

Sexual Assault and Campus Safety

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In May of 2016, the British Columbia legislature passed [Bill 23](#), effectively requiring all BC post-secondary institutions to draft sexual assault and misconduct policies. What follows are a series of considerations, proposals, and questions formed by undergraduate students in one section of EDUC 3240, *Social Justice and Diversity in Educational Settings*, during this period of policy development both at KPU and around British Columbia.

1. Trust in institutions

A victim's decision to report an assault to their university should not be unduly influenced by fears regarding their academic standing, confidentiality, or whether they will be believed.

Canadian students are making it clear to their university's administrators that they do not have trust in their institutions' ability to handle sexual assault cases. The national chairwoman of the Canadian Federation of Students, Bilan Arte, states that "administrations have made it very clear to us as students that they're more interested in protecting their bottom line and their reputation than they are in actually protecting the campus community" (Kane, 2016). This is significant because, at the core, a victim's propensity to report an assault relies on that person's perception of how well it will be addressed.

"Trust was a significant issue that determined if and to whom survivors reported (Sable et al., 2006). Other factors include survivors' concern over how they would be treated as a factor in the decision to report, specifically fearing that they might experience a lack of sensitivity (Amar, 2008; Logan, Evans, Stevenson, & Jordan, 2005) and a fear of the loss of confidentiality (Logan et al., 2005; Sable et al., 2006)... Barriers at an institutional level include requiring victims to participate in adjudication processes, unintentionally condoning victim blaming during violence prevention programs, and sanctioning victims who have used drugs or alcohol through strict policies (Karjane, Fisher, & Cullen, 2005)" (Amar et al., 2014, p. 580).

This is particularly concerning in the specific context of sexual assault - which is an already under-reported crime (Benoit, 2015). Policy must, therefore, reflect possible fears a student may experience in coming forward as a victim, and must take steps to rectify these. All members of the community must have a good understanding of the process of reporting *before* an instance of sexual assault arises, and should they not be, they should have immediate access to the information they need to help inform them of their reporting options. While draft policies around British Columbia today often touch on what students should expect when reporting, access to a policy document is not equivalent to education.

Discussion Point 1

How can universities increase trust in institutional processes?

2. The Days after

For victims, the return to campus is fraught. What do they need?

Arguably, one of the most vital roles the university must take on in the aftermath of an incidence of sexual assault lies in the support made available to the victim. While much of the aftermath of such incidents must be dealt with within the justice system, the responsibility of ensuring the safe and comfortable return of the victim to the campus, should they choose to return, falls heavily onto the university. Universities are seldom, however, fully equipped to support this return. For this reason, universities in BC need to make more extensive use of specialized external partners.



One study found that “...most campus sexual assault and women’s centres rely on volunteers and collaboration with off-campus organizations in order to maintain a breadth of services for sexual assault survivors” (Quinlan et al, 2016, p. 1). While internal resources should be thoroughly and intensively developed and utilized, institutions may choose to turn to partner resources to aid them in victim support. These are a multitude of well-formed organizations that are devoted to victim support, and given the adequate funding, would likely be interested in partnerships. The resources available through these partnerships should be merely supplemental, but would be highly beneficial if used correctly. Students, themselves, may feel more comfortable having their resources based off-campus.

This argument applies to investigations of assaults, as well. According to a Global News article, “after significant pressure from students and advocates on campus, the university has revised its draft policy to allow for highly trained, trauma-informed investigators to handle all allegations of sexual assault made against members of the UBC community” (Kane, 2017). This allowance for outside investigators is promising. One must be careful, however, that such measures do not disempower the survivors themselves.

Taylor (as cited in Kenney, 2002, p. 237) notes that a person who has been violated may have experienced a “loss of power.” Therefore, it might be of little surprise that this person may feel powerless, and possibly re-traumatized, if information about their case was withheld, or if the case proceeded at a pace that was not favorable to the person’s level of comfort. Any sexual misconduct policy should incorporate procedures whereby the person who has been violated maintains a certain degree of control throughout the process, provided this does not compromise the case.

Discussion Point 2

What resources can universities draw on in supporting the safe return of victims to campus life?

3. institutional reporting

We need shared definitions, and shared data.

Currently, Canadian universities are not required to publicly disclose their sexual assault records, and they are under no government regulations regarding their reporting standards. New policies must require BC institutions to properly document cases of sexual assault on campus. This reporting is vital in the creation of data sets to guide future policy development. There are, however, multiple barriers to the accurate reporting that is needed. One such barrier is the inconsistency with which institutions define sexual assault and misconduct (McLaughlin, 2015). Because this definition is left up to each individual university, universities are effectively reporting different data on different phenomena. Bill 23 does not require institutions to adhere to any specific definitions of sexual misconduct.

The issues with victim underreporting and institutional underreporting make the needed statistics nearly impossible to obtain, and the statistics that *are* obtained are to be taken with a grain of salt. In 2015, CBC news requested the sexual assault statistics from 87 institutions across Canada between 2009 and 2013. UBC reported 16 cases for their 43,020 students, 16 of the institutions had 0 recorded cases of sexual assault on campus, and the highest number of cases reported for the 5-year span (not adjusted for number of students) was 57, reported by Ryerson for their 23,860 students (CBC News, 2014). The highest instance per 10,000 students over 5 years was 11.429, standing far above the vast majority of the institutions on this list.

"[CBC] found just 700 reported cases on 87 campuses between 2009 and 2013. But according to academic studies in the U.S., between one-in-five and one-in-three women will experience a sexual assault on campus. Applying those proportions to Canada suggests between 230,000 and 360,000 assaults among the 1.1 million women that Statistics Canada recorded as enrolled at Canada's post-secondary schools in the 2013-2014 academic year, when the agency last counted" (Westwood, 2016).

While the exact statistics are contested, most estimates do indeed land astonishingly far from those published by the CBC. A York survey for example, found that, of 406 students, 17% reported either experiencing a case of sexual assault on campus, or know someone who has (Gray & Pin, 2016). To further deepen the problem, of these institutions, 21 have made their statistics publicly available, while the overwhelming majority of them, 66, have not. This dearth of accurate statistics stands in the way of future policy development.

Discussion Point 3

What do we need to know about each institution to guide policy development at the provincial or federal level?

4. Policy education

We need ways to communicate the values of the new policies.

The introduction of Bill 23 has begun promising conversations across the province. Institutions have made their policy drafts available to members of the community for consideration and comment, and many have hosted discussion events. A 2016 survey of 406 York University students found that only 66% of students were aware of the universities sexual assault policy (Grey & Pin, 2016, p. 6), and of those who are aware of it, it is unclear to what extent they understand it. So, while the policies themselves are more transparent, what they *mean* might not be.



In an Ontario discussion paper, it is stated that “**effective, well-communicated policies** help create ‘an environment where everyone on campus knows that sexual violence is unacceptable, victims receive the services they need, and perpetrators are held accountable’ (Ontario Women’s Directorate, 2013, p. 11)” (as cited in METRAC, 2014, p. 6, emphasis added). While universities are indeed moving in the right direction by encouraging discussions within their

communities during the drafting process, whether this will continue post-implementation remains to be seen.

There are several things universities can do to ensure their community is well informed and educated regarding their sexual assault policies. The first is to recognize that encouraging community members to read the policy itself is insufficient. University policy can be technical, and many persons will be disinclined to read any piece of institutional policy. Plain-language resources containing all of the information experts deem necessary for members of the community to understand must be made available and easily accessible. These could come in the form of video, pamphlets, and/or online sources.

Discussion Point 4

Beyond disseminating the actual policy, how can universities ensure it is widely understood?

5. Environmental design

We need safe spaces, not just policies about safety.

We must also consider changing how we construct the environment of campuses themselves. Changing landscape designs by exchanging tall, visually impeding trees for short shrubs, for example, would increase natural surveillance. Having adequately lit walkways and pathways around campus would also aid in making more campus space more visible and, thereby, more



safe. Removing restroom doors and replacing them with maze entrances could help avoid isolation in places that prohibit closed-circuit surveillance cameras. The display of security system signs, and or placing of resources such as benches and vending machines in areas which are commonly known to be underutilized can repopulate quiet areas of campus and, thereby, help deter crimes.

Discussion Point 5

What physical changes could make campuses more safe?

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