

HARVARD UNIVERSITY



May 20, 2015

Dear President Faust,

It has been a year since you convened and charged the University-wide Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Assault. Our work over the past year has left us more persuaded than ever of the importance of your charge. Harvard is not immune from the problems of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct that have so visibly gained attention across higher education. We have been deeply moved by the examples of how sexual assault has damaged people's lives and interfered with the ability of students to thrive at Harvard. As your charge to us urged, we have an obligation, both as individuals and as a community, to do better.

The Task Force would like to report on the implementation of the recommendations you accepted last May and for which you provided resources. These actions have already made a difference, and we are grateful for your support. Funding for the design and implementation of the student Sexual Conduct Survey will make possible a fuller understanding of the situation on our campus. Although the numbers have not yet been finalized, we are pleased that the outreach effort, in which you have been a key participant, resulted in at least 50% of students completing the survey. Given prior experience with such surveys this was a percentage that we had hoped for, but did not expect to reach. Information from the survey will be critical as we spend the summer crafting recommendations for prevention measures tailored to the circumstances at each of Harvard's Schools.

The increased staffing at the Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (OSAPR) has permitted expansion and enhancement of support services not only within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences but also at other Schools. We are convinced, in addition, that if we are to encourage fuller reporting of assaults, it is necessary, through OSAPR and other Harvard components, for the University to take good care of those with the courage to come forward. The development of the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Education (SHARE) website has permitted the University's sexual assault support resources to be found in one place, an important service to members of the community who have experienced sexual assault and those who seek to support them. The commitment to sharing ideas, programming, and material on sexual assault during orientation programs has been an important first step in ensuring training that is both engaging and effective across Harvard's schools.

Much hard work remains before us and before the entire Harvard community. If we are to effectively prevent sexual assault and misconduct, it will be necessary to create lasting changes in culture and behavior among members of a community who are here for a limited time and who absorb ideas from the larger culture. Indeed we must also pay attention to the diverse backgrounds of our students; they come to campus from across this country and across the world carrying with them very different life experiences, cultural norms, and expectations. Particularly in the case of undergraduates, the University brings together a large concentration of young people during a critical period of maturation. In this

context, it will not be enough to issue a report, but for change to be effective, it will require ongoing and committed engagement of faculty, University administrators, staff, and students.

The interim recommendations that follow are based on what we have heard from the community through our extensive outreach efforts along with focused research on factors that have been previously implicated in the incidence of harassment and assault. We will, of course, make our final recommendations only after we have received and considered the results of the Sexual Conduct Survey. Some of the interim recommendations that follow suggest specific approaches that the University may wish to consider. Others identify general areas that the Task Force believes may benefit from further evaluation by the Schools, which are better situated than we are to consider what may prove effective on their campuses.

Actions of the Task Force to Date:

The Task Force carried out its charge through intense, focused work by three sub-committees. The Outreach and Communications Sub-Committee members worked with students, faculty, and staff at each of Harvard's undergraduate and graduate schools to conduct 52 public and private outreach workshops and dozens of individual discussions. In total, these sessions reached 530 students and student leaders. The students represented a broad range of backgrounds and experiences and included all Harvard campuses. The aim was to develop a better understanding of the circumstances under which sexual harassment and sexual assault occur at each School and the possible contribution, to these events, of local cultures, and of specific educational and social settings. These sessions also aimed to spark ideas for changing norms, behaviors, and organizational settings that contribute significantly to unhealthy or unsafe environments on our campuses.

Over the past nine months, the Research Sub-Committee has reviewed prior studies on the prevalence and risk of sexual assault. The Sub-Committee has focused on work that had examined the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses, the proximate social, environmental, and behavioral risk factors for assault, as well as evidence on broader contextual risks such as campus climate. Together with the Sexual Conduct survey, this research will help the Task Force better understand the conditions that influence the likelihood of sexual assault and thus inform our recommendations about effective preventive interventions.

The Survey Sub-Committee spent the past year preparing the climate survey of our degree-seeking students that has just been administered with the goal of better documenting the incidence of sexual assault and other forms of sexual harassment at Harvard and understanding the circumstances under which these are most likely to occur. The Survey also seeks to document the perceptions of such conduct among students at each of Harvard's Schools. Members of the Task Force actively encouraged the Association of American Universities to take a lead role in a survey that would not only ascertain facts and perceptions on each campus, but that would also permit useful comparisons across similar institutions. The Sub-Committee has participated in the design of this national climate survey, which was administered by 28 schools this April representing approximately 800,000 students. Harvard administered the survey from April 12 through May 3, and results will be available in the fall.

Interim Recommendations:

Based on our outreach to the community and our other work, four broad themes have emerged. These themes form the basis for the following recommendations, which could be implemented in the short-term before the Survey is fully analyzed and before the Task Force develops final recommendations.

1. Changing the incidence of sexual assault will require a change in culture.

The University, as an institution, must play a vital role in culture change, for example by setting expectations, confirming shared values, and providing organizational support. However, much social psychology research, as well as the powerful testimony of our students, makes clear that significant culture change will require the active and constructive engagement of students through their organizations and more importantly through their informal networks. Students are particularly able to influence the behavior of other students. Our students have energy, skills, and concrete ideas about how to achieve these changes. The Task Force recommends that the University foster peer-to-peer engagement as a means to change culture and lower barriers to reporting assault. There are many possible ways that such change might be supported. We offer the following as initial steps.

a. Offer a Change Challenge

The work of the Outreach Sub-Committee generated a series of informative conversations with students across Harvard. The Task Force recommends that the University find ways to tap into the energy and innovative spirit of our student community and enlist its aid as we seek to foster prevention and reinforce norms that are foundational to this academic community. We propose that the President sponsor a challenge for students, working individually or in groups, to create new ways to spread the message of prevention and community well-being. The methods should be limited only by our students' imaginations and could include the use of social media, visual and performing arts, mobile applications, or other channels, such as the establishment of a peer-to-peer network that would provide effective ways to reach their peers. We suggest that the goal be to have the best ideas ready for use in the spring of 2016.

b. Use Seed Funding to Encourage School-based Innovation

Through the outreach undertaken by the committee, we heard many intriguing ideas about possible new approaches to prevention. Several Schools have expressed a desire to move forward on a trial basis with some of these suggestions. We see benefits to encouraging innovation in this area.

Most importantly, because changing behavior and culture is so challenging, we recommend the creation of opportunities and innovative approaches to the promotion of healthy culture and the prevention of sexual assault and misconduct. There is no established template to apply, nor is any single approach likely to be effective by itself. The Schools are not homogenous and any intervention needs to be sensitive to local contexts and diverse student communities. Encouraging the Schools and units to try different methods of intervention will result in a richer set of experiences on which the

University as a whole may ultimately draw – knowing what worked, what did not, and perhaps why.

To foster this important work, we recommend the establishment of a time-limited fund in the President’s Office to provide small grants to Schools interested in adopting innovative approaches to prevention over the Fall semester. The University should create a mechanism to capture these innovations, as well as the Schools’ judgments about successes and failures, and ensure this knowledge is made available across Schools and units.

2. High quality education and training needs to be available and should occur at regular intervals during a student’s time at Harvard, not only at orientation.

Encouraging an on-going dialogue about responsible behaviors within our community is an important component of culture change, and potentially a mechanism to change behavior. Creating methods to begin that conversation at the start of our students’ experience on campus and to reinforce it thereafter is the aim of this recommendation. There are clearly opportunities to share approaches across Schools and with peer institutions and to provide engaging educational materials that will help students absorb new concepts and encourage them to re-examine assumptions. The recommendations that follow are designed to make it easier for the Schools to have effective and continuing conversations with students about the responsibilities we owe to one another as members of a community.

a. An Education Toolkit

Last spring, the Task Force recommended that OSAPR and the Title IX Office work collaboratively with a subset of Task Force members to ensure that all Schools have access to materials to help develop new programming for student orientation and training sessions. After the 2014 orientations the Task Force met with representatives from each School to elicit their feedback on what was accomplished and their suggestions for what the Schools would find most helpful and effective if developed on a University-wide basis. The Task Force recommends that this spring and summer be used to build on that work by creating a toolkit of adaptable materials that would be made available to those School officers charged with structuring orientations and educational programs throughout the year.

We recommend that a working group be convened that would include several members of the Task Force as well as School-based experts in pedagogy, School Title IX coordinators, and others responsible for planning and leading student orientation. This group would create a suite of tools that could be made available for use in orientations for 2015 designed to support School-based efforts to most effectively educate students on prevention and intervention and to communicate critical information about the resources Harvard offers in response to sexual misconduct. This working group would evaluate the efficacy of the materials used in the 2015 orientations to help inform our recommendations for the final report.

b. Ongoing Education and Training

Even the most engaging materials are insufficient to facilitate change and ensure access to resources if used only as part of a single session taking place when students first come to campus. Through formal and informal means, the University needs regularly to reinforce its values and expectations for members of our community. The Task Force therefore recommends that the Schools look for ways, consistent with their academic schedule and programs, not only to ensure that orientation programs on prevention are effective but also to underscore the key themes at various points during the students' time at Harvard. One approach to the delivery of this message might be the development of an effective and properly resourced peer education program. Schools might also want to consider the best means for the effective dissemination of the University policy on Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment beyond student orientation to all members of our community.

3. The University should find additional and innovative ways to support safety and prevention-related efforts.

In the last year, Harvard has made significant investments in building resources to support counseling on and reporting of sexual assault and harassment. This investment has come through OSAPR, the Title IX office, and the SHARE website. We need to continue to develop methods that reinforce efforts to be safe.

a. Mobile Application

The recent mobile application developed by HBS and adapted by Harvard College provides easy access to sites with the highest use by students. It also highlights instant access to critical help and safety resources such as the SHARE website, OSAPR, and HUPD. The Task Force recommends making the mobile application available, in a customizable form, to other interested Schools. We suggest that the University consider some limited financial support to encourage Schools to tailor the content and information to their respective campus and make it available to their student populations.

b. Late Night Transportation

During a number of the student outreach sessions, concern was expressed about the difficulty both undergraduate and graduate students face when returning home after late night activities. The Task Force recommends that Campus Services be asked to study the safety issues presented by late-night transportation and, guided by what it learns, adopt any appropriate changes by fall 2015. Examples of approaches might include additional resources, scope, or advertising of the escort walk-home service or increased van service in the late night hours. We encourage Campus Services to experiment with approaches and adjust its plans depending on usage patterns and other feedback from the student body.

4. All Schools across the University should re-evaluate policies and programs that relate to student social activities and spaces that affect the student social experience in unintentionally negative ways.

During our outreach, we heard concerns that rules and structures at the School level may unintentionally make it harder for students to find suitable space on campus for social purposes. One School, for example, had attractive space that students could not use for social events, resulting in the migration of widely attended parties off campus, a situation that likely increased risk. When the School changed the rules to permit access to the on-campus space, students relocated some of these events to the campus and the overall experience improved materially - from both the School's and the students' perspective.

We anticipate learning more from the Sexual Conduct Survey about how campus-related spaces, student activity policies, and sexual misconduct may intersect, whether constructively or otherwise. In the meantime, we recommend that the Schools consider their policies and practices as they relate to student use of campus space or other socially-focused policies to evaluate whether they are having incidental and unintended consequences. Schools might also consider supporting programming targeted to provide alternatives to risky social settings as well as continue outreach and collaboration with student communities to help inform these approaches.

The need for safe and appropriate space for social purposes came through over and over, in both the College and the graduate and professional Schools. Whether the need is for space without alcohol, space with gender-neutral control, or providing on campus space as opposed to off-campus locales, it is clear that more positive options would be constructive.

Conclusion:

As a University community, we must make every effort to support a culture that enables our students to thrive. Sexual assault has a profound impact on individuals in our community and on our community as a whole. It is our obligation to create a positive environment that allows our students to flourish free from harm.

We are grateful for the opportunity to continue this important work and look forward to submitting our final report at the end of the fall semester. Please let us know if you have any questions about our recommendations or thoughts about the work ahead for us.

Best,

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