

Ad hoc committee tackles sexual assault at University of Toledo

Nationwide, 23 percent of undergraduate students report being sexually assaulted, four percent report being stalked and one in 16 men are affected by sexual assault, said Amy Thompson, co-chair of the sexual assault awareness and prevention ad hoc committee and health education professor.

At the State of the University Address just last week, University of Toledo President Sharon Gaber announced she would create an ad hoc taskforce with the goal of evaluating and providing information about how UT can improve sexual assault prevention and awareness.

“Dr. Gaber...put together a taskforce to basically assess our campus,” Thompson said, “in terms of, ‘What are our current policies?’ ‘What is the best practice?’ ‘Are there any gaps that need to be filled?’ And the most important thing is, ‘How do we keep our students, faculty and staff safer?’”

This taskforce is co-chaired by Thompson and Associate Vice President and Co-Director of Residence Life Valerie Walston. It also includes representatives from the Sexual Assault Awareness Programs, the Counseling Center, the Student Advocacy and Wellness Center, Student Affairs, Athletics and Title IX, Thompson said. Once the assessment is finished, the committee will look at programs, practices and policies at other universities and compare those to UT’s existing counterparts with an emphasis on education, information, prevention and adjudication, said Donald Kamm, Director of Title IX.

“Part of that is staffing questions as well,” said Kasey Tucker-Gail, associate professor and director of the Center of

Student Advocacy and Wellness. "Do we have the right number of people in the right positions to address these issues?"

The final report, that is expected to be finished and issued to Gaber in August 2017, will include existing programs and policies that need to be changed, as well as new policies and programs that need to be created, Thompson said. The committee had their first meeting on Thursday, April 13 to begin work on this report and the individual assignments for each member.

"The assignment I have is to look at trainings made available to faculty and staff as responsible employees under Title IX," Kamm said. "When a student goes to a faculty member to talk about a case, they need to know there is a legal obligation by that employee to act on that information."

Kamm said faculty and staff need to be trained in "informed interruption." This means interrupting the student to say that any information about sexual misconduct will be reported to Title IX, with or without the student's consent.

Approximately 88 to 89 percent of sexual assault victims never report it, and they often deal with the emotional, mental and physical issues resulting from the assault, Thompson said.

"I think for those especially who have been sexually assaulted, we need to encourage them to report, and create a system where they feel safe and that they know the perpetrator will receive due process," Thompson said.

One of Kamm's goals for this committee is to expand sexual assault awareness and prevention outside of the Haven program.

"The Haven program is the sole experience that a student has or relates to sexual assault or prevention on campus," Kamm said. "I would love to see certain outcomes for the entire four-year experience and have touchstones along the way where we're constantly reinforcing these messages."

Kamm said he also wants to see more outreach toward the students who are not involved in campus groups like Greek Life.

“When I came here last year, I said I wanted this campus to be a role model campus on how we handle sexual assault cases, how we administer Title IX and the adjudication of sexual assault,” Kamm said. “That’s still my goal, and even though I’m limited in my scope, it’s nice to see someone is looking at the big picture.”