

**Year 3 Public Description of Work for
Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education**

Utah State University

**Unlikely Allies in Prevention: Student Led Prevention Efforts in a
Technical Communication Classroom**

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

- Ally or Ambassador Programs
- Prevention Program or Toolkits
- Diverse Stakeholder Partnerships

Description of Work:

In 2019, Dr. Avery Edenfield published in *Communication Design Quarterly* an article comparing institutional modes of sexual harassment prevention to grassroots, peer-to-peer modes in the form of zines, specifically queer zines. After the article was published, to leverage his research into the change called for in the paper, he shared it with sexual harassment prevention professionals at his institution (USU), which resulted in a meeting to dialogue about how those changes could be brought about through their offices. The group identified Edenfield's "Project Management for Technical Communicators" course as a key collaboration opportunity in moving forward USU's sexual harassment prevention and education efforts.

The purpose of the academic course/prevention professionals collaboration was to provide a space for students to contribute to USU's sexual harassment prevention and education work outside of "traditional" methods of involvement (i.e., peer education, internships, volunteering), which typically attract "traditional" students to participate (i.e., white, heterosexual, able-bodied, social justice degrees/backgrounds). The micro-goals of the collaboration are to produce projects that more effectively consider and reach students of many backgrounds. The macro-goals of the collaboration are to foreground student knowledge and experiences to uniquely situate students as experts in prevention efforts.

Spring 2020 was the first time that the Project Management course was offered as a collaboration with USU's Office of Equity and Sexual Assault and Anti-Violence Information office (SAAVI). The first iteration of the class was designed to be facilitated entirely in-person. Students were divided into four project work groups that they worked in for the entirety of the class. The spring 2020 projects were: research and creation of a consent/sexual violence prevention/sexual health zine; research, audit, and overhaul of the Office of Equity and SAAVI websites; design education materials to support the SAAVI "It's Enough (to seek help)" campaign; and design education and promotion materials to support the annual "Start by Believing (victims/survivors)" April campaign. Each project was assigned to one of the prevention professionals for oversight and included pedagogical objectives critical to the course, such as timely and regular client communication, progress reports, quality control, time and budget management, iterative design, mock-ups, and teamwork.

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The course itself was designed to be a hybrid of in-class and out-of-class work. Classes functioned as a “lab” where materials students needed to complete the work were provided in the class while the instructor, Edenfield, and the teaching assistant acted as “coaches” to the projects, helping students to troubleshoot or acting as a sounding board for challenges or questions. Regular meetings with the prevention professionals were built into the course schedule in advance, including regular progress reporting. Students engaged with the prevention professionals in class and were also given “field trip days” to meet with other relevant stakeholders for their respective projects. Ultimately, each team worked toward three scaffolded deliverables — a proposal, a draft of their project, and the final deliverable.

The outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in a quick transition of the spring 2020 course to an entirely synchronous online format. The change in course format also created changes in the final deliverables for the projects, given that certain aspects of the projects (such as in-person tables for “Start by Believing” Day) were no longer possible. Despite the global climate and the challenges students faced, the projects were still completed on time and within (revised) specifications, clearly demonstrating the level of student dedication and buy-in to the projects.

The spring 2021 course was facilitated in an entirely asynchronous online format. Students engaged with each other, the instructor, and the prevention professionals via USU’s online learning management system (Canvas). They were required to participate in weekly discussions via the discussion boards, read relevant materials, and watch relevant videos. Given the asynchronous format, students were mostly assigned to complete individual projects. Examples of projects from the spring 2021 semester include: research, audit, and overhaul of various Office of Equity and SAAVI sexual harassment training slides for students and employees; research and creation of a consent/sexual violence prevention/sexual health zine; develop online resource sharing strategies for students at USU’s Statewide Campuses; and design education materials related to consent in married relationships.

The spring 2022 course was facilitated in an entirely synchronous online format. The project work groups structure was revisited with some new and some repeated projects: research, audit, and overhaul of the Office of Equity website; develop an assessment for people to align their strengths with Upstanding (bystander intervention) strategies; research and develop a website to debunk false reporting myths; and research and develop a speaker panel focused on sex positivity and acceptance. Students were required to participate in “live” weekly class sessions, read relevant materials, and watch relevant videos. They also were given “field trip days” again to engage with other stakeholders.

At the end of each spring semester, the instructor and prevention professionals group meets to debrief and identify ways to enhance the class for the next time it is offered. Students submit personal reflection papers and course evaluations at the end of the semester, which have been used to improve the course over time. Final deliverables from each semester’s class have been utilized by the prevention professionals to improve, supplement, and sometimes completely change existing sexual harassment prevention and education efforts. The products have also been shared with USU’s sexual harassment Implementation and Coordination Committee, which is an interdisciplinary group that oversees all aspects of USU’s sexual harassment prevention, response, remediation, and evaluation work.

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This academic course/campus stakeholder collaboration is relatively unique at USU, and it is also unique within the higher education space. In summer 2020, a graduate assistant was hired to conduct a brief national survey of sexual harassment prevention professionals as part of writing a research brief about the collaboration. The results of the survey indicated that many institutions do not directly incorporate student involvement in their prevention and education efforts. No participants in the survey indicated that students are engaged through academic course collaborations.

Potential immediate next steps for this collaboration include continuing to refine the class's structure, selecting possible projects for spring 2023's course, and determining how the course aligns with the goals and work of USU's new Center for Intersectional Gender Studies. Long-term next steps will likely include identifying other academic colleges, majors, and courses in which this type of formal collaboration would be possible and creating similar academic course collaborations within those spaces.

The Project Management course collaboration is consistent with the recommendations found in the "prevention" and "approaches for pursuing organizational change" sections of the 2022 Rubric on Areas of Work for Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education because the collaboration has created new groups of students who feel responsible for reducing and preventing sexual harassment. These students have participated in the process of identifying and developing a roadmap for collective prevention of sexual harassment at USU. The collaboration has demonstrated that the more students are able to see how sexual harassment issues intersect with all aspects of their education and lives, the more likely they will be to use the skills central to sexual harassment prevention including healthy relationships, consent, boundary setting, respect, and communication.

Website for further information (if applicable): <https://sigdoc.acm.org/cdq/unlikely-allies-in-preventing-sexual-misconduct-student-led-prevention-efforts-in-a-technical-communication-classroom/>

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