

September 2014 Community Update | Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Assault

September 4, 2014

Dear Members of the Harvard Community,

In the last year, Harvard, like hundreds of colleges and universities across the country, has engaged in a multifaceted effort to re-examine how we can more effectively prevent incidents of sexual harassment, including sexual violence, and how we should respond when such incidents occur.

As President Faust has said, "sexual assault is an affront to the personal well-being and dignity that rest at the heart of what Harvard seeks to be." It can be neither permitted nor tolerated, and we must support members of our community who have experienced it.

As part of Harvard's overall efforts, I was asked in April to lead a University-wide task force of faculty, students, and staff to recommend ways to improve efforts to prevent sexual misconduct and develop insight into these issues based on input from both within and beyond our community. Your participation will be critical if we are to succeed. Today, I am writing to update you on our efforts to date and to solicit your help.

In recent months, the University's [Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Assault](#) has taken some important first steps.

- **New sexual assault resource Web portal.** This week, we launched a new Web portal – <http://share.harvard.edu/> – that consolidates in one location all the resources Harvard provides to respond to and support students who have experienced sexual misconduct. Combining the resources of primarily the Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (OSAPR), the Title IX office, and the Harvard University Police Department (HUPD), the new SHARE (Sexual Harassment Assault Response and Education) portal provides quick access to the information a student would need to get immediate help, file a complaint with the University, or explore a criminal charge. I encourage you to bookmark this site on your mobile device.
- **Increased staffing for prevention and response.** In recent months, we have also significantly increased staffing at OSAPR to better support its dual mission of providing services to those who have experienced sexual assault and offering education and outreach programs to decrease the incidence of sexual assault on campus. As of August, OSAPR had doubled its staff to five full-time professionals, with a sixth position soon to be filled.

- **Campus survey.** Working with faculty experts, the task force has begun the process of developing a campus survey that will be designed to provide the task force and the Harvard community with a deep understanding of the problem as it exists today. In particular, the survey will help assess the incidence, circumstances, and perceptions of sexual assault and other forms of sexual harassment at Harvard. Great care is going into this work because the survey results will likely receive much attention and will influence policy recommendations. We expect to conduct this survey before the close of this academic year.
- **We need your help.** Despite these steps, we have only begun our work. In the coming months, we will need your help to foster the type of transformation in campus culture and norms that we hope to achieve. Our success will depend to a large degree on your willingness to engage in this important dialogue. As a small group of faculty, students, and administrators from across the University, we alone cannot represent the views of all in our community. With that in mind, we are planning a number of opportunities in November at which you will be able to discuss and share your views with the task force on the critical issue of how we can best reduce incidents of sexual harassment, including sexual violence. If you are interested in participating, please reach out to the designated contact at your School, which you can find by going to [this page](#) on the task force website. The School contact will be back in touch with you when task force meeting dates and times for your School are finalized.

In the meantime, a number of community meetings are being hosted by the [Office for Sexual and Gender-Based Dispute Resolution](#) to introduce the recently enacted and now operational Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment Policy. Similarly, a number of individual Schools are holding meetings as they work to integrate the new University policy into their own protocols.

We hope you will take advantage of all these opportunities to learn more and to have your voice heard. Only together can we create lasting change.

Sincerely,

Steven E. Hyman

Chair of the Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Assault

Harvard University Distinguished Service Professor and Professor of Stem Cell and Regenerative Biology