

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

University of Alaska

University of Alaska Campus Climate Report

This Action Applies to Rubric Item(s): 23, 25, 26

Description of Work:

In 2019 the University of Alaska (UA) first used the survey instrument developed by the Administrator Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative (ARC3). The open-source survey is nationally recognized for utilizing vetted methodology, and, importantly, allows the university to compare its results to other universities across the country and represents a new approach at UA to assess sexual harassment and violence. The ARC3 survey was distributed to a sample of 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students between March 18 and April 15, 2019 and there was an 8.4 percent response rate.

The survey found that UA's rates of sexual misconduct are similar to other public universities and the survey data facilitated new questions into issues such as the direct and combined effects of student sexual orientation and gender on the likelihood of sexual harassment victimization and the incidence of peer-perpetrated sexual harassment and faculty- or staff-perpetrated sexual harassment. To follow up on these issues, the university conducted additional secondary analyses of the 2019 UA Campus Climate Survey data under the leadership of Dr. Brad Myr Stol of the UAA Justice Center. Results of these new analyses were compiled for use in the university's enhanced dissemination and discussion with leadership, outreach, and submitted to The Journal of Interpersonal Violence. In a unique approach to data analysis and interpretation, the sex/gender identity of UA student respondents was used as the primary point of comparison rather than specific campus data.

The study looked at several areas including sexual harassment, stalking, dating violence, sexual assault and the overall campus climate. Our research consistently shows that while people of all sexes/genders experience sexual harassment, stalking, dating violence and sexual assault, those who identify as female or gender non-conforming (GNC) experience victimization at much higher rates than those who identify as male. However data also suggests that UA students are not tolerant of deceptive or coercive tactics when it comes to dating and sexual relationships. UA students understand the importance of obtaining affirmative consent in sexual encounters, and UA students are generally supportive of their friends and peers who experience and/or report incidents of sexual misconduct. In addition, UA students are willing to support and intervene on behalf of others in risky situations in which sexual misconduct or other forms of violence may occur.

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

Findings:

The survey revealed the estimated prevalence of sexual harassment, stalking, dating violence or sexual assault victimization experienced by UA students. The research indicates that potentially thousands of UA students may have been victims of one or more forms of sexual misconduct since enrolling at the university, including on- or off-campus incidents.

A comparison of UA's estimated prevalence rates with universities that have conducted campus climate surveys using the same ARC3 instrument -- the University of Colorado, Boise State University, Pennsylvania State University, Tulane University, and the University of Wyoming -- shows that UA's results are not atypical for universities across the nation.

These similarities are important not only because they show that UA is not unique with respect to students' experiences with sexual misconduct victimization, but also because they highlight the dramatic degree to which sexual misconduct incidents are under-represented in official reporting data.

Understanding other climate issues, such as students' knowledge about reporting policies and resources for victims, their attitudes about prevention and their perceptions about how their community addresses the problem of sexual violence, are critical pieces of information for improving campus responses and prevention programs.

Key Findings/Sexual Harassment:

The data demonstrate that sexual harassment is widespread among UA students. Overall, an estimated 53.9 percent of UA students—more than 10,000 individuals—have experienced one or more types of sexual harassment since enrolling at the university. The sorts of sexually harassing behaviors that UA students encounter differs widely, but typically takes the form of sexist or sexually offensive language, gestures or pictures.

An estimated 27.8 percent of UA students experienced at least one instance of sexual harassment by faculty, instructors or staff since enrolling at the university. Nearly two-thirds of incidents involved sexist or sexually offensive language, gestures or pictures. Notably, irrespective of a student's self-reported sex/gender identity, the least likely reaction to sexual harassment by faculty, instructors, or staff was to report the person.

Nearly half of UA students (47.9 percent) reported experiencing sexual harassment perpetrated by fellow students. Less than five percent of UA students indicated that they told the person to stop, or that they reported the person.

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

Further research by Dr. Myrstol into the direct and combined effects of student sexual orientation and gender on the likelihood of sexual harassment victimization since enrolling at university were assessed using logistic regression models, with separate models estimated for peer-perpetrated sexual harassment, and faculty- or staff-perpetrated sexual harassment. One key finding was that non-heterosexual students were significantly more likely to experience sexual harassment than heterosexual students, irrespective of the perpetrator. Student gender, however, did not influence the likelihood of sexual harassment victimization committed by university faculty or staff, or by fellow students. Students were much more likely to be sexually harassed by peers than by university faculty or staff. Further, while undergraduate and graduate students were equally likely to experience peer sexual harassment, graduate students were much more likely than undergraduates to be sexually harassed by university faculty or staff.

Key Findings/Stalking:

Overall, approximately 1 out of every 4 UA students (26.1 percent) experienced at least one instance of stalking since enrolling at the university. Female UA students are significantly more likely than male or gender non-conforming students to experience stalking. Slightly more than half of stalking perpetrators were identified by victims as being fellow UA students, and less than half of stalking incidents occurred on campus.

Key Findings/Dating Violence:

An estimated 14.9 percent of UA students—roughly 3,000 individuals— experienced at least one incident of dating violence since enrolling at the university. Female UA students are significantly more likely than male students, but not gender non-conforming students, to experience dating violence victimization.

Nearly 9 out of 10 dating violence victims indicated that the perpetrator was a current or former intimate partner or spouse. Less than one-fourth of victims reported that dating violence perpetrators were fellow UA students, and only about 10 percent of victims indicated that the dating violence incident that impacted them the most occurred at an on-campus location.

Key Findings/Sexual Assault:

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

An estimated 20.6 percent of UA students—approximately 4,100 individuals—experienced some form of sexual assault since enrolling. An estimated 11.2 percent of UA students—approximately 2,200 individuals—have experienced at least one instance of completed nonconsensual sexual penetration. Female students experience sexual assault—and, in particular, instances of attempted or completed nonconsensual sexual penetration—at significantly higher rates than male and gender non-conforming students.

The survey asked respondents about their sexual assault victimization experiences since enrolling at the university. The survey measured three types of sexual assault: (1) nonconsensual sexual touching; (2) attempted nonconsensual oral, anal or vaginal sex; and (3) completed nonconsensual oral, anal or vaginal sex.

In excess of 90 percent of UA students who were sexually assaulted knew the perpetrator; only 7.9 percent of victims indicated that the perpetrator was a stranger to them. An estimated 46.5 percent of sexual assault victims reported that the person who assaulted them was a current or former intimate partner or spouse. Sexual assault perpetrators are typically not fellow UA students (34.7 percent), and sexual assault incidents are much more likely to occur off-campus than on-campus (14.6 percent).

UA Response to instances of sexual misconduct:

Overall, only approximately 1 out of every 6 UA students (16.6 percent) who experienced sexual misconduct disclosed to anyone. It was rare (less than 5 percent) for UA students to report their experiences to university employees. Only 2 percent reported to the Title IX Office, and less than 1 percent reported to campus police.

Key Findings/UA Campus Climate:

Overall, data suggests that UA students are not tolerant of deceptive or coercive tactics when it comes to dating and sexual relationships. UA students understand the importance of obtaining affirmative consent in sexual encounters, and UA students are generally supportive of their friends and peers who experience and/or report incidents of sexual misconduct. In addition, UA students are willing to support and intervene on behalf of others in risky situations in which sexual misconduct or other forms of violence may occur.

At UA there appears to be a robust student culture that understands and values respectful sexual and dating relationships, and that prioritizes social and emotional support for victims of sexual misconduct and dating violence. While a majority of students indicated they thought the university would support students who experienced and/or reported incidents of sexual misconduct, a sizeable minority did not agree that the university would provide such

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

institutional support. Findings suggest that a potential obstacle to reporting is a lack of belief on the part of students that the institution is serious about responding to sexual misconduct.

In general, UA students said that they feel safe from sexual harassment, stalking, dating violence and sexual violence at the university. The challenge for the university, then, is to demonstrate and communicate to students that it does not tolerate sexual misconduct in any form, that it will take action when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, and that students who are the victims of sexual misconduct are believed and supported.

Website for further information (if applicable): <https://www.alaska.edu/equity/title-ix/compliance/climate-survey/index.php>

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