

Year 1 Public Description of Work for
Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Boston University

Interrupt: A Training for Graduate Students

This Action Applies to Rubric Item(s):

4, 5, 8, and 28

Description of Work:

Interrupt: A Graduate Student Training provides a framework for graduate students to become active change agents in preventing sexual harassment and other types of sexual misconduct. In 2019 the Boston University Sexual Assault Response & Prevention Center (SARP) developed the program in response to graduate student survivors who voiced that they felt ill-equipped to navigate the culture of gender harassment and sexual misconduct in their programs. *Interrupt* extends traditional bystander programming to incorporate interventions that can also be used by the target of sexual misconduct. It is offered to Boston University graduate students and has been available upon request since fall 2019.

The training has four goals:

1. Discuss accurate definitions of sexual misconduct types
2. Share sexual misconduct response and prevention resources
3. Provide a framework to identify opportunities to interrupt situations where participants are targets or bystanders of sexual misconduct
4. Facilitate the application of interrupt strategies to realistic situations of sexual misconduct

These goals are met through four corresponding activities. The first activity emphasizes defining and identifying sexual misconduct. Facilitators use an adaptation of “The Iceberg of Sexual Harassment,” a graphic from the NASEM report. The graphic of the iceberg displays the difference between the sexual harassment in the public conscious (above the waterline) and the enormity of the problem as it is experienced by survivors (the totality of the iceberg). This graphic helps participants understand the challenges of identifying sexual misconduct and creates space for participants to discuss how these behaviors manifest in their programs. Often the bulk of this conversation is focused on the behaviors found below the waterline (i.e., underrepresented types of sexual misconduct). This discussion validates the experiences of survivors and witnesses, even when these experiences are not depicted or acknowledged by the general public as sexual misconduct.

The second activity focuses on resources—internal and external to the university—that can be helpful to participants if they choose to interrupt sexual misconduct in the future. Traditional bystander intervention programs tend to introduce resources at the end of the

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training. However, when designing *Interrupt*, we felt it was essential to introduce resources early in the program. As a training that is geared towards both allies and survivors, we wanted to acknowledge that the responsibility to prevent sexual misconduct is never on the person who is being victimized. By introducing resources early, we remind survivors where they can get help and attempt to mitigate any feelings of blame or shame that may come when learning skills to interrupt on one's own behalf.

The third activity allows participants to identify opportunities for interrupting violence. Facilitators introduce participants to the 3-point framework for interruption: (1) Recognize the potential harm, (2) Choose if you want to interrupt, and (3) Take action. In step one, they apply the iceberg of sexual misconduct. In step two, they identify the risks and benefits of interruption. In step three, they review "the 4-Ds," a common tool in bystander intervention programs that puts interruption strategies into four categories (Direct, Distract, Delegate, and Delay). The framework primes participants to be prepared when they encounter a situation that requires attention. Participants use this framework to understand two examples, one that centers an individual witnessing sexual misconduct and another that centers an individual experiencing it. During this process, facilitators can evaluate participants' grasp of sexual misconduct and explore their concerns with interrupting misconduct. Facilitators help participants build their confidence for future interruption while also validating that if interrupting does not feel safe, it is ok to choose not to intervene directly and instead seek to support in another way.

The fourth and final activity is independent practice. Participants choose between a scenario where they are either interrupting for themselves or others. With guidance from the facilitator, participants work in pairs or small groups to apply the framework and choose their interruption strategy. After these discussions, the pairs report back to the larger group providing additional examples for all.

Before releasing *Interrupt* to the public, the training was pilot tested with a focus group of participants from the Graduate Women In Science and Engineering (GWISE) student group. Using feedback from this group, we updated the scenarios, updated length of training, and adjusted the language used throughout. GWISE remains an active partner with SARP, scheduling training sessions for their 500+ membership, and providing additional feedback that may not be captured in the post-survey evaluations.

SARP is currently evaluating *Interrupt* for satisfaction, behavior change, and knowledge acquisition. The evaluation measures *Interrupt's* impact on participants being able to identify sexual misconduct and apply intervention techniques learned in the program. Before taking the training, participants take a pre-test that collects demographic data including gender, graduate student status (e.g., years in their program), and type of graduate program. Additional questions relate to identifying sexual misconduct and previous experience with bystander intervention training. The post-test asks these same questions but with the addition of questions that evaluate participants' recall of information and the ability to apply tools discussed in the program. The 6-week follow-up survey is similar to both the pre- and post-test

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with additional questions that ask if in the intervening weeks participants used the tools learned from the program. SARP includes aggregate results of the survey data in our annual reports and will present a more in-depth review of the program's impact at conferences and in academic journals.

Website for further information (if applicable): <http://www.bu.edu/shs/sarp/how-we-prevent/graduate-students/>

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