Working Towards Consent Culture:
Developing a Plan to Combat Sexual Violence on Campuses in Nova Scotia
Introduction

A significant barrier to accessing and succeeding in college and university is the prevalence of sexual violence on campus, including sexual assault, sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Young women aged 15 to 24 experience higher instances of sexual violence in Canada than any other age group, with the rates of sexual assault experienced by this age group being 18 times higher than that of Canadians 55 and older. One in five women studying at a post-secondary institution in North America experience some form of sexualized violence over the course of her studies. It is evident that sexualized violence is pervasive on campuses and requires immediate and targeted action from post-secondary institutions and government.

Universities and colleges are in a unique position to challenge rape culture by promoting consent education, improving on-campus services for survivors of sexualized violence, and establishing strong, stand-alone sexual assault policies that are survivor- and student-centered. Currently, however, post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia are failing to take these necessary steps and are not held accountable by the provincial government.

The provincial government must take action to combat sexualized violence and implement the necessary requirements to ensure that every post-secondary institution in Nova Scotia is prepared to respond to incidents of sexualized violence on-campus and support survivors. For these reasons, the Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia proposes the following recommendations on how the provincial government can best address sexual violence on Nova Scotia’s campuses:

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation #1:
Pass legislation that mandates post-secondary institutions to have stand-alone sexual assault policies that are:
• Reviewed every 2 years;
• Created with key stakeholders, particularly students, student groups, and providers of survivor support services and local sexual assault centres;
• Include mandatory training for administration, faculty, and staff;
• Include mandatory consent education for students; and
• Mandate data collection and public reporting of incidences of sexualized violence.

Recommendation #2:
Establish specific funding for students and student groups developing initiatives and campaigns to address sexualized violence on-campuses in Nova Scotia.

Cost: $2 million for the first year, with a reassessment depending on need.

Recommendation #3:
Establish an accountability mechanism within the Department of Labour and Advanced Education to evaluate and ensure implementation of sexualized violence strategies and policies on all campuses.
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.
Recommendation #1: Pass legislation that mandates post-secondary institutions to have stand-alone sexual assault policies

Currently, the only accountability measure in place for the development of institutional sexual assault policies are the guidelines set out in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) negotiated by the Partnership Board, a body composed of representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Advanced Education (LAE) and the Council of Nova Scotia University Presidents (CONSUP). In this MOU, universities do commit to adopting stand-alone policies that address sexual violence and are created in consultation with student representatives and reviewed within three years.

Today, however, half of the post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia do not have a sexual assault policy that complies with the minimal standards outlined in the MOU. The following table outlines the status of sexual assault policies in the province.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Stand-alone policy</th>
<th>Last year reviewed</th>
<th>Updated in the last 3 years?</th>
<th>Student involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dalhousie University</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acadia University</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of King’s College</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSCAD University</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic School of Theology</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Université Saint Anne</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Francis Xavier University</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Breton University</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Saint Vincent University</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary’s University</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the above table demonstrates, five out of ten institutions in Nova Scotia have failed to comply with the directive to establish a stand-alone sexual assault policy. It is evident that the MOU has been ineffective in holding universities accountable.
Data Collection and Public Reporting:

While having strong, stand-alone policies on campus is imperative, it is a reality that sexual assault remains one of the most underreported crimes. The stigma of being the target of sexualized violence leads to a large discrepancy between the number of sexual assaults reported and the frequency of sexual violence. Research published in 2013 reports 90 percent of women who have experienced sexual assault by a non-spousal accused never report to the police. Post-secondary institutions often report annual sexual assault statistics in the single digits, while it is known that at least one in five women studying at a post-secondary institution in North America experience some form of sexualized violence on campus.

In order to measure the effectiveness of policies, the Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia recommends that provincial legislation:

Mandates universities to collect data and publicly report on incidences of sexual violence.

Mandatory Training:

Training for faculty, staff, and administration is an important component of a campus strategy to address sexualized violence as a student who has experienced sexualized violence may disclose to any employee of the institution. Front line staff such as residence workers, security workers, professors, teaching assistants, and student service providers are most likely to receive disclosures.

Literature on trauma recovery has shown that initial responses to disclosures are crucial in a sexual assault victim/survivor’s ability to recover. While positive responses can improve self-worth, negative responses can increase feelings of shame, isolation and increase likelihood of developing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia recommends that provincial legislation include:

Mandatory training for faculty, staff, and administration on how to respond to disclosures of sexualized violence to ensure that victims/survivors are supported in a way that prevents re-traumatization.

The provincial government must take immediate action and pass legislation, similar to Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia, in order to ensure that all institutions have sexual assault policies. This legislation will ensure that students attending any of the ten post-secondary institutions in the province will be studying on a safer campus.

To ensure the effectiveness and legitimacy of the policy, legislation must also mandate institutions to:

(1) Identify and include key stakeholders, particularly students, student groups, and providers of survivor support services and local sexual assault centres; and

(2) Review the policy at least once every three years and/or as issues arise.
Recommendation #2: Support Students’ Work

Students have been at the forefront of combatting sexualized violence for decades. In the absence of action by institutions themselves, student groups and campus organizations have taken on the work of providing resources for survivors and facilitating consent education, often in the face of administrative pushback. For example, when the administration at Dalhousie University recently failed to fund a sexual assault support line initiative, students held a referendum in order to maintain the 24 hour service and create a sexual assault support centre on campus.

For too long campus groups have shouldered the financial and emotional costs of combatting sexualized violence on campus. While institutions must do their part, student leadership on combatting sexual violence must be recognized and adequately supported. While the provincial government has committed $1.1 million dollars to execute the province’s sexual violence strategy, Breaking the Silence, there is no funding committed to supporting campus initiatives. Furthermore, the majority of funding is currently allocated under the Prevention Innovation grants, which are only available for project-based primary prevention work and inaccessible to groups doing sustained support, education, and response.

The Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia recommends that the provincial government:

Establish specific funding for students and student groups developing initiatives and campaigns to address sexual violence on campuses in Nova Scotia.

Cost: $2 million for the first year, with a reassessment depending on need.
Recommendation #3: Accountability

From the response to the rape chants at St. Mary’s University to the handling of the Dalhousie Dentistry incident, to a lack of compliance with the current MOU, time and time again, institutions prioritize the public image of the institution over the experiences of their students, leaving survivors of sexual assault without necessary supports.

In addition to provincial legislation, it is clear that a greater level of accountability is needed in order to ensure that institutions comply with the mandated regulations and support victims/survivors on campus. Students are calling on the Department of Labour and Advanced Education to ensure that post-secondary institutions develop and effectively implement stand-alone policies that comply with the standards established in the legislation.

To ensure the effectiveness of the provincial legislation, the Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia recommends that the provincial government first conduct the necessary research to determine the best structure for this accountability mechanism within the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. Upon its establishment, the Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia recommends that this accountability mechanism:

- Review and assess sexual assault policies to ensure compliance with legislation;
- Make amendments to sexual assault policies that are found to be insufficient;
- Ensure that institutions comply with their own stand-alone policies;
- Receive and manage appeals from individuals who have not been supported by institutional policies;
- Commission campus surveys on sexualized violence to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies to combat sexualized violence, to be completed every 3 years;
- Develop a common metric that can be used by all postsecondary institutions to count and report the number of incidents of sexualized violence experienced by students;
- Analyze and manage reports from institutions on incidences of sexualized violence on campuses;
- Coordinate and ensure training for faculty, administration and staff in the province; and
- Oversee the distribution of funding for campus initiatives for sexual violence education, prevention, and support programs.
References and Further Readings


