

2023 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Johns Hopkins University

***“We Listen. You Decide”:* An Evidence-Based Communication Campaign to Promote Awareness and Use of Confidential Resources**

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

1. Response: Improved Communication and Increased Transparency
2. Response: Trauma Informed Programs and Practices
3. Remediation: Confidential Resources and Support Services
4. Evaluation: Using Climate Assessments to Inform Action
5. Organizational Change: Coordinated Community Response

Description of Work:

Johns Hopkins University (JHU) developed and is implementing an evidence-based, student-focused communication campaign to promote awareness and usage of confidential resources related to sexual misconduct. This campaign stemmed from a recommendation by the Provost's Sexual Violence Advisory Committee (SVAC), a group comprised of students, faculty and staff from all JHU divisions, as well as representatives from Athletics, Security, Health and Well-being, and Student Affairs.¹ Based on SVAC's review of data from JHU's climate surveys on student sexual misconduct as well as direct student feedback, SVAC recognized that a significant population of students were not aware of, were confused by, or were otherwise not utilizing the many sexual misconduct related resources offered by JHU. In fact, the 2021 climate survey indicated that 75% of students who experienced an incident of sexual assault during their time at JHU did not contact any JHU resource.² It was critical to address this issue as research indicates that disclosing abuse and obtaining support and safety planning is beneficial for survivors of violence, and can reduce posttraumatic stress, self-blame, and re-victimization.

In spring 2022, SVAC approached the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs (CCP) with the goal of developing a campaign to promote and clarify the availability of existing resources and streamline students' paths for accessing these resources. CCP is a well-known leader in addressing public health issues and creating social and behavior change through evidence-based communication initiatives. SVAC's

¹ The [SVAC](#) 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.

² The top reasons for *not* contacting a resource were: *“I did not think it was serious enough to contact any of these programs or resources,” “I could handle it myself,”* and *“I did not want the person to get in trouble.”*

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first step was to share existing data and information with CCP about students' resource knowledge and usage. With this background, and in partnership with SVAC, CCP engaged in formative research to address the following questions: 1) Do students know about the many sexual violence and misconduct resources provided by JHU; 2) What barriers do students face when choosing to seek these resources?; and 3) How can JHU improve access to sexual violence resources?

Eligible participants included undergraduate and graduate students representing multiple schools, campuses and student organizations, as well as key staff who interact with students and student groups. Students and staff were recruited for key informant interviews and focus group discussions as well as pre-testing sessions. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the study protocol and interview guides underwent full ethical review by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Institutional Review Board. CCP conducted interviews and focus group discussions from August through November 2022, and pre-tested draft campaign materials in November and December 2022.

The research findings significantly shaped the resulting communication campaign. CCP found that many students are not aware of existing resources, or, if they are, feel overwhelmed by long lists and various detailed websites describing resources. Similarly, students can be confused about which resources are confidential, which can deter them from contacting any resource. As a result, the communications campaign focuses students on one supportive resource as a first step – a clearly-identified confidential resource who can listen to the student and provide additional options and guidance. The campaign also focuses on simple, frequent and widespread messaging, to ensure that students absorb the information even if they do not need it at that time.

CCP also uncovered a perception among some students that, once they involve the university in sexual misconduct concerns, they must move forward with a reporting process and cannot change their mind. Students want to maintain control over their information and the next steps, but fear losing control if they seek support. As a result, the communication campaign highlights each student's agency when they contact the confidential resource. The campaign slogan, "*We Listen. You Decide.*" conveys that students control both the information they choose to share and the decisions regarding possible next steps.

Findings further indicated that students are not as likely to seek resources when they perceive their situation is in a "gray area," and does not clearly constitute sexual misconduct. To address this, the campaign incorporates language such as "*If it felt wrong, we're here to talk,*" to encourage students to seek support even if they are not sure how to categorize a negative experience. Additional messaging will combine this slogan with specific, concrete situations that may create uncertainty for students, e.g., *Is it assault if I was drunk?* and *Can it be assault even if it was my partner?*

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Study findings also highlighted that, given the large and decentralized nature of JHU, messaging about sexual violence support is perceived to be siloed by school, less prominent on some campuses than others, and less visible for graduate students than undergraduate students. Students also reported having difficulty envisioning an actual person who would listen to and guide them. While JHU has expanded its counseling and university-wide gender violence prevention resources, the results suggested that greater advertisement and personalization of these resources can be helpful in increasing their trust and usage.

CCP provided a wide variety of suggestions for rolling out the communications campaign, some of which are being implemented and others which are still in planning phases. JHU has created a simple, straightforward website as a central location for information about confidential resources related to sexual misconduct. The campaign materials – flyers, lawn signs, mirror clings, stickers, posters and other “swag” – will include the *We Listen, You Decide* logo and a QR code that links to this site. The website and print materials will be supplemented with social media messaging targeted towards different schools and populations. JHU is in the process of evaluating other CCP recommendations, such as creating a text-friendly support option, sending regular reminder texts about resources to student populations, and incorporating the campaign into various JHU programs, including orientation, resident advisor training, and bystander intervention training.

JHU will be conducting its next climate survey on student sexual misconduct in either fall 2023 or early 2024, with all full-time undergraduate and graduate students invited to participate. Like our prior surveys, it will ask questions about students’ knowledge and utilization of specific resources, providing an opportunity for the university to evaluate the effectiveness of this communications campaign.

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