

**Sexual Violence Advisory Committee (SVAC)
2018 Final Report
Michigan State University**

1: Introduction

In response to guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights to universities across the country, over the last several years, Michigan State University (MSU) has worked to improve its approach to sexual assault and relationship violence. The 2017-2018 academic year brought several critical issues to surface in the university, including the serial sexual crimes of MSU physician Larry Nassar involving more than 250 survivors, along with infractions involving others who were employed and/or studying at MSU. Coinciding with these issues, MSU President Lou Anna Simon resigned, and several senior administrators followed soon thereafter. The sexual crimes of Larry Nassar, along with changes in administration, have left the MSU community in crisis and resulted in administrators, faculty, staff and students working together in conversation to respond and chart an informed and inclusive course forward. As part of these change efforts, Interim President John Engler was appointed, and Husch Blackwell was hired to undertake an assessment of the strengths and limitations of MSU's Title IX efforts, including education and prevention programs, support services, and broader engagement and outreach efforts. Husch Blackwell's preliminary report was completed in March 2018 and circulated throughout the campus community for review and feedback.

As part of MSU's response to the guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, since 2015, MSU's Sexual Violence Advisory Committee has had the charge of systematically gathering data from the campus community on issues pertaining to climate and ideas for augmenting prevention and response strategies to sexual assault and relationship violence. Each year, SVAC holds an open forum in spring, along with focus groups to solicit input from the campus community. In spring 2018, given the current crisis at MSU and the recent extensive assessment by Husch Blackwell, SVAC engaged in a targeted solicitation of feedback from the campus community on their reactions to Husch Blackwell's report. Namely, SVAC held multiple open forums with key campus constituents (e.g., faculty, staff, student groups) to gather feedback on the Husch Blackwell report; in the forums, SVAC asked three open-ended questions of the campus community: (1) what resonated with the community about the report; (2) what was missing; and (3) suggestions for improving the report.

2: Synthesis of the Spring 2018 Forums to Solicit Input on the Husch Blackwell Report

Resonated with Campus Members:

- **Freshman Seminar Course:** Across all forums, community members recommended a mandatory Freshman Seminar course that would focus on "Ways to be a Spartan," including underlying values and goals aligning with MSU's mission. The course would be similar to Writing Rhetoric and American Cultures courses, which are required for all MSU freshman. Ideally, the freshman courses would be developed and taught by MSU faculty, to ensure rigor and broad depictions of the campus community.

- **Concentrated Communications:** Across multiple forums, community members indicated there are challenges with receiving information in a timely, accurate, and digestible fashion (include less text and more graphics). Campus members expressed concerns about not knowing what is happening, and concerns that members of marginalized groups may not be receiving and accessing information about what is happening on campus. As well, there were concerns expressed that international communities may need culturally-sensitive communication outreach. Campus members indicated the need for a centralized hub for information, perhaps starting with D2L.

Missing in the Husch Blackwell Report:

- **Power Differences:** Campus members indicated a multitude of problems concerning power differentials on campus that may contribute to sexual misconduct, relationship violence, and other types of infractions. This includes, but is not limited to, undergraduate & graduate student to professor, staff to superior, student to athlete, and international student to student. Campus members suggested elevating information and education about these power differentials and strategies for navigating them.
- **Different Cultural Populations:** Campus members were interested in how different cultural populations are affected by sexual assault and relationship violence, particularly international populations and persons from underrepresented marginalized backgrounds. They suggested that the report expand upon how different members may be affected, rather than focusing mainly on the campus as a whole. This theme overlaps with the suggestion that targeted communication strategies be developed for international populations and persons from other underrepresented backgrounds.

Suggestions/Additions for the Husch Blackwell Report:

- **Multiple Doses:** Across most forums, community members highlighted the need for “multiple doses,” that is, multiple outreach and intervention efforts over time to improve prevention and response. Participants suggested multiple trainings throughout the year (in addition to the online training), and a supplementary survey that is taken a short while after the online training to probe retention and knowledge. The notion of multiple doses also applied to the “Freshmen Seminar” course; namely, instructors could review topics weekly to create a trusting learning environment, foster discussion, and underscore learning and skills building.
- **Ways to Educate:** When learning about the nuanced topics that involve Title IX, participants suggested engaging in round-table discussion compared to the PowerPoint slides and videos that are currently used. This round-table discussion could help clarify topics that might be difficult to understand for those taking the training. Having a diverse audience in each session could also help bring in different perspectives that might help to eliminate barriers between those in the campus community.

3: Synergy with the 2016 and 2017 SVAC Reports

The themes summarized above in the 2018 open forums are consistent with themes from the 2016 and 2017 SVAC reports and with discussions SVAC has had throughout 2017-2018. Themes from the 2016 and 2017 SVAC reports and our discussions this year in 2018 have focused on:

- **Communication:** Include more frequent, systematic, proactive (non-reactionary) communication, conveyed from senior leaders (deans, chairs, directors) and from advisors/offices that work with identity/affinity groups to the campus community using multiple mediums, including D2L, syllabi, faculty meetings, social media. Assess which communication practices are working (or not), and then devise a strategic communication plan to ensure communication is effectively reaching everyone, including those from traditionally marginalized communities and those with a range of relationship standards and values.
- **Multi-Dose Learning, Education and Support Services Within Campus Community Settings:** Continue to offer in-person trainings, such as the Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence (SARV) program and brief segments in the Academic Orientation Program, which are viewed as more effective than online trainings. Consider offering additional multi-dose learning/education/training within the specific communities where faculty, staff and students “live,” with an emphasis on holding the trainings in smaller group settings to facilitate engagement and dialogue, for example Academic Advancement Network, Greeks Take the Lead.
- **Offer Safe Spaces for Survivors.** Bring back the women’s lounge and women’s center. There is momentum to create gender equity foci units, which would also include the structural diversity pieces of space and resources. This also includes ensuring programs and systems that promote women’s empowerment.
- **Distribute Responsibility (“It’s On Us”) Across the Campus Community.** Ensure systematic communication and training regularly reach and are accessed by all faculty, staff and students--with a particular focus on ensuring effective training for all to improve knowledge and skills building. Require mandatory SARV training for faculty, staff and students, perhaps starting with administrators (deans, chairs, directors, etc.) and engaging colleges from there.
- **Examine Problematic Power Structures on Campus and Develop Programs that Dismantle These Structures.** This includes close examination of privilege and power afforded by the tenure system, to men on our campus, to perpetrators of sexual assault, to those without brown or black skin, and to senior administrators. There is concern about the voices of underrepresented communities being left out of education, planning and leadership efforts.