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SPEAKERS

Christopher Conover, Hannah Cree, Nicole Cox, Adrian Skabelund, Sophia Ramirez



Christopher Conover 00:03

Welcome to The Buzz. I'm Christopher Conover. This week, protests on Arizona's college campuses. It's quiet on the western edge of the University of Arizona campus as we record this late Thursday afternoon. This area of campus known as the Olive Grove was not that quiet 48 hours ago.



00:27

[Protestor] Tonight. We'll leave a mark. There will be graves that you can't see with your eyes but you can see with your souls. Whenever we return to the olive trees on campus in the future we will notice and the will know.



Christopher Conover 00:51

that confrontation between protesters and law enforcement was the culmination of two days of on again off again protests. Joining us now is Hannah Cree AZPM's reporter who had a very late Tuesday night actually, it was close to dawn Wednesday when you wrapped up covering these protests. Hannah, welcome.



Hannah Cree 01:10

Thank you for having me.



Christopher Conover 01:11

Or maybe I should say, welcome back, because this is where the protests were happening. So what happened before those protests because as we said, it was the culmination of two days of on again, off again, protests on the UA campus. nann

H Hannah Cree 01:28

correct. So in Cameron's did start 10am On Monday, directly behind Old Main at the University of Arizona, and they stayed all day. But the feel on Tuesday was very different compared to Monday.

C Christopher Conover 01:41

What changed to make the field be different?

i 01:45

Well, on Monday, things were pretty much over before the 10:30 curfew that administration had given them. The Group announced at 9:30, they had held an internal vote, and not enough people voted in favor of staying and facing arrest that night. They cited the fact that a lot of participants on Monday were very young students, 18 or 19. And the lead organizer said it was detrimental to the cause if a bunch of people at their very first demonstration like this get arrested, it would actually prevent them from engaging in the future events like this.

C Christopher Conover 02:14

So when the protesters got to this area, the olive grove, on Tuesday, as you said it felt different than it had on Monday over by Old Main on the UA Mall. What made it feel different that next day?

i 02:29

Well, at the beginning, they had chain link fence that UAPD alleged the protesters had stolen from a nearby construction site. Their encampment was a little bit more sturdy, I would say. And per their decision on Monday that made it seem like they had weeded out the people that were not willing to be arrested for this cause.

i 02:57

[protestor chants]

H Hannah Cree 02:57

And it was clear by about 11pm on Tuesday that those in the encampment were not going to leave. And when officers first tried to enter the encampment around 11:00, they removed a couple of the two by fours and plastic folding tables. But then they backed off after just a few

minutes. And I think this really energized those that were inside.

C Christopher Conover 03:17

Now we should back up a little bit. University officials, police officers had been giving warnings over loudspeakers, bull horns that if the encampment wasn't vacated and taken down by 10:30, that it was a violation of the law and people would be arrested. And in between all of that as the evening wore on coming up to that 10:30 deadline, UA officials met with representatives of the group protesting what did they talk about?

H Hannah Cree 03:50

Well, a lot of those conversations before 11 were closed. So I can't really tell you what was hitting those. However, once we got to about 30 minutes past that 10:30 Curfew, administration approached the encampment one last time and told her protester like, listen, the cops are really fired up, and they're ready to go. And are you sure that you really want to go through with this? And at that point, I understand the administration had made it clear that we're not ready to listen to your demands tonight. But we will listen tomorrow. And that did not make the protesters happy. And they kind of doubled down after that, because leaders began announcing via loudspeaker and megaphone after that, that the arrests tonight will leave a mark.

 04:30

[Police] I hereby declare this to be unlawful assembly in the name of the state of Arizona to disperse immediately. Those who remain will be arrested.

H Hannah Cree 04:41

Making it pretty clear that they were preparing themselves. And we saw lawyers with the National Lawyers Guild also enter the encampment around this time and instructed those inside on what to do, what to say what not to say when they get arrested. And I think it's also important to note that the decision to break campus policies and laws like this is entirely intentional. As we've seen across the country, students are actively unknowingly disobeying university policies for the Palestinian cause. And they see arrests and efforts to disband as obstacles that really only make them stronger.

C Christopher Conover 05:16

Now before the police went in, and we should point out that they went in at two in the morning, and you were still here, thus you work till close to dawn on Wednesday. We saw at times, they would get a little bit closer to the encampment, and they would get trash and water bottles thrown at them. You had video of some of that?

H Hannah Cree 05:40

Yeah, correct. Protesters were chanting pretty inflammatory words towards the police, especially in the instance where police approached the encampment for the first time and tried to take away the initial barrier. And there are definitely instances where the protesters reactions to the police seem to bother them.

 06:01

[crowd noise]

H Hannah Cree 06:01

One officer in particular had to be dragged back from the encampment by one of his colleagues after being hit with a few water bottles that really did seem to aggravate him.

C Christopher Conover 06:10

By the time police stormed the encampment or decided to take the encampment down. A crowd had grown. If people aren't familiar with this exact area. They call it the olive grove for a reason. Lots of trees and there's a wall that borders Park Avenue. And they'd closed off that area of Park Avenue. And there were well, you can give us the estimate. I wasn't here you were but there were a lot of people who had gathered out here. It seemed like there were protesters, counter protesters, maybe even spectators, who was out here?

H Hannah Cree 06:11

Yeah, honestly, it's very hard to say I have to say that it must have been more than 1000. I can tell you the pro Israel counter protesters were very vocal and how much they disagreed with the demonstration. They were egging the cops on in certain circumstances, to destroy the encampment.


 07:10

[crowd chanting] USA

H Hannah Cree 07:11

But again, it was late on a Tuesday night on the last week of school here at the U of A. People were drunk. Much of the surrounding crowd that showed up past midnight were college students that wanted a show, frankly, but also it really changed the energy having that group of people surrounding the encampment because both sides became aware that they now had an audience. And I'm sure it must have energized the people within the encampment. Almost


everyone in the crowd was taking photos, videos and live streaming even the hundreds of police surrounding this demonstration and it was a big deal. You also have the university pushing out campus wide safety alerts to everyone's phone. So everyone was definitely aware.

 Christopher Conover 07:49


You mentioned those UA alerts that went out via email and text message to anybody who gets those most of the campus community. I was getting them as I was in communication with you. And they warned of police activity, told people to stay away. And as they got close to 2 AM, they started warning about the use of chemical irritants and roads close.

 08:27


[Police loudspeaker]

 Christopher Conover 08:28

Chemical irritants being potentially tear gas or or pepper spray or things like that. So they were definitely ramping things up and telling people to stay away even as the crowd grew.

 Hannah Cree 08:40

Yeah, absolutely. As soon as we hit 2am, university administration pretty much had had enough. And the UA President Robert Robbins told police to move in with no further warning. And when that message came out, the energy immediately shifted. It's It's hard to describe what that wave of energy was like of anticipation, anxiety. It's pretty clear that those within the encampment left their tents, as soon as that announcement was made and joined the Palestinian protesters that had instead gathered on Park Avenue, because they thought that they would not face legal consequences there. They linked arms and they formed a front line in front of the police advancement. And then really soon afterwards, rows of police advanced in riot formation. And there's really no better word to describe it other than a clash. I mean, these two masses of people met in the middle and there were physical altercations. At least two protesters were taken to the ground that I saw. Pepper balls and rubber bullets were both used. And I talked to one protester who had been hit in the head with a rubber bullet and there was a pretty significant lump on his head. And this continued police eventually pushed them back a block towards Speedway Boulevard and then when the dust cleared about half an hour later, we learned that four people were arrested in total, including to students and charged with criminal trespassing.

 Christopher Conover 10:04

So was that the end, at least on the University of Arizona to all the protests? Two encampments, and that's it.

H

Hannah Cree 10:14

No more encampments yet, but we knew of at least one more protest. It was a small protest around lunchtime on Wednesday, in front of the U of A administration building. It lasted about two hours. And I am hearing from organizers here in Tucson that they're not done. But as of right now, I'm not aware of any formal plans.

C

Christopher Conover 10:35

All right, Hannah. Thanks for all your reporting. Here's to hoping you can get some sleep finally, this week. That's AZPM's Hannah Cree who reported on Tuesday night into Wednesday mornings protests here on the University of Arizona campus. You're listening to The Buzz after the break. We speak with reporters who cover protest at the state's other universities stay with us. Welcome back to The Buzz. I'm Christopher Conover we're looking at this week's protests on state university campuses. The largest gathering on a campus was at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. Estimates from the Arizona Daily Sun put crowds at NAU pushing 2000 Adrian Skabelund and was the Sun's reporter on the ground that night, I started our conversation by asking him to set the scene

A

Adrian Skabelund 11:58

On Monday night. And they use chapter four, you know, Students for Justice in Palestine, held a large meeting deciding to move forward with an encampment. And so where they set up on Tuesday morning was on a piece of lawn on the northern portion of campus, kind of between the University Union and the university bookstore. So definitely in a very high visibility, high traffic area. But they were just kind of on the lawn. They were not, you know, blocking any of the pathways or anything like that.

C

Christopher Conover 12:36

So everything. It sounds like very similar to what happened the first night here at the University of Arizona, as you said weren't blocking streets or pathways or everything. But everything changed at 10 o'clock Tuesday night. What happened then?



12:52

You know, throughout that day, there were I think about maybe 15 to 18 tents that had been set up and shade structures. They had set up kind of a very informal barrier around the encampment. I was not able to be there the entire day. But there were some very limited counter protesters. You know, some of the protesters had told me that they were approached by NAU administration several times throughout the day, just as it was starting to get dark, NAU administration and NAU PD set up to large floodlights to kind of illuminate the entire lawn. And then by about 830 and NAU PD themselves had be allowed speaker given first warning as to you know, 90 minutes out, please disperse. That was met with just you know, chants that I think we're hearing that a lot of the protests. Throughout the day there had been just, you know, maybe anywhere from, you know, five to eight, NAU PD officers just kind of milling

around. Within that next 45 minutes, the police presence increased drastically. The folks who showed up were Flagstaff Police Department. And then in addition to that Coconino County Sheriff's and Arizona Department of Public Safety, DPS had also arrived.

C Christopher Conover 14:23

Sounds very similar to what happened here with the University of Arizona Police Department, the Tucson Police Department Pima County Sheriff's and then troopers from from DPS.

A Adrian Skabelund 14:33

Yes. Yeah. I don't know if there's a playbook but if there is one that I think they were all kind of following it.

C Christopher Conover 14:40

In the breakup of the encampment and the surrounding demonstration we saw here at University of Arizona, right before the police went in to do the breakup. There had been a big crowd that had assembled. I hate to call some of them spectators, but some of them were definitely just spectators, others were protesters and counter protesters. Did we see the same at NAU?

A Adrian Skabelund 15:09

Yeah, definitely. It's always hard to judge of how many people are in a in our in a crowd. But I, we estimated that there was about 2000 people made up of both the protesters and the spectators, essentially, those outside the encampment made up, the vast majority of that. Now of the protesters had split themselves into groups of those with the intention of being arrested or like having a high risk of being arrested, and those with a lesser risk. So there was a large number of protesters who were also outside the encampment. But yeah, a lot of people had turned out either, you know, members of or those affiliated with Students for Justice in Palestine, that a the NAU chapter, or folks who had come out to watch. The the folks who came out to watch kind of fell into three groups, I wouldn't call them thirds of that, you know, split into thirds. But there were a large number of I think mostly students who, you know, may have been not affiliated with SJP, but had come out to support SJP or were chanting and and holding signs. There were another group of people who essentially had come out to see what was going on. And then there was also a, you know, maybe a smaller group of folks who would have, you know, maybe been your kind of classic Coliseum goers you know, folks who were really out there, I don't know, if they had strong opinions on whether they were pro or anti Israel or the, you know, the current conflict, but they were there to the A see what was going on, and hopefully, I think to them, see some heads get cracked or something like that.

C Christopher Conover 16:51

So when the the encampment here at the University of Arizona was broken up, especially because of that large crowd. That's where the police concentrated a lot of their action because

because of that large crowd. That's where the police concentrated a lot of their action because it was a very large crowd similar to what you're describing at NAU. We saw less than lethal weapons, there were reports of rubber bullets that the University of Arizona President did confirm, pepper balls, things like that was the exact same scene again, you mentioned earlier, the playbook. Was that part of the playbook?

A

Adrian Skabelund 17:29

So that seems to be maybe the difference. based on my observations. I didn't see any of that those kinds of tactics. The main thing that police seem to essentially use was just batons, I definitely didn't see any tear gas. Protesters and SJP has said that, at least in one case, they say that something like pepper spray might have been used, but there was no widespread use. It seems to be a more subdued response in terms of some of those immediate tactics used by police.

C

Christopher Conover 18:06

So when it comes to consequences, what happened with all these protesters?

A

Adrian Skabelund 18:12

out of the response on Tuesday night, there were 24 arrests. Almost all of those folks were charged with Third Degree trespassing, I believe two were charged with aggravated assault of an officer. NAU's response has so far been to suspend the NAU's chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine. I don't think there have been any student suspensions at this time. NAU just yesterday announced new guidelines for protesting on campus. Those hours had been from 8am to 10pm. And they rolled those back from eight to now ending at 5pm. NAU officials have said they no longer will allow temporary or permanent structures such as tents to be put up by protesters.

C

Christopher Conover 19:03

In Tucson, the day before the encampment went up. Another encampment on the campus of the University of Arizona went up. So this pop up protest. I think for lack of a better term. Are we seeing something similar at NAU, or is it right now just that one spot and I should point out, as you and I are talking on Thursday morning, we did see a little protest in front of the Admin Building on Wednesday, but no encampment.

A

Adrian Skabelund 19:33

so far. That encampment on Tuesday was the first encampment that that I am aware of that NAU has seen. There was planned initial plans by protesters to have another encampment Wednesday night. They decided to hold off on that, is what I was told and instead held a sort of

silent vigil in the same area along the sidewalk. What I've heard from the protesters is that their intention was, and I know your listeners I think are going to be hearing this on Friday, but on Thursday night, protesters had said that another encampment was their plan.

C Christopher Conover 20:12

All right. Well, as I said to the reporters who work for us, if another encampment comes up and I sent it to them going out to the ones here, stay safe if you're out there.

A Adrian Skabelund 20:22

Yeah, thanks. Yeah, I will.

C Christopher Conover 20:24

That was Arizona Daily Sun reporter Adrian Skabelund. Protesters at Arizona State University were the first to gather last Friday. Sophia Ramirez is the managing editor for the State Press ASU's student newspaper and was the reporter on scene.

S Sophia Ramirez 20:41

I arrived around 4:30. Police were present but no arrests were made. The protesters were linking arms in a chain around the encampment. There are people inside, lots of tents. They had food, medical supplies, masks like COVID protection masks, after the police presence kind of backed away around like six. We saw people chant and pray. And there was at one point a drum circle with a little kid dancing around. That was in the early evening. So that's when we left for a few hours. But at that point, we were told that the protesters were also aware that they would have to leave ASU campus by about 11pm. So that's when we left and then I later came back with a photographer Paul Pascual. And we were there when the police started to make megaphone announcements that they had to leave by 11pm. Those megaphone announcement started about 10:45. But arrests didn't start to be made until a closer to midnight like 11:50, we estimated maybe 20, state trooper cars pulled up. So it's actually state troopers that made the arrests. At that point they were about we estimated like 350 protesters. And so when the state troopers started to arrive, they made a large line kind of from one end of Alumni Lawn to the other backs against Old Main and started pushing forward. They dragged tents away, they picked off pieces of the encampment including the food. And then that's also when they started making arrests. Notably, when the state troopers started to arrive, the group kind of made two groups, there was a primary group of people who had linked arms in the very center of the encampment, as well as people closer to the sidewalk and closer to University Avenue. And that was where they were told to exit from. So they were a little bit closer to the exit at that point. And they were also the furthest from the line. I saw directly about 10 arrests. And then ASU later confirmed that I believe 69 people were arrested and then for that morning.

C Christopher Conover 22:36



Christopher Conover 22:50

We've heard from other reporters, the reporter that was covering the Tucson protests, the reporter that I was covering or a reporter who was covering the protest at NAU in Flagstaff, that the protesters were asking for disclosure and divestment by the university for Israel related investments. Was that what the ASU protesters were asking for also or was there something else?



23:03

Yes, absolutely. That was very much on the list of demands. There were also more specific ASU demands, of course, calling for Michael Crow, the president of ASU, to be removed from his position, as well as asking for MICHA at ASU a club to be reinstated on campus. They were removed as a club for a controversial Instagram post.



Christopher Conover 23:23

So at ASU, you all had 69 arrests, which so far is the most arrests of any of the three public campuses here in Arizona. Do we know anything about the arrestees? Were they all students? Was it a mix of students and non students? Who are these people?



23:44

So ASU confirmed in the statement the day after, I guess the Saturday later in the day, that only 15 students were arrested out of the approximately 70. A statement both on social media and from members of the student group Students for Justice in Palestine claimed later that 26 either faculty, alumni or students were arrested.



Christopher Conover 24:07

In Tucson, we saw and as far as we've been able to determine, talking to reporters in Flagstaff, they didn't see the use of less than lethal munitions. We saw rubber bullets in Tucson, the university president confirmed that in a statement that he issued. We saw pepper balls, things like that. Any of that at ASU, again, it wasn't at NAU?



Sophia Ramirez 24:34

No, nothing like that. At ASU people were arrested very bodily grabbed off the protest line. But there was no pepper spray, no rubber bullets or nothing like that.



Christopher Conover 24:43

You also reported on a group of counter protesters at the event. Do we know anything about who they were or how they were acting? Were any of them arrested?



24:53

None of them were arrested. I took footage of them behind the police line, throwing away pieces of the encampment. I do want to note that at the time of the protest, the messages they were sharing, sharing, including yelling at me directly, did not seem to be politically motivated. So I'm a little hesitant and labeling them counter protesters. They were there in opposition to the protest, but their message seemed apolitical and largely just agitating.



Christopher Conover 25:21

More against the protests, not against what the protesters were protesting, I guess we would say,



25:26

yes, counter protesters in the sense that they did not like the protesters.



Christopher Conover 25:30

You mentioned earlier, when we were chatting that there were a few 100 people who were involved in this encampment did it end up as we saw in Tucson and in Flagstaff, where there were a lot of spectators? There were 1000 or so people outside the encampment here in Tucson, some were protesting. Some were counter protesting and some just seemed to be there to watch. And the same seems true at NAU. Did you have that experience at ASU?



26:05

Earlier in the day when I was there in the early evening. There were definitely people just stopping by to view. There were people, Alumni Lawn is sort of framed by concrete pavers on all sides. And so while the encampment largely stayed inside the grassy area, there were definitely viewers at all times during the early evening. Later in the evening, when the arrests were made. I saw a handful of other viewers, people who especially lived in the area we saw them walking in just to see what everything was about, especially when police light started to lit up. But I don't I did not see anywhere near 1000. I saw you know in the range of 15.



Christopher Conover 26:43

We have not seen in Tucson big protests. We saw one small protest at the University of Arizona after police broke up the encampment this week. There are rumors of course of more to come. The same thing at NAU after police stepped in almost a week ago now at ASU. Have there been more protests.



27:06

Last night there was a small group of protesters outside alumni lawn, which was at that point still barricaded off but they left around 8pm without incident. We just reported on that at the State Press. This morning. There was a press conference. We're also reporting on that at the State Press. I do not know if there is a currently planned another encampment but we are keeping an eye out.

C

Christopher Conover 27:27

Allright. Well, thanks for joining us.

S

Sophia Ramirez 27:28

Thank you for having me.

C

Christopher Conover 27:30

That was Sophia Ramirez of the ASU State Press. We invited all three universities mentioned in this episode as well as the Arizona Board of Regents for interviews, they either politely declined or didn't respond. Statements sent to all media outlets by the universities and ABOR are on our website. The Arizona Board of Regents holds the broadcast licenses for AZPM which originates The Buzz and that's The Buzz for this week. You can find all our episodes online at azpm.org And subscribe to our show wherever you get your podcasts just search for the buzz Arizona. We're also on the NPR app. Zac Ziegler is our producer Our music is by Enter the Haggis I'm Christopher Conover thanks for listening.

N

Nicole Cox 28:34

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