





# TACTICS FOR PREVENTING **Campus Sexual Assault**

by Jodi Hogerton

Thanks to recent efforts to boost awareness, more people are familiar with the shocking statistic: one out of five women is sexually assaulted while in college. Sexual assault and rape are the most underreported crimes.



In fact, only about 12% of incidents are reported to law enforcement, according to recent studies by Kilpatrick et al. Studies also show that 90% of rape victims know their attacker, and 50% of women who have experiences that fit the legal definition of rape do not label the incident as rape. Both of these factors—along with fear, shame, self-blame, and the perceived futility of reporting—can contribute to the very low reporting rate. Ross and Achilles showed that sexual violence is more likely to occur in communities where the behavior goes unpunished, and low reporting rates can add to the problem of sexual violence on campus. What can universities do to encourage victims to report sexual assault and rape?

### Start at the Top

Campus leadership sets the tone for safety and must make sexual assault prevention and education a priority for the entire campus community. By spearheading initiatives, investing resources and holding people accountable, university leaders can increase the student and staff buy-in for prevention efforts. Sexual violence affects the entire campus community by creating

an unsafe atmosphere, and an environment that (intentionally or unintentionally) fosters inequality. Preventing sexual assault is a team effort that requires support from all stakeholders, especially those in leadership positions.

### Publicize Your School's Policies, Expectations, and Consequences

Education programs surrounding consent, bystander intervention, campus resources and the consequences for sexual misconduct are essential elements of a prevention strategy. Clearly defining policies and consequences can help reduce men's and women's misunderstandings about what constitutes rape. Get students involved in publicizing policies; when they frame sexual violence prevention within context that is relevant to them, it can be more effective among their peers.

### Teach What Consent Means

Emphasize that the absence of a "no" does not equal a "yes," and that someone who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol cannot give consent. Victims that have a clear understanding of consent are more likely to correctly label incidents that

fit the description of rape. Whether or not your institution chooses to adopt an affirmative consent policy, fostering an environment in which discussions about safe, healthy relationships are the norm will encourage students to make healthy decisions. If students are comfortable expressing expectations and communicating openly with sexual partners, it can reduce misunderstandings about consent.

### Make Reporting as Easy as Possible

Universities should provide a variety of methods for students to report incidents of sexual violence and widely publicize the options that are available to victims. Not all students will feel comfortable reporting an incident directly to campus authorities or outside law enforcement. Putting systems in place for students to report anonymously or confidentially can still help universities measure the scope of the sexual violence issues on campus, even though the reporters may not be seeking judicial proceedings. Universities with multiple reporting channels can use incident reporting software to make sure all reports are delivered to the correct people and counted in Clery statistics.



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## Train Your CSAs

First of all, make sure your Campus Security Authorities know who they are and what is required of them. In addition to Campus Safety departments, Campus Police, safety escorts and facilities access monitors, any official who has significant responsibility for student and campus activities is considered a CSA. CSAs are the point of contact for those who wish to report sexual violence. Reports don't need to come from the victim or even a student, but CSAs are required to report incidents through the university's reporting structure. Because each university has a number of CSAs, using software with an online reporting portal can help ensure that reports don't fall through the cracks. Additionally, universities should offer training programs to teach CSAs how to correctly respond to victims who come forward to report sexual violence. The trauma of the event can have profound effects on a victim, so CSAs must be careful not to make assumptions or take any actions that may discourage a victim from continuing with the reporting process.



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## Implement Automatic Communication Channels

The reporting and investigation process relies on solid communication at every level. If communication breaks down, it can have devastating results—it can create a perception that reporting sexual violence is futile, damage a university's reputation and bring financial penalties to an institution. Automating communication channels ensures that the right people are made aware of sexual offenses in a timely manner. Many universities use incident reporting software to streamline communication and keep campus leaders abreast of critical incidents. Setting up automatic email channels for certain types of incidents ensures that the right information is delivered to the right people at the right time.

## Use a Mass Notification System

Universities are required to issue timely warnings when a situation poses a threat to the campus community. Sending out warning messages when incidents of sexual violence are reported can help convey that reports are taken seriously, and the

notifications may also increase awareness of the problem and the role students can play in preventing sexual violence on campus.

Mass notification systems should be used carefully. Overuse can make students opt out or lose interest in notifications. However, waiting for an emergency to use a system for the first time is also problematic. Without credibility and some familiarity with the system, students might not trust the notification. It's best if the mass notification system manages distinct lists of recipients to send targeted notifications to the right group of people.

## Measure and Adapt

The more that is known about the scope of the problem on each campus, the more universities can tailor their prevention efforts. As incidents are reported and investigated, valuable, campus-specific information about sexual violence is captured. Utilizing analysis tools to identify commonalities between incidents or emerging trends can help inform the campus sexual violence prevention strategy.

## Keep Detailed Documentation During Investigations

Some universities choose to work with outside investigators during the adjudication process in order to eliminate any perceived bias. Whether the investigation is conducted internally or using external resources, universities should make sure every detail of the investigation is thoroughly documented. In the case of appeals or lawsuits from students, the university will need to provide details surrounding the investigation process to prove that no bias was shown.

## Offer Victim-Centered Restorative Justice Options

After the investigation concludes, universities should not close the book on victims of sexual violence. During the adjudication process, much of the focus is on the accused and the punishment they may receive. For some victims, a victim-centered process—in which they experience validation as a legitimate victim, have questions answered, observe offender remorse and receive support—may be particularly beneficial in healing. Most universities have campus resources



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that offer counseling services and can help throughout the healing process. These organizations should work with victims to ensure that their needs are met and provide them with options for moving forward.

Right now, universities are in a unique position to have a profound impact on the way that future generations understand and respond to sexual violence. They also face unique challenges as they work to overcome destructive attitudes and behaviors among campus populations. As awareness increases and current initiatives produce new plans to combat sexual assault and rape on campus, it's more important than ever to take action to facilitate a culture of reporting crime. When college students understand sexual violence, and know they have community support as they come forward to report sexual assault and rape, that's when we can expect to see a change in the statistics.



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