

Campus Sexual Assault Series

Series Editor: Cortney A. Franklin, Ph.D.

Crime Victims' Institute

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Development of a Campus Climate Survey

*Brittany E. Hayes, Ph.D.
Eryn Nicole O'Neal, Ph.D.*

Recent years have seen an increase in scholarship, policy reports, activism, and legal reforms directed at campus safety, with specific attention given to sexual victimization. This increased attention on campus climate has mistakenly communicated to the public that sexual assault on college campuses is a more recent issue. Sexual aggression, harassment, and violence on university campuses have, however, always been serious problems. Research dating back to the late 1950s and 1960s consistently found that a significant percentage of college women reported experiencing sexual victimization during their university tenure (Fisher, Daigle, & Cullen, 2009; Kirkpatrick & Kanin, 1957; Koss, 1989; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007). As previously noted in existing Campus Sexual Assault Reports, empirical studies suggested that between 15% and 25% of women experience some form of sexual victimization during their college career (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Krebs, Lindquist, & Barrick, 2011; Krebs et al., 2007). Despite efforts to disprove the “1 in 5” statistic, data in campus sexual assault surveys have continued to hover around this figure (Fisher et al., 2000; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Krebs et al., 2007).

The current issue in the Campus Sexual Assault Series introduces campus climate surveys as an effective mechanism for capturing safety concerns among campus community members, including students, faculty, staff, and administrators, to address campus violence. This issue specifically outlines the development and administration of a campus-wide survey through three alternative mechanisms; highlighting strengths and weaknesses for future efforts on additional university campuses.

Efforts to Curtail Campus Violence

Widespread efforts to highlight, respond, and address campus sexual violence have been made in the past decade. More than 35 years after the passing of formative Title IX legislation and nearly 20 years since the passing of the Clery

Act, recent legal reforms have brought attention to the importance of safety on university campuses. In 2008, the American College Health Association (ACHA, p.5) acknowledged that sexual violence was a “serious campus and public health issue” and three years later, the United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights released a “Dear Colleague” letter aimed at guiding institutions of higher learning toward effective steps to end sexual violence (Office of the Assistant Secretary, 2011). In 2013, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was reauthorized and the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination (Campus SaVE) Act was enacted. Campus SaVE is considered the most recent and far-reaching legal effort to protect students from sexual victimization (Campus SaVE Act, n.d.). Finally, in 2014, the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault was formed, cementing the importance of addressing campus climate.

The Clery Act requires all institutions of higher education (IHEs) that are eligible for student aid to meet three requirements each year. One of these requirements includes that the school publishes an annual report on crime statistics and security policies. Importantly, research has shown the limitations that are associated with reporting requirements under the Clery Act (Ahn, 2009; Cantalupo, 2011). For example, though many victims of sexual assault tell a friend about the incident, the vast majority of sexual assaults go unreported to law enforcement or administrators on campus (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003; Sudderth, Leisring, & Bronson, 2010). What this means is that the statistics reported under the Clery Act have not been an accurate representation of crime on campuses.

In response to federal efforts and the limitations of the Clery Act, universities have implemented a wide array of strategies to address campus safety generally and sexual assault specifically. Under federal protections associated

with Title IX, colleges and universities are responsible for addressing sexual assault, intimate partner or domestic violence, sexual harassment, and/or stalking. Administrators and researchers at IHEs have begun to collect data on the rates of these offenses under the umbrella of campus climate surveys. Campus climate surveys provide a more precise representation of student victimization experiences. Since their creation, the scope of campus climate surveys has expanded to include questions related to attitudes, in addition to assessing knowledge and use of on-campus and off-campus resources (Wood, Sulley, Kammer-Kerwick, Follingstad, & Busch-Armendariz, 2016). Since campus climate surveys were strongly encouraged under Title IX and Clery Act compliance programs, the University of Kentucky now holds an annual conference on the topic.

Campus Climate Survey

The campus climate survey that was administered at the Texas State University System (TSUS) school reported here was adapted from the University of Kentucky's Campus Attitudes Toward Safety (University of Kentucky, 2015). Questions on the survey included perceptions of safety, knowledge of campus resources, experiences on campus, social attitudes, and utilization of services. The campus climate survey was administered in three forms: 1) an in-person paper-and-pencil survey administered in randomly-selected classes, 2) an electronic survey sent to students enrolled in randomly-selected, online-only courses, and 3) a mass email sent to every enrolled student. The goal of administering the survey in three different formats was to compare findings based on the mode of administration. Namely, if the same conclusions can be made across the three survey formats, confidence in conclusions are bolstered. In addition, future versions of the survey can use the most cost-effective and time-efficient mode of administration. Subsequent sections elaborate on the processes behind each mode of administration as well as the advantages and disadvantages.

In-Person Paper-and-Pencil Survey

A random sample of courses offered during the Spring semester of 2017 at this university were selected. To do this, a list of all course offerings for Spring 2017 was identified. Labs, independent studies, and duplicate sections were deleted from this list. With this complete list, a unique random identifier was assigned to each class section. Based on this unique number, approximately 10% of classes were selected (N = 198). Of the 198 courses selected, the instructor of record was emailed to request permission to allow their students to participate in the survey during the first two weeks of class. The body of the email recommended allowing the research team to administer the survey on the first day of class. If that date was not convenient for the instructor, the research team worked to find a date or time that was convenient for the instructor. At the discretion of the instructor, students were also offered extra credit for participation.

In total, 96 instructors permitted the research team to administer the survey to their class. In other words, almost half of classes (48.24%) solicited for participation took part in the survey. Across all classes, 89.65% of the students who were in class the day the survey was administered took the survey. These numbers indicate that, once the research team was in the classroom, the majority of students voluntarily participated in the survey.

Strengths/Weaknesses. Paper-and-pencil, in-person survey administration had several advantages. Because the sample was randomly selected (i.e., every class had an equal chance of being selected to participate in the study), conclusions can be made about the entire student population. Second, the research team was able to answer any questions respondents had when completing the survey because they were available during survey administration. Lastly, response rates were much higher when the instructor offered extra credit. There were also disadvantages to this approach. Because the survey was administered in a paper-and-pencil format, the data from these surveys had to be manually entered into a computer program. In addition, one member of the research team had to be available during the scheduled administration time. With four team members, there was only one hour and a half period from Monday to Friday when all team members were unavailable. Conducting an in-person survey across a sizeable campus requires coordination among research team members. Paper-and-pencil administration required over 2,000 copies of the survey, which was very costly.

Electronic Survey: Mass Email to the Student Body

An email, with the survey link embedded, was sent to every enrolled student on three separate occasions. The first email was sent on March 21, 2017. Two follow-up emails were sent on March 30, 2017 and April 10, 2017. The timing of these emails were important as incentives (i.e., gift cards) were distributed based on when the student completed the survey. The first 25 students who completed the survey received a \$10 Starbucks gift card. For the two follow-up emails, 25 students who completed the survey within 48 hours of the email distribution were randomly selected to receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card. In addition, among all students who completed the survey, eight students were randomly selected to receive a \$100 Amazon gift card. A total of 1,583 students began the survey. In other words, 7.74% of the student body began the survey. In total, 990 students completed the final question on the survey (62.5% attrition rate).

Strengths/Weaknesses. The mass email had several advantages. First, because the survey was electronic, the data was automatically generated and did not require data entry like the paper-and-pencil version, saving resources. In addition, the online survey platform, Qualtrics, calculated the time a respondent spent on the survey. This allowed the

researcher to determine if the respondent was rushing through the survey in an effort to be eligible for incentives. On the other hand, the findings from the mass email do not apply to the entire student body. There is no way to tell how many students opened the email and elected not to participate, deleted the email because it was from someone they did not know, or never checked their university email. In addition, students who completed the survey may have been interested in the topic and wanted to share their experience. Female students were more likely than male students to complete the online survey when compared to the total number of male and female students at this university. Students who were of traditional college age (i.e., 18 to 22 years old) were also more likely to take the online survey when compared to students of non-traditional college age at this university. There may be a “digital divide” between younger and older individuals (Nobles, Reyns, Fox, & Fisher, 2012), which influenced whether or not they completed the survey when administered in this format.

Electronic Survey: Online-Only Classes

In a similar process to the selection of in-person course sampling, a random sample of online classes was selected. Because there are a smaller total number of online classes offered at this university ($N = 639$), 20% of online classes were randomly selected, which produced a sample of 129 courses. Instructors in these classes were asked if they would offer extra credit to their students for voluntary participation.

Strengths/Weaknesses. The administration of the survey to online classes had more challenges than the other two forms of administration. First, the survey needed a way to link the student to a particular course in order to receive extra credit. Given the very sensitive nature of the questions included in the instrument, the research team did not want student participants to provide their name. Instead, students provided the course number and their university email. At this university, emails are a combination of three letters and three numbers that make it difficult to identify a specific student based on visual inspection alone. At the end of the semester, the research team compiled a list, by class section, of students who participated in the survey and would be eligible for extra credit. This resulted in 37 separate emails to the instructors of these online courses. In addition, students could have been enrolled in multiple courses that offered extra credit. This resulted in follow-up emails from instructors to check if the student had completed the survey for another section. This method was more labor intensive than the solicitation of in-person classes. This disadvantage must be compared to the fact that the online courses completed the survey electronically and the research team did not have to manually enter the data, saving resources. In addition, many of the instructors had multiple sections of the online course that were combined once the semester began. In these cases, the research team allowed the instructor to email all students in all sections.

Existing Texas Campus Climate Surveys

This university is not the only IHE in Texas that has conducted a campus climate survey. The University of Texas-Austin made headlines in March 2017 when their campus climate survey revealed 15% of undergraduate female students reported they experienced rape while on campus (Vagianos, 2017). Rape was defined as “since enrollment, someone put their penis, fingers, or other objects into my vagina [or butt] without my consent” (University of Texas, 2017, p. 17). Nevertheless, this rate is consistent with prior research (Fisher et al., 2000; Krebs et al., 2011; Krebs et al., 2007).

Texas State University is scheduled to launch a campus climate survey in the Fall of 2017 (Texas State University, n.d.) while Texas A&M conducted a graduate campus climate survey in Spring 2012 (Texas A&M University, n.d.) and an undergraduate campus climate survey in April 2013 (Texas A&M University, 2015). The University of Houston also conducted a campus climate survey on the nature and scope of sexual violence in the Spring of 2016 (University of Houston, 2017). Based on the proliferation of campus climate surveys, it is evident many universities are using them in an effort to understand not only the nature and scope of campus crime but also to identify areas for intervention and prevention. Similar to the study conducted by The University of Texas, it would be beneficial for future surveys to be conducted across campus to identify similarities and differences. Findings from the present university campus climate survey will hopefully identify the most reliable, cost-effective, and efficient mode of administration to aid the reliable and cost-effective collection of safety data.

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Resources

Association of American Universities Climate Survey

<https://www.aau.edu/key-issues/aau-climate-survey-sexual-assault-and-sexual-misconduct-2015>

Campus Climate Survey Validation Study

<https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ccsvsfr.pdf>

About the Authors

Brittany E. Hayes, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology and the Assistant Director of the Crime Victims' Institute at Sam Houston State University. Her research involves victimology and has been published in the *American Sociological Review* and the *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*. She is the 2017 recipient of the Division of Victimology *Researcher of the Year Award* from the American Society of Criminology.

Eryn Nicole O'Neal, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at Sam Houston State University. Her research has appeared in *Justice Quarterly*, *Violence Against Women*, *Feminist Criminology*, *Women & Criminal Justice*, and *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. She is the 2017 recipient of the Division of Women and Crime *New Scholar Award* from the American Society of Criminology.

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