

Introduction and Rationale

On Thursday, February 21st, 2019 the Student and Presidential Committee on Sexual Assault (SPCSA) 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. Mary Lamar (Deputy Title IX Coordinator) was present at the event to answer questions. In addition, we created a google form for any students who did not attend the event to share their comments and thoughts. SPCSA has and will continue to host this event each term in order to formally serve as a liaison between students and administrators. We believe that with access to this direct student feedback, administrative leaders can better understand how to tailor policies and initiatives to students and continue to cultivate student-administration relationships. Below is a summary of the feedback from the event and the google form. We have also added a section called “miscellaneous feedback” for other themes and student concerns that came to SPCSA’s attention throughout the term outside of the Round Table. 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.

Theme 1: *Students had questions regarding situations in which multiple parties make reports against one responding party or in which the College would proceed with an investigation without a reporting party asking for an investigation to occur.*

- Students expressed concern that there is not a written policy or protocol publically available that addresses multiple reports against a responding party.
- Students were not clear on how the college evaluates multiple reports and who is responsible for making the decision to proceed with an investigation without the reporting party asking for one.
- When the concept of a “threat assessment” came up with regards to multiple reports or concerning individual reports, students had questions with regards to who was on the decisions making panel and what processes they followed.

Recommendation: *The Title IX office should be as transparent as possible about its processes surrounding multiple reports. Preferably there would be a witten policy, but if this issue is truly too situational for a written policy then more clarity about the decision-making process is needed.*

Theme 2: *Students expressed confusion about the process of reporting an assault when the responding party is someone already involved in an investigation regarding sexual violence.*

- Students did not understand why a second report cannot be incorporated in an ongoing investigation of a previous report.

- Students expressed concerns that investigators for one report about a particular responding party were not informed about any other investigations or reports about the same party if they arise.
 - The discussion focused on sexual violence as a crime where perpetrators are commonly repeat offenders, and feel that the investigation process excludes the concept of a “pattern of behavior.”
 - Students also brought up how statistically unlikely false reports are, let alone multiple false reports about the same person.
- Students were confused why in certain situations the College considers multiple reports against one party a reason start an investigation whereas if an investigation is already taking place additional reports are not included in the same process Students perceived these two protocols to be contradictory to each other.
- Students also expressed confusion about whether character witnesses are allowed. When the Deputy Title IX officer explained that they are not allowed, students expressed concern that some witnesses begin to act as character witnesses throughout the investigation.

Recommendation: *Publish the policy and rationale regarding separate investigations for multiple reports regarding the same responding party in order to provide clarity to students.*

Theme 3: *Students were frustrated that the PBS lawsuit has mostly resulted in gossip instead of productive conversation and that the college’s response seemed entirely PR focused.*

- Students were unsure of how the college could respond to the lawsuit in a way that felt more constructive, but still expressed frustration with the lack of communication channels between students and administration.
- Students feel that the college has failed to recognize the impact that the lawsuit has had on current undergraduate students and feel they lack a space to process this impact.

Recommendation: *Administration should provide additional resources to students who have been affected by the culture of the PBS department and should do the same for the broader community which has also been affected by these events.*

Theme 4: *Students feel as if over their time at Dartmouth, the conversation surrounding sexual violence has not changed in any substantive way.*

- Students feel like similar levels of harm are being committed as in prior years, which is somewhat corroborated by the Clery Act Report.
- Students acknowledged that the lack of progress was mostly easily identified within the student community. There has not been a shift in norms within the student community that overwhelmingly condemns violence or perpetrators.
- Students commented that even in the aftermath of the PBS lawsuit, students who were previously unconcerned about violence have not changed their attitudes about sexual violence.

- Students acknowledge that there are certain initiatives within the institution, such as SVPP and our external investigator model, that are progressive relative to our peer institutions.

Recommendation: *The College should put resources towards shifting the campus culture to one that does not tolerate violence. This could be done by providing more training or education for student leaders regarding the prevalence of harm and individual responsibility to prevent harm. This training and education could be included in existing programs that focus on leadership development on campus (such as through SVPP and the Rockefeller center). Dartmouth should utilize the influence that leaders, especially upperclassmen leaders, have on this campus and leverage this influence to create change.*

Theme 5: *Students brought up certain misconceptions about the role and implementation of SVPP, particularly one rumor that MAV facilitations are to be replaced with SVPP facilitations and that MAV would cease to exist.*

- Students know that staff members are working hard to implement SVPP but still do not know what the program involves.
- Upperclassmen students in particular lack knowledge about SVPP because they have not been exposed to much of its programming which have been created mostly for underclassmen so far.
- Discussion about which forms of violence prevention are supported financially (or to what degree) by the college and which aren't surfaced. In particular, students discussed the fact that Student Advisory Board members for SVPP are paid whereas MAV facilitators aren't.

Recommendation: *Clarification that existing violence prevention efforts and groups will not be eliminated by SVPP should be circulated to the general student body. The College should consider its ability to compensate students in groups such as MAV for their labor.*

Theme 6

Few people were aware that the college was drafting a new sexual misconduct policy and were concerned by the lack of student awareness and participation.

- Students wanted clarification on what the motivation for the changes were and the timeline for when new policies would take place.
 - Students wanted clear and transparent avenues for student feedback and to know how that would be incorporated into the policy revision process.
 - Students expressed discomfort that there was a website inviting student feedback that has been online since January yet it had not been publicized to undergraduate students.

Recommendation: *Administrators involved in the drafting process of the policy need to significantly improve the feedback process and effectively communicate how students can share their concerns such that they will be considered by the policy-writers.*

Miscellaneous Feedback: the draft Sexual Misconduct policy

Students expressed strong concern regarding the introduction of a live hearing into the investigation process.

- Students expressed that the current format to air grievances with the judicial process, which is submitting them in writing, successfully provides a checks and balance system to ensure a fair process.
- In particular, many students felt that the live hearing had a large potential for harm to the reporting party and that there was a lack of logistic planning in the draft policy to reduce this harm.
- There was also concern expressed about the potential for bias given the increased likelihood that the responding party would be uncomfortable

Students would like clear communication regarding the draft policies that will impact them.

- It is essential that the policy draft and comment form are distributed and publicized through channels of communication that students use.
- There should also be an executive summary of the policy changes made public on this platform as many students lack the time or background knowledge to know what the key changes in the policy are.
- Leaders should explain clearly how student comments on the policy will be incorporated into the drafting and revision processes to improve transparency.
- Students should also know what faculty and staff protocols they would be subject to if they were in an investigation with a faculty or staff party.