

Working Towards Consent Culture:

Developing a Plan to Combat Sexual Violence on Campuses in Nova Scotia

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Introduction

In the past few years, Nova Scotia has been witness to multiple incidences of sexualized and gender-based violence that have been showcased on the front page, on our screens, and at the forefront of students' minds. The reality is that one in five women experience sexual assault while attending a post-secondary institution. Campuses are a reflection of broader society, where students' experiences echo similar systemic issues found in the home and in the work place. However, when it comes to sexual assault, campuses are unique. Post-secondary students experience a disproportionate amount of sexual assault as compared to the general population.

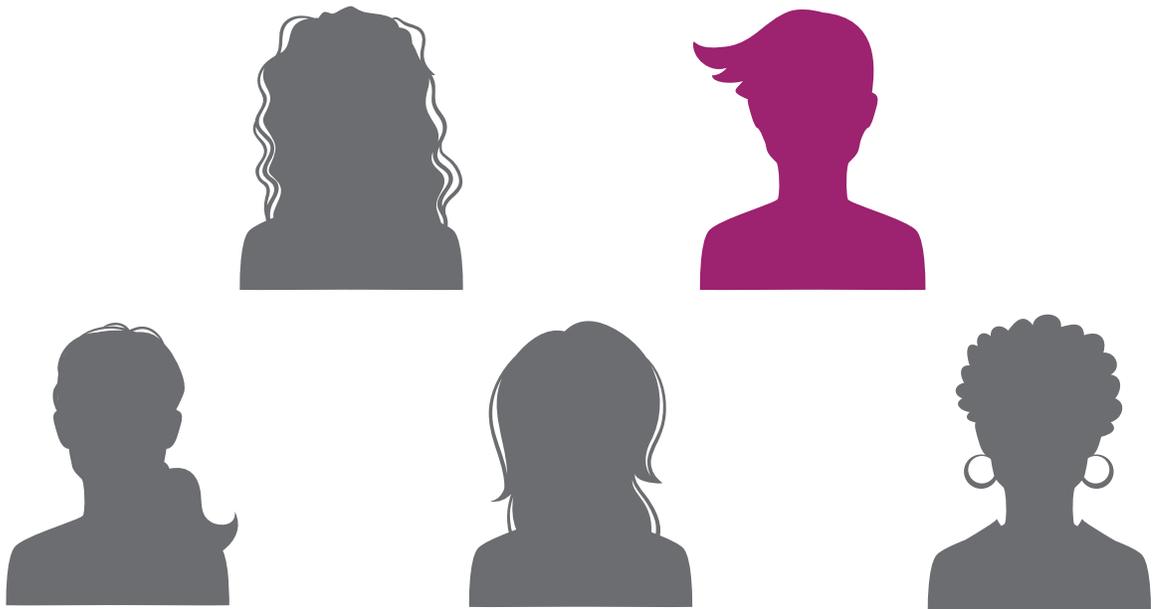
Universities and colleges possess unique tools to prevent, mitigate, and address sexual assault. From lecture halls to dorm rooms, universities and colleges have numerous avenues to implement mandatory consent education programs and clear policies and procedures to prevent and deal with sexual assault.

The Canadian Federation of Students – Nova Scotia (CFS-NS) has been dedicated to combatting issues of sexualized violence for more than 20 years. We were among the first to respond each time a new story of gendered violence appeared in the media, and have provided on going, proactive education and support through our No Means No Campaign. In 1981, the Federation's No Means No campaign broke ground and has since led the way in fighting rape culture both on and off campus. Recognizing that rape and sexual assault are 100 per cent preventable, the campaign aims to create a culture of consent through the understanding that consent is mandatory.

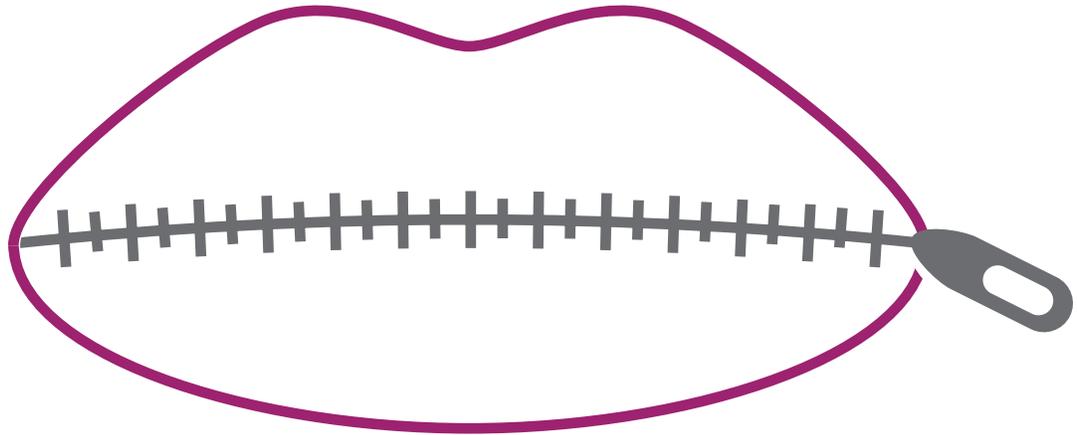
The Nova Scotia government has also recognized that sexual violence is a serious health, social and public safety issue in our province and has taken steps to develop a provincial strategy on sexual violence. This province can no longer sit idly by when the safety and well being of our students is at risk. The time to develop an action plan to specifically deal with sexualized violence on our campuses is now. The Canadian Federation of Students—Nova Scotia would like to partner with the Nova Scotia Government to develop a comprehensive plan to combat sexualized violence on our campuses. Students cannot begin another school year without the support of the provincial government behind them to combat these issues. It is time to take action together.

Background

Research published by Statistics Canada in 2013 found that post-secondary students experience a disproportionate number of sexual assaults as compared to the general population.



1 in 5 women studying in North American post-secondary institutions is sexually assaulted.
It's time Nova Scotia takes campus sexual assault seriously.



The majority of sexual assaults on campus go unreported.

It's time we create space to support students who have experienced sexual assault.

Research shows that women don't report incidences of sexualized violence because they fear they will not be believed or supported or that they will have to disclose the degrading and humiliating details of what was said and done to them. Commonly, they believe that there is little chance the perpetrator will be arrested or convicted.

Develop and Resource Education, Training and Services at Post-Secondary Institutions

Universities and colleges are in a unique position to tackle sexualized violence in the campus community. Many on campus sexual assaults occur during the first eight weeks of classes. Students starting college or university in Nova Scotia may be unaware of concepts such as consent and/or lack an accurate definition of what constitutes sexual assault. The start of the school year is a pivotal time to ensure we are educating students about consent. The way we frame the beginning of a student's university or college experience will make a huge impact, for better or for worse, in terms of the way students behave in the future. Mandatory consent training is necessary for all incoming students to ensure that we are doing everything we can to prevent incidences of sexual violence on campus.

Much of the data collected over the last thirty years establishes that there are severe short and long term impacts associated with sexualized violence. These impacts are compounded when secondary wounding occurs due to lack of competent care when someone who has experienced sexual assault attempts to get help. Students, staff and faculty at our universities and colleges need to have access to training to help mitigate this harm, and ensure that people are getting the care they need. Survivors should have around the clock access to support services.

The Nova Scotia post-secondary education system is underfunded, and when university administrators are looking to make cuts, women & gender centres, counselling services, and other frontline supports are often targeted. These services are core to our campuses and not ancillary. The support that students need will look different for each institution; institutions need to empower students to make the choices about what services are best suited for the needs of their

campus.

Action must be taken to develop mandatory preventative education, well-funded and varied support resources, and mandatory accountability measures. These actions are the most effective way to combat sexual assault on campus. These resources must not replace current resources allocated to support services on campus. Instead, we must create more robust and complete systems of support.

Many on campus sexual assaults occur during the first eight weeks of school.

Recommendations:

- Make financial resources available for a long-term Sexual Assault Support Resource Fund that would allow students, campus groups, universities and colleges to apply for funding to develop or enhance existing education or training programs and support resources on campus or in the greater campus community.
- Ensure each campus has clearly stated complaint procedures and response protocols; effective training and prevention programs; and services and supports for survivors available 24/7.
- Ensure all students have information about preventing sexualized violence and harassment and are informed of resources and supports, starting with their first week of orientation and continuing throughout the year, for students in all years of study.

Policy Review and Development

Students are on the front lines of combatting sexualized and gender-based violence on campus. Sadly, and despite pressure from students, college and university administrators have resisted supporting our work. When students experience sexualized violence and harassment on campus, they are often unable to access the support services they need from the institution. This is due to the fact that there are few policies in place, or if they exist, the policies in place are difficult to access and hard to navigate.

When speaking to incoming students about consent, we also need to talk about what to do if consent is not respected. It is integral that we effectively and clearly explain to students how to navigate support services and use the policies and procedures that should be designed to help

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them.

Sexual assault policies are what hold institutions accountable when a student submits a complaint about sexualized violence. This year, the public saw how profoundly lacking these policies are in the case of the Dalhousie Faculty of Dentistry. In this case, the policies favoured the perpetrator instead of centring on those experiencing harm. There was no arms-length process in place, and students were forced to reveal their identity if they wanted to make any sort of formal complaint. At the same time, the identity of the students who participated in sexist, misogynist, and violent behaviour remained confidential. Policies like these achieve the exact opposite of providing

a student who has experienced sexualized harassment or violence with support and justice. Instead, this approach discourages students who have experienced discrimination, harassment, and violence from coming forward.

The Dalhousie Student Union has recommended specific actions to develop supports and improve policy; including, providing accommodations for students who have experienced harm as a result of incidences of misogyny, sexual harassment, or gender-based violence on campus and implementing an acceptable formal process for students to anonymously report incidents of discrimination and harassment. These are supports students have been recommending for years, and it is time to ensure they are implemented.

These policies vary from campus to campus and must be developed to address the unique context at each post-secondary institution. Students need well thought out, survivor-centred policies, that are developed with students at the forefront of the process.

Recommendation:

- Bring forward legislation that will require all post-secondary institutions to have stand-alone sexual assault policies that are developed - and renewed every 4 years - through a student-driven process. This legislation would ensure that all universities and the Nova Scotia Community College are legally bound to properly act upon receipt of a complaint of sexual assault. It would also give students recourse if their university or college did not have, or did not properly follow, their sexual assault policy.

Government Oversight & Data Collection

Students have little to no faith that university or college administrations will properly handle incidences of sexualized violence on campus, and for good reason. At some universities, for example, students have been told that talking about sexual assault would draw unwanted attention to the fact that it happens on campus. In other instances, students have been told they were over reacting. This is not an acceptable response. Students and the Nova Scotia government should work together to ensure university and college administrators are held accountable and prioritize the safety of students.

The provincial government must establish oversight and accountability mechanisms when it comes to sexual assault in the post-secondary education sector. Universities and colleges are expected to respond to complaints of sexual assault, and when they don't, students often have nowhere to turn for reassurance that their safety will be maintained in the classroom, on campus, and in residence. The government can show leadership and provide a crucial support role for students that has been neglected by post-secondary education institutions.

We know that incidents of sexual violence are under-reported in our province and on our campuses. Available data indicates approximately 9 in 10 incidents (88%) of sexual assaults are not reported to the police. College and university administrators are often more interested in brushing incidences of sexual assault under the rug to preserve their reputation, which further ignores the realities of sexual assault on our campuses and in our communities. If we want to make real progress in ending sexualized violence, we need to know what's really happening on campus and how institutions are responding.

Recommendations:

- Create a Sexual Assault Support division within the Government of Nova Scotia that would:

- Compile all relevant policies within the sector;

- Develop and enforce data collection standards of reported sexual assaults at all Nova Scotia universities and colleges;

- Collect data of reported sexual assaults from all Nova Scotia colleges and universities for provincial analysis; and

- Directly oversee and enforce university and college accountability measures including receiving and pursuing student complaints of policy non-compliance

- Establish a long-term Sexual Assault Support Resource Fund available to students, campus groups, universities and the Nova Scotia Community College for education or training, or to develop or strengthen existing support resources.

- Require universities and colleges to report publicly on incidences of sexual violence, as well as initiatives underway to address sexual violence and harassment and their effectiveness of such initiatives.

Conclusion

The Canadian Federation of Students - Nova Scotia has been doing work to combat sexualized and gender-based violence for over 25 years. This submission provides a framework to make our campuses safer spaces, but we need the support and resources of the province to do so. We all know that we cannot continue on the same path we have been on. Incidences of sexualized, gender-based, and misogynistic violence can no longer be tolerated and now is the time to act. Preventative consent based education, well funded and varied support services, clear policies and procedures and real accountability measures

are all tangible projects for Nova Scotia. We look forward to working with this government to break new ground in this province, and make our campuses safer for everyone. We look forward to forging this important relationship between the Nova Scotia government and the Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia over the coming months.

References

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Pamela Rubin. *Suffering In Silence: An Assessment of the Need for a Comprehensive Response.* Nova Scotia Sexual Assault Services Planning Group: Nova Scotia, 2008.

Turning The Page: A New Chapter For Ontario's Post-Secondary Students. Canadian Federation of Students Ontario: Ontario, 2015.

What we Heard: A Sexual Violence Strategy for Nova Scotia. Government of Nova Scotia: Nova Scotia, 2014.

Summary of Recommendations



Develop and resource education, training and support services at our institutions.



Bring forward legislation to mandate all post-secondary institutions to have stand-alone sexual assault policies that are developed - and renewed every 4 years - through a student-driven process.



Create a Sexual Assault Support division within the Government of Nova Scotia and establish a long-term Sexual Assault Support Resource Fund available to students, campus groups, universities and the Nova Scotia Community College.



Require universities and colleges to report publicly on incidences of sexual violence, as well as initiatives underway to address sexual violence and harassment and their effectiveness.



CANADIAN FEDERATION OF STUDENTS - NOVA SCOTIA