Support Resources for Faculty

According to a 2013 AAUP report, "faculty members may thus find themselves in the role of "first responders" to reports of sexual assault, yet few consider themselves adequately equipped for the role—in part because they are the least likely campus constituency to receive information about sexual assault and guidance about reporting and responding to it" (7).

As part of the guidelines suggested by the federal government, the College is required to provide training for all of its community members, including faculty. The Task Force will be recommending training for all faculty that address how to identify and report sexual harassment and assault, the College's policies and procedures, and the requirement to report any incident of sexual harassment or misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator. In the interim, this section will provide some additional resources to guide faculty.

The statistical evidence about the impact of sexualized violence on college students is sobering. According to the CDC's 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), almost 1 in 5 women (18.3%) and 1 in 71 men (1.4%) have experienced rape. One in 20 women and men have experienced sexual assault other than rape. One in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced some form of intimate partner violence (IPV).

The NISVS does not yet collect data about gender-non-conforming people's experiences with sexualized violence, nor has it examined how sexualized violence may affect transgender people differently from the cisgender population. However, the National Center for Transgender Equality & the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's 2011 survey of gender non-conforming and trans* people found that 64% of those surveyed had experienced sexualized violence.

We provide these statistics as a teaching aid to demonstrate the prevalence of sexual assault. There is a significant body of research addressing the issue of sexual assault, including data about underreporting. We have chosen a representative government-based study here, recognizing that this is but one slice of the available data. To some extent, the exact numbers, which vary across studies, are unimportant—even one incident of sexualized violence is one incident too many.

However, given these statistics, which demonstrate that issues of sexualized violence affect a significant percentage of our population, we think it important to consider how faculty can be attuned to survivors in the classroom.

In an Oberlin class that contains 20 students, we estimate that there may be about 2 to 3 students in the class who have experienced some form of sexualized violence. If 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced IPV, there can be at least 5-6 survivors of IPV in the class. In other words, you may have taught and may continue to teach individuals who have experienced significant trauma.

You may also face a number of students of all genders in your classes who have committed some form of sexual misconduct, or who hold views that may contribute to a culture and climate where sexualized violence is more likely to occur.

Oberlin's community cannot afford to ignore sexualized violence, including intimate partner abuse and stalking. Faculty can make a serious impact on students' lives by standing against sexual misconduct and making classrooms safer.

How To Support a Student

- First, take steps to make the classroom more inclusive for survivors and individuals of all genders, gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations. When the classroom is inclusive from day one, students experiencing crisis are more likely to trust faculty, more likely to ask faculty for help, and more likely to get help.
- Understand the requirement to report sexual misconduct; tell students about the requirement to report and why it exists.
  - It is important to disclose this obligation so that survivors can make an informed decision about whether to confide in you or seek fully confidential support.
  - Before a student approaches you, consider different ways you might be able to help. Consider...
    - Listening to a student's story
    - Offering emotional support and validation to survivors
    - Offering an extension on assignments. Be clear about if and how long would you be willing to delay deadlines
    - Acting as an advisor for a reporting party or a responding party in a formal adjudication
  - Consider what avenues of support you are willing and prepared to offer, and which you are not. This way, you can be honest with yourself and your students if you are called on for help.
- Know where to refer a student.
- Campus resources
- Local resources
- National resources

Remember, any support you offer a student must be coupled with a report to the Title IX Coordinator to ensure a coordinated and effective institutional response.

Faculty Roles, Pedagogical Issues and Sexual Misconduct

The following frequently asked questions illustrate the number of ways that faculty may interact with students about the sexual offense policy:

What are the signs that someone has survived sexual misconduct? When should I check in with a student?

- There are no clear-cut or typical "signs" of surviving sexual misconduct; in fact, there are as many responses to surviving sexual misconduct as there are survivors.
- Keep an eye out for sudden changes in student behavior or behavior that concerns you in any way. For example, a sudden drop in performance or class attendance should raise red flags as it is usually symptomatic that the student is encountering a challenge of some nature. Even if it is not related to sexual misconduct, the College may be able to provide other behavioral intervention or supportive responses.
- It never hurts to show care for your students. If you're worried about a student, ask them if they'd like to talk.

What if I learn that one of my students has survived sexual misconduct?

- Be sensitive and supportive. It is important to enter this space with an attitude of care.
- Listen to the student. Faculty members should make clear that they are available to talk, but also make sure the student doesn't feel like they must divulge all the details.
  - Give the student full attention.
  - Practice active listening techniques.
  - Listen not only when the student is speaking, but also when you speak. How are they reacting? Is the student feeling heard, or should you change your approach?
- Believe the student. It is not your job to be an investigator, lawyer, judge, or juror.
  - A very small minority of reported sexual assaults prove to be false reports.
  - Sexual misconduct is grossly underreported. One of the greatest obstacles to reporting is the fear that a survivor will be questioned, judged, and not believed.
- Ask yourself, is the student getting the help they need? In this moment? In general?
  - "The help they need" here means, of course, the help that the student decides they need.
  - If you believe a student or the community is in immediate danger from themselves or someone else, you should report your concern to Safety and Security, even if the student does not want you to tell anyone.
- Ask the student how you can help, and be honest with the student about what you can offer. For example, if a student asks for an extension on assignments, give clear options for any possible alternatives to the student.
- Talk to the student about other available resources.
- Respect the student's decisions.
  - Do not make decisions for the student, or pressure them to choose one route over the other.
  - There is no "right" or "wrong" way to survive. The only "right" choice is the one that the survivor makes for themselves (unless you suspect someone is in immediate danger from themselves or someone else)
  - Please share your knowledge about options, and be honest if asked for advice, but trust the survivor to make the final call.
- Follow through. It's important to respect and maintain the trust that has been established between you and the student. Do your best to stick to agreements.
- If a student has disclosed information about an experience/s with sexual misconduct, report it to the Title IX coordinator.
- Keep students' information private. If you learn of an incident of sexual misconduct, you should not:
  - Conduct an independent investigation or gather facts without direction from a supervisor
  - Counsel the reporting or responding party
  - Notify the responding party of the allegations
  - Explain to an involved party how the process works
  - Discuss the information with other individuals outside of the Title IX "need to know" circle
  - Mediate between the parties or third parties
  - Encourage a party not to file a report
  - Take any action other than necessary immediate steps

How can I make my classroom more inclusive for survivors of sexualized violence?

Because all professors will have survivors of sexualized violence in their classrooms, these tips can help ensure a welcoming and supportive environment. They are in no way meant to limit academic freedom or free speech, but rather to provide pedagogical tools to ensure that all course members benefit fully from a class.
Understand that sexual misconduct is inextricably tied to issues of privilege and oppression.
- Educate yourself about racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, ableism, and other issues of oppression.
- Anticipate these issues entering class discussion. Think about how you could support positive ideas and discussions.
- Invite and accept pushback in the classroom. Being engaged or even challenged by a student on these issues is an opportunity to learn, and to model supportive behavior for students.
- Respect students’, colleagues’, and guest speakers’ pronouns.
  - The Sexual Offense Policy defines sexual offense as “a behavior, which calls attention to gender, sexuality, gender identity or sexual orientation in a manner which prevents or impairs an individual’s full enjoyment of educational or occupational benefits or opportunities.” For many, use of incorrect pronouns calls attention to gender in a very inappropriate way, and prevents or impairs their safety in a classroom.
  - When possible, don’t call roll using names from Presto or Blackboard – allow students to self-identify using preferred names by asking them to sign in or to speak their preferred names.
  - On the first day of class, ask all students for their preferred pronouns. Memorize them as you memorize names.
  - If you realize you used the incorrect pronoun, apologize to the student in private and take steps to avoid repeating that mistake in the future.
  - If your class is too large to memorize names and pronouns, avoid using gender-specific language whenever possible. For example, if your instinct is to call on “the guy in the purple shirt,” try instead saying, “you, in the purple shirt.”

Understand triggers, avoid unnecessary triggers, and provide trigger warnings:
- A trigger is something that recalls a traumatic event to an individual. Reactions to triggers can take many different forms; individuals may feel any range of emotion during and after a trigger.
  - Experiencing a trigger will almost always disrupt a student’s learning and may make students feel unsafe in your classroom.
- Triggers are not only relevant to sexual misconduct, but also to anything that might cause trauma. Be aware of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, ableism, and other issues of privilege and oppression. Realize that all forms of violence are traumatic, and that your students have lives before and outside your classroom, experiences you may not expect or understand.
- Anything could be a trigger—a smell, song, scene, phrase, place, person, and so on. Some triggers cannot be anticipated, but many can.
- Remove triggering material when it does not contribute directly to the course learning goals.
- Sometimes a work is too important to avoid. For example, Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart is a triumph of literature that everyone in the world should read. However, it may trigger readers who have experienced racism, colonialism, religious persecution, violence, suicide, and more. Here are some steps you, as a professor, can take so that your class can examine this source in the most productive and safe manner possible:
  - Issue a trigger warning. A trigger warning is a statement that warns people of a potential trigger, so that they can prepare for or choose to avoid the trigger. Issuing a trigger warning will also show students that you care about their safety.
    - You may hesitate to issue a trigger warning, or try to compose a vague trigger warning, because you feel it might also be a “spoiler.” A trigger warning does not need to give everything away. If you’re warning people about the issue of Things Fall Apart, you can write, “Trigger warning: This book contains a scene of suicide...” You don’t necessarily need to “give away” the plot. However, even if a trigger warning does contain a spoiler, experiencing a trigger is always, always worse than experiencing a spoiler.
    - Try to avoid using graphic language yourself within the trigger warning, but do give students a hint about what might be triggering about the material. If you say something like, “This movie might be upsetting to some of you,” that can a) sound patronizing and b) lead everyone who’s experienced trauma to feel like they might have a terrible time. Try instead saying, “This movie contains scenes of racism, including slurs and even physical violence, but I believe that the movie itself is working to expose and stand against racism and I think it is important to our work here.”
  - Tell students why you have chosen to include this material, even though you know it is triggering. For example:
    - “We are reading this work in spite of the author’s racist frameworks because his work was foundational to establishing the field of anthropology, and because I think together we can challenge, deconstruct, and learn from his mistakes.”
    - “This documentary challenges heterosexism in an important way. It is vital to discuss this issue. I think watching and discussing this documentary will help us become better at challenging heterosexism ourselves.”
  - Strongly consider developing a policy to make triggering material optional or offering students an alternative assignment using different materials. When possible, help students avoid having to choose between their academic success and their own wellbeing.
- Bring in a guest speaker who can help you make the conversation productive. The Oberlin College Dialogue Center is one excellent campus resource for facilitating difficult dialogues.
- Respect your students’ personal space and bodily autonomy. Physical touch and feeling one’s body controlled is often triggering.
  - It is absolutely necessary to touch a student or direct that student’s body, practice active consent. Always, always, always ask.
  - For example, instead of correcting a student’s posture without saying anything, say, “Your posture is a little off, do you mind if I adjust your back?”
- Listen to your students; accept no-gracefully.
A "no" is not a comment on you personally nor on your rapport with the student. Educate yourself on issues surrounding sexual misconduct. Understand that sexual misconduct can affect individuals of any identity. Understand that sexual misconduct affects the Oberlin community. Familiarize your self with current definitions of consent. Familiarize yourself with Oberlin College’s Sexual Offense Policy. Educate yourself on why the word survivor is used in discussion of sexual misconduct instead of victim. Keep track of the range of available resources. Continue to ask questions and challenge yourself.

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