

Chancellor's Task Force on Sexual and Relationship Violence

Status Report for Fall 2015

Introduction-First Steps

In April 2015, Chancellor Kent Syverud appointed the Chancellor's Task Force on Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence. The 30-member Task Force is chaired by Senior Vice President and Dean of Student Affairs Rebecca Reed Kantrowitz and School of Education Dean Joanna Masingila, and it is modeled after the Educational Advisory Board publication "Building an Effective University Infrastructure: Addressing Sexual Violence on Campus."

Over the course of the fall, the Task Force held four meetings, focusing as a group on educating members on policies and practices (reporting, advocacy, investigating, and adjudicating), Title IX, You Are Not Alone, Enough is Enough legislation, Clery reporting, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Student Handbook, and the Department of Public Safety annual report on campus security and fire safety. The Task Force learned more about training designed for students, the needs of victims and survivors, and University staff and student groups who support this work. The Task Force heard presentations by the Sexual and Relationship Violence Coordinating Committee, the Office of Health Promotion, Title IX staff, the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities, and the peer educators. Accomplishments and challenges were also shared.

The Task Force also sponsored or supported several campus-wide awareness-building activities, including a public screening of "The Hunting Ground" documentary and the national "It's On Us" national week of awareness, which culminated with a visit and public address by Vice President Joe Biden. Members of the Task Force also read and discussed Jon Krakauer's recent book "Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town," a powerful factual account of sexual violence, the response and ramifications, at the University of Montana.

Finally, the Task Force created four committees, each of which met twice this fall, to focus on communications and outreach, policies and procedures, assessment, education and prevention. Several key themes, or focus areas, emerged from the work of the Task Force and these four subcommittees.

Key Findings and Actions

1. **Best practices.** The Policy and Procedures subcommittee determined the need to identify best practices for reporting, advocacy, investigation, and adjudication policies and procedures. Toward that end, it is reaching out to University of Virginia and Columbia University to learn more about their Office of Civil Rights (OCR) investigations, what they learned, and how practices changed after articulation agreements were signed. The subcommittee has also consulted with a Rochester-based attorney who specializes in Title IX compliance and with the Education Advisory Board regarding sexual assault and relationship violence research and best practices. It also has reviewed Syracuse University's current policies and procedures relating to sexual and relationship violence reporting,

advocacy, investigation, and adjudication in order to compare them with promising practices and evidence-based strategies.

- 2. Data collection analysis.** The Assessment subcommittee began conducting an overview of all campus data sources on sexual and relationship violence in order to determine what types of data are currently collected, what gaps remain, and how best to address those gaps. To further this information gathering, the subcommittee will meet this spring with some of the individuals working on the front lines of the problem, including Title IX officer Sheila Johnson-Willis, Counseling Center Director Cory Wallack, Deputy General Counsel Gabe Nugent, Department of Public Safety Chief Bobby Maldonado, and others.
- 3. Multi-targeted education and prevention measures.** It was determined that education and prevention measures are needed on several levels: to address students, faculty/staff, and to promote an overall change in the campus culture. Several student-focused training initiatives are already in place, including a new one, Bringing in the Bystander. Awareness efforts also need to be made among faculty and staff regarding their role in promoting a safe campus and the resources currently available to students in need of them. A more widespread challenge that the subcommittee is examining is how to effect a campus-wide cultural shift that affirms the University's commitment to sexual and relationship violence prevention.
- 4. Enhanced communications.** Under the supervision of Barry L. Wells, Special Assistant to the Chancellor, the Communications and Outreach subcommittee worked to develop and launch a new website, which went live in March. The site will help to keep the University community informed about its work and provide information on resources and prevention efforts. One prominent feature of the site is a "Get Help Now" information box that links students in crisis to currently available resources.
- 5. Cross-campus collaboration.** It was determined that many groups across campus are involved in activities related to sexual and relationship violence prevention. The Task Force affirmed the importance of collaboration and regular communication among the different groups in order to magnify the impact of those efforts, assure consistency of messaging, and better inform the process of formulating best-practices policies and procedures.

Emerging Recommendations-Spring 2016

- 1. Refine data collection.** Once the Task Force determines the data currently collected, it must research and refine the type and range of data collected, identify gaps, and formulate recommendations for filling them. The Task Force also will review and address issues emerging from the campus climate survey.
- 2. Expand training.** Increase the number of trainers working through the Office of Health Promotion, and provide the additional resources and staff support needed to conduct and coordinate expanded training.

3. **Assure adequate staffing.** Education and prevention can only succeed if adequate staff are in place to assure an effective and stable response. Adequate staffing must be in place for the various offices that support the Sexual and Relationship Violence Response Team. This might include adding staff to fill key roles as well as converting interim positions to permanent status.
4. **Maintain consistent messaging.** Meet with administrative and communications leadership and all campus groups dealing with or discussing sexual and relationship violence to better coordinate and ensure consistent messaging that reflects the University's stated values.
5. **Formulate education and awareness programming.** Explore effective strategies for educating faculty, staff, and administrators about Title IX and about what it means to be a responsible employee. Also identify a suitable, practical statement for class syllabi.
6. **Enhance channels for communications and outreach.** Work with marketing and communications leadership on branding and other communications/outreach efforts, including possibly developing a plan for using social media.
7. **Support ongoing programming.** Provide support for campus-wide spring programming dedicated to raising awareness and support for sexual and relationship violence prevention, including Take Back the Night, Vera House White Ribbon Campaign, Break the Silence, and others.

At the end of the spring semester, the Task Force will prepare and submit a report to the Chancellor identifying initial findings and providing recommendations for going forward.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rebecca Reed Kantrowitz

Joanna Masingila

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