



Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des Associations des Professeurs des Universités de l'Ontario

Sexual violence on campus

May 2019

Context

On March 19, 2019, the Ontario government finally released a summary of the results of 2018 Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey. More than 160,000 students from campuses across Ontario participated in this voluntary survey which had detailed questions regarding experiences of sexual violence and harassment on campus. The results were deeply disturbing. Over 63% of university students surveyed disclosed an experience of sexual harassment in the last academic year (2017-18); 75% reported that they have witnessed a form of sexual violence within the same period, and almost 60% said that they have very little knowledge of sexual violence supports, services, and reporting procedures on their campuses. These results point to the significant amount of work still needed to create campuses and communities free of sexual harassment and violence.

With the release of the results, the government also announced a number of initiatives they are taking to address the rampant problem of sexual violence on campus. These include an increase to the funding for the Women's Campus Safety Grant in this year's budget (although the government has also simultaneously cancelled a promised increase in funding to community sexual assault centres), and requiring every publicly-assisted college and university to:

- a. Report annually to its Board of Governors on a number of measures related to the experiences of, and support for, students who have experienced sexual violence;
- b. Start a task force devoted to tackling sexual violence on campus that would include diverse student representatives and be required to report its findings to the respective Board of Governors and to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities; and
- c. Review any and all sexual violence policies by September 2019.

Given these directives, in the coming months universities will be striking task forces and putting committees together to review their standalone sexual violence policy. It is important for our faculty associations to be vigilant about this issue and actively participate in these conversations.

Why it matters

This matters for a plethora of reasons, and primary among these is that student survivors' wellbeing, and therefore their capacity to learn, is directly negatively impacted. Faculty may learn of sexual harassment or sexual violence through student disclosures or requests for accommodations (from needing more time to complete work, to changing group work composition, to responding to a student's inability to attend classes etc.), and it can often be unclear and daunting for faculty to navigate these disclosures and any accompanying requests.

In addition, we need to think of faculty as survivors and potential perpetrators of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Overall, it is important to remember that the conversation about sexual violence on campuses extends beyond students, and that the students' learning environments are also faculty's working environments. Of particular note in terms of learning and working environments is the potential negative impact of the use of Nondisclosure Agreements (NDAs) by universities, which usually mandate that parties involved in an investigation remain silent, and that findings of an investigation (and any resulting discipline) are confidential.

Possible actions

- Educate your faculty association about the results of the survey and the importance of discussing the issue of sexual violence on campus, including how sexual violence affects faculty as well as students.
- Inform your faculty association executive about the new requirements for a university task force, and advocate for the association to be an active part of these conversations.
- Volunteer to sit on the task force as a representative of the faculty association, and bring an equity lens to the task force discussions, as well as the report backs to the association.
- Have your faculty association publicly support sexual violence and harassment prevention and support initiatives on campus.
- Encourage your faculty association to advocate for harassment and sexual violence training for your faculty members, including how to respond to disclosures and how to properly interpret and apply the stand alone sexual violence policy

