

**Syracuse University Chancellor's Workgroup on
Sexual Violence Prevention, Education, and Advocacy**

**Final Report
December 17, 2014**

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INTRODUCTION

On May 30, 2014, after Commencement and the departure of most students from campus, Chancellor Kent Syverud announced in a campus-wide email that he was closing Syracuse University's Advocacy Center, the campus's primary resource center for victims and survivors of sexual abuse and violence. This occurred suddenly, without any campus input or discussion, and came as a shock to all. Many but not all of the services provided by the Advocacy Center to victims and survivors were realigned with those already existing at the Syracuse University Counseling Center. This workgroup recognizes that both similar and distinct services for victims and survivors had always existed at the Counseling Center and the Advocacy Center, prior to this change. The service that was lost in the realignment was a safe place or community—a physical space for communion and healing. Following this action, there was much anger and protest, including a petition to “Reinstate the Advocacy Center” that quickly attracted over 8000 signatures. Partly as a result of this public outcry, the Chancellor's Workgroup on Sexual Violence Prevention, Education, and Advocacy was commissioned on September 22, 2014. Its purpose was twofold, as articulated by the Chancellor: to identify critical gaps in services and support for victims and survivors of sexual and relationship violence on campus, and to propose a set of recommendations for improving campus and community culture relating to these matters.

As the Workgroup executed its charge, three things became abundantly clear. First, the Advocacy Center (started in 1989 as the R.A.P.E. Center) had a rich and innovative legacy of 25 years of service to the Syracuse University community, and was a pioneer campus-based advocacy program that had attracted acclaim and emulation across the nation. The staff was dedicated to the support of victims and survivors of sexual assault, and was committed to educating and raising awareness among students, faculty and staff about the prevalence and impact of sexual and relationship violence and its prevention. The Workgroup recognizes and appreciates the many invaluable contributions of the Advocacy Center. The current structure, in which services and programming are provided by the Counseling Center and the Office of Health Promotions respectively, was utilized by many students during the fall semester. However, the availability of a safe place for victims and survivors to gather for mutual support is no longer available.

Second, the process by which the Advocacy Center was closed lacked community involvement and transparency, fostering intense feelings of mistrust, anger, and disenfranchisement throughout the Syracuse University community. Third, the University acted with the intention to improve student services and to ensure that complex and shifting Title IX requirements (in combination with state laws) were satisfied. While there is debate about the merits of the realigned services, there is little doubt that the closure process should have been more transparent, sensitive, and inclusive. Nonetheless, it was the very dissent that devolved from this event that gave birth to the Workgroup, and it is hoped that its report will result in at least some constructive response to the very real concerns of the campus community.

This report focuses on services currently available at Syracuse University, and acknowledges the complexity of issues relating to sexual and relationship violence prevention,

education, and advocacy. We note that the recommendations address more than issues of sexual assault and relationship violence, and draw attention to an urgent need for significant changes in campus culture and climate.

METHODOLOGY

The Workgroup spent the fall 2014 semester gathering information and data from a variety of individuals and groups, attempting to clarify the reasons for the realignment of services, including at least some of those previously provided by the Advocacy Center. Among its objectives were: to understand the availability of and gaps in services under the current structure; to hear concerns about the consequences of closing the Advocacy Center; to understand the impact of federal and state statutes, guidelines, regulations, and policies (e.g., the White House Report, Title IX, the Clery Act, the Campus SaVE Act) on the provision of services and support for victims and survivors of sexual assault and relationship violence. Data were gathered from the following sources:

- The "[Reinstate the Advocacy Center at Syracuse University](#)" petition, located online at *change.org*
- Three Listening Sessions sponsored by the Senior Vice President for Student Affairs.
- One student focus group meeting sponsored by the Workgroup
- An online survey done through Qualtrics and administered by the Workgroup
- Meetings with administrative leaders from the Division of Student Affairs, former Advocacy Center staff, Counseling Center staff, Office of Health Promotion staff, Office of Student Assistance staff, and staff from Vera House.
- Task Force Report on Rape from 1989 and other archival materials.

A summative description of several federal reports, along with summary data gathered from the petition, Listening Sessions, focus group, and on-line survey are contained in appendices at the end of this report.

The Workgroup unanimously agreed to maintain confidentiality and provide a safe space for discussion; we extended the same to those who came to speak with us. This report reflects our attempt to balance a desire for transparency while working to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of individuals who provided us with sensitive information.

LIMITATIONS

In many ways, the task of the Workgroup was to "know the unknowable": to uncover information about sexual and relationship violence, in all of the forms in which these issues take place, and within which too many matters are obscured or misunderstood. The challenges we faced because of lack of time or legal confidentiality of information limited the thoroughness of our deliberations and our conclusions. We also lacked data and information from sources such as:

- A comprehensive campus climate and culture survey about sexual assault and relationship violence issues.

- Information about students who used the Advocacy Center before 2012, when these data began to be collected.
- An assessment of gaps in services that existed prior to the closing of the Advocacy Center.
- Campus officials and constituencies that we were unable to meet with during the semester, due to schedule conflicts and lack of time.
- Information on how comparable services and concerns are addressed on other campuses (although we did some research into this area, we would have liked to have done more extensive and comprehensive work).
- Undergraduate students, whose attendance at the listening meetings and focus group was not as extensive as we had hoped, especially among undergraduate men and other communities often not addressed in education about sexual assault and relationship violence. [It should be noted that two of the three listening meetings were held during the summer, when the majority of undergraduate and graduate students are not on campus.]
- Victims and survivors of sexual assault and relationship violence who did not seek services from the Advocacy Center or Counseling Center and are therefore not reflected in the reporting numbers.
- The Workgroup's reluctance to ask survivors to identify themselves and cause re-victimization.

GAPS IN SERVICES

We identified numerous service gaps in the wake of the closing of the Advocacy Center and after the subsequent realignment of services and resources. To be fair, some of these existed before the Advocacy Center was closed and continue to need to be filled. Most notable to us, perhaps, is a serious lack of communication at all levels in the Syracuse University community, from the Chancellor on down. But among the more specific gaps we noted in the current state of things, those most significant to us include:

1. The loss of the Advocacy Center as a cultural locus and place for survivors to find advocacy and healing, to connect with others who share the lived experience of being survivors of sexual and relationship violence, and to have a safe space on campus. Although counseling and advocacy services related to sexual assault and relationship violence have been moved to the Counseling Center, there is no longer a single office designated to provide information about services, advocacy, education, and prevention, as well as physical space for victims and survivors to informally congregate and support each other.
2. The limited visibility of and awareness about the Sexual and Relationship Violence Response (SRVR) Team, combined with confusion about how to report incidents of sexual assault and relationship violence. In the various listening sessions and online venues, Syracuse University community members repeatedly stated that the Counseling

Center itself was a potential barrier for seeking out services, because of its location adjacent to several fraternities on Walnut Avenue and because of excessive delays in obtaining appointments. While the SRVR Team provides immediate response to incidences of sexual assault and relationship violence and will meet at alternative locations when a student does not wish to go to the Counseling Center's current location, some students expressed concerns over availability of appointments and wait times after receiving immediate services.

3. The discourse on campus about sexual assault and relationship violence typically focuses on male-on-female violence involving students who are fulltime undergraduates, White, and heterosexual. The narrow focus of this discourse overlooks large numbers of individuals who experience sexual assault and relationship violence, including graduate and part-time students, as well as students of color, queer and transgender students, those with disabilities, international students, and others from marginalized identity groups.
4. Insufficient staff and resources to effectively investigate incidents of sexual assault and relationship violence, and to educate members of the Syracuse University community. This has led to a lack of information and training for faculty, staff, and students regarding legal and other obligations to report incidents. Current training appears to consist of little more than information sharing and the obligations of "responsible employees" to report incidents of sexual assault and relationship violence to the Title IX coordinator. Questions remain about who are designated as "responsible employees" and current training does not include specific tactics for promoting sensitive discourse, and on the "art" of referring people to the appropriate campus resources. Finally there still remains a significant lack of clarity about legal privilege, confidentiality, and the role of both in identifying responsible employees.
5. Students, faculty, and staff all report insufficient training about the meanings of consent, rape culture, and what it means to be an empowered bystander.
6. More resources and attention need to be allocated to particular constituencies on campus, especially Greek organizations, athletic teams and staff, and other student groups traditionally associated with a disproportionate amount of sexual and relationship violence.
7. Other limitations that were identified included the lack of a centralized and always available source of information (such as a mobile app) for students to access resources about their rights, the student code of conduct, Counseling Center availability (including after-hours services), and other resources.
8. Deterioration of the important and long-standing collaborative relationship between Syracuse University and Vera House under the previously articulated memorandum of understanding (MOU), given the new structure of services, education, and prevention programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend a series of short- and long-term changes to address gaps in services. We hope these will meet specific needs and, equally importantly, contribute to essential changes in

campus culture. As the University adopts these recommendations, we hope that services relating to sexual assault and relationship violence will be approached from a “victim/survivor advocacy” perspective. This means supporting a victim or survivor throughout the process of responding to sexual assault and relationship violence by fostering relationships with administrators, campus personnel, and community partners committed to society free from sexual assault and relationship violence. Advocacy consists of responding to immediate, crisis-driven needs, safety, and requests for services from the campus and local community (e.g. Public Safety, Counseling Center, Health Center, Student Assistance, Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities, Title IX Office, clergy, Syracuse Police, various hospitals, criminal and/or family court, District Attorney’s office, and other legal services). Advocacy also includes supporting and educating victims and survivors, as well as their support network, about the dynamics and impact of gender-based, sexual assault and relationship violence, and how to work toward healing and empowerment. Advocacy also needs to be an explicit and central dimension of services to victims/survivors, as well as a part of campus-wide education. Everyone needs to know more about the dynamics and impact of sexual assault and relationship violence, and work alongside formal support systems to assist those most deeply affected in achieving healing and empowerment.

Short-Term Recommendations (to be addressed in spring 2015):

1. Restore trust and foster healing among members of the Syracuse University community. We planned to ask the Chancellor to issue an apology and appreciate that one was given during the fall semester, although we realize that it was not fully satisfactory to everyone. An additional effort toward healing would be for the Chancellor to publically recognize the important legacy of the Advocacy Center and the tireless work of its former staff.
2. Institute an effective communications campaign to address gaps in awareness of services available to all members of the campus community. This should be aimed at promoting new services and educating people about how they can have their needs met and how they can get involved in helping others. For example, the Workgroup placed an advertisement in the *Daily Orange* during the fall semester (see Appendix) that contained some of this information. Ads like this can be used as part of future efforts to inform the community.
3. Update the stickers that communicate information about sexual assault and relationship violence services, education, and prevention. These should use clear language and infographics. They must be placed in the stalls and common areas of every bathroom on campus, and efforts must be made to remove outdated stickers as quickly as possible.
4. Increase the visibility of offices and personnel associated with responding to sexual assault and relationship violence, including the SRVR team, Office of Student Assistance, Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities, Department of Public Safety, and Office of Health Promotion.
5. Communicate University policy about the meaning of affirmative consent, which is in the spirit of the “Yes means Yes” national movement, by building upon previous and

current efforts (e.g., “Got Consent? Be SU.R.E.”). The result should be an ongoing extensive campaign throughout the Syracuse University community.

6. Provide accessible information to faculty, staff, and students about the Student Code of Conduct, Title IX, and other relevant policies. Information should be available on posters in all buildings on campus, including residence halls, and paper copies should be located in all advising offices and residence hall offices.
7. The Provost should distribute a memorandum before the start of each semester describing services and resources related to sexual assault and relationship violence, and should provide a Title IX statement for use on every course syllabus.
8. Identify members of the campus community who are considered to be responsible employees under Title IX, and define the scope of this role. Responsible employee education must be expanded to include what is expected of them (e.g., when responsible employee status is invoked, statements for inclusion on syllabi, what to say to students, and how to report knowledge about incidents of sexual assault and relationship violence, as well as campus climate characteristics that are unhealthy and liable to foster dangerous behaviors).
9. Require annual training for all University employees and students that extends beyond superficial transmission of information, and that utilizes technologies and multi-media components to provide detailed information about relevant campus resources and policies, including Title IX.
10. Establish a Chancellor’s taskforce on sexual assault and relationship violence that reviews services, policies, and programs every semester. Taskforce members should include individuals with expertise and authority on issues related to students’ need; privilege and confidentiality; federal, state, and local statutes and policies; and fiscal and human resource issues. This taskforce must be able to respond to systems of power and privilege, and to encompass multiple perspectives including those from marginalized and under-represented groups on campus—particularly those susceptible to sexual violence.
11. Institutional support is needed for Title IX training of faculty and staff, who are responsible employees according to the University’s interpretation of these regulations. Additional resources should be provided to enhance the Title IX office for investigation, training, and student and employee support. Expand exploration and understanding of the range of current and future interpretations of Title IX requirements, and revise Syracuse University policies if and when that is deemed appropriate.
12. Provide additional staffing and resources for the Counseling Center to support advocacy, therapy, and community collaboration and partnerships.
13. Identify and include culturally relevant approaches and practices that enhance the support of victims and survivors from marginalized identity groups (e.g., students of color, students with disabilities, queer students, and transgender students) and strengthen efforts to encourage students from these groups to participate in leadership of this work.
14. Include among the University’s Counsel a lawyer with sexual assault and Title IX expertise to augment the work of the Title IX Coordinator and development of policies related to sexual assault and relationship violence.

15. Develop and implement support groups for student victims and survivors to be in relationship with each other in a privileged and confidential setting.
16. Administer a climate survey across Syracuse University about issues of sexual assault and relationship violence; make the results available to the entire campus community.

Long-Term Recommendations (To be implemented within the next 2-3 years):

1. Establish a “hub” at 111 Waverly Avenue (or another suitable venue that is centrally located on campus and not within close proximity to any of the fraternity houses) that would house all services responsive to incidents of sexual assault and relationship violence, including advocacy services, education, and prevention programs. Offices within this “hub” should include the University Health Center, Counseling Center, Office of Student Assistance, and Office of Health Promotions. Within this “hub” there would also be dedicated space to facilitate advocacy services (e.g. meeting with Public Safety, Syracuse Police, and clergy) and peer support among victims and survivors. Housing these services in one building would relocate the Counseling Center, facilitate information sharing and collaborative programming, and lead to a holistic approach to supporting victims and survivors. Establishment of this “hub” would serve to promote safety, healing, and empowerment for victims and survivors.
2. Provide resources for the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs, as well as the Department of Athletics, enabling the creation of positions that educate their respective constituencies about issues of sexual assault and relationship violence.
3. Examine the interpretation of federal and state regulations about sexual assault and relationship violence in the wake of changing policy landscapes at regular intervals over the course of months and years. This process should include external legal counsel with expertise and understanding of the needs of victims and survivors.
4. Strengthen the relationship between Vera House and Syracuse University, through a regularly updated and detailed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
5. Explore the possibility of extending confidentiality to specific faculty and/or staff who complete substantial and specialized training, so that they may provide safe access to education and support across campus.
6. Attend to the need for services that address the entire Syracuse University campus community. Human Resources should create services for University employees that work in conjunction with or in addition to those provided for students, and annually provide notice regarding the availability of these service to the University community.
7. Require first-year fora across all schools and colleges to address issues regarding sexual assault and relationship violence. These should include definitions of relevant behaviors and concepts, how incidents are reported and investigated, available privileged and confidential resources, reporting options for victims and survivors, campus policies, the meaning of affirmative consent, the roles and dangers of alcohol and other drugs, and bystander interventions. These fora provide ideal opportunities to engage all incoming students in serious conversations about topics central to their lives and college

experiences. Comparable opportunities must also be provided to students who transfer to Syracuse University after the first year.

8. Develop ongoing bystander education that is inclusive of the identities and experiences of students of color, queer and transgender students, international students, students with disabilities, and others from marginalized groups. This should be designed from perspectives that are not limited to male-female relationships.

CONCLUSION

We end this report recognizing the complex leadership challenge Syracuse University faces in building a comprehensive and responsive system in the short run and changing campus culture over time. According to results from a national survey, our institution appears to be ahead of other comparable institutions in recognizing and addressing sexual and relationship violence issues.¹ However, though there has been some progress, the more difficult steps need to be taken. This will not happen through the efforts of University leadership and administration alone. For us to have the culture of respect and dignity that will end sexual violence, we will need to build a committed community of leaders that includes all of us.

¹ <http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2014/07/college-campus-sexual-assault>