

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

Utah State University

Sex Education Programming for Students

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

1. Prevention: Other efforts to address or prevent sexual harassment
2. Organizational Change: Leveraging the strengths of distinct stakeholder groups and creating partnerships between them

Description of Work:

According to data from the 2021 Utah College Sexual Behavior Survey, 75% of survey participants felt unprepared to have penetrative sex for the first time as a youth (pre-college). The survey was administered to Utah State University students who had attended high school in Utah and asked them to reflect on their sexual experiences prior to coming to college. Only 34% of participants who had penetrative sex in high school always communicated with a partner about sexual boundaries, limits, and comfort levels prior to engaging in sex. Less than half (43%) of participants who had penetrative sex in high school always communicated with a partner about sexual consent prior to engaging in sex.

The majority of USU's student population are Utah residents (84% in spring 2023), which means that many students attending the university did not receive comprehensive sex education prior to attending the institution. K-12 teachers in Utah are not permitted to use the word "consent" when educating about sexual health-related topics, and much of that education has to focus on abstinence-only practices. This landscape has created a large gap in student knowledge, skills, and abilities for meeting behavior expectations under USU's policies.

In an effort to address this gap, the university's Office of Equity, Sexual Assault and Anti-Violence Information (SAAVI) office (victim advocacy office), Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Residence Life, and Student Health and Wellness Center (SHWC) now collaborate on various sexual health education efforts each year. Prior to this collaboration, Residence Life was the only department offering sexual health-related education, and it was infrequent. The purpose of the collaboration is to provide both basic sexual health information and to reinforce existing sexual harassment prevention messages about consent, healthy relationships, boundary setting, and bodily autonomy. The main goals of the collaboration are to prevent sexual harassment by describing standards of behavior clearly and accessibly and move beyond solely educating about the behaviors prohibited under USU's policies.

The collaboration began in 2021 when USU's sexual harassment campus climate survey for students asked participants to indicate whether they would like USU to provide more sexual health-related education. About one-third of participants indicated they would like to receive that kind of education from the university. In summer 2021, a Master of Public Health (MPH) intern for the Office of Equity started compiling and creating sexual health education content and resources for the SHWC's website. The content focused on sexual health-related medical care, communication and consent, and safer sex practices. This content was an expansion of the

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existing content on the website, which solely focused on sexual health-related medical care and was not inclusive of various gender identities. The expanded website content was also turned into a brochure that could be handed out by medical providers, SAAVI, and the Office of Equity.

Initial data from the Utah College Sexual Behavior Survey was released in 2022, which prompted the Office of Equity's undergraduate peer educator team to create a sexual health education series in spring 2022 as part of Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This was the first time that this kind of education series was provided at USU. It was a three-part series: demystifying sexual health (part 1), sexting (part 2), and inclusive sex ed (part 3). Participants could sign-up for all three sessions or only the ones that interested them. Part 1 addressed bodily autonomy rights, consent, sexuality definitions, reproductive anatomy, birth control options, STIs, the orgasm gap, and the four aspects of sexual well-being. The content in part 2 covered hygiene and menstruation basics, birth control, pregnancy, STIs, and consent. The inclusive sex ed session focused on sex safety, sexual pleasure, how people define sex, personal preferences, and university resources. The peer educators researched their assigned topics, compiled the content, and facilitated each of the sessions live/in-person. They advertised the sessions via social media, printed posters in the residence halls and around campus, word of mouth, and during the required student training sessions that they facilitated.

In summer 2022, a joint MPH intern for the Office of Equity and SAAVI started to create content for a self-paced sexual health online course within the university's LMS for students (Canvas). They also developed social media graphics to advertise the online course. The online course expands on the content created for the SHWC website by the previous MPH intern. It includes modules about physical health, emotional health, "things less talked about" (such as masturbation), sexual identity, STIs, and contraceptives. The intern researched the content, created graphics and found other visual representations, and built all of the information into the online course. The course should be released to students in fall 2023.

The current culmination of the multi-department collaboration was the "sexual health day" in spring 2023. On this day were multiple events. SAAVI and CAPS hosted a sexual health fair, which was located in the student center and featured booths from various campus and community organizations, such as the health department, a local sex store, a sex therapist, and the community victim advocacy agency. Speakers also shared information about topics like testing and medical services, the safe use of sex toys, and impact play and consent. Participants were given passports that would be marked by each of the booths that they stopped at to demonstrate they had engaged with that organization. The completed passports were added to a prize drawing.

The second event was a different version of the Office of Equity's peer educator sexual health education series. This time, the peer educators decided to do a single event and have it set-up similar to the sexual health fair. At each of the tables, participants could learn about various topics, including sexual health, after care/emotions, and gender identity/inclusive sex ed. The last station was a jeopardy game featuring questions about numerous sexual health-related topics. Participants received condoms, lube, personal care wipes, and dental dams for visiting the various stations. Winners of the jeopardy game received a book about making choices about sexual activity ("Enjoy Sex: How, When, and If You Want To").

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The final event on the “sexual health day” was a modified version of Vagina Monologues. Students were invited to submit monologues about sexuality and sexual health-related topics in advance of the event, which were screened by the event facilitators. The participants who were selected to read their monologues at the event received basic coaching about presentation skills from the facilitators prior to the event.

All of these efforts have been or will be evaluated in various ways. Attendance at the Office of Equity peer educator events increased between 2022 and 2023. Participant engagement during the sexual health fair and the monologues event was greater than expected. The sexual health brochures are distributed by different departments on campus, and students are being referred to the SHWC website by medical providers. The online Canvas course will be evaluated using pre- and post-tests for each of the modules. Evaluation will also likely include reviewing student answers to relevant questions and discussions during the required trainings, feedback survey data from the required student trainings, sexual harassment campus climate survey data, sexual harassment cases reported to the Title IX Coordinator and USU Police, and sexual harassment cases discussed with university victim advocates and therapists.

Next steps for the collaboration include finalizing the online Canvas course, continuing the “sexual health day” programming, and identifying additional opportunities for implementing more sexual health-related education at USU consistently throughout the year. The Sexuality and the Body Research Cluster, which is part of the USU Center for Intersectional Gender Studies, is interested in creating bathroom posters/flyers about these topics for the 2023-2024 year. Residence Life would also like to increase its residence hall-specific education efforts during the next academic year.

The sexual education programming efforts are consistent with the recommendations in the “prevention” section of the 2022 Rubric on Areas of Work for Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education because they are impactful programming that can change climate and behavior and follow the broad guidelines detailed in the 2018 NASEM Report. The efforts cater to specific populations (students); attend to the institutional motivation for training (decrease sexual harassment incidents); use live qualified trainers (professional staff and peer educators) and offer trainees specific examples of (in)appropriate conduct (boundary setting, consent, conflict management); describe standards of behavior clearly and accessibly (talk about your STI status with a partner, ask questions to understand a partner’s boundaries); establish standards of behavior rather than solely seek to influence attitudes and beliefs (don’t proceed if someone is uncomfortable, don’t make assumptions about what someone is okay with); and conduct training in adherence to best practices (multiple modalities, time frames, and formats).

Website for further information (if applicable):

<https://www.usu.edu/aggiewellness/shwc/sexual-health> and https://chass.usu.edu/social-work/research/sexual_behavior_survey/research

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