

Sexual Violence Prevention Training During Orientation: What Students Need to Know

Lindsey Koch and Mary Christopher

According to federal requirements, colleges and universities must provide sexual violence prevention programs to all new students. These requirements can prove complex, and orientation personnel must sift through all the information to determine what students need to know about sexual violence prevention. This topic is only growing in importance. Therefore, orientation personnel must remain informed and possess solid plans for information dissemination. This article provides a brief history of campus safety legislation, followed by the critical information students need to prevent sexual violence, including "How To Protect Themselves From Becoming a Victim," "How To Protect Themselves From Becoming a Perpetrator," "How To Protect Others From Becoming Victims," and "How To Make Healthy Decisions About Sex and Relationships."

Higher education institutions, specifically residential institutions, represent communities within themselves. Institutions possess legal liability for the safety of the students and staff who live, work, and study on their campuses (Kaplin & Lee, 2009). Based on this legal liability, coupled with a desire to aid students in their developmental process while encouraging healthy decision-making, institutions attempt to prepare students for the campus environment. Unfortunately, a major component of necessary campus safety training includes sexual violence prevention. Statistics show that one in four women will suffer sexual assault during their time in college (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). This staggering statistic causes great concern to universities, students and families, and American society. As a result of this violent reality on college campuses, many lawsuits and a great deal of legislative action aimed at altering this situation emerged in recent years.

Despite the desire to train students in sexual violence prevention, university personnel often get lost between what they need to know about the changing federal campus safety requirements and what students need to know about safety on a college campus. This conflict proves particularly crucial during new student orientation, where institutions must educate students on sexual violence

Lindsey Koch (lkoch@smu.edu) is a Doctoral Student at Hardin-Simmons University and the Director of Student Transitions & Orientation at Southern Methodist University

Mary Christopher is an Associate Dean in the Irvin School of Education, Professor of Educational Studies, Director of the Masters of Gifted Education and Doctorate in Leadership program at Hardin-Simmons University

prevention and university resources available to support victims (The Clery Center, 2014). While orientation personnel assume a large portion of the responsibility for training students on sexual violence prevention, the question often remains: What, exactly, do students need to know? University personnel tasked with developing orientation programs for new students need guidance in order to prepare students to prevent sexual violence by living safely and making healthy choices.

Based on the current climate of sexual violence on college campuses and ongoing clarification of federal requirements, a brief history of campus safety legislation supports a better understanding of the issue. Incoming college students need to receive relevant information in order to make healthy choices regarding sexual behavior and personal safety.

A Brief History of Campus Safety Legislation

The Campus Security Act

The Campus Security Act, often called the Clery Act, passed in 1990 due to activism on the part of the parents of Jeanne Clery, a student who was tragically raped and murdered in her residence hall room (Kaplin & Lee, 2009). The Campus Security Act amended the Higher Education Act of 1965. The Campus Security Act, amended in 1992, “imposes requirements on colleges and universities for preventing, reporting, and investigating sex offenses that occur on campus” (Kaplin & Lee, 2009, p. 387). This legislation mandates colleges and universities publish their security policies, maintain and publish an annual public crime log, and provide timely warnings to students and campus employees related to any crimes that pose an immediate or ongoing threat to the campus. Additionally, the law ensures basic rights for victims of campus sexual assaults (The Clery Center, 2014). “The law also requires colleges to include in their policy (1) educational programs to promote the awareness of rape and acquaintance rape, (2) sanctions that will follow a disciplinary board’s determination that a sexual offense has occurred, (3) procedures students should follow if a sex offense occurs, and (4) procedures for on-campus disciplinary action in cases of alleged sexual assault” (Kaplin & Lee, 2009, p 388).

Federal Programs

The federal government provides an enormous amount of funding to higher education institutions through student aid. “To protect its investment and ensure the fulfillment of national priorities and goals, the federal government imposes many requirements on the way institutions manage and spend funds under federal programs” (Kaplin & Lee, 2009, p. 332). These regulations relate to university policies regarding nondiscrimination, campus safety, sexual assault investigations, Title IX policies, and more.

Title IX

Title IX refers to the aspect of the Education Amendments of 1972 related to the Civil Rights Act. Title IX declares, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (Kaplin & Lee, 2009, p. 735). Historically, the main focus of Title IX relates to intercollegiate athletics, but Title IX also includes sexual harassment as clarified in the 2011 Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011).

What Students Need to Know

While university officials certainly must understand the history and requirements of campus safety legislation, students require a much different knowledge base. When it comes to preparing students during orientation to live safely on a college campus and to make healthy choices, four crucial topics rise to the top. These topics include “How To Protect Themselves From Becoming a Victim,” “How To Protect Themselves From Becoming a Perpetrator,” “How To Protect Others From Becoming Victims,” and “How To Make Healthy Decisions About Sex and Relationships.”

How to Protect Themselves From Becoming a Victim

Students need to know strategies for protecting themselves. Unfortunately, college students often serve as easy prey for people with poor intentions. Students should learn about personal protection strategies, including warnings to never leave a drink unattended, even non-alcoholic beverages (Breitenbecher, 2000). They also need to adopt the practices of safety in numbers and utilizing the buddy system, whether at a party, on campus, or out in the community (Yeater & O’Donohue, 1999).

How to Protect Themselves from Becoming A Perpetrator

While sexual predators exist, other individuals can also unintentionally harm a sexual partner. Regardless of intention, sexual behavior in certain situations constitutes criminal behavior. *Gray rape* describes the blurred line between consensual and nonconsensual intercourse (Jervis, 2008). This blurred line can result from many factors, including intoxication and consent to some, but not all, sexual contact. The concept of consent proves complicated and goes beyond saying “yes” (Humphreys, 2007). Students need to know how to avoid unintentionally violating a partner by ensuring any partner possesses the capacity to give consent and that given consent remains mutual and ongoing. Verbal communication of consent represents less ambiguous consent than non-verbal expressions (Lim & Roloff, 1997).

How to Protect Others from Being Victims

Bystander training may represent the strongest tool for educating incoming students about campus safety. As previously mentioned, college students often consider themselves invincible. Especially when discussing sexual assault, students often believe “that will never happen to me.” Based on this perception, encouraging students to accept responsibility for their peers can stand as the best way to keep them engaged in campus safety training. Students may remain attentive to information about how to help their friends during problematic sexual incidents longer than how to protect themselves (Katz, 1994).

How to Make Healthy Decisions about Sex and Relationships

Finally, orientation programs must provide new students with information about making healthy decisions regarding relationships and sexual behavior. College programming “could help young adults identify their expectations about relationships and hooking up, learn how to define their romantic relationships and communicate about expectations, and monitor barriers to making good relationship decisions (e.g., alcohol use)” (Owen et al., 2010, p. 662). Colleges are perceived to possess a hook-up culture; therefore, students may enter their college experience expecting to engage in this culture without negative ramifications. However, many students report a negative reaction to hooking up and experiencing poorer psychological well-being (Owen et al., 2010). Additionally, a high proportion of sexual assaults occur during what college students consider a hook-up (Flack, 2007). Sharing this information with students and encouraging consideration and conversations about relationship expectations and safe sexual practices can equip students with tools to protect themselves and others.

Conclusion

Sexual violence prevention programming will remain part of higher education for the foreseeable future, as will federal requirements for these programs. The sexual violence prevention landscape will likely continue to increase in complexity, making it crucial for orientation programs to clearly communicate what students need to know to live safely on college campuses. Programs that successfully train students to protect themselves from becoming a victim, protect themselves from becoming a perpetrator, protect others from becoming victims, and make healthy decisions about sex and relationships will serve students well.

References

- Ali, R. (2011). Dear Colleague: 3 April, 2011. *Office of Civil Rights, Department of Education*. Retrieved from www2.ed.gov/print/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.html.
- Breitenbecher, K. H. (2000). Sexual assault on college campuses: Is an ounce of prevention enough? *Applied and Preventive Psychology, 9*, 23–52.
- Flack, W. F., Jr., Daubman, K. A., Caron, M. L., Asadorian, J., D'Aureli, N., Kiser, Stine, E. (2007). Risk factors and consequences of unwanted sex among university students: Hooking up, alcohol, and stress response. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 22*, 139–157.
- Humphreys, T. (2007). Perceptions of sexual consent: The impact of relationship history and gender. *Journal of Sex Research, 44* (4), 307-315.
- Jervis, L. (2008). An old enemy in a new outfit: How date rape became gray rape and why it matters. In J. Friedman & J. Valenti (Eds.), *Yes means yes! Visions of female sexual power and a world without rape* (pp. 163–177). Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.
- Lim G. Y., & Roloff., M. E. (1997). Attributing sexual consent. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 27*, 1-23.
- Katz, J. (1994). *Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) trainer's guide*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Center for the Study of Sport in Society.
- Kaplin, W. A., & Lee, B.A. (2009). *A legal guide for student affairs professionals*. (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Owen, J. J., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Fincham, F. D. (2010). "Hooking up" among college students: Demographic and psychological correlates. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 39*, 653–663.
- The Clery Center. (2014). *The Clery center for security on campus*. www.clerycenter.org/.
- Tjaden, P. & Thoennes, N. (2006). *Extent, nature and consequences of rape victimization: Findings from the national violence against women survey*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
- Yeater, E. A., & O'Donohue, W. (1999). Sexual assault prevention programs: Current issues, future directions, and the potential efficacy of interventions with women. *Clinical Psychology Review, 19*, 739–771.