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| University of Colorado Boulder |
| Sexual Misconduct Task Force Report |
| Recommendations for preventing and reducing the occurrence and impact of sexual harassment and violence in our university community |

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| 8-4-2023 |

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# Introduction

The Sexual Misconduct Task Force (SMTF) was formed by the COO and Provost in September 2022 to strengthen engagement across campus for continuing progress on current prevention efforts with the goal of reducing the occurrence and impact of sexual harassment and violence in our university community. The SMTF was chaired by representatives from the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) and Office of Victim Assistance (OVA). It consists of leaders from across the university (see Appendix A) including from Academic Affairs, the BFA, the **Office of the Senior Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**, Student Affairs, CU Police Department, Athletics, and student government, along with staff from offices that hold expertise in preventing and responding to sexual harm on our campus.

The SMTF convened eleven times between October 2022 and July 2023 to thoroughly review campus data and peer-reviewed research and determine and prioritize recommendations for reducing harm. This process was facilitated through presentations, large and small group discussions, voting, and the sharing of insights and expertise for implementation.

The strategies being recommended align with the goals of the Buff Undergraduate Success Leadership Implementation Team (BUS-LIT) and the implementation of the learning objectives and skills that comprise the Common Curriculum. Strategies that strengthen engagement, prepare students to become tomorrow’s leaders, and increase retention by enhancing college students’ learning and living experiences also minimize factors that potentiate sexual misconduct and reduce the subsequent negative impact it has on students and the campus culture. Reciprocally, strategies that reduce the impact of harassment and violence on our students remove a significant barrier to students’ well-being and academic success.

The work of the SMTF aims to reduce sexual harm, and these recommendations reflect the comprehensive efforts necessary for realizing that goal. This report is not an exhaustive inventory of all the current prevention and response efforts in place at the university. Our purpose is to outline the actions and recommendations that have been identified and endorsed by the SMTF.

Items 1 and 2 are current actions in place that were activated by task force discussions and could be immediately implemented. These new, pilot efforts will inform implementation of recommendations 3 and 4 and help determine what additional resources are needed. Leadership’s preliminary endorsement of recommendations 3 and 4 will provide the SMTF with the support necessary for members to begin coalition building to garner buy-in. This will lead to further refinement of each recommendation, which will allow us to determine what resources are needed. Once we have support, we will submit an implementation plan and budget endorsed by the task force, key departments, and faculty to request approval from the COO and Provost. Finally, endorsement of recommendation 5 will allow the SMTF to continue its work and ensure partnerships and ongoing collaboration.

# Current Actions and Recommendations

## Current Action 1

Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) will partner with Residence Life, Student Affairs Office of Planning, Assessment, and Data Analytics, CU Boulder Office of Data Analytics, and the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences (CEAS) first-year student Engineering Village program, known as “Engineering Connections,” to assess sexual misconduct among Williams Village first-year residents as well as factors that may reduce its prevalence and consequences.

**Fall 2023 implementation:**

* Respond to a request from Katherine Eggert, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Planning and Assessment, to submit a BUS-LIT proposal to measure whether the sense of community and mutual accountability fostered in the Engineering Connections (EC)[[1]](#footnote-1) program also reduces the prevalence of sexual assault among first-year students and, when assault does occur, its subsequent negative consequences. This will include:
	+ Collecting pre-arrival data on anticipated belonging and administering two assessments during the fall semester and one in the spring to measure sense of community and belonging, friend making and study peer connections, mutual accountability, values, incidents/characteristics of sexual assault, and sexual assault consequences.
		- This assessment project will include all first-year CEAS students *and* all other first-year students living in Williams Village who will serve as a control group.
	+ Determining the impact of this effort on reducing sexual assault, ameliorating the negative impact of sexual assaults that do happen, and on increasing sense of community and belonging will be used to inform future development and implementation of a first-year experience course for all incoming students.

## Current Action 2

Expand resources and education for incoming students and their families through coordinated programming from the OIEC, Office of Victim Assistance (OVA), Health and Wellness Services, Health Promotion, Residence Life, Center for Inclusion and Social Change (CISC) including the Pride Office, New Student and Family Programs (NSFP), CUPD, and Student Affairs Communications.

**Fall 2023 implementation:**

* Provide NEW educational materials and programs for parents and families during move in and Fall Welcome events.
	+ Buff Family Tents
		- “Understanding sexual assault prevalence at CU Boulder and talking with your student about how to look out for others” parent handout (OIEC).
		- “Healthy, unhealthy, and abusive behaviors in relationships” handout (OVA/OIEC).
	+ Fall Family Welcome and Family Weekend
		- Four facilitated sessions of “Launching your young adult” focused on holistic wellness and harm reduction (CAPS/OVA/HP/OIEC).
		- “Top 5 conversations to have with your student” handout (OIEC/OVA/HP/CAPS).
* Provide new and enhanced educational materials and programs for first- and second-year students during Fall Welcome and the first few weeks of the semester.
	+ Fall Welcome and Neighborhood Block Parties
		- “Sex education skill building workbook” (OIEC/HP).
		- “Red Cup” activity - alcohol risk reduction (OIEC/HP).
		- “Understanding consent” (handout).
		- “Understanding sexual assault prevalence at CU Boulder and looking out for others” (student handout).
		- “Healthy, unhealthy, and abusive behaviors in relationships” (handout).
	+ Residence hall programs
		- Relationship and sexual wellness (OIEC/HP).
		- Bystander intervention booster (Hall Directors/OIEC).
		- Hall director and RA efforts to focus on social belonging interventions to increase meaningful connections for first-year students and create a strong sense of mutual accountability in the residence halls.
	+ Program offerings for *all* students
		- Relationship and sexual wellness (OIEC/HP).
		- Inclusive leadership and community building for student organizations, club sports, and other student leaders (OIEC/HP/CISC).
	+ Responding to microaggressions and harm (OIEC/SCCR).
	+ CU Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL) and Undergraduate Interfraternity Council on the Hill (IFC Hill)
		- Officer/leader orientation and sexual assault prevention advisory board (OIEC/OVA/HP/FSL/CUPD).
		- Engage stakeholders and students within FSL and IFC Hill to identify further action (OIEC/OVA/HP/FSL/CUPD).
		- Expanded sorority and fraternity member education through enhanced collaboration (OIEC/OVA/HP/FSL/CUPD).
	+ Social media and campaigns
		- Updated and expanded “Just Because” and “Don’t Ignore It” campaigns distributed through print, social, digital boards, Buff Bus, and RTD (OIEC).
		- Expanded CUBT and Healthy Buffs digital content dissemination (OIEC/OVA/HP/SA Comms).

## Recommendation 3

Bolster strategies that increase academic demand at the start of the semester and foster belonging and mutual accountability in the classroom and campus environments for first-year students.

**3-year implementation:**

* Members of the SMTF to work with the BFA Student Affairs Committee and Student Affairs, specifically New Student and Family Programs, to develop and sponsor a resolution of recommended strategies for the larger BFA to consider and put to a vote.
	+ Expand College Day programming to include sessions on Thursday and Friday of Fall Welcome (if programming is not already offered on those days) for all colleges.
		- Require first-year students to attend.
		- Offer a session on establishing positive community norms and a sense of mutual accountability.
		- Offer a session on healthy relationships and responding to harm (interpersonal, relational, and identity).
		- Offer optional sessions for returning second-year students.
	+ Recommend classroom practices that enhance belonging and academic engagement.
		- Institute assignments that occur earlier in the semester and improve timing and spread of assignments throughout the semester, which will also enhance the efficacy of the course alert system.
		- Integrate discussion of classroom norms and institute a syllabus quiz or other activities to engage students on setting expectations within the first 1-2 weeks of the semester.
		- Integrate formalized study peer/group processes in core classes for first-year students.
	+ Expand education for faculty and advisors on how to respond to and support students who disclose a traumatic incident.
		- CTL and Faculty Affairs to help with implementation of sessions for a broad representation of faculty across the university.

## Recommendation 4

Establish a one-credit, first-year experience course for all incoming undergraduate students and expand belonging interventions and peer support to foster community in the residence halls.

**3-5-year implementation:**

* Members of the SMTF to work with the BFA Student Affairs Committee, First Year Experience Advisory Board, and Undergraduate Student Success (USS) to develop and establish a course.
* Require all incoming first-year students to complete a First Year Experience course focused on Common Curriculum habits of mind and essential skills including civic and personal values, mutual accountability, and skills for successfully forming community and establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.
	+ Campus Curriculum Committee, in concert with BFA and college/school leaders, to determine course structure, content, and scheduling.
		- Consider frontloading the semester with the course occurring the first 5-6 weeks of school.
		- Courses to be led by faculty (TTT and teaching faculty).
* In collaboration with the first-year course, expand social supports in the residence halls including funding and developing Journey Leaders (peers), Wellness Coordinators, and returning upper-division students (“returners”) to provide additional community building support and belonging interventions in the residence halls.

## Recommendation 5

Continue the charge of the Sexual Misconduct Task Force to further progress on identifying and supporting prevention efforts that reduce the occurrence and impact of sexual misconduct in our CU Boulder community, and appoint new members as needed.

**5-8-year implementation:**

* Ensure that key personnel are appointed to the task force through the implementation of proposed recommendations.
* Provide periodic reviews of campus data and propose new initiatives.
* Continue to support the creation of partnerships and collaboration to fulfill the mission of the task force.

# Supporting Evidence

Data foundational to these recommendations come from findings from CU Boulder surveys and relevant peer-reviewed research.

## CU Boulder Sexual Assault Data

Based on the 2021 Sexual Misconduct Survey findings, sexual violence disproportionately impacts incoming undergraduate students early in their college career.

* > 70% of all sexual assaults happened in the fall semester. Among incoming 2021 first-year women who were assaulted since becoming a CU student:
	+ 13% reported that the assault happened during move-in/Welcome Week
	+ 77% indicated that the assault occurred after classes began on August 23, 2021: August (21%), September (39%), and October (28%)
	+ > 80% of undergraduates were assaulted by someone they knew, had just met, or didn’t know except that the offender was affiliated with CU.

### Sexual Assault and Belonging

* Undergraduate women who indicated on the Fall 2015 Sexual Misconduct Survey that they had experienced sexual assault during the first 12 weeks of that semester were significantly more likely to have previously reported a diminished sense of *anticipated* belonging at CU before they arrived on campus in August 2015. In other words, women who had significantly greater concerns about being accepted and fitting in, and who anticipated less belonging before they even arrived on campus, were more vulnerable to sexual assault during their first semester. Because of this vulnerability, it may be easier for offenders to perpetrate against women who have concerns about fitting in before they’ve had the opportunity to forge reliable/accountable protective friendships.
* Based on the 2021 Campus Culture/Sexual Misconduct Survey, undergraduate women who experienced sexual assault during their time at CU also reported a significantly lower sense of CU belonging overall and in terms of feeling valued, feeling supported, perceiving faculty as invested in their success, having a sense of community, and feeling treated like they belong at CU. They also report lower residence hall belonging (trust and acceptance), a less positive classroom environment, were more likely to have considered leaving CU, and less likely to choose CU again if given the chance to start over.
	+ This impoverished sense of belonging may, in part, derive from social consequences of experiencing assault—for instance, no longer wanting to interact with a perpetrator who is part of an existing friend group, which may lead the person to socially isolate. Further, a sexual assault survivor’s peers may be ill-equipped to provide the kind of support that would be most helpful, leading to feelings of a lack of support and being unable to share worries and fears with friends.

### Sexual Assault and Retention

* Among first-year undergrad women who completed the 2015 Sexual Misconduct Survey, 91% of non-assaulted first-year women returned in Fall 2016, compared to only 84% of first-year women who had been assaulted. This difference is statistically significant.
* Among all undergraduate women who completed the 2021 Sexual Misconduct Survey, those who had been assaulted during their time at CU had a lower retention rate to Fall 2022 (89%), as compared to undergrad women who had not been assaulted during their time at CU (93%). This difference is statistically significant.
* Cultivating an explicit ethos of looking out for each other among first-year students has the potential to both reduce sexual assault and increase retention. Residence hall practices that emphasize students’ sense of accountability to each other and scaffold friend-making opportunities appear to reduce rates of sexual assault.
	+ In 2015, residence halls with substantially lower sex assault rates among their female first-year students were particularly focused on creating community connections and mutual accountability starting on or before move-in day.

## CU Data and Peer-Reviewed Research on College Students

### Social goals and the transition to college

* Students attend college for academic reasons, but for most, creating a social network is a/the primary goal during the first year.[[2]](#endnote-1)
* At CU, almost two-thirds of incoming students report that CU’s “social reputation” was an important reason they chose to attend.[[3]](#endnote-2)
* Peers are at least as influential as faculty, if not more so.[[4]](#endnote-3),[[5]](#endnote-4),[[6]](#endnote-5)

### Alcohol’s role in helping students establish their social networks

* Research on Fear of Missing Out (or FoMO) in first-year college students indicates that students are highly motivated to forego enjoyable solitary activities and 1:1 time with a friend in favor of going out with a group or attending a party.[[7]](#endnote-6)
* Heavy alcohol use by incoming college students is primarily associated with meeting people, making friends, and having fun.[[8]](#endnote-7)
* First-year students make up the largest percentage of attendees at off-campus parties.[[9]](#endnote-8)
* Students often pursue high-risk drinking at off-campus parties for the status it confers because binge[[10]](#footnote-2) drinking is associated with high-status groups.[[11]](#endnote-9) In fact, members of high-status groups who are *not* binge drinkers report lower levels of social satisfaction than their binge-drinking peers.[[12]](#endnote-10)

### Alcohol use may undermine students’ academic launch

* Among first-year students who use alcohol, the heaviest drinking occurs during the initial weeks of the first semester.[[13]](#endnote-11),[[14]](#endnote-12)
* Students express little concern that heavy drinking at the start of the school year will impact their grades.[[15]](#endnote-13)
* Large stretches of free time allow many college students to continue to drink heavily.[[16]](#endnote-14),[[17]](#endnote-15)
* Students consume more alcohol when there are fewer academic demands.[[18]](#endnote-16)
* About 1 in 4 college students report academic consequences from drinking, including missing class, falling behind in class, or getting behind in schoolwork.[[19]](#endnote-17)
* Problematic drinking behavior that gets established during the first weeks of school often continues throughout college and frequently undermines academic success.[[20]](#endnote-18),[[21]](#endnote-19)

### Alcohol use makes students more vulnerable to physical harms and to causing harm

* New students with the fewest social connections are especially vulnerable to physical and emotional harm from the party experience.[[22]](#endnote-20)
* Every year almost 700,000 college students are physically assaulted by another college student who has been drinking.[[23]](#endnote-21)
* Research on college-age men suggests that alcohol interacts with personality and aspects of the situation, adding to the risk of perpetration among men already predisposed to engage in sexually aggressive behavior.[[24]](#endnote-22)
* Offenders of sexual assault have used alcohol in more than 70% of incidents.[[25]](#endnote-23)

### Disrupting the problem

* Addressing the problem of excessive drinking requires offering students meaningful and effective ways to make friends and establish social networks outside of a party context.[[26]](#endnote-24),[[27]](#endnote-25)
* Students who have rewarding activities during the day are less likely to drink heavily because of the possibility that this would negatively impact their activities on the following day.[[28]](#endnote-26)
* Students who have classes earlier in the day or who take Friday classes are less likely to drink heavily on the evening before.[[29]](#endnote-27),[[30]](#endnote-28),[[31]](#endnote-29)
* Reorganizing the timing of assignments to occur earlier in the semester and throughout the semester may reduce the level of excessive drinking that happens at the beginning of the term.[[32]](#endnote-30)
* Strategies like staying with the same group of people and making sure to go out with friends who will take care of each can reduce harms like sexual assault and physical injury.[[33]](#endnote-31),[[34]](#endnote-32)
* Practices that support student connection early in the semester and help students make high-quality friends and foster study peer connections also appear to reduce sexual assault.[[35]](#endnote-33)

# Appendix A

CU Boulder Sexual Misconduct Task Force Members

**Co-Chairs**

Jessica Ladd-Webert Director, Office of Victim Assistance (OVA)

Teresa Wroe Assistance Vice Chancellor of Prevention and Education & Deputy Title IX Coordinator, Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC)

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Holly Nelson Deputy Dean of Students and Assistant Vice Chancellor in Student Affairs and Director for Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution

Lucie Nguyen CUSG Student Affairs Tri-Executive

**Task Force Assessment & Research Consultants**

**Task Force Assessment &**

Erin McPherson Quantitative Research Analyst, OIEC

Julie Volckens Director of Assessment, OIEC

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