

HARVARD UNIVERSITY



May 13, 2014

Dear President Faust,

I am writing on behalf of the Sexual Assault Task Force convened on April 3 of this year. Reflecting the urgency of the issue, we chose to begin our work immediately. We have had two very productive meetings. We provided essential background to Task Force members. Our main focus, however, was how best to use the coming months as we work toward providing you with recommendations for effective prevention of sexual assault, support for those who have experienced sexual assault, and a process of evaluation to ensure that programs that turn out to be insufficiently effective in the Harvard context are culled to make room for more effective interventions. During the summer, we will gather data on effective practices developed by other universities and by the military and will also review relevant academic literature. In addition we plan to develop survey instruments attuned to the Harvard community. A critical activity that will begin as soon as students and faculty return in the fall will be a process of broad outreach to members of the Harvard community to gather input.

While we have much work in front of us in the next months, we have determined that there are several steps that can be taken now. We would like to strongly recommend that you consider the following four immediate actions.

- The Office of Sexual Assault and Prevention Response (OSAPR) and the Title IX Office play an essential role in the University's efforts to prevent and respond to sexual assaults. We recognize that efforts are already underway to increase the size of the Title IX office. With renewed attention to sexual assaults, the call for services has increased and will likely continue to do so. We are concerned that moving forward, an understaffed OSAPR risks slow or ineffective responses to students who have experienced sexual assault. This would be deeply upsetting to affected students and could signal inadequate commitment on the part of the University to addressing sexual violence on campus.

Although our task force is not equipped to determine what level of staffing is needed for OSAPR, we can recommend that the Office be provided with the resources necessary to effectively fulfill its University-wide mission. The Task Force asks that OSAPR be provided with whatever additional resources are necessary to carry out its role – beginning as soon as possible.

- The University currently lacks a website that provides clear and comprehensive information to members of the Harvard community about the resources available to people who have experienced sexual assault and other forms of sexual harassment. While the Harvard University Police Department, OSAPR, and the Title IX Office each has important information on its website, there is no single place to which people can turn to find university policies, resources available to them, and the like. In addition we are not aware of any central source that provides guidance to members of the community about how best to respond to sexual assault.

We recommend that the University establish such a resource, with the goal of having it up and running by the time students return in the fall.

- Each of our Schools has orientation programs for new students. I anticipate that the work of the Task Force will result in recommendations aimed at improving such programs along with much else aimed at reinforcing the expression of the Universities values and making significant strides toward the prevention of sexual assault and sexual misconduct. Of course, it is not possible at the beginning to know what we will recommend at the end of our work. We believe it useful, however, to recommend that OSAPR and the Title IX Office work collaboratively with a subset of Task Force members to ensure that even in the interim, all Schools have access to materials on which they may draw in developing programming for new student orientation and training sessions to be offered in the fall.
- The Task Force believes that a survey of the campus is necessary as a means of understanding such matters as the incidence of sexual assault and other forms of sexual harassment, the circumstances under which they are most likely to occur, as well as perceptions of such conduct in each of Harvard's Schools. We request that we have the appropriate resources to devise, implement, and interpret a well-structured, statistically sound and comprehensive survey.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations. It is the hope of the Task Force that, by moving forward on these actions, we are able to take important steps in a rapid yet thoughtful fashion.

Best,

Steven E. Hyman
Harvard University Distinguished Service Professor