

UC implements new student model in ongoing progress toward addressing sexual violence and sexual harassment

The University of California this month is implementing new systemwide procedures for investigating, adjudicating and imposing sanctions in student cases of sexual violence and sexual harassment, as part of its continuing strategy to more effectively prevent and respond to sexual violence and sexual harassment on campuses.

These new procedures assign specific authority, roles and responsibilities to designated offices to ensure consistency across the UC system, and set projected timeframes designed to promptly and effectively respond to complaints. It outlines a fair, trauma-informed process in which a student filing a complaint, and a student responding to the complaint can be heard, offer witnesses and evidence, and appeal.

This is the latest milestone in UC's development and implementation of a comprehensive approach to address sexual violence and sexual harassment in a way that increases transparency and consistency across the system and importantly, fosters a culture of respect and safety at campuses.

In June 2014, President Janet Napolitano formed a task force to address this issue. Throughout the process, the task force has consulted intensely with a broad spectrum of stakeholders including students, staff who work closely with survivors of sexual assault, administrators, campus police, legal counsel and nationally recognized experts outside the university.

"The task force has been extremely diligent and collaborative in developing a comprehensive approach that is uniform, rigorous and meets the needs of our 10-campus system," President Napolitano said. "We've made significant progress over the past year and a half that enables UC to more effectively prevent and respond to sexual assaults."

The task force's work continues this year. A committee will present recommendations to President Napolitano by Feb. 29 on handling cases of sexual violence and sexual harassment involving UC faculty. Once this work is complete, the university will review the adjudication procedures for cases that involve staff members.

Other components of UC's comprehensive approach that were implemented over the last 18 months include:

- Implementing mandatory systemwide education and training on sexual violence issues and prevention. Incoming students must participate in the education and training program at their campus within the first six weeks of classes. Continuing students participate in ongoing education and training during the year. A systemwide program for faculty and staff that will require routine training will be implemented this month.

- Establishing a “CARE: Advocate Office for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Misconduct” on each campus with a full-time trained staff member to provide crisis intervention to students and help them access campus resources such as psychological counseling and academic accommodations. CARE advocates help students understand reporting options and accompany them through the reporting process, if they choose to file a report. These are confidential and independent offices, separate from reporting and investigations.
- Ensuring every campus has designated individuals to help respondents understand their rights and UC’s investigation and adjudication processes, in order to provide fair support services to respondents in cases involving sexual violence or sexual assault.
- Strengthening its policy against sexual and domestic violence, stalking and harassment as part of its ongoing compliance with the federal Violence Against Women Act. The university adopted an affirmative consent standard that defines consent as conscious, voluntary and revocable, before the California affirmative consent bill became law.
- Implementing a standardized two-team response model at all UC campuses. A case management team reviews sexual violence reports to ensure that institutional responses are timely and appropriate and that complainants and respondents receive fair and objective consideration. A second team focuses on policies, community relations, prevention and intervention.
- Creating a systemwide website designed to serve as a user-friendly, one-stop portal for quick access to campus resources and important information. In addition, key information such as how to get help and reporting options is standardized on all campus sexual violence websites.
- Collecting a standard set of data across all campuses on sexual violence reports and the use of campus programs and resources. The university will use the data to assess the effectiveness of its services and identify areas for improvement.

UC campuses have long had programs and services in place to educate students, faculty and staff and to respond to sexual violence. The task force’s work and the resulting comprehensive framework aim to strengthen those services and ensure consistency across all UC campuses.

The university plans to routinely review and evaluate the implemented measures, with input from the UC community, to ensure its effectiveness.