

BRYN MAWR & HAVERFORD COLLEGES

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February 14, 2010

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Haverford Hosts Rape and Sexual Assault Week

By Andrew Thompson

About 15 Haverford students stood out on the Coop patio under a clear night sky, holding candles, on the evening of Wednesday, April 8. This was the start of Haverford's second-annual "Take Back the Night" march against sexual violence. The march was the first of many events, as part of Rape and Sexual Assault Awareness Week at Haverford College, sponsored by the Women's Center.

Over the next 30 minutes, the group would walk through the night to Founders Common Room, stopping in places along the way to read works of poetry and literary art by candlelight that described the roots and horrors of rape and sexual assault.

"It's a way for survivors of rape and sexual assault to take back their voice," said Stephanie Contreras '11, who works at the Women's Center. "You can't take back the experience, but it's a matter of the community understanding the horror that these survivors underwent."

The march's destination was the Speak Out event, a time for survivors and members of the community to sit in silence, and hear and attempt to understand the stories of survivors.

Other events during the week included Haverford's version of the national Clothesline Project, a variety of t-shirts set out on clotheslines on Founders Green. The shirts were all created by members of the Haverford community, said Contreras.

"It's a very in-your-face visual to illustrate what goes on, and a metaphor of 'airing out the dirty laundry,'" she said.

Students' Council Co-President Harrison Haas '10 said that he really appreciated the Clothesline Project. "Not only did it reach out to students, professors saw it too. I saw a professor in between classes who asked me what it was. It's a great educational project," Harrison Haas said.

Another component of the week, the "Solidarity Board," was in the Dining Center Lobby from Friday to Sunday. Community members could take ribbons and pin them to the board and write short messages, symbolizing their pledge to be aware of sexual assault.

"It's a powerful way of bringing it to the community, in their own words," said Contreras.

"[The week] is supposed to be in your face and confrontational," continued Contreras. "We need to make people aware and bring it to Haverford's consciousness."

"So much goes unreported," said Students' Council Co-President Will Harrison '10. "Unless there's some Honor Council Dean's Panel, you just don't hear about this stuff, so there's a little bit of disbelief."

Said Contreras, "I think as a community, we need to understand that Haverford isn't infallible when it comes to these situations. They're part of our society, so we bring it to this space."

According to the Haverford College Safety and Security website, four cases of sexual violence were reported in 2008, the latest year for data, and six cases each were reported in 2007 and 2006.

Reporting of sexual violence on college campuses is mandatory as a result of The Cleary Act, explained Vice President for Finance and Administration and Treasurer G. Richard Wynn. "The act was passed a decade ago. A local family's daughter was raped and murdered in a dormitory at Lehigh, and they got a federal law passed. We must report crime statistics on campus, and rape and sexual assault fall in that category," said Wynn. "This is not something you fool around with, you don't cover up statistics."

"Anytime an administrator hears of a sexual assault, that gets reported confidentially to Safety and Security," said Dean of the College Greg Kannerstein '63.

"A lot of times a student would come in and say 'I know that this happened,' and sometimes we would try to reach out to the survivor," continued Kannerstein. "But you can't force someone to take measures, but we would hope they would get involved in the system one way or another."

Kannerstein said, "The reports can come from a variety of places. Sometimes people may call security, often it's health services. In each case, people are trained to tell them the options available, both legally and medically."

Internally, Kannerstein explained, Honor Council has two methods of dealing with cases of sexual assault, the Dean's Panel or the Joint Student-Dean's Panel. According to Kannerstein, the first Dean's Panel on an instance of sexual violence was in 1980.

When asked about what she thought of the situation of rape and sexual assault on Haverford's campus, Contreras said, "I wouldn't say that we're better or worse [than other schools,] I think that Haverford is just a smaller scale of what happens outside. Whatever the statistics are on the outside, we're just a microcosm of that."

As to ways for improving the situation, Contreras emphasized community awareness. "What we can do is start talking about it more, air it out, not have it be a taboo subject," she said. "It should hit close to home, this is home. If it becomes a taboo subject, what kind of community are we fostering?"

Harrison Haas also gave the point that the Women's Center, which sponsored the Awareness Week and provides a place for discussion, isn't located in an accessible spot.

"[The Center] has so much to offer, but it's tucked away in the corner of [the campus center,] and it could be more effective in a more visible spot on campus," said Harrison Haas.

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