

Task Force for Combating Sexual Violence and Supporting Our Students

FINAL REPORT | 2022



UConn
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

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INTRODUCTION

In February 2022, the President's Task Force for Combating Sexual Violence and Supporting Our Students was formed by Interim President Radenka Maric. Twenty-two members of the President's committee were charged specifically with:

“...evaluating how the University of Connecticut educates, prevents and responds to sexual violence. This includes how students are educated on the topics of sexual violence, the standard of consent, healthy relationships, incapacitation, and bystander programs. In addition, this committee is charged with the intentional review of all relevant procedures designed to support students who are participating in the process of reporting sexual violence including how policy, process, Title IX obligations, and support are shared with students.”

Over the course of the Spring semester, the Task Force met to evaluate and understand the University's role in sexual violence prevention, education, and access to support and resources. Sexual violence in this report is defined as sexual assault, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, stalking, and sexual exploitation. As a group of colleagues and students from across the University, everyone contributed their knowledge and expertise to the Task Force. We feel it important to emphasize that our evaluation was extended beyond sexual violence to include all forms of interpersonal violence including stalking, intimate partner violence and sexual harassment.

The following report addresses both the intentions of the charge as well as our own discoveries as a Task Force.

PROCESS

The Task Force formally met on six occasions to review the charge and discuss and develop recommendations. After presentations from various invited stakeholders and discussion, Task Force members divided into three sub-committees based on emerging themes — Connection to Resources; Education & Training; and Assessment & Accountability. These sub-committees met and communicated electronically to provide feedback on their sections of the report. The full group then met and communicated electronically to provide feedback on the final drafts of the report and recommendations. The content and topics of meetings were publicly shared via the Task Force's website.

Meeting content included the following presentations:

- Title IX Overview: presented by the Office of Institutional Equity
- Code of Conduct: presented by the Office of Community Standards
- Criminal Process: presented by University Safety
- Protect Our Pack: presented by the Dean of Students Office
- Gender Based Violence Prevention Programs: presented by the Women's Center
- Sexual Assault/Harassment Training Overview: presented by Student Activities
- U Got This: presented by the Vice President for Student Affairs Office
- Multi-tiered Prevention Education: presented by the Office of Institutional Equity
- Student Health and Wellness Services Overview: presented by Student Health and Wellness
- Dean of Students Office Support: presented by the Dean of Students Office
- Women's Center: Resources and Support: presented by the Women's Center
- Student Feedback for the President's Task Force: presented by the Undergraduate Student Government (USG)

This spirit of transparency should be continued following the conclusion of this Task Force to disclose accepted recommendations and implementation plans. It's important that the University communicates with students several times during the academic terms regarding Task Force implementation of recommendations, changes in resource allocation, public disclosure of continual reporting and evaluation, survey results, and support for new positions and initiatives.

OBSERVATIONS

Prior to delving into our recommendations, the Task Force made a number of key observations. First, there are extensive resources and support available to students who are victims of sexual violence. However, many of these resources were unfamiliar to members of the Task Force, including students. When one is a victim of trauma, it is intimidating and overwhelming to search through disaggregated web pages to find a keyword or resource that will help one seek the support they need. Our recommendations seek to remove those barriers, increase access to connections and resources that enable prompt access to care, and empower students to make their own decisions throughout the process.

Second, our student-led focus groups, including numerous student organizations on campus, revealed a painful truth that the Task Force was grateful to hear. The University, police, and structures of authority are not necessarily trusted by our students. A perception of inaction or disinterest on behalf of the University leads to students distrusting the very resources that are designed to support them. While that was a painful truth to hear, it is essential that we thank the students who were forthcoming in expressing their concerns while the University seeks to be a trusted resource for our students. The Task Force also appreciates the additional needs expressed by student leaders in the Revolution Against Rape and other student organizations. Those demands have been attached to the conclusion of this report. While they are not all directly incorporated into our own recommendations, their influence upon our thinking is clear.

The recommendations offered here should not in any way suggest that sexual violence at the University of Connecticut is resolved. The solutions of today are not the solutions of tomorrow. Rather, as reflected in the University's previous history of student activism, expression and the previous Task Forces formed on this topic, the University must embrace a willingness for ongoing reflection and review of our approach to, as the title of this Task Force suggests, combat sexual violence and forever support the needs of our students. Sexual violence is not a phenomenon unique to the University of Connecticut. Yet providing for the needs of our students and earning their trust is a responsibility that must be given the greatest seriousness and the necessary resources to demonstrate a continued commitment to our students and our community.

Finally, anyone impacted by sexual violence should never stand alone. It is a disservice to ourselves as a great university that cares for its students when we appear to simply seek compliance. UConn must fully respond to the presence of sexual and interpersonal violence as it expresses itself in higher education. This includes the importance of focusing upon the presence of intimate partner violence, stalking, and sexual harassment among all members of the UConn community. We should, as a Task Force member expressed, strive to be a university that aspires to change the culture in unique and innovative ways. The care and compassion Task Force members apply towards UConn students and each other was clearly exhibited by every member of the Task Force. We began and concluded our work by acknowledging the reality that sexual violence or misconduct impacts 1 in 4 undergraduate women (NSVRC) and 1 in 10 men in the United States experience some form of sexual coercion in their lifetime (NSVRC). We also recognize the reality that transgender, non-binary, and BIPOC individuals experience even greater rates of sexual violence. The call to action for the University is clear: good intentions do not ensure good responses. Instead, educational programs, advocacy, and a cultural commitment to sexual violence prevention and education are essential and must be adequately resourced, culturally responsive, and informed by the experience of those most directly impacted.

It is with gratitude to the University community and confidence for our continued improvement in this work that the Task Force offers the following recommendations to the President for review and approval.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Connection to Resources

While an abundance of resources exist for students related to sexual violence, locating and easily interpreting that information can be challenging, particularly when considering the impact trauma has upon individuals. The Task Force recommends the following measures be adopted to improve accessibility of information:

1. Develop a new system for organizing information

Develop dynamic, visually compelling and clear communications presentations (possibly leveraging student design teams in the School of Fine Arts in consultation with University Communications). These pieces should focus on essential communication rather than organizational structure that may not be intuitive and center the information on what students

may need. Communications should include posters, campus signage, banners, and social media campaigns. Pieces should reflect the diversity of the community and be available in multiple languages and alternative media upon request. Information to present includes:

- Frame resources as: Support (rape crisis, Dean of Students Office, Women’s Center, Counseling, etc.); Medical (SHAW, SAFE exams); and Investigations: (911; police and Community Standards)
- Organize resources further into tiers of detail: Have to Know (critical resources on procedure); Need to Know (i.e. emergency care); Want to Know (obligated information to disclose)
- Work with the Office of the Provost to include resource information in course syllabi. Information should be clearly expressed visually and be accessible using only a few clicks. Avenues include but are not limited to HuskyCT, University departmental web sites/offices, residence halls, and through the LiveSafe app.

2. Improve existing resources

All existing resources should be audited to ensure they are current and clear, and aligned with elements included in new communication vehicles described above. This includes cross-referencing any institutional statements on sexual assault with policy and procedure, and vice versa. As with new communication vehicles, pieces should reflect the diversity of the community and be available in multiple languages and alternative media upon request.

- Add language to the University’s Title IX website that clearly indicates all referrals will be contacted by a university professional with a focus on care and support.
- Add information/infographic to Title IX website regarding jurisdiction and pathways (described above)
- Leverage HuskyCT for further development to automatically enroll students and include in the “organizations” tab a link to the Title IX website and the Inform site.
- Include brief information on the Title IX website and the Inform (UConn’s university-wide reporting site) site on course syllabi.
- Articulate our values and aspirations as a violence free community. This should include a review of the university’s commitment to campus safety and sexual assault response to ensure the messaging underscoring a climate that is free of sexual harassment and violence is clear, and that it includes the responsibilities of faculty, staff, and students in prevention, education, and reporting.
- Utilize and bolster the ability of highly utilized campus centers for dissemination of information including how to access confidential and exempt resources. Campus centers should include the Cultural Centers, SHaW, Dean of Students office, Residential Life, etc.

3. Support the launch and promotion of the new LiveSafe app

The LiveSafe Mobile App will provide the UConn community with a new way to report concerns and emergencies to the UConn Police Department. Reports can be sent anonymously by text, photos, or videos and allow for two-way communication with a University Safety Dispatcher who can initiate the appropriate response. LiveSafe’s SafeWalk feature allows others to virtually walk or drive with you to a destination. LiveSafe will also provide links to university resources in a time of need.

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- 4. Increase awareness of and ease of access to no-contact directives (NCDs) in sexual violence cases**
- UConn's No-Contact Letters are different from legal protective and restraining orders, and can be requested at any time from the University regardless of whether criminal charges have been filed or a referral to campus conduct has occurred. Increased awareness of and ease of access to NCDs is suggested regardless of investigation status. In matters of sexual or interpersonal violence (and other potential violations of The Student Code), Community Standards is the office that issues NCDs involving current students. Requests for NCDs in matters of sexual or interpersonal violence should promptly be implemented within one business day of the student's conversation with Community Standards. Students should be able to speak with Community Standards only on one occasion for the NCD to be implemented. Individuals do not need to file a Formal Complaint or participate in an investigation to obtain an NCD.

Education & Training

Education and training programs for students, faculty, and staff should be expanded upon. Additional educational sessions, in addition to existing trainings, should be created, implemented, and mandated that speak to the unique needs of their audience. The Task Force recommends the following measures be adopted to enhance existing programming and promote peer education:

- 1. Enhance faculty/staff training by developing a tiered training model responsive to the different needs and interests of employees:**
 - First responder training: required annually for initial first responders such as UCPD, residential life staff, and SHaW (Student Health and Wellness). Training should include information on policies, procedures, trauma-informed response, the role of off-campus advocates, and university resources.
 - Develop a compensated cohort of accessible colleagues: Create a cohort of employees who wish to have advanced training that builds on the trauma-informed practices and cultural competency found in current trainings. These individuals will provide support to students and their peers and connect individuals to the appropriate reporting mechanisms in addition to existing reporting requirements expressed to university employees. This cohort will be co-chaired by the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) and a faculty/staff representative. Cohort members will receive compensation (such as stipends or course reduction).
 - Required training for ALL employees: Newly hired employees currently receive comprehensive, 2-hour Sexual Harassment Prevention Training during their first six months of hire. This session should be reviewed on a regular basis and modified as needed. OIE should create and implement a second mandatory education session for all employees to complete every three years to include any policy updates, resources, reporting options, trauma-informed practices, and cultural competency.
- 2. Hire an additional education and training specialist in OIE to ensure development and implementation of additional training described above.**

3. Expand student training

- Review all peer education programs to develop a cohesive curriculum that ensures students are learning from each other on topics related to sexual and interpersonal violence. These efforts will require additional resources and funding to support intentional coordination and support of these efforts among ODI, Student Affairs and OIE.
- Hire a full-time employee within the Dean of Students Office to expand, develop, and oversee peer-led trainings and programs for all campuses, such as Protect Our Pack and to provide support to victim-survivors and respondents.
- Implement a mandatory, peer-led education session, through the Protect Our Pack program, for all students during their second year at UConn. This will require additional resources to hire more student peer leaders (Pack Leaders) across all campuses to ensure they are properly trained and compensated.
- All FYE courses are required to receive a Consent 201 or comparable workshop. The Task Force recommends increased accountability and monitoring to ensure all students receive this programming. First Year Programming will ensure FYE instructors connect with the Women's Center to provide the workshop.
- Restore funding to Week of Welcome (WOW) to include required educational programming related to sexual and interpersonal violence.

Assessment & Accountability

Compliance provides the floor to build upon, while the university strives for the ceiling. The Task Force recommends that the University commit to a culture of trust and care through a systemic and strategic assessment processes of UConn's prevention and intervention programs, policies, procedures, and practices that are rigorous, transparent and continuous. Institutional obligations for compliance as mandated by state and federal law should serve as a starting point as we expand our vision beyond what the university is legally obligated to do, in order to achieve our aspirational goals as a university. Assessment and accountability are fundamental to the University to transform culture, actively engage students, and demand healthy relationships.

“Assessment” and “Accountability” are significant words for the University to embrace if it is to work to efficiently respond to, educate, and prevent sexual violence. This model of evaluating our institutional values and procedures around sexual and relationship violence will serve as an expansion of our work around diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that the voices of those impacted are heard at all levels of the policy making process. Accountability mechanisms must include themes of how we apply care, hear perspectives, how we include the voices of those impacted in the policy making process, our institutional values around sexual and interpersonal violence, and how we can be consistent but not uniform.

The impact of federal mandates surrounding Title IX is bolstered by state law in Connecticut. Our recommendations intend to go beyond what we as a University must do in order to remain in compliance with the law, to what we should do to ensure that everyone affiliated with our institution is able to learn and work in an environment that is safe and supportive.

With these principles in place, we recommend the following:

1. Conduct an externally led, program-wide assessment that is secure and preserves student anonymity.

Identify and engage with an external organization, such as the NASPA Collective or the National Academies Action Collaborative, to rigorously assess institutional policies, processes, and programs related to the prevention and response to sexual and interpersonal violence. This assessment may be done in collaboration with the University's Community Resource Team and focus on auditing policies and educational programs to determine efficacy, next steps, and process improvements. This evaluation should be comprehensive and focus on the efficacy of trainings, the success rate in communicating policies and resources to students, the efficiency of timelines for incidents referred to either the conduct or the criminal system including their ultimate resolution, and the timeliness of response time for support services.

It is essential that the disclosure of these findings be publicly shared with the UConn community, ideally on the Title IX website, and that any student disclosures occur through an anonymous and secure format.

2. Require assessment of all required trainings to determine immediate and long-term impact

Introduce required pre-test, post-test, and annual evaluation of impact required for all students, faculty, and staff. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has developed a tool for assessment strategies and tools that may provide valuable guidance in developing such a measure and enabling effective and consistent assessment strategies across trainings to ensure consistency and information sharing.

3. Continually assess the education, training, and response efforts for students and employees related to sexual and interpersonal violence.

Create a Graduate Assistant position in OIE to routinely evaluate and assess existing training programs for effectiveness to ensure they are meeting the desired learning outcomes, including but not limited to the Protect Our Pack orientation session, Consent 201, and U Got This as well as staff and faculty trainings.

4. Gather anonymous feedback from students through the implementation of a survey tool about their experience making a report and/or participating in a university investigation related to sexual and interpersonal violence.

5. Identify opportunities and staffing needed to implement restorative practices to promote accountability and alternative methods for conflict resolution.

6. Develop research excellence in sexual violence on college and university campuses.

Establish a research-based locus for assessment that will enable the University to continue to assess and grow from those measures following the completion of an objective, external assessment as described in recommendation 1. This could include calling upon the research strength and expertise of the Institute for Collaboration on Health, Intervention, and Policy (InCHIP) and encouraging the creation of a center that focuses upon the occurrence of sexual violence on college campuses. The Center should be headed by an advisory board of experts in sexual violence from across the country and leaders in higher education. The focus of this Center will be to promote research that informs prevention, intervention, and treatment related to sexual violence.

Conclusion

All these recommendations insist that the University seek to assess the funding and resources needed to meet these staffing, programmatic, assessment, and communication measures. The current resources are admirable but should not be further taxed to meet the additional needs expressed by this Task Force. Capital and ongoing investment ensure that constant review and critical reflection will enable continual growth towards the transformative culture we seek to achieve at the University of Connecticut. Further, we strongly encourage the University to expand the intention of this work to include the impact of sexual violence upon staff and faculty as well.

Continued Commitment to the Work

The intention that brought this Task Force together should not be concluded with this report. Rather, Task Force members are ready and available to serve on the continued implementation of these recommendations. We thank the President and the University of Connecticut for their continued commitment to this work.

References and Recommended Tools:

HRC Foundation. (2021). Sexual assault and the LGBTQ community. Human Rights Campaign. <https://www.hrc.org>

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2021). Evaluating the Effectiveness of Interventions to Prevent and Address Sexual Harassment: Proceedings of a Workshop. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26279>.

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. (2021). Violence against trans and non-binary people. VAWnet. <https://vawnet.org>

NASPA. (2021, November). Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. The CORE Blueprint. 3rd Edition.

President's Task Force for Combating Sexual Violence and Supporting our Students: University of Connecticut Office of the President | Combating Sexual Violence & Supporting our Students (uconn.edu)

The Women of Color Network, Inc. FAQ Collection (2018). Sexual violence in communities of color. The Women of Color Network, Inc. www.wocninc.org

Connection to Resources

RECOMMENDATION	LEAD OFFICE OR DEPARTMENT	SUPPORTING DEPARTMENTS	DUE DATES	NOTES
<p>1. Develop a new system for organizing information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame resources as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support (rape crisis, Dean of Students Office, Women's Center, Counseling, etc.); Medical (SHaW, SAFE exams); Investigations (911, police and Community Standards) 	Communications	SFA, Student Affairs, OIE, USG	<p>Phase 1: Fall 2022</p> <p>Phase 2: Spring 2023</p>	
<p>2. Improve existing resources</p> <p>A. Add language to the University's Title IX website that clearly indicates all referrals will be contacted by a university professional with a focus on care and support.</p> <p>B. Add information/infographic to Title IX website regarding jurisdiction and pathways (described above)</p> <p>C. Leverage HuskyCT for further development to automatically enroll students and include in the "organizations" tab a link to the Title IX website and the Inform site.</p> <p>D. Include brief information on the Title IX website and the Inform (UConn's university-wide reporting site) site on course syllabi.</p> <p>E. Articulate our values and aspirations as a violence free community. This should include a review of the university's commitment to campus safety and sexual assault response to ensure the messaging underscoring a climate that is free of sexual harassment and violence is clear, and that it includes the responsibilities of faculty, staff, and students in prevention, education, and reporting.</p> <p>F. Utilize and bolster the ability of highly utilized campus centers for dissemination of information including how to access confidential and exempt resources. Campus centers should include the Cultural Centers, SHaW, Dean of Students office, Residential Life, etc.</p>	<p>A, B, D Office on Institutional Equity</p> <p>C Provost's Office/CETL</p> <p>E, F Women's Center</p>	<p>A, B, C Student Affairs (Community Standards and Dean of Students office)</p> <p>D Provost's office</p> <p>E, F Student Affairs, Human Relations, Provost's office, USG</p>	September 7	
<p>3. Support the launch and promotion of the new LiveSafe app</p>	UCPD	Communications, USG	August 29	
<p>4. Increase awareness of and ease of access to no contact directives (NCDs) in sexual violence cases</p>	Student Affairs	OIE	August 29	

Education and Training

RECOMMENDATION	LEAD OFFICE OR DEPARTMENT	SUPPORTING DEPARTMENTS	DUE DATES	NOTES
<p>1. Enhance faculty/staff training by developing a tiered training model responsive to the different needs and interests of employees.</p> <p>A. First Responder Training</p> <p>B. Develop a compensated cohort of accessible colleagues</p> <p>C. Required training for ALL employees</p>	OIE	Student Affairs, Provost, UCPD, HR	Spring/ Summer 23 Development Fall 23 launch	Contingent on new staffing for OIE (FTE and GA)
<p>2. Hire an additional education and training specialist in OIE to ensure development and implementation of additional training described above.</p>	OIE		January 1/23	
<p>3. Expand student training</p> <p>A. Review all peer education programs to develop a cohesive curriculum that ensures students are learning from each other on topics related to sexual and interpersonal violence. These efforts will require additional resources and funding to support intentional coordination and support of these efforts among ODI, Student Affairs and OIE</p> <p>B. Hire full-time employee within the Dean of Students Office to expand, develop, and oversee peer-led trainings and programs for all campuses, such as Protect Our Pack, and provide support to victim survivors and respondents</p> <p>C. Implement a mandatory, peer-led session, through the Protect Our Pack program, for all students during their second year at UConn. This will require additional resources to hire more student peer leaders (PackLeaders) across all campuses to ensure they are properly trained and compensated</p> <p>D. All FYE courses are required to receive a Consent 201 or comparable workshop. The Task Force recommends increased accountability and monitoring to ensure all students receive this programming. First Year Programming will ensure FYE instructors connect with the Women's Center to provide the workshop.</p> <p>E. Restore funding to Week of Welcome (WOW) to include educational programming related to sexual and interpersonal violence</p>	Student Affairs	Provost/Academic Affairs, Women's Center/ODI, OIE	AY 23 review programs Develop recs and launch for Fall 23	Contingent on new staffing for DOS

Assessment and Accountability

RECOMMENDATION	LEAD OFFICE OR DEPARTMENT	SUPPORTING DEPARTMENTS	DUE DATES	NOTES
1. Conduct an externally led, program-wide assessment	OIE	CRT	Select assessment by Spring 23	
2. Require assessment of all required trainings to determine immediate and long-term impact.	OIE	CRT	Spring 23 assessment shared May 23	
3. Continually assess the education, training, and response effort for students and employees related to sexual and interpersonal violence. A. Create a Graduate Assistant position in OIE to routinely evaluate and assess existing training programs for effectiveness to ensure they are meeting the desired learning outcomes, including but not limited to the Protect Our Pack orientation session, Consent 201, and U Got This as well as staff and faculty trainings.	OIE		Hire GA Fall 22 Assessment shared May 23	
4. Gather anonymous feedback from students through the implementation of a survey tool about their experience making a report and/or participating in a university investigation related to sexual and interpersonal violence.	OIE	Student Affairs	Spring 23 Survey and public disclosure of results	
5. Identify opportunities and staffing needed to implement restorative practices to promote accountability and alternative methods for conflict resolution.	Student Affairs	Student Affairs, OIE, ODI	Fall 22 Review and recommendations Spring 23 implementations	
6. Develop research excellence in sexual violence on college and university campuses.	Academic Affairs	Student Affairs, ODI	AY 23 exploratory committee Final report and recommendations May 23	Great initiative for AVP of Allied Health/inCHIP