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## **Reducing and Eliminating Sexual Assault at University Park:**

How to Catch and Deter Perpetrators on Campus

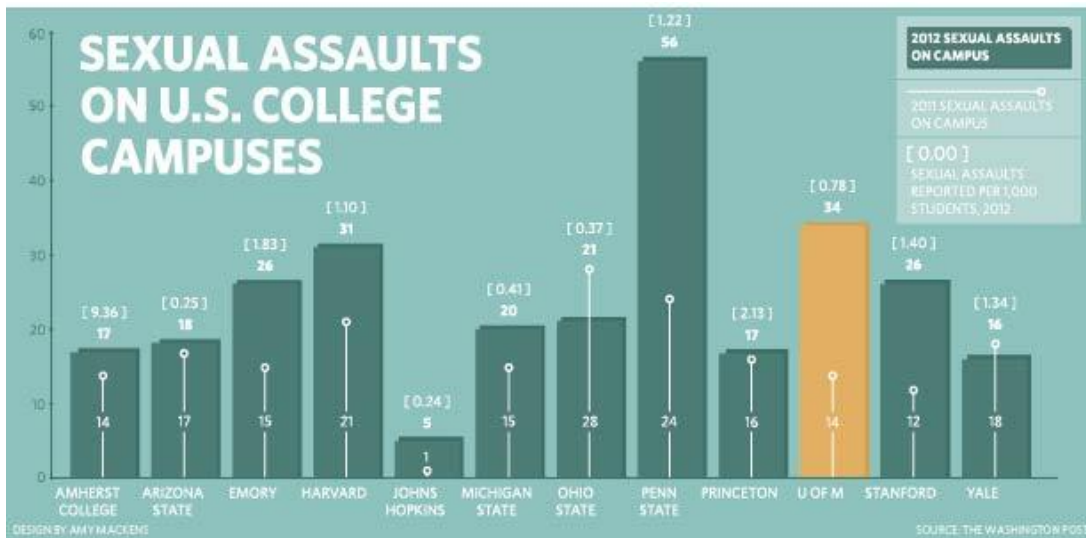


Table 1: In 2012 Penn State Ranked #1 in Sexual Assaults per 1,000 Students.<sup>4</sup>

The Results of the Sexual Misconduct Climate Survey in Fall 2015 raised concerns across campus. The University learned that out of a small sample size many students are victims of sexual assault. Furthermore, more than a year later much has not been done to eliminate sexual misconduct on or off campus. In Fall 2016, all incoming students completed the AWARE Sexual Assault Awareness learning module.<sup>1</sup> However, by the end of the 2017 Spring semester there has been 18 reported sexual assault incidents in Freshmen Residence Halls.

Education has proven in this past year that it alone is not enough to combat sexual misconduct. In order to proactively catch and deter perpetrators on campus, University Park must invest in expanding and advancing existing campus security technology and incident reporting to reverse the investigator's disadvantages.

## **The Endless Sexual Assault Cycle at University Park, Penn State**

At the largest campus of Penn State, sexual assault has been a plague held to no avail when it comes to apprehending the heinous sexual offenders that live, study, and socialize among us. These perpetrators rest easy in the fact that few, if any, will ever be discovered and or convicted of their crimes. This is what may be called the endless cycle of sexual assault at University Park.

In the Fall of 2015, 27% of 11,023 University Park Undergraduates responded to the Sexual Misconduct Climate Survey with concerning results. Out of the sample group that responded, the survey finds that 27.5% of women and 25.7% of lesbian, gay, and transgender students were victims of sexual assault at University Park alone.<sup>2</sup>

Little to none other than the draft of the 18 Recommendations made by the Task Force on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment has been implemented since Fall 2015.<sup>3</sup> This alone will not deter and apprehend any perpetrators of sexual misconduct.

A year later, it is evident that the climate of sexual misconduct at University park has not improved. In the Fall of 2016 and Spring of 2017 there has been a combined number of 18 sexual misconduct reports. Out of those 18 reports, 8 incidents occurred where the perpetrator was unknown or a stranger to the victim and all 18 occurred within a on campus residence hall.

- **Why and How Perpetrators are not caught Committing Sexual Assault in Dorms**

From a victim's stand point, sexual assault incidents are incredibly traumatic and difficult to remember. Furthermore, in the survey conducted in 2015, 77.5% of respondent victims admitted to consuming drugs or alcohol prior

to the incident.<sup>2</sup> This adds another factor in how difficult it is for survivors to identify or remember the assailants after the attack. This leads to high possibilities that the attacker will walk away unpunished and may be inclined to act again.

Although there have been 18 reported incidents, that number does not represent the total number of students affected by sexual misconduct. The gravity that is associated with reporting sexual assaults often deters victims. Victims often avoid revealing any important information such as suspects names, characteristics, and locations of incidents, if they do report anything at all.

Both of these sets of factors leads to incomplete sexual misconduct reports that puts a disadvantage on police and campus officials who aim to apprehend these offenders. Although reporting is becoming more prevalent, the apprehension of perpetrators is not. This is due to the fact that in some circumstances victims are uncomfortable revealing information, were incapacitated at the time of the incident, or did not know the aggressing individual. To overcome these challenges there are many suggestions the University must take seriously to apprehend more perpetrators.

### **Expanding Existing Campus Security to Better Identify and Apprehend Perpetrators**

In terms of security, University Park residence halls have many standard features to protect its students from outsider individuals. However, there is little to none security measures that are geared toward the acceleration of sexual misconduct

investigations. Investing in certain technological advancements or security in residence halls may lead to higher apprehension rates of perpetrators. These investments include syncing all existing residence hall cameras to one centralized system, facial recognition within that system, and ID card logs.

- **Investing in a ID Log, Centralized Camera Hub, and Facial Recognition.**

Without question one of the major reasons that apprehension of sexual misconduct perpetrators continues to be low is because of an inability to identify them. Whether that may be because victims may be uncomfortable revealing identities or because they simply cannot remember, facial recognition in dorm cameras and connecting them to a central hub will have a large and positive affect on sexual assault apprehension and deterrence.

When a student enters their residence hall two things occur. First they swipe their Penn State ID card and then as they enter, are seen on the overhead cameras facing the entrance. However, both of these two electronic systems are neither linked to each other nor to other residence halls. This makes each residence hall independent of each other.

When it comes to identifying and apprehending individuals suspected of sexual misconduct, syncing these two systems together and with all other residence halls provides advantages. This will allow for police and university officials to efficiently find where victims were and who they were with no matter what residence hall the incident occurs. This proves advantageous when the victim is

incapable of remember where they were, what time they entered, or who lead/followed them to a dorm room.

The ID log is advantageous for numerous reasons associated with eliminating sexual assault. This log system should be designed in a way that it is feasible for officials to look up an ID number and see when and where that card was used. However, in certain incidents the victim may not use their own ID card or enter their own residence hall, but rather the perpetrator.

To combat this challenge the University must also invest in a facial recognition system. This would allow for two things to occur in a sexual misconduct investigation. First it would allow for school officials to find which residence hall the victim entered should they know the time frame when the incident occurred. Second it would allow officials to identify those perpetrators found entering a residence with the victim.

This security feature coupled with the ability to view camera feeds related to ID card usage in every dorm will allow the University to determine exactly when and who was there in the suspected incident time frame. This will lead to not only more apprehension of these unwanted offenders from our community, but also deter would-be perpetrators from committing acts knowing there will be a very high chance they will be caught.

### **Making Reporting Sexual Misconduct More Comfortable for Victims**

When it comes to investigating sexual assault, there is a major problem across campus. Most incidents go unreported to the police and or the University. To victims, there are many fears

associated with reporting sexual assault. Many of which are related to the shame associated with coming forth and or the comfort in revealing highly sensitive experiences with unknown individuals in law enforcement who may be male or have never been sexually assaulted. In order to overcome these factors that hold victims back from reporting the University must use places

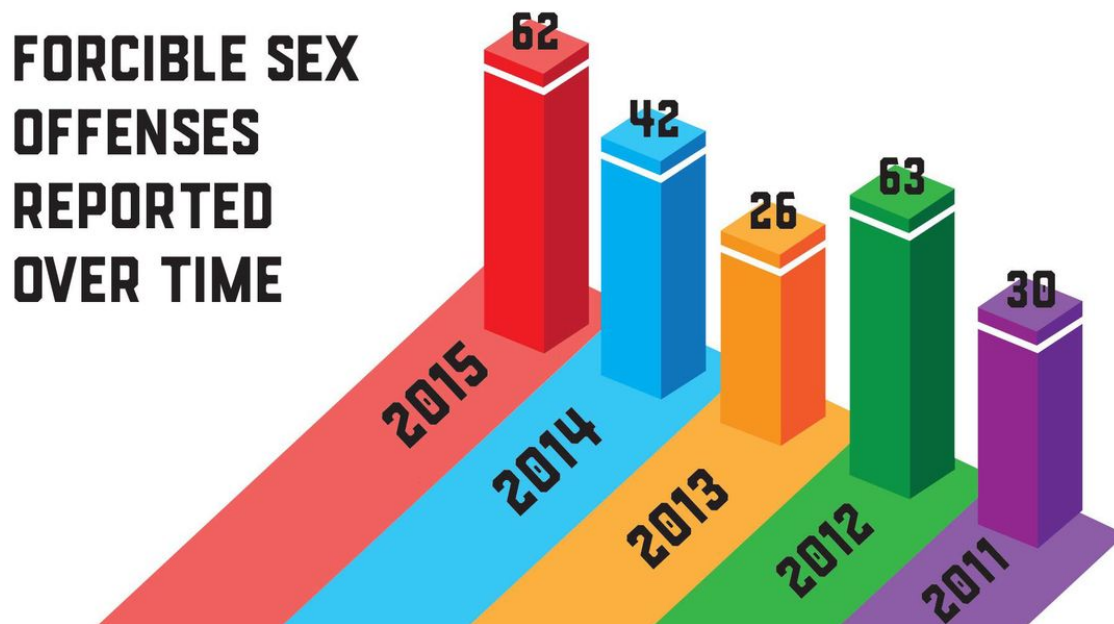


Table 2: The Daily Collegian states this table illustrates the amount of sexual assault reports have been filed at University Park by year from 2011 to 2015.<sup>5</sup>

comfortable enough for students to share their incidents to officials who were also affected by sexual assault.

- **Creating a Soft Space for Reporting Incidents**

At the University of Iowa, they have introduced a new interview room known as a “soft space”. The advantages of having such a room alleviates some of the stress and anxiety for a victim while they report incidents to school officials. There is a tremendous amount of real estate across campus to be used to create such a room. At a low cost to the University, the implementation of a room will accelerate the number of students willing to talk about their sexual assault experience and report it.<sup>4</sup>

- **Using Survivors of Sexual Assault to Interview New Victims**

When it comes to reporting an incident, many victims choose to speak over the phone rather than in person and avoid giving all the necessary information that may lead to apprehension. An intuitive solution to this dilemma is to have social workers affected personally affected by sexual assault to console the victim. This will allow for the student and the official to connect and find each other trustworthy. Also by doing this a social worker can pass on the necessary idea that the victim is solely responsible for the apprehension of the perpetrator and may be the difference in someone else life.

### **Feasibility and Possible Objections**

The cost of expanding technology and reporting methods will come at a high cost. However, costs should never outweigh the level of safety a student Penn State student is entitled to. Sexual assault at University Park has become an epidemic that effects not only a student's academic, social, and career capabilities, but also effects parents and their anxiety that their beloved son or daughter may become part of the statistic that 1 in 4 women are raped in college.

- **Feasibility of ID Log**

Today there are systems in place at numerous facilities across Penn State Campus that requires a student to swipe their ID card. In residence halls they are used to validate a student lives there, in weight rooms they are used to validate students pay for membership, and in the Pollock Testing Center they are used to ensure the correct student is granted admission to use a computer. However, there

is no system currently that can log where the use of these cards is used in regards to residence halls. This piece of the campaign against sexual assault is essential to finding where victims were at the time of reported incidents.

- **Feasibility of Facial Recognition**

Time and time again, there have incidents associated with sexual assault and other crimes that are left unpunished because of an inability to identify faces in camera feeds. The cost of implementing a facial recognition system may be one of the most expensive security updates Penn State will ever invest in. However, the benefit of having such an advantage will greatly effect crime across campus not only related to sexual assault.

- **Feasibility of Central Camera Hub**

In almost every major institution or building, there is a central camera hub with the purpose of accessibility of information quickly. At Penn State, we currently have this implemented, however, we do not have a system in place, specifically, for residence halls. This may add to the cost of updating our security but is another essential part to eliminating sexual assault on campus.

- **Feasibility of Soft Space and Counsel Affected by Sexual Assault**

Out of all the updates needed to completely eliminate sexual assault in the future a soft space and special counsel are the most feasible and least expensive. Both of these new updates will not be difficult to fund or design. Many individuals who have been affected by sexual assault often dedicate themselves to the cause. Those people can be relatively easy to find and employ at Penn State. The soft space is a



matter of finding the right room on campus and decorating it in a way that relieves anxiety and stress.

### **Conclusion on How to Apprehend and Deter Predators in University Park Residence Halls**

Sexual Assault is a heinous felony that traumatizes and devastates individuals. Sexual assault on campus will never be tolerated by any member of the Penn State Community. Under no circumstances will the student body stand idly by as our peers are molested and terrorized by students undeserving to be a part of our culture. The University has done too little too long and the students demand changes to security and reporting methods.

The student body has gone through countless amounts of Sexual assault learning modules both in person and online, which has done little to nothing to eliminate or decrease the number of incidents. The course outlined within this issue brief is clear and concise. The university must take action-oriented changes with the intent of apprehending criminals rather than relying solely on education and persuasion as our defense against sexual assault.

The Pennsylvania State University is a standout leader in every facet of higher education, yet in 2012 we lead the Big Ten with the most sexual assaults reported. This is an opportunity for the Penn State administrators and Penn State community to lead the Big Ten Division One Conference in combating sexual assault on campus.

**End Notes**

- 1) <http://news.psu.edu/story/154170/2011/10/25/new-penn-state-students-must-complete-sexual-assault-awareness-module>
- 2) <http://news.psu.edu/story/403894/2016/04/13/campus-life/survey-sheds-light-students'-attitudes-experiences-sexual>
- 3) <http://news.psu.edu/story/342644/2015/01/29/campus-life/task-force-report-details-recommendations-halting-sexual>
- 4) [http://www.collegian.psu.edu/news/campus/article\\_66baf18e-ac6a-11e6-aec2-3f8c4fed28a6.html](http://www.collegian.psu.edu/news/campus/article_66baf18e-ac6a-11e6-aec2-3f8c4fed28a6.html)
- 5) <https://www.michigandaily.com/news/university-ranks-second-number-reported-sexual-offenses-2012>