



STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: STEP BY STEP

Gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, is a serious issue on college campuses. Recently, there has been a spike in media attention regarding this issue due to high profile cases and, thus, heightened awareness about the potential ramifications associated with violent acts against women. The reality, however, is that gender-based violence is an enduring problem on college campuses.

Students groups are working hard to address gender-based violence. In recent years, universities have implemented new policies and procedures to better address sexual misconduct, stalking, and intimate partner violence. This renewed vigor at the administrative level works to strengthen student efforts to raise awareness about, and promote programming that reduces gender-based violence.

In 2012, Futures Without violence and the Avon Foundation for Women convened a national Campus Advisory Board to review the most sophisticated knowledge on preventing and responding to gender-based violence on campuses. The group produced *Beyond Title IX: Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence on Campus*, which provides guidance on how to develop a consistent and integrated approach to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. Student groups were highlighted as key stakeholders who could greatly reduce gender-based violence on university campuses.

Six Steps For Effective Student Leadership

Student groups are leaders in reducing gender-based violence on college campuses. To support student advocates' work, Futures Without Violence recommends six actions to ensure a safe, respectful campus.

1 Create a Sustainable Movement

Student organization members and officers change frequently. Because of this, it can be difficult to maintain momentum among student groups. However, it is critical that student advocates create a sustainable campus movement if they are to effectively address gender-based violence. To create this sustainability, students should consider ways to:

- **Create a system to successfully transfer knowledge from current organization members to incoming members.** Look at how other organizations have done this and adopt successful knowledge transfer models.
- **Identify and cultivate allies and partners.** Seek groups and individuals who share similar goals and experiences addressing violent acts against women. Such groups could include community groups, faculty members, or other student organizations.
- **Develop a strategic plan.** Lay out the organization's goals and action strategies. Be sure to include the objectives, promotional tactics, ways in which you intend to keep the administration accountable and future steps in this strategic plan.
- **Document and store materials.** Keep a record (digital and hardcopy) of all materials and processes created by the organization. Additionally, store any relevant information regarding gender-based violence and the campus. This way members, particularly incoming members, have a clearinghouse of data they can easily access.

2 Know Your University's Gender-Based Violence Policies

Many college and universities have implemented new gender-based violence policies and procedures. Learn them. Additionally, find out who is in charge of overseeing these policies and procedures on the college campus. Most colleges have designated a team of individuals within the administration to handle issues related to sexual misconduct, stalking, and intimate partner violence. By familiarizing student group members with policies and key people, student organizations will be able to identify whom to speak with when issues of gender-based violence arise.

3 Understand Your Numbers

Campus-based research on sexual assault and other acts of gender-based violence and program effectiveness serve as the foundation for real change. While national studies indicate that women ages 18-24 are at a heightened risk for sexual violence and stalking, each college campus is unique.

College campuses are required to collect gender-based violence data. Examine and absorb these numbers as campus-based data is fundamental to creating prevention and accountability programming specific to universities' needs. Remember, however, that acts of violence on campus are often underreported. This means that it will be impossible to fully quantify the incidence of gender-based violence on campus. However, when properly understood, this reality can assist in creating an honest dialogue about gender-based violence.

4 Listen to Students and Build Narratives

Stories move people. They also help put a "face" to data, such as campus-based statistics on sexual assault. Thus, to gather stories, student groups should strive to create a safe space where those interested in the subject and/or wanting to share their story can come and talk. Be mindful that such conversations may trigger strong emotional responses among students. Always emphasize anything shared with the organization is confidential unless otherwise authorized.

Additionally, make sure to talk to those who might not be initially interested in the subject of gender-based violence. Identify these people and find out what they think about gender-based violence. Do they think it is an important issue, a non-issue, or even over reported? Understand their position on gender-based violence to determine which stories and campus-based data will best motivate these individuals into action.

5 Create a Media Strategy

Student groups should strive to develop a thorough communication plan that defines their communication goals, messaging, and tactics to affect implementation of programming and/or raise awareness about gender-based violence. This plan should include the media tools (e.g. website, Facebook, Twitter), key talking points, and strategies to educate and build relationships with student and local media that student groups intend to use.

However, be aware that while journalists can help student groups get their message heard, it is impossible to control what they print or say. Consider designating a student group spokesperson to ensure messaging is clear and that gender-based violence victims are not blamed.

6 Identify Self-Care Mechanisms

Gender-based violence work is stressful. Student groups should acknowledge this and work to create an environment that encourages self check-ins and mental health awareness among members. Groups should also celebrate any organizational victory—no matter how small it appears. All efforts to reduce gender-based violence deserve recognition and reward.



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