



Addressing sexual violence on college campuses using a community focused approach

In our work, over the last decade and a half, with universities and colleges, advocates and survivors, CALCASA has identified a 3-pronged approach to addressing sexual violence on college campuses. This approach can lead to more effective policies, responses and procedures when sexual violence occurs and can create a shift in cultural norms on campus that can prevent sexual violence before it begins.

- **Survivor Centeredness:** In an environment where almost everyone seems to want to answer the call to solve the problem of sexual assault on college campuses, that work must start with the needs of the survivor at the center. This approach requires universities, policy makers, advocates and others to **pay attention to the varying needs of survivors** and prevents a "one size fits all" approach. We often think of survivors having homogenous needs, but in fact, each survivor comes to their experience of sexual violence with varying community influences. By creating policies without a focus on the diverse needs of student survivors, we risk isolation or silencing those who come from traditionally marginalized communities. Additionally, developing **strong policies regarding confidential resources** are critical in a survivor-centered approach. Ensuring that the stories and experiences of survivors remain protected from disclosure, creates an environment where survivors are more likely to come forward to seek support and more willing to work with university officials to hold offenders accountable. Using this approach allows survivors to provide input into policy development and includes them in discussions related to the needs of the entire campus community
- **Community Collaboration and Engagement:** Universities and colleges can be very insular and frequently survivors express fear about coming forward because they are worried about who might find out. The insular nature of college communities can also contribute to a lack of willingness of bystanders, staff and faculty to "step in" or address systemic problems. We recommend that universities use an approach that engages the entire community in addressing and preventing sexual assault on college campuses. **Systematic climate checks and partnerships between various campus programs and departments and community based resources** are critical in ensuring access for survivors to much needed resources and increases the accountability of institutions to the community. Systematic climate checks that include a range of participants including students, faculty, staff, parents, and off campus community partners increase knowledge about the impact and existence of sexual assault on campus. And while community based resources may be more challenging to come by in some communities, they are necessary to effectively develop comprehensive and

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sustainable programs, and eliminate fears that may keep survivors and college community members from coming forward

- **Comprehensive Prevention:** While it is tempting for universities to focus on "programs in a box" prevention, or one or another type of prevention strategy on campus, comprehensive prevention creates an environment on campus that has the potential to change campus norms that can support a culture where rape can thrive. **No one prevention strategy can have the impact of a comprehensive approach.** Comprehensive prevention requires a range of prevention strategies from effective campus policies and response, social norms change, bystander, gender equity, women's empowerment, and promoting healthy masculinity. Comprehensive prevention includes strategies that address sexual violence before it happens (known as primary prevention) as well as address sexual violence after it takes place so it will not occur again. Comprehensive prevention on college campuses requires more than just providing information at orientation for incoming students. Prevention efforts **must occur at various levels** of the university from faculty to all levels of students, including transfer students, non-residential students, and graduate students. It is also critical that Comprehensive Prevention **efforts saturate the campus** community from curriculum development to student orientation and everywhere in between.

By ensuring that they use the above approach as a framework for designing responses, policies and prevention programs, universities and colleges can effectively design community specific models that work with and for their campus community.

What can you do today to address sexual assault on college campuses and make students safer on campus?

For Universities:

- Reach out and explore existing community programs that can support your students who have experienced sexual assault.
- Start a climate survey by beginning to JUST ASK students, faculty and community partners about the culture on campus related to sexual assault.

For Advocates:

- Call your local university and discuss establishing or strengthening your relationships. Discuss how you can create more formal resources available to survivors.
- Call local media and schedule an opportunity to interview about this issue. Media outlets need to be informed about how to report on this issue from a survivor perspective.

For Students:

- Review your campus policies regarding sexual assault for a student/survivor focused tone. Tell your university what you find.

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- Become a partner with your university in creating more effective responses. Reach to your local rape crisis center to see what other ways you can become involved in your community and your university.

For assistance with how to incorporate these into the work that you do addressing sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking on campus please contact the CALCASA Campus Team at leona.smith@calcasa.org, sari.lipsett@calcasa.org or denice@calcasa.org .