

---DRAFT: Comments and revisions welcome---

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Integrating Campus Sexual Assault into the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Curriculum

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Introduction

Some faculty members have been addressing issues related to gender-based violence in the classroom for years. Others, however, are new to the issue and looking for guidance and materials on how to address it. The integration of campus sexual assault into courses taught in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies can be seamless. Although curriculum changes can be always introduced, timing seems crucial. We need to take advantage of fact that the problem of campus sexual assault is now on the public's agenda. At the same time, we should recognize that despite the frequent use of term "epidemic" to discuss the prevalence of sexual violence on our campuses assault, the problem is not new. In fact, the rates of campus sexual assault have not changed much over the past three decades. The heightened public awareness to the problem is a direct result of a new wave of survivors-led organizing across campuses throughout North America.

Faculty members have an important role to play to ensure that the current momentum for systemic change regarding the problem of campus sexual assault is not lost. At present, there is a particular urgency for faculty to become vocal and involved with this issue, inside the classroom, on campus, and in the public sphere, because institutions have been forced to change their policies and practices on the matter. Sadly, on many a campus, faculty members with expertise on campus sexual assault have been excluded from discussions focused on the university's response to the problem. Moreover, faculty involved in advocacy efforts on behalf of survivors and supportive of campus activism designed to raise awareness to the problem have been retaliated against. As tenured faculty members we can play an important role to play in safeguarding the classroom as a "safe space" for survivors and their allies and as a potential platform for continued organizing on campus and nationally.

Faculty members who are new to the issue of campus sexual assault have expressed apprehension about the prospect of having to act as a "self respondent" when a survivor confides in them. Working with survivors is not something we learned in graduate school, nor a topic our institutions view as part of our job. But in reality, we all work with survivors because they are present in our classrooms and if we care about our students, we must seek be prepared to support them if they confide in us. Ultimately, we teach about women, gender, sexuality in the academy because feminist activists challenged both society

and institutions of higher learning. It is because of these struggles that we teach in programs and departments where feminist and queer theories and intersectional analysis inspire a new generation of students. At the same time, we must not forget that the intellectual rigor of our scholarship must go hand in hand with our commitment to a critical examination of the struggles confronting us. With this in mind, we should embrace the opportunity to focus on campus sexual assault and work alongside our students to radically transform our institutions.

This document provides an overview of approaches to curriculum design and integration on campus sexual assault as well as some teaching resources and notes on pedagogy. I also include a brief article sparked by my ongoing conversations with both students and faculty about working with survivors. Finally, I include brief discussion of academic freedom in the context of two institutional responses to faculty involvement on the issue: co-optation and retaliation and some strategies on how to cope with them. Finally, although this document was written for faculty teaching in women, gender, and sexuality studies program, the materials can be integrated into courses in other departments, including but not limited to sociology, psychology, political science, history, criminal justice, counseling, education, social work, and communications.

Approaches to curriculum integration

Faculty may choose one or more of the following approaches to focus attention on campus sexual assault. Faculty should discuss their plans with one another to ensure that students enrolled in multiple courses in the program/department are exposed to different aspects of the issue, at various degrees of depth, rather than find the treatment of the topic repetitive or redundant.

Syllabus insert

If you are not ready to integrate a full unit on campus sexual assault, you could, at least, include a paragraph in the syllabus with an anti-discrimination clause and contact information, including a confidential resource, if possible.

Here's a link to an op-ed article about this approach:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nadia-dawisha-/how-syllabi-can-help-combat-sexual-assault-on-campus_b_6423844.html

Here's an example of a syllabus insert:

<http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f6f014e4b048ab305feffd/t/545eee10e4b0f88a2c15b720/1415507472411/ExampleDiscriminationClauseforSyllabi.pdf>

A unit as part of an introductory course

The introductory course in women, gender, and sexuality studies is an ideal place to integrate a module on campus sexual assault, especially in institutions where the class satisfies a General Education requirement. Most introductory texts have a section that focuses on violence against women, or in

more recent editions, on gender-based violence. Using campus sexual assault as a case study would most likely engage many students. With some planning, the unit on campus sexual assault can coincide with campus events, thus linking theory, research, and activism. Typically, on most college campuses, events are planned in October, violence against women month, and in April, sexual assault awareness/prevention month. If, for whatever reason, activism on these issues on your campus is non-existent, perhaps teaching about these issues and including examples of organizing on other campuses would empower your students to take action.

A unit as part of an upper level course

A unit on campus sexual assault could be integrated into a feminist theory course, either towards the end of the course as a case study that requires students to apply existing feminist theories on gender-based violence to campus sexual assault or design a new theory that addresses the problem. The course would also fit nicely into a feminist research course as there is a growing body of new and exciting research on the subject and the students can become well-versed in the research and perhaps even interact and collaborate with some of the key researchers on the topic (see section on guest speakers for more on this idea). Programs/department that offer a course on men and masculinities may wish to integrate a module on campus sexual assault into that class.

New courses

Initially, you can propose a topics course, which at most institutions could be taught once or twice without having to go through the official curriculum approval process. These courses are often upper-level seminars and you may be able to cross list them with the Honors program at your institution or offer them through the Honors program. Topics may include: "Campus Sexual Assault: Theory, Research and Activism," "Gender-based Violence in Higher Education," "Campus Sexual Assault: Prevention and Intervention," "Sexual Assault: Prevention and Intervention" or "Gender-based Violence on Campus."

Skill-based courses or components of courses

Collaborate with community organization offering training in rape crisis counseling and advocacy. Students enrolled in a course that focuses on campus sexual assault may receive extra credit for completing such a training or if there is enough interest, the faculty member may arrange for the training/or a portion of it to be integrated into the course with the trainer as a guest instructor. Such collaborations accomplish at least two objectives: 1. Connecting students with resources in the community and 2. Providing students with hands-on experience that may lead to advanced study or careers in the field.

Teaching and pedagogy

Integrating a unit on campus sexual assault into an existing course or developing a stand-alone course on the topic is a great opportunity to forge a balance between theoretical and applied knowledge and between research-based inquiry and interactive exercises and group discussions. At the same time,

because the topic is considered controversial on many college campuses, paying attention to pedagogy is important.

Faculty should include a note about pedagogy in the syllabus, especially if they employ non-traditional pedagogy. For the purpose of this document, “non-traditional” pedagogy includes critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, and any other student-centered, interactive approach designed to nurture a learning community in the classroom and to problematize power relations, including between faculty and students. With the growth in Women’s Studies and feminist critique of the academy and the production of knowledge more generally, non-traditional pedagogies have morphed into a distinct approach to teaching and learning that is often referred to as “feminist pedagogy.” This approach has informed curriculum development and teaching in our field for decades. In addition to turning the classroom into a democratic, vibrant and engaging space, feminist pedagogy also provides a rationale and tools for dealing with emotions and conflict in the classroom. Faculty who are new to this pedagogical approach may want to familiarize themselves with the scholarly work on the topic. A great place to begin is with bell hooks.

In my experience, it has been helpful to using intersectional analysis to foreground the concepts of “power,” “privilege” and “social location” as the basis for a critical and systemic examination of campus sexual assault. This approach would allow for a re-framing on the problem as not merely a relational one that involves victims, perpetrators, and by-standers but also as a structural problem involving institutions and systemic forms of discrimination. An intersectional analysis also allows to pay careful attention to differences among survivors, with special attention to the experiences of survivors of color when they come forward as well as to the obstacles that may confront survivors from other such special constituencies as international students, students with disabilities, and students who identify as LGBT.

Strategies and practices

We should be prepared to work with and to accommodate survivors and learn to identify the signs of trauma in our students. Based on the 1 in 5 statistic, we should anticipate that there will be survivors in our classrooms. Moreover, it would make sense that survivors would choose courses that allow them to reflect on their trauma and learn more about the topic. Therefore, we should anticipate that there will be quite a few survivors among the students in courses devoted solely to campus sexual assault. Acknowledging this in the syllabus is a great idea, in addition to including a trigger warning. A faculty member with experience in the area may also invite survivors to contact them and indicate a willingness to help facilitate a space for survivors to gather and discuss their experiences outside of class. For several years, I hosted and helped facilitate a Survivors’ Empowerment Breakfast that grew out of the first weekend course we taught on the topic. In many instances, the opportunity to work with other survivors, may prompt students to share their experiences with the entire class. Survivors should not be pressured to do so but if they seem ready and interested, the faculty member should explore ways to integrate an activity that features survivors enrolled in the class. In my experience, students often cite being part of a class or event where they listened to a fellow student recount a personal experience as life-transforming.

Guest speakers

Students and faculty that have been involved in the movement to end campus sexual assault view speaking on college campuses as an important part of the struggle. There may be people in your community (on and off campus) that you could invite to your classroom. If these resources are not readily available in your community and/or if you wish to have a greater impact on your campus you can contact the various organizations dedicated to ending campus sexual assault for available speakers. Often, for a moderate fee, you could have a speaker come to your class as well as do a large public event.

Team-teaching

In institutions that support team-teaching, this would be a course that would greatly benefit from having two instructors at the helm, ideally at least one with experience of working with survivors. Team teaching also allows for faculty to teach the topic from a multi-disciplinary perspective and ideally to cover both the research and applied aspects of the problem.

Academic freedom, retaliation and co-optation

Regardless of the Public Relations campaigns many campuses have launched, we should make clear that the renewed attention to this problem is a direct result of efforts led by survivors and their advocates. College administrators have been under pressure to reform the ways they have been dealing with campus sexual assault in order to comply with federal and state mandates. Ironically, college administrators that once suppressed and tried to co-opt student organizing and protest on the topic are now taking credit for student activism.

Faculty expertise on the problem has been largely ignored on most college campuses with task forces created to address the issues often involving a majority of administrators and faculty representatives who are new to the issue. Across the nation, faculty who expressed public support for student organizing around campus sexual assault have suffered some form of retaliation. Several highly publicized cases of exceptional faculty members, like Kimberley Theidon at Harvard and Heather Turcutt at the University of Connecticut, demonstrated the risks associated with advocacy on this matter. Less visible at this point are examples of retaliation against tenured faculty members, including full professors. This type of retaliation often takes the form of marginalization, isolation, and/or coordinated attempts to damage the faculty's reputation by describing them as "trouble makers," "too radical," or engaged in "polarizing behavior." The reputational harm and hostility suffered by these faculty members notwithstanding, the real damage is to survivors on campus who may lose their most powerful and vocal advocates. Given these risks, it is understandable that many of our colleagues seem reluctant to get involved with this issue. Based on our experience, we advise untenured faculty to proceed with caution and only once they have obtained support from their department chair and ideally from the Dean. At the same time, we hope that tenured faculty members will embrace this challenge, using it as an opportunity to align our curriculum with one of the most important issues presently confronting our students. We are more protected than any constituency on campus, especially those of us who are unionized; we should use the privilege of our academic freedom to ensure that our campuses engage

the problem of sexual assault seriously and that survivors and their advocates are always represented in every initiative. The more faculty members are involved in this effort the harder it would be to silence and undermine us.

Trigger warning

Many faculty members have been using trigger warnings in class long before the concept became controversial. In 2014 survivors on several college campuses demanded, among other things, that faculty issue “trigger warnings.” The request was reasonable, survivors have the right to know if a film or a book involving a rape scene will be part of the curriculum, not because they wish to excuse themselves from the class, but in order to prepare themselves and not be caught off guard. Personally, over the years, I have re-examined the materials I use in my class and have refrained from showing films with explicit acts of violence, including rape and sexual assault. The materials I do include involve survivors re-counting their experiences of the traumas but I always situate the materials, provide a detailed trigger warning and prepare alternative assignments for survivors that seem concerned about the emotional toll of the activity or assignment. I don’t view this open dialogue with survivors as an impediment to my academic freedom but rather as good teaching. By including a trigger warning on course syllabi, we communicate our students, especially survivors, that we are aware of the problem of sexual assault and that we care about the survivors enrolled in our courses.

Conclusion

Campus sexual assault does not only affect individual students; it interferes with teaching and learning – the core activity of the college years. The decision to address campus sexual assault in the classroom provides students with a safe space to address a key issue on the public agenda, which has direct relevance to their experiences on campus. The history of inadequate response by college administrators to the problem, places the responsibility to ensure that serious policy changes are implemented on the shoulders of students and faculty. The growing body of scholarship and resources on rape and sexual assault on college campuses can enrich class discussions and more in-depth explorations of the problem and possible solutions. Curriculum integration is a viable approach for both prevention and intervention. As faculty members, by deciding to make this issue an integral part of our teaching and research agenda, we can contribute to ensuring that campus sexual assault is addressed and that the institution is transparent and accountable to both students and faculty.

Suggested Readings

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