

CATHERINE SPEAR
TITLE IX OFFICE
O'NEIL HALL, ROOM 037
CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA 22904

**RE: Student Committee to Assess Climate Related to Sexual and Gender Based
Harassment and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence ("Student Climate Committee")**

Report AY 2016-17.

Ms. Spear,

On behalf of the Student Climate Committee, I would like to express our gratitude for allowing us to be involved in this process. Working with various students and groups across Grounds has been quite a privilege. It is our hope that the recommendations detailed in this document will lead to meaningful changes and improvements of our culture at the University. If the members of this committee can be of any further assistance now or in the future, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Paddy Foss

Student Climate Committee, Chair
Curry School of Education| M.Ed. 2017
College of Arts & Sciences| B.A. 2016

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I. Introduction and Problem Statement

After both internal and external reflection and discussion, this committee has come to several conclusions regarding culture on Grounds that should inform future strategy for addressing sexual violence. It is our intent that this report will serve as a medium to gain insight into the processes, behaviors, and thoughts of the general student body, as well as a means for examining the intersectionality of the human condition with the gravity of the subject. This committee explored the following elements of the subject in particular: a clear definition of sexual assault; feelings of indecisiveness/peer pressure; the current political climate, and the response of the administration to instances of sexual assault.

When asked about what constitutes sexual assault, a majority of University students we interacted with express confidence in their responses; they universally identify a capable expression of consent as the distinguishing factor. It is in the application of this definition to specific cases of sexual assault where we begin to see a disconnect in popular opinion that reflects the nuances of student thought and culture. Upon reflection our committee has determined that there are two main areas of ambiguity within the student body when it comes to definitions of assault: what constitutes assault itself, and the distinction between coercion and assault.

Perceptions of what constitutes consent seems to blur when interaction remains shy of physicality. Students can almost always recognize a lack of consent when physical contact is involved, but they are much more tentative about what this looks like when referring to verbal interaction and/or body language. Until students see physical violence, they don't feel comfortable intervening in fear of mislabeling the nature of the interaction. Such patterns of behavior concerns us, as we know that this pre-physical line often marks the key moment in distinguishing between harassment and violence.

The practice of harassment can and often stands as a stepping stone to actual physical contact. The passivity of peers serves as an enabling mechanism and a confirmation that inappropriate behavior is tolerated and a next step is logical. What we need students and bystanders to understand is that sexual advances of any sort need to be made with the consent of all parties involved. Consent should not solely mean a readiness for sex, but should also be defined by an openness to simple interaction and exploration prior to forms of sexual engagement. Our committee advances the need to educate the student body on both the distinction between sexual advances, sexual harassment, and sexual acts, as well as the need for consent in all forms of interaction.

The second blurred line of physicality we have identified involves the distinction between coercion versus assault. The difficulty of identifying consent here is that coercion can occur without any use of physical violence by an involved person. During this process, we found the use of mental or emotional intimidation is more prevalent among the student body than it may appear. This includes the application of social pressures, the manipulation of mental disorders,

and the exploitation of a prior connection shared between the individuals. Students can often feel apprehensive about acting upon instinct when witnessing a possible problem, as the innuendos are much more difficult to identify, and often the signs are impossible to recognize at all outside of a close circle of friends. This points to the necessity for bystander intervention to be the norm and not the exception. In order to sustainably and substantially change our culture around sexual assault, the University must facilitate programming and bystander intervention, actions that cannot be substituted by programs.

While organizations such as Green Dot are excellent ambassadors for the sexual freedoms and rights that each individual is entitled to, such programs depend on the action of people often unfamiliar with the experiences of those they intend to educate. The bystander must become the close friend in each friend group, not the bartender that may be busy serving drinks. And even then, bystander intervention should not be viewed as the endgame. Bystander intervention is a supplemental strategy that can and should be employed, but individual responsibility and ownership for action remains our end goal. In the relatively short time that we have been students, the University seems to have made excellent progress with bystander intervention, and the vast majority of students that we spoke to stated that they have intervened when they noticed a problem arising. This sentiment underlines our conclusion that the next logical step for our University community to advance a culture of safety and respect is to move into broader, culture-based change — the University must continue to progress in changing the behaviors around these issues.

Our discussion of the student culture around consent must also include the broader issue of indecisiveness, especially in situations where alcohol and other substances are involved. Third parties and those involved often don't feel confident acting on a situation in the moment. One striking discovery we made through our work was that almost all students who witnessed a drunken person headed for a sexual encounter were a) either *unsure* how to intervene or b) *unwilling* to intervene. The common disconnect between wanting to be active bystanders and actually intervening seems to be the impact of alcohol on the ability to give consent. Bystanders prefer to lean towards inaction rather than action, as it is nearly impossible to identify at what level of intoxication an individual can no longer give meaningful consent. This committee believes that we need to enact a shift from the present default modus operandi, assuming consent, to a willingness to intervene despite ambiguity and understandable barriers to action. This is a cultural change dependent on a shift in general perception of how intervention will affect students personally. We as a community must highlight the significance of any sexual encounter involving alcohol. According to the National Institute of Justice, at least half of sexual assaults on college campuses involve some type of alcohol consumption. The culture of intervention must be ingrained in the student body, so that even intoxicated bystanders have the ability to ask first and allow second.

Any discussion of culture and attitude on Grounds must take into account the culture of the greater population of which it is a part. Given the current national climate, we find it duly

important to publicly emphasize that the University is committed to continue its work on sexual violence prevention. The reinforcement of unhealthy gender “norms” by national leaders can be damaging to someone feeling vulnerable due to assault, and should be taken into consideration in the coming year. The University needs to publicly highlight that this community is one of empathy, and it needs to explicitly assert how it plans to foster an atmosphere of safety and respect. No matter what our elected leaders will say or do, U.Va. must stand firm in its commitment to providing a positive space that affirms the rights of all its members.

Following from this conclusion, our committee moves to consider the student perception of the administration’s response to addressing and condemning past occurrences of sexual assault. Through our investigation and conversations, we have found that a significant number of students do not feel that a survivor would be supported in filing a report. Furthermore, a number of students do not feel that a survivor of sexual assault would be taken seriously by the administration. These sentiments are consistent with the American Association of Universities (AAU) data gathered in the 2015 Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct, and are certainly cause for concern. It is clear that the reputation of the University’s administration is poor in the view of the student body. The administration must put an emphasis on regaining some of the student trust that seems to have been lost, or has never existed.

In the process of identifying strategies for culture change, it is important to look at positive influences that already exist. This committee, alongside organizations and programs such as Take Back the Night, One in Four, One Less, Hoos Got Your Back, and Green Dot, demonstrate student interest in promoting an attitude of proactivity on Grounds. These coalitions each provide safe spaces for victims, their peers, and advocates to discuss the culture of sexual assault, as well as contribute to a community of support for those victims who know how to utilize the resources that they offer. CIOs, such as Sustained Dialogue, provide forums for discussion that allow open conversations about personal experiences, as well as provide an intimate support circle for those who feel safe to share.

A healthy culture around addressing and preventing sexual violence requires victims to feel comfortable. The impetus for reporting lies largely with the victims, and given the emotional and psychological consequences that sexual assault can have on an individual, a supportive community attitude regarding the issue of campus climate is critical. Consistent among the elements of culture that we have discussed so far is an overarching necessity for mutual respect and responsibility. The continued development of these characteristics is not dependent on reacting to specific instances of sexual violence, but promoting respect and inclusion of all types. Each has a unique intersection with sexual violence that could be expanded upon meaningfully in their own separate analyses. In this Committee’s report, we seek to focus on the steps and perceptions that directly surround sexual violence, but that should not be taken as a disregard for the array of factors that relate and contribute to it. It is a recognition of the limits of action in a progressive community that exists in the network of disagreement and argument that is the general education system and society.

II. Improving Sexual Violence Education on Grounds

This committee has identified issues concerning education around sexual violence as a point of potential improvement. While the University's efforts towards education have notably increased in recent years, we believe these efforts can continue to be improved for all students at the University, especially first-year students.

Concerning first-year sexual assault education specifically, we found the orientation presentation at JPJ Arena to be helpful event, due largely to its emphasis on bystander intervention. However, this presentation is given after numerous hours of various information is thrown at brand new students all at once. Numerous students claimed they could not focus and were unable to keep up during the bystander intervention presentation simply due to the nature of long hours during orientation. While the committee agrees that this information needs to be communicated very early in the first semester, we feel it may be more effective if this presentation is given on its own on a later day.

The committee found first-year hall meetings conducted by RAs to be effective means for educating our community's new students. Considering that hallmates and suitemates alike will be in constant contact throughout the entire first-year, the RA hall meetings serve as an excellent opportunity to have hall meetings focused on sexual violence. These sort of meetings would ensure that this important topic receives sufficient time to be discussed in meaningful ways as these are safe spaces and provide resources that all students have access to.

Before arriving on Grounds, all students are required to complete educational, interactive modules on the topics of sexual assault and alcohol use. These modules present great potential as tools to engage incoming students, they fall short in regards to the delivery and intended effect. Students find ways to perfunctorily skim through these modules, and thus fail to engage with the content as the administration intended for them to do. Our committee thereby suggests that the University alter these modules so that students must interactively engage with them throughout their full duration in order to receive completion status. Currently, this type of educational module is in use by Greek organizations at the University. The committee believes this interactive participation will make these modules much more effective for all topics.

Finally, the last suggested action for first-year education is an incorporation of sexual assault and bystander intervention education in COLA and ENWR courses. This incorporation into normal first-year curriculum will help ensure that first-years are adequately informed concerning the issue of sexual assault. Similar to the RA hall meetings, students in COLA and ENWR courses will benefit from the intimate, small-group structure that allows for a deeper discussion on the issue of sexual assault.

Apart from first-years specifically, the University must continue to educate its other students on this important issue. Classrooms are a severely underutilized resource for communicating critical messages. While not everyone has to be involved in aforementioned programs and organizations, or live on-Grounds after first year, all students attend classes.

Our suggestion to better utilize classrooms as avenues for change also speaks to a larger, systemic problem—education about the student climate is concentrated at a few, discrete points over the course of a student’s college career, and is completely neglected for the vast majority of it. For instance, all students receive education in their first year through orientation events, the module, and for some, Dorm Norms. For a select group, those who choose to join fraternities or sororities, this education is more regular, but this is not the experience of the majority of students. While this committee seeks to capitalize on the steady information flow to first-years, we also recognize that all U.Va. students must continuously engage with this issue to both embody the norms and values we seek to facilitate and that we expect of our students, as well as to model this behavior to the younger students who look up to them.

III. An Analysis of Hoos Got Your Back (HGYB) // Community Outreach and Student Safety

In the realm of culture change and education, there exist a number of initiatives that have enjoyed success in promoting a community of support and bystander intervention. Notably, the Hoos Got Your Back (HGYB) program has established a presence in off-Grounds merchant shops and restaurants, expanding the network of the Community of Trust to open a safe and supportive space in locations frequented by students. A revitalization of this program is necessary, with special attention to the standards by which a retail location is able to consider itself a part of the HGYB campaign. Beyond simply sharing the iconic campaign sticker in a window, businesses should incentivize their employees to undergo bystander intervention training. Only after a majority of employees are trained should the business be permitted to display the sticker signifying their involvement in the campaign. Thus, involvement with HGYB is not just a tacit statement of support for the initiative, but rather an impactful ability to truly take part in protecting students and community members off Grounds, in environments where sexual misconduct is more likely to occur.

We recommend increased partnership with local bars, especially on the Corner. In addition to employee training, we suggest actions such as encouraging establishments to post signs for special drinks, meals, or orders inside of female restrooms as a way for students to discreetly get themselves out of dangerous or uncomfortable situations. These strategies have been positively received by students and can be implemented more widely.

Extant social awareness campaigns and education initiatives, especially those that are peer-led, are extremely valuable in sharing relevant information in non-judgmental, positive, inclusive, and encouraging manners. We find that these programs continue to be the most

efficacious strategies for creating systemic cultural change for health and safety issue. Examining ways to increase participation and funding for student-led programming must be made a priority.

The University must consider expansion of existing safety services. Particularly, the transportation system fails to adequately address the needs of students on Grounds, placing them in potentially harmful situations. The University Transit System (UTS) is not available past 12:30 AM on weekdays and 2:30 AM on weekends, forcing individuals to either walk to their destination (a dangerous alternative late at night) or seek other forms of transportation. One such alternative is the SafeRide service, but perennial complaints regarding reliance and expediency of this service dissuade students from considering it a valuable transportation option. Expansion of the staff operating both the UTS and SafeRide services is imperative to offer students a reliable and consistent transportation option around the clock. Additionally, several universities have partnered with companies such as Uber to offer subsidized rides that begin or end on campus. Such an initiative would limit burdens placed on existing transportation infrastructure, provide greater destination options for users, and better ensure the safe transportation of students at all hours of the day and night.

IV. Reporting at UVa

The U.Va. reporting process can seem overwhelming and complex to the average student. In one conversation with a member of the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS), they were surprised to learn that most students do not understand the differences between responsible and confidential employees, and students are unsure who falls into these categories. This example underscores that the basic fundamentals of the reporting process are not understood by students.

If a student is assaulted, their first instinct may be to turn to the internet to find resources and direction for reporting. However, our sexual violence website is a confusing maze of links to different websites and drawn out paragraphs. To someone who has just been the victim of an assault, this can add to their anxiety, fear, and confusion. The confidential resources link takes students to the Title IX website, which is filled with brightly colored graphics, and clip art photos. These all appear disingenuous and overwhelming. Resources are listed in lengthy paragraphs and phone numbers are clustered together. The website is difficult to understand, overwhelming, and cold. It does not help those who have recently experienced trauma find the resources they need. The JustReportIt tab is filled with verbose paragraphs, legal jargon, and again links students to more websites with more drawn out, legal explanations. One portion of the JustReportIt form links students to “The Student Resource Guide identifies confidential resources” yet the link goes to a website of copy and pasted Title IX segments. Students who have just reported cannot easily access resources, instead they must now search through the Title IX website until they find the brightly colored graphics. The Title IX website that students are taken to as a “Student Resources Guide” says, within paragraphs of information, that if a student

believes they were assaulted they should consult the University Policy on Sexual and Gender Based Harassment. The website should allow students and faculty who believe they have been the victim of a crime report it, instead of linking them to several hundreds of pages of policy.

The Title IX website needs to be changed to make it easier for survivors of sexual violence to report the incident and find the resources they need. Schools like the University of [Connecticut](#) have websites that clearly show the resources, ways to report, and highlight which services are confidential and which are not. There is a button for “Call Now” that shows phone numbers that students call and it lists if the number is a confidential resource or not; our website never mentions if resources are confidential or not. It shows students how to report to the University or to the police; we do not offer both options on our website. The reporting page also answers questions about what to expect, explains the University standards process, and outlines the pursuit of a “no contact” letter from the University. Having a website that makes the reporting process easy to understand with limited legal jargon and resources for students, respondents, faculty, friends, and partners is imperative. We recommend that the University of Virginia redesign its sexual violence website to make it easier for students and faculty to report an incident or find resources for help. This recommendation includes ensuring that the website is mobile-friendly.

Another way this can be approached is through an electronic tool or application that allows students to click through the process, step-by-step. This way, they can see how a decision will affect their future options and they will not be surprised along the way. From the privacy of their homes, they will be able to see the different paths they can take and thoroughly understand the process. This can be used for both complainants and accused students.

While many of these issues may seem trivial, when a student is in a traumatic situation it should be the responsibility of the University to make the process as clear and simple as possible. The current website isolates students from the resources they so desperately need.

V. Survivor Support Services

Perhaps the greatest demonstration of our efforts to heal this community is manifested in the initiatives we undertake to respect and care for those who find themselves survivors of sexual assault. To that end, expansion of counseling and outreach services is necessary. This is especially true of the Maxine Platzer Lynn Women’s Center, which is more specifically equipped to provide support to victims of gender-based violence. Similarly to other counseling services on Grounds, this service often reaches capacity intake early in the year, after which point it is difficult for students to utilize. In addition to a general hiring increase to meet the demands of a growing student body, specialized on-call positions filled by individuals properly trained to work with victims of sexual assault are needed.

Additionally, we call for continued support for peer education strategies. The Women’s Center offers Peer Survivor Support Network trainings, which facilitate education for students

who wish to become assets equipped with the knowledge required to serve as a support system for victims of sexual assault. The expansion of this program, including the designation of the program as meeting Fraternal Order Agreement (FOA) requirements, would better empower the student body to more appropriately and sensitively provide support for survivors on Grounds.

VI. Conclusion

It is our hope that in this report we address several existing structural insufficiencies, provide both preventative and reactive policies aimed at limiting violence, provide further support for survivors, and ultimately improve the culture on Grounds.

The Committee recognizes the feasibility of implementing these recommendations varies from proposal to proposal; however, this should not diminish the importance of each particular cause. Changing the culture on Grounds continues to be an ongoing process, and the administration has the ability to advance it further by using its resources to back culture-changing programs. Expanding these education programs will increase student awareness of the issue as well as socially normalize third party intervention in potential sexual assault situations.

The Committee recognizes the University's jurisdiction does not extend to local businesses. However, we strongly recommend the administration work to establish partnerships with these businesses, expanding the reach of sexual assault prevention policies to off-Grounds areas, particularly on the Corner.

We highlighted the importance of creating an easily accessible and navigable online reporting system in addition to a more interactive sexual assault orientation module. We believe these recommended policies are simple changes that have the potential to significantly influence the reporting rate.

The recommendations outlined in this report can significantly change the campus climate surrounding sexual violence, increased awareness, reporting, and general knowledge of this issue. We thank you for taking the time to consider these recommendations and look forward to working together as peers to create a safer environment for all community members.

