshall's Vice-President of Communications, "His boss has been notified." Ms. Collins was speaking about someone we will call "OFFICER #1," who has been working as a Public Safety Officer since November of 2007, even though he has never taken the legally required oath of office to hold the position.



You would think that these are real police. They're not.

So, just how does a person get appointed to be an F&M public safety officer? The college petitions the Lancaster County Court of Common Pleas to appoint a particular officer. Next, but before the officer is authorized to wear the badge, he must first raise his right hand and take an oath to uphold the Constitutions of both Pennsylvania and the United States. "OFFICER #1" has never taken the required oath of office, nor filed the corresponding legal paperwork needed to operate as a Public Safety Officer.

On the F&M Public Safety website, which has been removed in the past four weeks, the college also lists "OFFICER #2" and "OFFICER #3" under the heading of a Public Safety Officer. The man and the woman are pictured in uniform with a metallic badge. A record check at Lancaster County Courthouse shows that neither OFFICER #2 OR #3 not only didn't take the oath of office. but neither were approved by any judge.

Lancaster County District Attorney, Craig Stedman, said about the phony police:

"There do not appear to be any penalties included in the statute, however, one would have comply with the act in order to lawfully exercise authority under it. Therefore, failure to comply with the act is likely to lead to dismissal of any charges brought by someone who was not in compliance.

"A cursory review in the area appears to indicate that a university is not prohibited from hiring public safety officers who are not compliant with the act as long as they do not hold themselves out as and/or are not exercising police powers.

"As a result of your email, we will contact F&M regarding this subject."

When Collins was first contacted about OFFICER #1 not taking the oath of office, she insisted that he was indeed a properly authorized policeman and that she was "looking at the paperwork now." Collins was shown that OFFICER #1 was appointed by a judge, but that he had never taken the oath of office (which includes upholding the Pennsylvania and United States Constitutions) required by the law.

Now what? Collins responded a little over 24 hours later that, "The duties to which he is assigned do not require him to be a sworn police officer." Then why are these "phony" public safety employees dressed in the same uniform and wearing a badge like the "real" police?

What about those government blue and white license plates that F&M's Public Safety vehicles sport? They say "OFFICIAL USE" on the top and "PENNSYLVANIA" on the bottom. Every PennDOT truck, Pennsylvania State Police and every stated owned vehicle has the same kind of plate. So how did F&M get these plates? Collins said, "I don't know anything about them," and refused to answer any other questions.

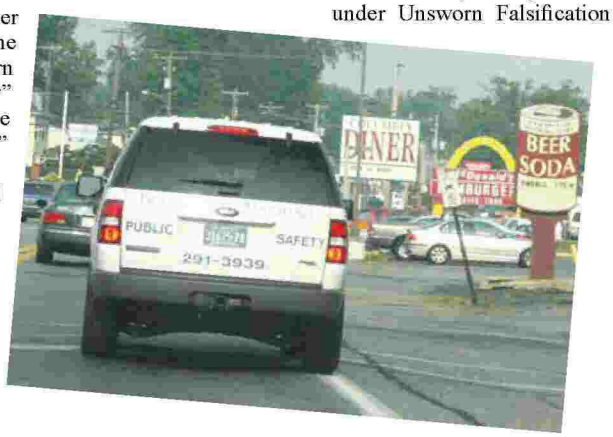
So is F&M allowed to have government plates on their cars? After all, it makes them look official and they also avoid paying registration fees on the vehicle. A PennDOT media flack, in response to our inquiries about eligibility said, "Official Use Only plates are for use by state agencies and state-related institutions of higher learning. At this time, we are not aware of anything that would qualify Franklin and Marshall College for Official Use Only plates."




F&M's private police force makes illegal use of plates intended for government vehicles.

PennDOT also said that they are not "…aware they have obtained them. In order for us to investigate this issue further, can you please provide us with a license plate number of one of the vehicles." The *Post* provided three of four "OFFICIAL USE" plate numbers that they observed.

So just how did F&M get official government plates when they clearly do not qualify for them? The PennDOT form requires a signature under that statement that the information is subject to penalties under Unsworn Falsification




F&M police car, spotted miles away from campus.

law which include up to a $2,500 fine and a year in jail. We also discovered an F&M internet video posted last August which shows a "common" license plate on their public safety car so the "OFFICIAL USE" plates must be a relatively recent phenomenon. So who filed the form for these illegal plates?

The *Post* will be following up on this story...