

Raising *the* SAFETY Bar

How colleges are battling sexual violence. BY BETH HOWARD

The young man watched his fraternity brother at a large university lead a woman up the stairs at a house party. Something didn't feel right. The woman was clearly intoxicated and needed help climbing. "Hey, dude, your car is getting towed!" he yelled – with the predictable result. His quick thinking, which created an opportunity for the woman's friends to whisk her away, was inspired by training he had received a few weeks earlier.

Encouraging students to act when they see a risky situation unfolding is one of a number of ways that colleges are grappling with the sudden imperative to improve campus safety. A string of highly publicized reports of sexual violence on campus, many involving intoxication to the point of blackout, has alarmed the White House and prompted a Department of Education investigation of more than 100 colleges and universities for possible violations of Title IX, the civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on gender. Earlier this year, a bipartisan group of senators introduced the Campus Accountability and Safety Act, which would require better coordination with local police departments when accusations are made. Says Scott Berkowitz, president of the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, a nonprofit dedicated to fighting sexual violence: "There's been more movement on this front in the last year than in the entire last decade."

Tackling the new sex education

Traditional programs aimed at prevention "are brief – one hour or less – and focused on improving knowledge about the problem," says Sarah DeGue, a behavioral scientist for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention who has studied prevention efforts and whose findings informed a recent White House report. "Knowledge is important, but it's clear these programs don't prevent people from perpetuating sexual violence."

So a growing number of schools are mandating a deeper dive into the topic. Incoming students at Elon University in North Carolina, for example, must take a course online before they even reach campus that marches them through the ethics of relationships and alcohol's effect on behavior. Orientation at Indiana University includes a musical that covers everything from negative gender stereotypes to what constitutes sexual assault. At the University of California–Berkeley, incoming students have to participate in an educational program online or in

In January, Dartmouth College announced one of the boldest blueprints for culture change, mandating education on preventing sexual violence all four years of college and placing everybody, including fraternity members, in one of six new residential communities beginning in 2016. A community will have its own cluster of dorms and will put on social and academic programs; students living in Greek or off-campus housing will be included in community events. The school has also banned hard alcohol and will require outside security guards and bartenders at parties. "You can't address just one aspect of the problem," says Heather Lindkvist, Dartmouth's Title IX coordinator. "You need a comprehensive, integrated approach."

What kinds of initiatives can families look for when checking out schools? The most responsive institutions are now teaching classes on everything from what a healthy relationship looks like to ways both women and men can steer clear of harm, changing the way they investigate reports of sexual misconduct, and cracking down on all of the excesses associated with fraternity life. Getting a read on the scope of the problem can be tricky: Although the Department of Education compiles statistics on campus crime (ope.ed.gov/security), sexual violence is notoriously underreported. Your best bet is to ask the school and find out what is being done to improve prevention. Here's how colleges are trying to turn the tide:

person by October 1 or have their registration for spring semester blocked until they do. The UC system has been rolling out a comprehensive new prevention and intervention plan across its 10 campuses over the past year.

But "you can't do a one-time program and expect it to make a difference," says Ruth Anne Koenick, director of the Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey–New Brunswick. UC–Santa Cruz dedicated one week in April – Consent Week – to discussions on topics from violence



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in the gay community to cultural attitudes about sex and rape that need to be changed. Dartmouth students will get a refresher course every year about healthy relationships and how to prevent and respond to misconduct. Many schools are beefing up their online resources – explaining stalking, the dangers of date rape drugs, how to support a friend who’s been victimized, for instance – and hosting programs for both women and men “focused on knowing what your sexual comfort zone is and feeling empowered to say that out loud,” says Laurel Kennedy,

vice president for student development at Denison University in Granville, Ohio. Student groups – including fraternities – are helping get the word out. When the Women’s Resource Center at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point approached the school’s frats last fall, they collected and then donned high heels for a “Walk a Mile in Her Shoes” event. Says Justin Wieseler, 20, a junior there and member of the Phi Sigma Phi fraternity, “We pride ourselves on educating ourselves about sexual assault and how to prevent it.”

Because so often the unwanted

advances come from “your friend or someone who you had a crush on,” when both parties are drunk, the new campaigns are focused on illuminating what it means to consent, says Sara Colombo, 20, a junior and a member of the Student Organization for Sexual Safety at Colorado College. That definition is changing to make the concept of consensual sex less ambiguous – which puts a new level of responsibility on the person making advances. In California, for example, consenting no longer means simply not saying no. A student who is initiating sex must re-

ceive an unambiguous yes, and that's not possible if the student being approached is incapacitated. New York enacted its own affirmative consent, or "yes means yes," law this summer, and New Jersey and Connecticut are considering similar bills. Some worry that this trend could spell trouble for students who mean no harm but mistake alcohol-facilitated flirtation as consent. There's certainly room for misunderstanding: A Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation survey conducted earlier this year found that 54 percent of those asked think nodding in agreement counts; 47 percent say consent is gained if the person takes off his or her clothes, and 40 percent say getting a condom means "yes."

Many campuses are pinning their hopes for prevention on educating bystanders. Traditionally, "we told men 'don't be rapists' and women 'don't get raped.' But the vast majority of men aren't rapists. The breakthrough was identifying them as allies," says Dorothy Edwards, head of the non-profit Green Dot Violence Prevention Strategy, which teaches students to set norms that don't tolerate violence and how to intervene when they see a risk looming. "Everyone has that sixth sense of behavior they feel is over the line," says Berkowitz.

Bystander education programs like Green Dot help people pay attention to that sixth sense. Green Dot has been implemented by a slew of schools, among them the University of Virginia and the University of Dayton in Ohio. Participants brainstorm and role-play strategies, such as the use of distraction for defusing risky situations.

One bystander can "accidentally" spill a drink on a potential perpetrator or enlist him to go on a pizza run, for example, while another alerts the friends of a possible victim to what's happening. "Our goal is to make intervening the norm," says Nicole Eramo, an associate dean of students at UVA, which rolled out the program last year, before the school came under fire in a quickly discredited Rolling Stone article alleging it had mishandled assault complaints. (Eramo has sued Rolling Stone for its portrayal of her.) A 2014 study by University of Kentucky researchers showed that the Green Dot

Talking Points

Some issues families might want to discuss well before saying goodbye at the dorm:

The dangers of intoxication.

A large proportion of sexual assaults involve alcohol, which, when consumed to excess, impairs judgment and memory and the ability to perceive risk. Even when there's no ill intent, fuzzy judgment raises the risk of misreading a partner's willingness.

What consent means.

An enthusiastic "yes" is what you want. Short of that, it's vital to be very cautious about interpreting cues. Kissing – even disrobing – might not hold up as consent when someone has been drinking. George Koob, director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, says a person is defined as unable to consent as soon as a sober third party recognizes the person is impaired, which generally happens around the legal driving limit. If there's any doubt that your date knows what he or she is doing, that's your signal to call a halt.

The wisdom of buddying up.

When drinking, women and men both benefit from being with people who will look out for each other. Smartphone apps such as Circle of 6 and Kitestring send prewritten texts to specified contacts letting them know where you are and that you might be in trouble.

–Maura Hohman

program resulted in a 50 percent drop in sexual violence over five years in the Kentucky high schools where it was implemented. At Rutgers, similar lessons are conveyed through theater productions in which students act out common scenarios that can lead to trouble, followed by discussions and training about bystander responsibilities.

Putting frats on notice

Fraternities have long been hotbeds of extreme behavior, but there's a rapidly growing consensus that serious transgressions can no longer be dismissed as collegiate antics. "We're approaching zero tolerance," says Kevin Kruger, president of NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Within the past year, fraternity chapters have been suspended or put on probation at Yale, North Carolina State University, Penn State, the University of Houston in Texas, Washington and Lee in Virginia, Furman University in South Carolina, and the University of Arizona, among others. Several colleges, including Williams and Amherst in Massachusetts and Colby and Bowdoin in Maine, have done away with fraternities altogether in recent years. Wesleyan University's tack: requiring frats to go co-ed by 2017. (One fraternity has filed suit to block the move.)

Many new restrictions center around alcohol. Dartmouth's ban on hard alcohol at fraternity parties follows that of other elite schools, including Swarthmore and Brown. At Denison, parties with more than 15 students where alcohol will be served must be registered with the university. "Campus security personnel stop by the party to look at what's being served," says Kennedy. New rules at the University of Virginia require at least three fraternity brothers to stay sober to monitor behavior at parties with wine or beer. Hard alcohol must be served from a central location by a sober brother; at larger parties it can only be served by a bartender licensed by the state. A security guard must be present at the larger parties.

Changing the college's response to accusations

Women often assume they will get more careful and sympathetic treatment if they take their case to the administration than to the police, but, in the absence of clear policies, they frequently don't get satisfaction. Complaints



range from being blamed themselves for the behavior to allowing students found responsible to remain on campus and continue to play on teams.

When Annie E. Clark, 26, a graduate of the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, sought help from the school after a 2007 assault, she says she was asked, “What could you have done differently in that situation?” Clark, who didn’t know who her assailant was and didn’t pursue adjudication, doesn’t think the comment was ill-intentioned. “It goes to a lack of training,” she says. Clark has garnered national attention by filing a Title IX complaint against the university with several other women in 2013, still pending at press time, and by assisting students on other campuses through the organization she co-founded, End Rape on Campus.

UNC has since overhauled its practices on prevention of and response to assault, says Hilary Delbridge, a spokesperson for the university’s Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office. That has meant improving resources for victims and requiring students to receive online training in what behaviors are unacceptable and what support and reporting options are available.

Many colleges are revisiting the traditional disciplinary process, too,

RUTGERS STUDENTS REHEARSE A SKIT DEMONSTRATING THE CONCEPT OF CONSENT, TO BE PRESENTED AT ORIENTATION.

which often involves investigations and hearings by inexperienced panels of faculty and students. There’s a move to outsource sexual assault cases or hire experienced investigators.

The University of Michigan and Michigan State have created a Special Victims Unit within the campus police department. This should result in better evidence gathering and more sensitive treatment of victims of sexual assault and other violent acts, predicts Holly Rider-Milkovich, director of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center at the University of Michigan. A former sex-crimes investigator from the Philadelphia district attorney’s office was recruited to preside over cases at the University of Pennsylvania. Harvard has created a central office to investigate and prosecute allegations and has hired expert investigators. Stanford relies on student and faculty reviewers but has changed its process and now interviews the accuser and the accused separately.

Last year, Princeton and Harvard lowered the required standard of proof

in these cases to the widely used “preponderance of the evidence” standard that is recommended by the Department of Education. A growing number of schools are also stiffening penalties for offenders. At Duke, for example, expulsion is now the favored sanction.

Even as schools do a better job of preventing and dealing with the real problem, some experts fear that certain changes make students more vulnerable to problematic accusations. In fact, lawsuits by male students who feel they were unfairly treated are on the rise. Last fall, 28 current and former members of Harvard’s law faculty published a statement in *The Boston Globe* warning that the university’s new policies make it difficult for a student to mount a defense and are “overwhelmingly stacked against the accused.”

To make colleges accountable for finding solutions, the White House has called on them to conduct anonymous “climate surveys” to determine how many students have been victimized; Congress is considering making the surveys mandatory and the results public. Rutgers is working with the administration to pilot such a survey. And Koenick is guardedly optimistic that all the new efforts will pay off. “For the first time in 45 years” of doing this work, she says, it seems that real change is possible. ●