

Year 1 Public Description of Work for  
Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

**Johns Hopkins University**  
**Consent Education Campaign**

**This Action Applies to Rubric Item(s):**

Prevention #'s 2 & 8

**Description of Work:**

Johns Hopkins University (JHU) has created and is planning the implementation of a consent campaign geared to reach all students with comprehensive and relevant affirmative consent messaging.

The consent campaign was recommended by the Provost's Sexual Violence Advisory Committee (SVAC). The SVAC – comprised of students, faculty and staff from all JHU divisions – is charged with providing community input and advice to the Provost on matters pertaining to education, training, and other preventive measures; reporting; policies and procedures; and community engagement. In 2019, the SVAC engaged in a comprehensive and ongoing process to develop, refine and put into action prevention and support recommendations that would, among other things, respond to data from the most recent campus climate surveys and build upon Center for Disease Control (CDC), National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) and other toolkits, as well as promising practices identified through the National Academies of Science Action Collaborative. In addition to the consent campaign, SVAC work in progress also includes bystander intervention training expansion, resource assessment and expansion, and exploration of best practices and evidence-based methods of engaging faculty, staff and students as change-makers to empower others and set positive norms, create a culture of inclusiveness and respect, prevent discrimination and harassment, and intervene in situations of misconduct.

SVAC review of JHU 2018 and 2019 campus climate survey data revealed an opportunity for students to better understand and implement affirmative consent - i.e., active, ongoing voluntary agreement to participation in sexual activity. The most frequent survey response examples of consent failure occurred when a partner: initiated sexual activity "without checking in with [them] first or while [they] were still deciding;" (2) "during consensual activity, ignored [their] nonverbal cues to stop or slow down;" and/or (3) "otherwise failed to obtain [their] active ongoing voluntary agreement."

SVAC research revealed that studies done in 2017<sup>1</sup> and 2015<sup>2</sup> recommended addressing the following topics when teaching consent and/or in consent messaging: (1) openly communicating during sexual activities; (2) recognizing verbal and nonverbal consent and non-consent cues; and (3) maintaining consent throughout a sexual experience - all while being mindful to avoid invoking harmful myths related to rape (e.g. the perpetrator did not mean to commit assault/there was a misunderstanding/the

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<sup>1</sup> Dixie, K.D. (2017). Defining Consent as a Factor in Sexual Assault Prevention. *McNair Scholars Research Journal*.10 (1), 35-54.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, Annika M. and Hoover, Stephanie M. (2015) "The Potential of Sexual Consent Interventions on College Campuses: A Literature Review on the Barriers to Establishing Affirmative Sexual Consent," *PURE Insights: Vol. 4, Article 5*. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/pure/vol4/iss1/5>

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assault was accidental). In 2019, the NSVRC developed an “I Ask”<sup>3</sup> campaign geared to foster more effective active consent conversations, and to encourage students to check in with their partner before proceeding with sexual activity. This campaign directly addresses the first consent failure identified by the JHU campus climate survey data above: initiating sexual activity without first checking in with a partner. Research also revealed a consent education evidence base still in its infancy, with few available examples of peer consent campaigns.

With available research and climate survey data in hand, JHU sought to expand on the NSVRC campaign, innovate, and create its first comprehensive consent campaign. JHU’s Center for Health Education and Wellness (CHEW) expanded on the NSVRC “I Ask” campaign and developed companion “I Listen and I Respect” campaign elements which, when paired with the “I Ask” campaign, are geared to further highlight the requirements that consent be active, mutual, and rooted in mutual respect. The resulting “I Ask, I Listen and I Respect” campaign not only addresses the first consent failure identified in the JHU campus climate survey, but also addresses the second and third consent failures (i.e., encouraging partners to notice cues and obtain active, voluntary agreement throughout sexual activity). Consistent with the 2018 NASEM report, this campaign also weaves in respect aspects, highlights behaviors that students should engage in (by not only telling students what the elements to healthy consent look like, but also giving examples of what language surrounding asking, listening and respecting consent looks like), rather than focusing just on those behaviors they should avoid. The campaign identifies and reinforces community values as they relate to consent.

To receive feedback and further refine campaign messaging, CHEW and Student Affairs representatives conducted a student listening tour (with reach outs to a large number of student groups) to receive feedback on the draft campaign messaging using a structured tool created with the SVAC to document feedback. Taking the feedback received from their reach out efforts, which was overwhelmingly positive, JHU refined the foundation messaging. In February, 2020, SVAC representatives met with communications representatives to plan for the spring 2020 roll out of the campaign. However, given the move to fully online learning in March 2020, JHU is looking into when the most effective time will be to implement the campaign.

Post-campaign, JHU plans to explore the effectiveness of the campaign via campus climate survey questions and by comparing future climate survey data to past data. JHU also plans to explore options for evidence-based, ongoing community mobilization programming on affirmative consent-related norms to extend the impact and sustainability of the communications campaign.

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<sup>3</sup> National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2019). *Sexual Assault Awareness Month - I Ask*. [online] Available at: <https://www.nsvrc.org/saam>