

The Case for a Sexual Violence  
Prevention and Response Coordinator  
October 28, 2020  
*Office of the Vice President Student Life*



## Core Reasons to Hire a Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Coordinator

- To have one person who can identify and help address the gaps in the University's policies, procedures and culture.
- To have one person who can identify and help address the gaps in the supports offered by the University and how we can better help survivors.
- To have one person who serves as a subject matter expert for any sexual violence matter.
- To respect years of requests from students and subject matter experts.
- To expand sexual violence prevention and response beyond the Office of the Dean of Students and throughout the campus community.

## The Urgency of the Situation

Sexual violence is one of the most intractable problems of university education. In 2019, sexual violence impacted 11% of Canadian post-secondary students who identify as women and 4% of students who identify as men.<sup>1</sup> The 2019 NCHA data makes it clear that UAlberta's sexual violence problem is consistent with national rates: within the last 12 months, at least one out of eight UAlberta students experienced sexual touching without consent, and one out of 40 experienced sexual penetration without consent. We also know that two out of three female Albertans and one out of three Albertan males (1.8 million people in total) have experienced sexual violence.<sup>2</sup> A 2017 UASU survey indicated that the majority of students were unaware of their rights, appropriate reporting mechanisms, and the existence of the Sexual Violence Policy, and the Discrimination, Harassment and Duty to Accommodate Policy.<sup>3</sup> In short, our university community should be a refuge; at this point, it is not.

We use the term 'campus sexual violence' (CSV) as shorthand for sexual assault and harassment in our community. How institutions handle (and mishandle) CSV prevention and response has profound impacts on the student experience. UAlberta has no specific staff to coordinate sexual violence prevention and response, just relatively

---

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, 'One in ten women students sexually assaulted in a postsecondary setting,' September 2020

<sup>2</sup> Government of Alberta, 'Ending Sexual Violence in Alberta,' September 2020

<sup>3</sup> UASU, "Educating Students on Rights and Responsibilities," November 2019, available at <https://www.su.ualberta.ca/governance/advocacy/research/>

junior staff to help students navigate available supports. Students and alumni tell us that reporting CSV is extremely confusing, humiliating, and complicated. For years, student leaders and the University's own subject matter experts<sup>4</sup> have strongly recommended hiring a sexual violence prevention and response coordinator (SVPRC) with the appropriate authority to make real change. UAlberta administrators have not followed this recommendation. Numerous survivors have reached out to the Students' Union to ask how we can get the University to address this issue meaningfully.

A SVPRC cannot be another low-level employee of the Dean of Students. The proposed position *must* have a direct mandate from the President or Provost with the authority to spearhead the necessary change. At this point, CSV response functions are fragmented, but SET offers an opportunity to create a coherent institutional response.

## Recommendations of the Sexual Misconduct Review Group

While the exact scope of this position is up for discussion, we draw from the scope of the SMRG's 2015 recommendations:

*That a Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Coordinator be appointed and situated in a high profile area that makes intuitive sense for University community members to contact in cases of sexual assault disclosures. This position should be responsible for:*

- *Coordinating the units who respond to sexual assault and the Sexual Misconduct and Assault Response Team (SMART)*
- *Education and prevention programs*
- *Maintaining the central website on sexual assault*
- *Communications to the University community*
- *Conducting periodic climate surveys*
- *Collating data from the individual units and report to the community*
- *Coordinating necessary professional development for investigators and decision makers*
- *Liaising with internal groups, such as the Inter-fraternity Council, Pan Hellenic Council, University Athletic Board, Faculty and Staff Relations, staff associations and Occupational Health and Effectiveness, to name a few.*
- *Liaising with community agencies and supports*

This recommendation was not followed despite years of followup advocacy. The absence of a SVPRC contributed to the key shortfalls that the Sexual Assault Centre staff highlighted in their 2019 protest.

---

<sup>4</sup> In 2016, the University's Sexual Misconduct Review Group released a report that recommended hiring a SVPRC. In January 2019, Sexual Assault Centre (SAC) staff launched a [protest](#) at the Board of Governors/Senate/GFC retreat over the University's consistent failure to take CSV seriously.

## Fragmentation and Scope

A response centred in the Office of the Dean of Students will not be sufficient. DoS mechanisms and norms are effectively powerless when the CSV perpetrator is a staff member. DoS staff have a mandate to support student survivors, but not survivors who are academic and non-academic staff. Much of the necessary change (e.g. fixing investigation standards in collective bargaining agreements) is entirely out of scope for DoS.

Various staff across the University are empowered to offer token support within constrained mandates. Student survivors tell us that staff members often express frustration at flawed options and limited recourse. There is a structural lack of accountability for faculty who harass or even assault students; existing policies and standards are not enforced equally. A properly placed SVPRC could help the University address all these challenges.

## Trust and Reputation in CSV Response

Risks accrue when a post-secondary institution fails to address, rather than simply manage, CSV. Success in CSV prevention and response depends entirely on whether community members can trust the University's often-flawed reporting mechanisms and standards of accountability.

Statistics Canada data shows that "95% of survivors do not report their assaults to the police, making sexual violence the most underreported crime in Canada."<sup>5</sup> Underreporting of sexual violence is a worldwide challenge in higher education. Along those lines, the 2019/20 Annual Report of Student Conduct Responses notes that a meagre 49 disclosures are "not indicative of the overall incidence of sexual violence in our community." It certainly does not reflect the Statistics Canada data - one in ten women students, one in twenty-five men, all within a single year. And the most recent NCHA data suggests that, within the last 12 months, at least one out of eight UAlberta students experienced sexual touching without consent, and one out of 40 experienced sexual penetration without consent.

These students simply are not comfortable coming forward to the University. Survivors tell us that they struggle to trust that justice or healing will result. Many have been disappointed too often.<sup>6</sup>

The consequences are pervasive. Patrick Deane, Principal at Queen's, calls a university "a union of diverse interests. What is required to counteract that centrifugal tendency is a glue made of three key ingredients: communication, trust and generosity. The glue, in essence, is community...[but] these things appear to be in rather short supply

---

<sup>5</sup> Government of Alberta, 'Ending Sexual Violence in Alberta,' September 2020

<sup>6</sup> UAlberta alum Alix Kemp's widely-read series of blog posts (parts [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#)) is one recent example.

in our institution at the moment. Whether people blame the budget model, history, or other people...Queen's is struggling to be the community it once was."<sup>7</sup> Dr. Deane was speaking about institutional racism, but his point - that trust and *trustworthiness* define community - applies to CSV as well.

Recent headlines are full of cases where universities' processes and cultures proved unworthy of that trust. Accounts of sexual violence and institutional failure in Eternity Martis' bestselling memoir 'They Said This Would Be Fun' eviscerated Western University. The notorious pedophile and rapist Larry Nassar benefited from Michigan State University administration turning a blind eye. Administrators at all levels are being prosecuted, and MSU faced millions of dollars in fines. Multiple staff members at McMaster's psychology department are under investigation for complicity in a major sexual assault case.

Beyond a lens of reputational risk, we urge UAlberta to consider risks to trust.

---

<sup>7</sup> "Components of an Emerging Strategy: A Report on the Conversation," October 2020, found at <https://www.queensu.ca/principal/join-conversation>