

Sexual and Relationship Violence Task Force

Status Report for 2016-17

The Chancellor's Task Force on Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence, created by Chancellor Syverud in spring 2015, continued to make excellent progress in its second year toward identifying and implementing improvements in sexual violence prevention, education and advocacy services at Syracuse University.

The 30-member task force continued to be chaired through 2016-2017 by School of Education Dean, Joanna Masingila, and Interim Senior Associate Vice President and Dean of Enrollment and the Student Experience, Rebecca Reed Kantrowitz. The group is modeled after the Educational Advisory Board publication "Building an Effective University Infrastructure: Addressing Sexual Violence on Campus."

The task force as a whole met five times during the 2016-2017 academic year, with additional meetings convened by its four committees. Throughout the year, the task force focused on further advancing progress on key recommendations that emerged during the 2015-2016 year, including a focus on enhanced data collection, promising practices, clear understanding of policies and procedures, ongoing communications efforts, and support for related campus initiatives, such as "It's On Us" and Take Back the Night.

Key Activities and Updates

Best Practices

1. The task force in December heard a presentation by Susan Pasco, associate director of the Counseling Center, on the American College Health Association (ACHA) and her participation in a task force focused on sexual and relationship violence.

The ACHA acknowledges that the scourge of sexual and relationship violence is complicated and without a quick solution. It believes that the use of a public health framework is needed, emphasizing physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both victim/survivors and providers. There also must be sensitivity and responsiveness to concerns of marginalized populations, and recognition that diversity of cultures influences participants' interpretation of messaging.

To that end, the ACHA task force has created a toolkit that will assist campuses, including Syracuse, with several aspects of the problem: management, sustainability of programs addressing the issue; advocacy resources; defining best practices for prevention, risk reduction, and response; assessment and evaluation; and trauma-informed systems for responding to incidents.

Syracuse University currently is ahead of most campuses around the country in education, prevention, and response in accordance with ACHA guidelines.

2. The task force continued to monitor developments relating to a case filed with the Office of Civil Rights against the University. Regular updates were presented throughout the year, providing an opportunity for the task force to discuss both the processes involved in filing a complaint as well as an opportunity to evaluate the University's investigation protocols, responses, and law compliance related to sexual assault.

3. The task force hosted guest speaker, Debora Osgood, Esq., who gave a talk titled "Title IX Compliance: Moving Forward." Osgood, a partner at Hogan Marren Babbo & Rose Ltd., Chicago, is a nationally recognized expert on the civil rights laws and regulations that govern educational institutions. She has provided legal guidance on compliance to public and private colleges and universities, as well as numerous other types of educational institutions and state boards of education.

As part of the presentation, the task force considered how the Trump Administration might alter the law, requirements, or current cases. Syracuse University will continue to be proactive and to strive for continuous improvement in education, training, process, and inclusiveness regardless of what the federal government does going forward. The Campus Climate Survey will be one tool for formulating positive changes.

Data Collection

1. The task force reviewed data on reported cases of sexual and relationship violence at Syracuse University for the last three years. The figures will be posted publicly in the future as part of New York State's Enough Is Enough requirements.

2. In addition, the group reviewed and discussed the findings of the Climate Assessment Survey. Those responses will help guide preparation for a second survey to be conducted in two years, as required by Enough Is Enough legislation. Among the observations relating to the survey responses:

- Many of the student respondents may be student leaders who are already aware of resources, which may indicate that our campus has a greater understanding of resources than really exists.
- Low student response rates may reflect a lack of confidence and trust. We need to convince students they will be taken seriously and that things can change.
- Faculty and staff need to reach out to students more; get involved; attend events; show support of student endeavors.
- Faculty and staff also need education in how to talk with students who have experience assault, without being too academic in our approach. Survey responses indicated that students sometimes just need to talk about what

happened, and that they are more likely to seek a friend or confidante rather than officially report.

- Students need to know what a healthy relationship looks like.
- Students need a safe space where they can talk.

It was noted that among the recommendations that the task force will put forward in response to the survey will be a call for appropriate training for faculty and staff in order to better facilitate a cultural change from the ground up and the top down.

Policies and Procedures

1. In April, the task force heard a presentation from Chief of Public Safety Bobby Maldonado, who explained procedures relating to student sexual assault complaints. He reported that

- The Department of Public Safety (DPS) reports all cases of sexual assault to the Title IX office and the Syracuse Police Department (SPD). The student can choose whether to pursue the case criminally.
- DPS, along with other University departments and Vera House, all provide support to the student during the process.
- In cases where the SPD is involved, that agency leads the initial investigation and decides if appropriate to move forward toward prosecution. This process can delay the campus investigation and our legally required response within 60 days.

In May, Chief Maldonado and Samantha Skaller '17, Syracuse University's regional representative to the national It's On Us campaign, met with SPD Chief Fowler to discuss how to improve relationships between students and police and work together more productively. Chief Fowler was reported to be receptive to suggestions. Those suggestions included expanded officer training, adding an SPD representative to the task force, and facilitating collaboration between DPS and New York State Police investigators to expedite case investigations.

2. At its last meeting, the task force took up a request from the Chancellor to discuss, in partnership with the Chancellor's Council on Diversity and Inclusion, how the University might appropriately screen candidates for major awards in order to avoid selecting an individual who has a background that may be incompatible with the institution's values. The request from the Chancellor came in response to concerns expressed to him by three students who strongly objected to the awarding of an award to an alumnus who had a history of domestic violence and an allegation of sexual assault.

Moving forward, the task force will formulate recommendations about how to address the situation and how best to avoid a similar situation in the future.

Communications

Communications continued to be a key focus area in order to better raise awareness of prevention strategies and resources, and solicit feedback on how to improve the campus climate and culture relating to sexual and relationship violence.

The communications committee of the task force continues to maintain the task force [website](#) and worked with SU News to place stories in SU Today. During the academic year, the news site published stories about Frisky February, the “It’s On Us” campaign, and task force member Samantha Skaller ’17, along with an interview with the task force co-chairs.

Support for Ongoing Activities

1. The task force continued its support for several special awareness-building programs on campus, including the national “It’s On Us” campaign. The program was established in 2015 by President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden L’68, in an effort to end the epidemic of sexual and relationship violence on college campuses.

Samantha Skaller ’17, a member of the Sexual and Relationship Violence Task Force and a regional representative to the national “It’s On Us” campaign, reported that Syracuse University is ahead of the curve and a role model for other schools in the Northeast regional group.

Samantha continued to work through the year on this effort, speaking with various student groups and working to recruit more participants, including a representative to take her place after her May 2017 graduation.

2. The group also heard a presentation by Samantha and three other students on how to facilitate more extensive collaboration among the task force, students, and the University administration regarding sexual and relationship violence issues.

3. The task force also continued its support for and participation in the campus-wide Take Back the Night event. The turnout for the event was strong, even without mandatory attendance for sororities. (Mandatory attendance is no longer considered a best practice.) Other campus programs supported by the task force included SU Rising, Be Orange training, and the Vera House White Ribbon Campaign.

Task force member, and Special Assistant to the Chancellor, Barry L. Wells was selected as this year’s Sister Mary Vera Recognition Award recipient.

Looking Ahead

The task force formulated the following goals/priorities for the 2017-18 academic year:

- Explore ways to continue to support the Office of Health Promotion.
- Reinstate the Assessment Committee.
- Encourage and recruit more involvement from men and student-athletes.
- Identify what has worked in the past (e.g., education, outreach, events) and build on those methods for the future.
- Consider sponsoring and hosting a statewide, daylong conference on sexual violence at Syracuse University.
- Continue to pursue closer collaboration with the Syracuse Police Department.

Finally, Diane Lyden Murphy, Dean of the David B. Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics, joined the task force in June as co-chair, succeeding Dean Joanna Masingila, who has stepped down to take on another assignment from the Chancellor.

The entire task force expresses its thanks and appreciation to Joanna for her dedicated service as co-chair these last two years. We look forward to continuing our work to build a safer, more respectful campus for all in the coming year.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joanna Masingila

Rebecca Reed Kantrowitz

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