

Task Force Update

Delivered by Virginia Ambler, Chair on February 12, 2015 at the session, "Gender-based Discrimination and Violence at W&M: An Open Conversation"

The overarching goal of the Task Force for Preventing Sexual Assault and Harassment is to help ensure sure that William & Mary deals honestly, effectively, and fully with the complex issues surrounding campus sexual violence. As chair of the task force, I appreciate having this opportunity to highlight major activities to date and review our plans for the remainder of the year. Based on President Reveley's charge, our efforts are organized around four broad areas with subcommittees focused on each. While the full task force meets monthly, the detailed work of the subcommittees takes places in dozens of meetings between the meetings.

The following subcommittee updates were shared at our half-day retreat in January and most recently with the Board of Visitors when they met last week:

The **Investigation and Adjudication** subcommittee spent the fall semester reviewing our current policies and procedures. In collaboration with the Office of Compliance and the Dean of Students Office, proposed changes to our Sexual Misconduct policies and procedures were shared with the campus community for comment. After considering feedback from the community and responding to input from the Task Force, updated policies and procedures were recommended to the President the first week of February and were approved, effective immediately on Monday of last week. There were a number of key updates. As you would expect, the revised documents are now more explicitly aligned with Title IX guidance and have been expanded – consistent with the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) -- to include language about dating and domestic violence and stalking. The revised documents also provide greater clarity regarding our processes. Though we had been fine tuning many aspects of our work over time, the written procedures now fully reflect and describe in detail the improvements we had made in practice. We have affirmed the right of each party in an adjudication process to be assigned a trained administrative advisor, and those advisors are assigned to both the reporting party and the responding party at the very beginning of the process. In addition, in cases of sexual misconduct, there is now an automatic right to appeal to the Provost.

Campus Climate – As the White House's *NotAlone.gov* documents affirm, "we know from decades of research that victims rarely report sexual assault . . . Thus, official statistics underrepresent the extent of the problem on any one campus. Further, campus response, intervention, and prevention efforts will be more successful if they are tailored to the needs of each campus community." Late last Fall we administered the National Sexual Misconduct Survey to begin collecting quantitative data to help us understand these issues for W&M. While the task force is now in the process of analyzing the data from that survey, we are now fully engaged in qualitative data collection. We need to hear the stories, the lived experiences of people in our W&M community. That is one of the purposes of tonight's "Open

Conversation,” and this event will be followed in the coming weeks by smaller focus group sessions with specific populations of students. What we learn from these campus climate assessments will give us a clearer picture of our own campus and inform the recommendations the task force will make in our report, particularly in the area of education and prevention.

THAT third subcommittee spent the fall cataloging and reviewing the breadth and depth of our current **education and prevention** efforts, and identifying areas where we need to do more. The Governor’s Sexual Assault Task Force has a similar subcommittee, and that state-wide group is working to compare the effectiveness of a wide range of education and prevention trainings, delivery modes, and curricula. Our W&M task force will take advantage of their research to help guide our recommendations. Additionally, members of the W&M task force will be taking part in a national webinar on March 4 entitled “Looking Beyond Orientation: New Approaches to Sexual Assault Prevention Programming.” There is no doubt that a “once-and-done” approach to prevention programming – on any significant issue, especially sexual violence -- is wholly insufficient. What might additional, on-going educational efforts look like beyond the mandatory freshman year programs, and how might those efforts be tailored to meet the needs of different sub-populations, particularly those who are in high risk categories? As I mentioned before, our campus climate data (both from the survey and from sessions like this and the focus groups to follow) will help that subcommittee identify areas of greatest need and, therefore, greatest opportunity for strengthening our prevention efforts. Any efforts to change our campus climate around sexual assault must begin with meaningful and effective prevention.

And finally, the **Faculty and Staff Training** subcommittee has moved ahead with dispatch to equip our responsible employees with knowledge of Title IX and the campus resources available to help someone at W&M who may be the victim of sexual assault or harassment. An on-line training module was rolled out two weeks ago and already, 837 of our faculty and staff members have completed the training. Kiersten Boyce, our Title IX Coordinator, is also offering two “in-person” trainings in the coming weeks. Pre- and post-tests will help us evaluate the effectiveness of the training -- important data as the subcommittee makes recommendations about how best to train faculty and staff going forward.

As I explained to the Task Force at our first meeting in September, we have stepped into a fast-flowing river that W&M must navigate with skill and in real time, even as the task force moves forward with deliberate and thorough consideration of multiple issues. The university’s efforts to improve, to innovate, and to be responsive to the problem of sexual assault and harassment is not waiting until June 30 when the Task Force completes its report for the President’s review. Rather, our report will spotlight actions taken over the course of this year and include recommendations for continued forward movement. We are working in a dynamic environment, the momentum of which inspires us at every turn to do our best work for the students who call this place home.