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Prevention is the New Policy: Addressing Sexual Assault at Trinity College

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The epidemic of sexual assault within schools and college campuses is one that the United States Department of Education has dealt with for several years. Sexual violence endangers students and effectively disadvantages a student from receiving an equal educational experience. Thanks to the Obama administration's aggressive policies that required institutions to take more responsibility, schools know to implement rules and regulations that reduce sexual misconduct. However, despite creating ways to treat this issue, preventing sexual assault is the most immediate and effective solution. This paper will discuss the importance of bystander intervention and prevention training, evaluate Trinity College's sexual assault educational resources, and provide recommendations on how to further improve them.

In order to understand how best to revise Trinity's current policies on Title IX, it is important to establish context on this law and its evolution. The Office of Civil Rights established the Title IX education amendments, and the Dear Colleague Letter 2011 expanded Title IX to govern sexual conduct among students and faculty. The Dear Colleague letter was a response by the Obama Administration to campus sexual assault (Busch & Thro 64). This policy turned Title IX into a mechanism for holding institutions responsible for instances of sexual assault by informing schools how to adjudicate cases in a quasi-legal setting. Schools were encouraged to promptly respond to sexual assault and conduct internal investigations to acknowledge and adjudicate incidents under the DCL. In 2014, the Obama administration created a new policy that would publicize the names of institutions currently undergoing Title IX investigations to shed light on the issue and "put an end to sexual violence-- particularly on college campuses" (Melnick, 151). The thought of a long, public, and expensive investigation put pressure on schools to comply with Title IX (Melnick, 151). K-12 schools and colleges all over the country began to revise their rules and include education training programs to reduce the instances of sexual violence. The DCL memo represents the most significant expansion to Title IX policy today, and it ensured that institutions equally and effectively protected their students from sexual violence.

The sweeping reforms of the Obama administration received a significant amount of backlash from the public. Many argued that the rules required created a legal structure under which schools did not have the resources to effectively address cases and protect due process ("Secretary DeVos Prepared Remarks on Title IX Enforcement," 2017). This criticism led to extensive policy changes as the next administration revoked the Obama-era DCL. DeVos' changes reduced the previous protections and significantly scaled back the scope of Title IX, and required schools to change their procedures once again to comply with the federal government. Currently, sexual assault is defined as conduct that is "severe and pervasive and objectively offenses that deny and individual equal education access" ("Summary of Major Provisions of the Department of Education's Title IX Final Rule," 2020). This definition includes quid pro quo harassment, dating violence, and stalking.

Despite the changes Secretary DeVos made to the Title IX policy, schools continue to have cases of sexual assault. To address sexual assault, institutions must take action post-trauma, protect the rights of both parties involved, and ensure due process is upheld. These are the issues that colleges and other educational institutions' proposals are still facing today when trying to comply with the current standing rules of Title IX fully. Effectively eradicating sexual

misconduct in educational institutions requires juggling a variety of different factors. Institutions must provide resources to the victim, transparency to the accused, balance trauma-informed procedures with holding respecting due process, and most importantly, implement education training on identifying assaulting and preventing it altogether.

Although it is vital to have legal processes set up, it is much more critical to have established proactive measures to prevent sexual incidents from happening in the first place. Under Title IX, schools nationwide must have a procedural and disciplinary policy to adjudicate cases of sexual misconduct. They also must provide various grievance procedures and resources for those accused and the victims. According to the OCR, mandated training includes training employees on reporting sexual harassment and recognizing the signs of misconduct, training the individuals who sit on disciplinary boards that adjudicate cases, and specific training for student-athletes, coaches, and Greek life (Melnick 207). The CDC states that there are various risk factors involved in sexual assault: individual facts, community factors, relationships factors, and societal factors, and a college's programming must address these risk factors to fix the issue (Melnick 207). These post trauma processes are necessary to address the issue of sexual assault on campuses but should be accompanied by institutional steps to protect students and avoid assault altogether.

Instead of solely focusing on post-incident measures intended to rectify the issue after the trauma has already occurred, schools must consider the importance of preventative measures through education. Education on the subject of sexual assault helps change the norms and eventually change the campus culture. The OCR claims that changing the culture involves "teaching new expectations about sex and most intimate personal relationships" (Melnick 210). Providing programs that teach individuals how to prevent sexual assault and what resources they have if they or someone they know is sexually assaulted is essential for reducing this type of conduct at any institution. The 2011 Dear College Letter included a guide for schools on how to implement prevention education. The OCR suggested schools have training within their orientation programs for all students and faculty and special training for individuals such as advisors, mentors, coaches, and student-athletes (Busch 205). These trainings are designed to teach students how to take action before, during, and after an instance of sexual assault to make campus communities safer for all individuals. Prevention has been proven to work and includes teaching potential perpetrators about what actions of theirs are non-consensual and problematic. It starts by changing the students' attitudes and leads to a change in their behaviors (Winerman, 2018). In the 1990s, the development of Bringing in the Bystander, a bystander intervention workshop, had great success in reducing the acceptance of "rape myths." It increased the likelihood of students to intervene in a situation (Winerman, 2018). Differently adapted programs are used by schools, colleges, and universities nationwide. These adaptations include a program entitled Green Dot, a co-ed intervention training program. According to Winerman, when evaluated, this specific program lowered the rate of student-initiated sexual violence by the third and fourth years of the program (2018). In one study compared to schools without bystander training, the training program in place led to reduced rates of sexual violence by 17% (Coker et al., 2015).

The shift in focus from programs designed solely for victims and perpetrators to ones that include third parties support the idea that anyone can help keep the campus community safe when in situations that involve sexual assault (McMahon and Banyard, 2012). According to Mchanon and Banyard, bystander training benefits include breaking down the barriers that would prevent an individual from intervening while also bolstering the supports systems for survivors

after an assault (2012). Eighty percent of sexual survivors experience their first assault before the age of 24 years, which is why it is essential to tackle prevention on college campuses, where the majority of students are 18-24 years old (McCauley and Casler, 2015). Implementing trauma-informed education is an approach that always assumes the audience includes survivors of sexual assault or individuals who know survivors; this emphasizes support services and practices sensitive to assault. McCauley and Casler note that comprehensive prevention must incorporate violence prevention and bystander intervention into the general health and wellness education to normalize discussions and learning about this issue (2015). Emphasizing preventative measures to prevent sexual violence helps make a campus community safer and encourages administrations to take a more proactive rather than reactive role.

“Reducing sexual assault requires a deep cultural change.” (Melnick, 2007). It is important for all institutions, but especially educational institutions to teach students the appropriate behaviors in the context of sexual interactions. The Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE) states that institutions receiving federal funding must provide “a primary prevention and awareness program” that educates students, faculty, and staff on “rape, acquaintance rape, and domestic violence” (“Frequently Asked Questions.”, 2014). At Trinity College, the current education and training programs for sexual assault prevention include a video-based, online course entitled Not Anymore, and the Green Dot Violence Prevention Program, in which individuals are taught how to help stop power-based personal violence (“Green Dot Violence Prevention Strategy-Trinity College,” 2020). According to the author of the module, Dr. Steve Pearlman, the Not Anymore education program is an interactive program designed to engage students with peer-taught content and stories of real individuals. The methodology includes targeting specific groups such as undergraduate students, asking students questions throughout the modules, and implementing a pre and post-test in order to measure comprehension (“Prevention Programming Matrix”). Incoming students to Trinity college must complete the 45–90-minute program before registering for classes as it will prepare them for a discussion during their new student orientation (“Not Anymore: Sexual Assault Education and Prevention”). Students receive additional training in their second year, which includes new videos on the prevention of sexual assault. While Not Anymore comprehensively address the broad scope of sexual assault and misconduct, there are still limitations to this prevention education method at Trinity College. This is particularly concerning given that many schools across the country rely on its course material to teach students, change behaviors, and fulfill Title IX requirements. The test questions at the beginning and end of the modules may not accurately measure what knowledge students have gained; students can easily find the answers to any test question on the internet or can ignore program’s videos and still receive a passing grade (Chang, 2020). Furthermore, this module is only provided to incoming students at Trinity once in the summer before their freshman year.

During their required workshop, second years receive Green Dot prevention training. This year, Greek life will participate in the same routine training that sophomores receive (Laura Lockwood). Coaches and athletic administrators receive Green dot training as well. Green Dot is a bystander training that only a select few members of the Trinity community receive, including athletic coaches, members of Diversity Equity and Inclusion, the Student Affairs Office, and some faculty. Limitations on the program include the fact that the entire campus community does not receive this training and relies on a limited number of individuals to spread this information to the rest of the Trinity community. As a sophomore on Trinity's campus, I did not know what Green Dot was or that it was a prevention program until recently; this is also the experience of

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many of my peers. To ensure the entire community has the resources to prevent sexual assault effectively, programs such as these should be more accessible and more publicized to the campus community.

Athletes will receive online training called Impressions by the company United Educators (Caitlyn Morris). The Impressions course is 45 minutes long and includes basic information such as the definitions of sexual assault, bystander intervention techniques, information on consent, and how to report an incident of sexual misconduct (Impressions: Preventing and Reporting Sexual Assault). Although the existence of Impressions is promising, it should be more specific to its audience. Additionally, for all students, the general training modules' information should be continuously taught and at least refreshed every year before the start of the fall semester for each class year. Re-engaging with ways to prevent, avoid, and stop sexual violence at the beginning of the semester could reduce the number of assaults during the Red zone. The Red zone is "the first six weeks of a college's semester (August- October), during which sexual assault, rape, and harassment are statistically most prevalent." (Trinsurvivors).

Trinity College has done a great job of creating sexual assault education and prevention training, per the Title IX requirement; however, the institution still should make a few adjustments to maintain a more effective way to ensure the safety of all students. To address the weaknesses of the school's current programs, Trinity can implement the following five steps to create a culture of awareness and positive action:

- Incorporating prevention into the curriculum.
- Intentionally training certain groups on campus.
- Expanding the role of the Dean of Students Office
- Expanding the role of the Campus Safety Office.
- Altering the structure in which the first years receive training.

First, the college should create either a course that analyzes assault and prevention or a distribution requirement that all students must fulfill during their time at Trinity. The course material would address the concepts of intimate interpersonal relations, sexual assault in policy, understanding why individuals commit sexual assault, and how students can act as influencers in changing the campus culture surrounding sexual assault. Students would be encouraged to take this course in their freshman year. The course would maintain a rotating professor system, including instructors from different disciplines such as Psychology, Public Policy, Women gender and sexuality studies, and Sociology. Each professor from each domain will teach an individual section of the class to cover the course material they are most qualified to teach. Furthermore, professors should be of various races, genders, and sexualities to ensure students learn from varying perspectives (Chang, 2020).

The second recommendation would be to ensure that athletic teams and campus fraternities and sororities have intensive and audience-specific training. At Trinity, training needs to be targeted for members of Greek life because, in general, this group is often more involved in sexual assault cases than other groups on college campuses. Looking at data collected by TrinCollSurvivors, the anonymous group that exposes "rape and rape culture at Trinity College" on Instagram, of the 40 cases of sexual assault they displayed, 17 were incidents involving fraternities; an involvement rate of 42.5% sexual violence on campus. For athletes, the involvement rate was similar at 45%. Fraternities and sororities must receive training to cultivate a culture of respect and awareness to prevent sexual violence. Student-athletes should receive

training specific to the context of being on a sports team and working with coaches. Athletes represent a more susceptible group to issues of sexual violence, as one study found among the 46% of individuals who engaged in “sexually coercive behaviors,” half of them were either recreational or intercollegiate athletes (Mordecai, 2016). Specifically, at Trinity, student-athletes are regarded as leaders on campus. According to Tony Porter, a lecturer on healthy male masculinity, it is not only important to teach athletes how to prevent sexual assault, but it is necessary to teach them how to “use their status to prevent sexual assault” (Mordecai, 2016). Using this logic, if Trinity incorporates more targeted programs to educate athletes and fraternities on sexual assault and consent, the college could develop a strong base of informed change-makers who can teach other students, ultimately making the campus safer.

The third recommendation is to expand the role of the Dean of Students Office to emphasize the importance of maintaining a campus that is safe and respectful to the entire Trinity community. To accomplish this, the Dean of Students Office should send out bi-monthly email notices to the whole student body that states how Trinity does not tolerate this behavior and include some Green Dot certified ways to be active bystanders. These emails should also re-emphasize all the available resources for survivors or potential victims of sexual assault. These email notices would be similar to the COVID update emails students would receive during the 2020-2021 school year. Both sexual assault and the Coronavirus are threats to students' safety and, although vastly different, should be treated with the same seriousness and concern. Furthermore, to normalize prevention behaviors and thought processes among students, the Dean's emails could also promote WGRAC events that pertain to raising awareness about sexual assault. If the Dean's office cannot send emails bi-monthly, the recommended period would be during the first six weeks of the first semester, in which students are more likely to experience sexual assault (Trinsurvivors). Emails coming from the Dean's Office are likely to be opened by more students, which can help further the message of prevention and intervention for the benefit of all students.

Since sexual assault is one of the most common crimes to occur on college campuses, Campus Safety should have more active roles in reducing sexual violence by prevention (“Campus Sexual Violence: Statistics”). The Campus safety officers should also receive trauma-informed sexual assault training that covers how to recognize warning signs of sexual assault and how to interact with victims trying to report an incident. Further expansion for campus safety officers' roles would include putting more officers in problem areas on campus, such as near fraternities when they host parties. When student groups have events and parties, especially the Multicultural Organizations, campus safety is everywhere at the event. In contrast, any night on Vernon Street, there are rarely any officers posted near the fraternities, the place where more assaults are likely to occur. The increased presence of safety officers might help deter individuals from committing assault and provide increased protection to students who might be vulnerable. Furthermore, the representatives from the newly formed Task Force on the Status of Women should sit on the Campus Safety Student Advisory Board to exchange ideas and solutions regarding the issue of sexual assault on campus. Women are disproportionately affected by the issue of sexual assault and are “twice as likely to be sexually assaulted,” so the Campus safety office must hear their voices and opinions (“Campus Sexual Violence: Statistics”).

Finally, changing the structure of sexual assault education prevention might be necessary to reach students and change their behaviors more effectively. In addition to requiring first-year students to participate in the Not Anymore training, students should be required to attend discussion meetings with their peers to talk about what they learned. In my experience, in-depth

discussion on topics even as provocative as sexual violence is necessary to have an impact. Creating group instruction, whether in person or virtual and creating environments with ten or fewer members helps facilitate thoughtful discussion (Chang, 2020). Also, giving students a chance to talk with peers about a topic before sharing it with the larger group, I believe, is a great way to ensure students are critically and thoughtfully thinking about the subject matter.

In 2020 Trinity College had taken more active steps to "reinforce the values of respect, safety, consent, and shared responsibility" ("Our Work to End Sexual Misconduct at Trinity"). According to the goals listed on the Trinity website, the College has acknowledged the need to enhance further preventative measures that "teach individuals, academic and administrative departments, athletic teams, and student organizations [our] community values" ("Our Work to End Sexual Misconduct at Trinity"). I believe that the steps outlined in this essay will help the College achieve this goal. First, by incorporating prevention into the curriculum, Trinity College can truly say that they are taking steps to reduce sexual violence. As an educational institution, it is the College's job to teach students, provide them with skills, and prepare them to operate in the world. By allowing students to read about, write about, and analyze sexual assault, the college can help make students more understanding and comfortable with the ideas of assault prevention. From the course, students will be well versed in the issue and will apply what they have learned to real life situations on campus or beyond. Furthermore, specific, targeted training for Greek life and athletes will educate well-known groups and leaders on this campus. Initiating a change in thought and actions in these particular populations that could be considered problem areas will cause a trickling down effect to the rest of the students. Training specific and directed towards a specific audience will allow Greek life members and athletes to talk about examples of what assault or misconduct may look like in environments familiar to them. By making these students aware of the issue, they can become leaders in preventing sexual violence as individuals and as an organization.

Using the Dean's Office to institutionalize bystander intervention effectively shows that sexual assault is a serious matter to the college. The Deans of Students hold authority and respect among the students. In the past, the Dean of Students Office has sent emails that impacted the entire student body. Thus, it makes sense that emails about sexual assault prevention and the college's safety fall under the offices' duties. The expansion of Campus Safety efforts to reduce sexual violence at Trinity will help send the message that Sexual Assault is a crime, jeopardizes all students' safety, and is not tolerated. The officers should work with representatives from the Task Force on the Status of Women to ensure the college has adequately informed and trained individuals to help reduce sexual assault and direct individuals to the resources they need. The last suggestion to restructure how students learn and apply what they have learned about sexual assault prevention ensures that students retain the information received in the training and workshops. Including discussions that are peer-led and intimate can provide an opportunity for students to teach and learn from each other for the benefit of one another.

Despite various changes to Title IX policy, the issue of Sexual Assault has existed on the campus of Trinity College and other campuses across the nation. Federal regulations dealing with how the adjudication and investigation of individual cases are an important measure to address this policy do not necessarily tend to the root of the issue. Prevention measures effectively stop the violence before it occurs and eradicate rape culture in campus communities. The recommendations outlined in this paper are designed to institutionalize the concept of prevention and make it clear to students that sexual violence and harassment are not tolerated and will be eradicated at the source. These recommendations induce sexual assault education into

Trinity's curriculum, use the role of authority such as the Dean's Office and Campus Safety, and suggest a restructured intentional training meant to commit the college to finally eradicating all forms of sexual misconduct. Taking action steps to stop sexual assault ensures that students have equal educational opportunities when they come to college.

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