Columbia University Town Hall on Sexual Misconduct: Questions & Comments
Questions and comments below are as of 3/13/14. Additional questions will be addressed and posted to the site on an ongoing basis.

GREEK INVOLVEMENT

Q: Some Greek organizations have consent training mandated by their nationals, and they've been received well and seen as very effective. Can these additional workshops become mandatory for ALL Greek organizations?

A: While some Greek organizations have a mandate from their national organizations, the 2014 updated ALPHA Standards, which was developed in partnership with the Inter-Greek Council and launched in January, requires each chapter to participate in a sexual violence educational workshop. This educational workshop can include topics like sexual assault, sexual harassment, consent, bystander intervention (to prevent sexual assault), healthy sexuality, alcohol and sexual assault, how to help a friend, or Student Services for Gender-Based and Sexual Misconduct policy. This expectation also outlines which on-campus resources can be contacted for facilitating the workshop.

RIGHTS OF THE ACCUSED

Q: What rights should those accused of sexual misconduct have?


QUALIFICATIONS

Q: I am curious to learn about the educational and professional backgrounds of all administrators involved in this process. What credentials do you have in managing sexual assault response? Be specific.

A: Melissa Rooker: At Columbia, we have one Title IX coordinator, and we have three deputy Title IX coordinators: one for student concerns, one for faculty and staff concerns, and one for the law students. We also then have two Title IX specific investigators in SSGVSM, and two Title IX investigators in Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action. Out of those, all of us have received specific Title IX investigator training, some advanced investigator training, Title IX coordinator training. There are a number of organizations, such as the National Association of College and University Attorneys, ATIXA [Association for Title IX Administrators], that provide these training and certifications in strictly this type of work. We've also attended, for instance—when hearing panelists have trainings, and we have experts come in to discuss sexual predators, sexual assault, we've all been at those trainings. We've also attended, for instance, bystander intervention training. I think we all come from different backgrounds. But some do have social work backgrounds; some have counseling; some have law enforcement; some have legal. But they had experience in doing this type of work, in addition to the additional training that I talked about.
A: Amy Zavadil: At Barnard, I am the Title IX coordinator. Our deputy coordinator is our Vice President of Human Resources. Each of us have our professional background and training. There is certainly a wide variety for each of us, but there is a certain amount of—whether it be legal training, counseling, and attending to the vast range of dynamics of not just the construct of sexual violence, but working with individuals, working with students across the spectrum of traditional-age undergraduate students, and the broader visiting students, international students, graduate students—all of those things. So it is also our professional experience and training that we bring to these roles.

A: Michael Dunn: So the hearing panelists are three people, usually two administrators and a student, who have been especially trained to serve as hearing panelists. This year we've increased the pool of hearing panelists. We've had a three-part training series over the course of a few months. We've had outside experts and Columbia experts come in and talk about these issues. One thing about Title IX that we've all learned is that it's a very dynamic, evolving field. We're constantly getting new guidance from the government. We're constantly getting feedback from students and learning from experience at other universities, so our knowledge as Title IX administrators is always growing. We're trying to make sure that we are professionally developing, and we want to do the same for our panelists.

PROGRESS & FEEDBACK

Q: (q1) How can members of the Columbia community know that progress has been made in the coming months on how sexual assault cases are handled? (q2) How frequently can we expect updates, and from whom? (q3) Will PACSA solicit feedback from victims to get a better understanding of how these changes might be helping or needing work?

A1: We are hoping to utilize this website (www.studentaffairs.columbia.edu/townhall) to post updates. Please check back regularly.

A2: The Town Hall website is currently owned by the CC/SEAS Dean of Student Affairs and will centralize communications. Updates will be posted as changes are implemented and as new information becomes available.

A3: The University Senate is reviewing PACSA and has made the following recommendations. The first is for PACSA to annually review polices and make recommended change to the senate through annual reports. The second is to reduce the composition of the committee from 24 members to approximately 13, while also increasing student representation and faculty member participation. This will provide a better balance across the board in terms of who is looking at these policies.

Q: How can students give feedback about the complaint process and report mistreatment from IX Coordinators? How does Barnard and Columbia hold their IX Coordinators accountable for how they treat students? How can students who go through the campus
reporting process give feedback on what worked and did not work? And how can the school ensure that these complaints will be listened to?

A: Melissa Rooker: They should come and see the Title IX coordinators, either Amy or myself, or even a deputy Title IX coordinator who's not involved in the process. We are the people here who want to hear what's wrong and any concerns that have been raised.

A: Amy Zavadil: If a Barnard student has been engaging in a process with me and has concerns about my behavior, there are two options: to go to our deputy Title IX coordinator, who is our VP of Human Resources, or to go to my supervisor, who is the dean of the college.

RESOURCES & SUPPORT

Q: I agree with all of the Student Proposals to Fight Sexual Violence and Rape Culture at Columbia, though I want to emphasize a need to coordinate and include all graduate programs/schools and international student programs in the support and expansion efforts.

(q1) This includes mandatory consent trainings not only at undergraduate orientations, but also for graduate student entrants (including the opt-out and confidentiality provisions detailed in II1 of the Student Proposals).

(q2) This is also to emphasize the importance of expanding the open hours and availability of the RC/AVCS to be accessible during the orientation and pre-orientation periods of all graduate programs, as well as any academic periods that begin during the summer term.

(q3) Finally, this includes a need for comprehensive, easily accessible reports and explanations of all policies, support resources and survivors' rights to be included, all in one place, on the student services websites of all graduate programs as well as undergraduate.

A1: Please note that the title of Consent 101 has been changed to reflect the primary focus of the presentation: “Sexual Violence on Campus.” The Sexual Violence on Campus presentation will continue to be mandatory during NSOP for all incoming CC, SEAS, and Barnard students. We are also actively exploring making the Sexual Violence on Campus session mandatory for all incoming GS students. Furthermore, students who report dissatisfaction with the presentation—for instance, with the consent education facilitator—will be given the opportunity to participate in a “make-up” presentation early in the fall semester. See the section on “Education, NSOP & Program Expansion” for updates on graduate student trainings.

A2: Samuel Seward: We're committed to staffing that office during NSOP week, and we're just working on how to do that.
A3: Michael Dunn: In January, we launched a new sexual-respect website, which is designed to be a central clearing house of policies’ resources; what to do if you’ve experienced gender-based misconduct; frequently asked questions; links to everybody. That's located at TitleIX.columbia.edu. In January, we also revamped the Student Services website SSGBSM.columbia.edu to be more comprehensive and user-friendly.

Another thing we've been working on is the creation of a letter that complainants and respondents will receive that really has a comprehensive listing of the policies, their resources, and will serve as a kind of index of what they should know. We've been working with a number of students on that, and we're really excited to be rolling that out soon.

Q: I got raped in high school and I only just decided I could go talk to someone about it, but the free counseling hasn't been that helpful because it's only short term. It is really discouraging to look for help and not get it. I think it would be helpful if there was some kind of a support group on campus. I tried to find one last semester, but the one I looked into wasn't taking new people and I just gave up after that for a while. I know some people might not be comfortable going to a rape support group on campus, but that seemed like a better option to me than therapy for a while, so I'm sure others might feel the same. I would never feel comfortable starting something like that, so it would be great if someone else did.

Does CPS or the Rape Crisis Center offer group or long-term therapy?

A: Yes, there is currently a group therapy program available for students, which focuses on identifying and understanding the effects of the abuse and finding ways to address these. CPS can also recommend therapists in the area for longer term treatment if the number of sessions offer through campus treatment programs is not sufficient.

Q: What is the policy of the College regarding a student who has been a victim of sexual assault/ harassment during a given semester whose grades are suffering because of what they experienced? How does the university treat these situations?

A: Michael Dunn: In that kind of situation we would work closely with the student, and hopefully work with their adviser, to address whatever academic issues are going on. This could be a time when interim measures or accommodations might be relevant and an important part of the conversation. A big part of our job is to make sure that the students have the proper support, and that they're getting the resources they need. So we would be willing to work with professors and advisors to give a student leeway if possible, without divulging any inappropriate or sensitive information, to give the student breathing room to continue their studies, while this is going on. We know that going through a trauma is incredibly disruptive. Going through this [reporting] process is also really disruptive. In extreme cases, students may find that a leave of absence would be helpful for them, if they find that they can't manage their academics with everything else. But as long as a student is here, we'd want to work with advising and their instructors to address those needs.
A: Amy Zavadil: At Barnard, students would be working with me to help with those accommodations, and I want to be clear that it's not until the grades are bad when the Title IX coordinators become aware that someone was involved in a situation. If we can provide some extensions during the process, that helps to elevate those grades rather than it being an after-the-fact, "I haven't been able to focus, and now there's some detrimental results to that." It's important that we're engaging in conversation with a survivor who has expressed that they've had an adverse experience, that we're talking about the range of resources that are available includes support.

Q: When you are a victim of a crime, is it practice to remove someone from a situation in order to "protect" them? Isolation is not always the best means as it makes the victim feel as if it is their fault, while the victim may isolate themselves in an effort to find a balance between their discomfort and their goal.

A: Michael Dunn: The first thing that happens when we get that report is that the next day the Assistant Director at Student Services, who is acting as the case manager, meets with the survivor and the respondent, separately. The purpose of that intake meeting is really to see how the survivor is doing, see what they need, and make sure they understand the entire landscape of policies, procedures, and options that are before them. Some people go to that meeting and decide to move forward with the Student Services process. Some people say, "No, thanks. I don't want to do it." Some people say, "I might come back later. I'm not ready to face this now." Some people say, "I want to go to the police," and if they say that, then we help them make that connection, and we'll liaise with them to get to the police.

At the intake meeting, we may also discuss interim measures and accommodations. If a student decides to move forward with the process and says, "I feel really uncomfortable. The person who sexually assaulted me lives in my residence hall," or, "The person who sexually assaulted me is in my class," then we may make steps to remove the respondent from the residence hall or from the class, during the duration of the investigative process. Other interim measures might include barring access to certain facilities or residence halls. If a student comes to us and says, "I've experienced sexual assault. I've experienced sexual harassment. I don't feel comfortable saying more information, or telling you any more details, or doing anything further with this process, but I would like to change residence halls," or, "I would like to be removed from a certain class," we may be able to make those changes, as well, and those are known as "accommodations."

Q: One of the changes student leaders and administrators are working on is changes to the wording and explanation of the sexual assault and gender-based misconduct policy itself.

(q1) What form do you anticipate these changes will take?
(q2) Will they ensure that the initiator of a sexual activity is responsible for obtaining consent before the initiation of any sexual activity, like Antioch College's 1991 Sexual Offense Prevention Policy? The wording at the SSGBSM website seems to indicate this, but the examples it gives makes it unclear as to what the University considers consent and sexual assault to be.

A1: All the sexual and gender-based misconduct policies and subsequent updates will be published on the website: ssgbsm.columbia.edu.

A2: Descriptions and examples of sexual assault and gender-based misconduct are described on the website: ssgbsm.columbia.edu/examples-misconduct. If you think you may have been sexually harassed and/or sexually assaulted, please contact the Assistant Director for Student Services for Gender-Based and Sexual Misconduct at 212- 854-1717, or submit a report in writing via the website’s secure webform.

EDUCATION, NSOP & PROGRAM EXPANSION

Q: I need consent education to be a mandatory part of my fellow community members' experience at Columbia in order to begin to feel safe on this campus.

(q1) Why hasn't consent education been mandatory in the past? Please don't tell me it is technically "mandatory" - most students skip their session; there is no sign-in process; "Consent is Sexy" trivializes the seriousness of sexual assault by 'game-ifying' consent - Consent is not sexy, it is obligatory.

(q2) What will you do moving forward to ensure that every student at this institution receives adequate consent education (as required by federal law)?

(q3) How will consent education go beyond NSOP?

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A2: The “Sexual Violence on Campus” presentations will continue to be mandatory during NSOP and we will be confirming attendance using student ID swipes.

A3: In addition to the “Sexual Violence on Campus” presentations during NSOP, Columbia Health and Sexual Violence Response are working with the deans for
CC/SEAS, Barnard, and GS to add one to two additional prevention education trainings, reiterating the most important topics of the Sexual Violence sessions.

La'Shawn Rivera: In August 2013, we piloted our step-up curriculum on bystander intervention. We’ve been doing training on campus with different student groups and organizations, and our athletics department. We’re incorporating that into current efforts around education training, and we anticipate incorporating that in the upcoming student orientation program.

Q: Will the Rape Crisis Center be open during NSOP next year?

A: Samuel Seward: We’re committed to staffing that office during NSOP week, and we’re just working on how to do that.

Q: I want to emphasize a need to coordinate and include all graduate programs/schools and international student programs in the support and expansion efforts. This includes mandatory consent trainings not only at undergraduate orientations, but also for graduate student entrants (including the opt-out and confidentiality provisions detailed in II1 of the Student Proposals).

A: Melissa Rooker: Beginning in August of last year (2013), the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action and Student Services for Gender-Based and Sexual Misconduct began presenting at every single student orientation on policy education. Beginning next year, what we’re trying to do, in light of student concerns on graduate students, especially with consent education, is to work with Sexual Violence Response, and expand that presentation at every student orientation, including our graduate schools, to include prevention education as well as policy education.

A: Melissa Rooker: What we’re doing for some of the other schools, the graduate schools, is to make sure that there’s policy education, meaning that the new students know what the policy and procedures are, as well as a prevention education and consent education aspect. We are looking to the schools to make this mandatory, and making sure that the deans of students, or whatever offices we’re working with, that this is mandatory for their students.

A: Marc Heinrich, Coalition Against Sexual Violence: One of the things we’re looking at, as many of you are probably aware, is consent education, not only on the undergraduate level, but also the graduate students are involved in this discourse. It is incredibly important to remember that there are differing levels of consent education.

PREVENTION

Q: There is no substitute for self-defense. As long as there are victims, assaults will continue. If a situation is inescapable, why not encourage individuals to fight? It’s awfully difficult to assault someone with a cracked eye socket, broken jaw, and ruptured knee. However, more important is not to put one’s self in such a position. That means being
aware of surroundings and not getting incapacitated. Is there any effort to enhance preventative education? What are you doing best?

A: Columbia Public Safety teams up with the Columbia Shotokan Karate Club to give free classes on “Basic Self Defense” for students, faculty, and staff several times during the academic year. Upcoming classes and directions on how to register will be posted on the CU Public Safety website: www.columbia.edu/cu/publicsafety as sessions are confirmed.

The Shotokan Karate Club also holds classes three times a week on campus. For times and locations, please visit the Shotokan Karate club website: http://www0.gsb.columbia.edu/faculty/nsicherman/Ska/uptown.html. The group also has a quick video to show some of the topics covered during class: https://vimeo.com/62222284

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS & COMMENTS:

- Add an explicit Amnesty Clause to the Gender-Based Misconduct Policies stating that complainants, who report gender-based or sexual misconduct, as well as witnesses and supporters involved in the adjudication process, will not be subject to Dean's Discipline related to their use of alcohol, drugs, or other illegal substances relating to the investigation's proceedings. This amnesty clause does not adequately protect potential parties and will discourage victims from reporting. If, in the course of an investigation, non-witness/non-supporter alcohol or drug use is discovered, the blame for resulting consequences will lie with the reporting party. I.e. drug use occurs in a fraternity/residence - sanctions fall on non-witness hosts - they will tie blame back to the victim who reported propose extended hours for resources on campus and making them easier to find. When I was raped, I wished I could call Nightline, but they weren't operating. Immediate, anonymous access to that kind of anonymous counseling service—and access that wouldn't require I visit an office—would have made the months ahead much easier.

- "I'm a survivor, and because I know it will be triggering, I won't be able to attend or watch this event. But a couple thoughts:
  - Until recently, the dialogue has focused on issues of adjudication. I have serious doubts about the efficacy of that emphasis for two reasons:
    1. In the middle of the act, I doubt that my rapist would have been dissuaded by a higher likelihood of "conviction."
    2. The adjudication process relies on the victim reporting. I am an educated feminist who knew that what had happened to me was rape, but after I was assaulted, I was more shocked than anything else. I chose to sleep for days on end because thinking meant thinking about what had
happened and meant being incapacitated by the experience. Reporting was the last thing I wanted to do.

- I would instead propose extended hours for resources on campus and making them easier to find. When I was raped, I wished I could call Nightline, but they weren't operating. Immediate, anonymous access to that kind of anonymous counseling service—and access that wouldn't require I visit an office—would have made the months ahead much easier.

- Even as the majority of rape victims are female, I think there's more room for male voices in this discussion, and I think that fraternities can/should be leaders in education (beyond mandated consent education for members). For both brothers and for non-members, fraternities provide something of a guide to masculinity and being a “good man,” and with a comprehensive education program focused on the psychological and sociological reasons and effects of sexual assault, they could a force for change.

- Sometimes the sexual misconduct on this campus has looked like having strangers (students, faculty, and staff) purposefully bump into you and use their energy to make you nervous or uncomfortable. Sometimes, the misconduct has been to speak to you as you walk by, saying things to you, about who men believe you to be, dirty names, and even threats. And I cannot place it completely on the men, the culture of rape, of sexual harassment and misconduct has been carried out by the women on this campus also, making it even more difficult for a woman who has been harassed to feel safe, because others who share her gender feel she is an enemy; maybe even competition for a sexual goal they didn't know they had until it was threatened by someone for whom they deemed unworthy to have it.

- I would like for the school to consider that harassment and sexual misconduct also be considered in line with racial identity, perceived ability, and socio-economic class, and not to leave intersectional identity out of the consideration for why someone may have become a target of harassment.

- I would like for the school to consider how a lack of privacy in this space can lead to a level of harassment that is almost unheard of and could be debilitating for the one who experiences it, affecting their school work, their ability to achieve, and their consideration of Columbia University as an institution they would consider referring anyone else to.

- I want the school to consider that many women do not report what is occurring because they see the opportunity to be here as a great privilege and believe they can hold up under the pressure of it in order to gain their goals. Why? Because when you are a victim of a crime it is practice to remove someone from a situation in order to “protect” them because we have not figured out how to protect people while they are in the midst of a negative situation. Isolation is not always the best means as it makes the victim feel as if it is their fault, while the victim may isolate themselves in an effort to find a balance between their discomfort and their goal.
• Create an additional CPS group for sexual abuse survivors that do not have a gender requirement. I understand that many women who have survived sexual abuse may feel more comfortable discussing their experiences in an all-women environment. For this reason, the "Group for Women Healing from Sexual Abuse" should definitely remain. However, there are men at Columbia healing from sexual abuse as well. A second group that is open to both men and women would be beneficial to them.