

SPCSA Round Table Memo  
Summer 2018

On Tuesday, July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018 the Student and Presidential Committee on Sexual Assault hosted a “Round Table on Sexual Violence,” a forum for all students to express their questions, comments, and concerns regarding policy, prevention efforts, response processes and protocols, or anything relating to sexual violence at Dartmouth. In addition, we created a google form for any students who could not attend the event to share their comments and thoughts. SPCSA designed this event with the goal of more formally acting as a liaison between students and administrators. We intended to share with administrators a summary of the feedback we heard at the event and in the google form responses so that college leaders could have an idea of the student body’s current concerns and questions regarding the college and sexual assault. We believe that if the administration has access to this direct student feedback, leaders can better understand how to tailor policies and initiatives to students and continue to cultivate the student-administration relationship. We intend to host an event like this each term to keep this chain of communication intact. Below is a summary of the feedback from the event and the google form. Please direct any questions about this feedback or the event in general to SPCSA leadership via our email: [student.and.presidential.committee.on.sexual.assault@dartmouth.edu](mailto:student.and.presidential.committee.on.sexual.assault@dartmouth.edu).

One central theme that emerged from the discussion was drinking behavior at Dartmouth.

**Theme 1:** *Student groups, mainly Greek houses, have been conducting internal investigations and trials according to improvised protocols when a member is accused of being a perpetrator of sexual violence. Houses, mainly fraternities, who attempt to adjudicate matters internally in this way are wildly ununiformed and harmful, mostly to survivors who are asked to “testify” in front of their perpetrator’s brothers and participate in bogus procedures.*

- Because various student groups and activists have been increasingly critical of those who are complicit in a campus culture that promotes sexual violence, pressure has been directed at groups to remove members who are known perpetrators of sexual violence in our community, but who have not been formally investigated by the college or the police.
- As a result, Greek houses have been conducting their own internal investigations and judicial protocols to adjudicate the cases that are brought to their attention. This raises many concerns, because of the extreme lack of training and education that these Greek leaders have on the issues of sexual violence and how to conduct these very delicate investigations. Furthermore, internal investigations in general are often biased towards whatever action protects the group as a whole, which often means protecting members who are perpetrators. Retraumatization, victim-blaming, and many other forms of harm are being perpetuated by these trials and investigations.
- Still, many student survivors do not wish to go through formal investigations because they hear accounts from their peers who had very negative experiences in those processes. There are many other barriers preventing students from seeking formal investigative procedures, so the removal of perpetrators from Greek houses or other social groups is one way that survivors attempt to prevent their perpetrators from committing repeat assaults and having access to Greek social spaces where they can continue to commit harm.
- Ultimately, this is a predicament that requires immediate administrative intervention, as groups have no idea what they are doing, and in the absence of formal resources and education around their options, will continue to try and figure out their own methods to deal with these scenarios.

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- One potential policy could be for groups to suspend members who are accused of sexual violence until an official investigation is conducted, but again, the systems that conduct official investigations have committed harm to many student survivors in the past according to many of those survivors and not all survivors want to seek that option. It is a dire predicament.

**Recommendation:** *Students and staff leaders who work on sexual violence response should meet to discuss the current state of affairs and potential solutions.*

**Theme 1:** *Students noted that due to the ban on hard alcohol, and the fear of associated repercussions, especially for Greek houses, students resort to drinking large amounts of hard alcohol quickly in their rooms or off campus houses before going to Greek spaces for a night out.*

- The drinking of hard alcohol has moved underground and become faster-paced → dangerous environment at Greek spaces where guests might be very intoxicated and almost incapacitated or “blacked out” and those in control of the space or those who are less intoxicated can take advantage of those who are vulnerable.
- Students also commented on the phenomenon of “batch”- a concoction of various kinds of alcohol and sometimes drugs (cough syrup, marijuana, blood thinners, etc.) that houses will serve in a large garbage can, which can often be further drugged by guests at parties.
  - Students feel the practice of serving batch can add to a feeling of unsafety, where individuals don’t know what is in their drink and houses seem to be aiming to strongly intoxicate or incapacitate their guests.

**Recommendation:** *This feedback from students seems to warrant an adjustment of the pre-matriculation alcohol education curriculum which is tailored for a campus where hard alcohol is banned, and drinking behaviors have adapted in unique ways.*

**Theme 2:** *Students noted feeling many barriers to calling Safety and Security when a situation becomes unsafe. They spoke of wishing there were separate departments responsible for enforcing campus rules and regulations versus ensuring that students feel safe if they find themselves in trouble.*

- Though creating two distinct departments does not seem feasible, more education and clarity around the “good sam” policy might be prudent. While administrators seem to cite the policy as one that removes barriers to calling for help, many students worry about the costs associated with being housed at Dick’s House overnight.
  - One student recalled that their friend adamantly warned their group of friends to never “good sam” them no matter what because the consequences of paying the fees would be worse than any health issues that could be incurred from alcohol / drug use. The friend said instead to let them “sleep it off.”
  - Clearly there exists some misinformation about the real dangers of alcohol poisoning or drug overdose as well as a deep mistrust that the “good sam” policy will actually protect students from repercussions when deciding whether or not to call for help. Other students in the room echoed similar experiences.
- Another barrier to calling SNS mentioned: negative experiences regarding intrusive and insensitive officer interactions. One survivor of sexual assault in the room mentioned that after they called SNS to respond to the situation, they had wished they had never called and felt the officer’s comportment was retraumatizing.

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- Students recommended sensitivity training for officers and cited the Hanover Police's new "You've Got Options" program and its survivor-centered philosophy as being perhaps a useful model for SNS to adopt.

**Recommendations:** *Clarify "good sam" policy in matriculation education sessions; sensitivity training for SNS officers.*

**Theme 3:** *Much of the discussion within this particular group gravitated towards the Greek system. Students seemed to be very preoccupied with brainstorming ways to improve safety measures within the system to mitigate violence, which seemed to illuminate a gap in education about the role of rape culture in promoting and permitting violence.*

- Instead of focusing on why individuals might take advantage of high-risk spaces to commit violence, students were wondering what safety measures could be put in place to deter a perpetrator with intentions to harm others.
- Students discussed the idea of making all houses co-ed, requiring one house leader to have training in sexual violence prevention and response, making parties have sober student volunteers to monitor the space, policies around turning on lights and lowering music in basements, having to swipe into parties with their IDs, having guest lists for parties, anonymous reviews of the level of safety felt at each house (described as "Yelp for frats"), college-support for sorority localization, etc.
- Ultimately, the focus of the discussion seemed to be misplaced on these external measures, though a deep wish to increase the safety of the current system seemed genuine and urgent. Students seemed to accept the fact that rates of violence are very high and wanted to find ways to police themselves and add safety precautions to the current system to try and deal with its present level of risk.

**Recommendation:** *Identify any feasible and effective additional safety measures that could be implemented while also refocusing the conversation on cultural norms and behaviors as the target for prevention efforts.*