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## #DUSomething! A Qualitative Exploratory Study to Identify Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement in DU's Response to Sexual Harassment and Assault

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# **#DUSomething! A Qualitative Exploratory Study to Identify Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement in DU's Response to Sexual Harassment and Assault**

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## #DUSomething!

A qualitative exploratory study to identify challenges and opportunities for improvement in DU's response to sexual harassment and assault

*Edited by Alejandro Cerón for the Winter 2024  
ANTH 3750: Ethnographic Methods course*

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The study was designed and coordinated by Winter 2024 ANTH 3750 Ethnographic Methods students, under the supervision of Alejandro Cerón, course instructor.

The following students participated in study design, data collection, data analysis, and report drafting: Amanda Cali, Briana Cox, Camille Cruz, Camryn Evans, Cyndal Groskopf, Ashley Joplin, Clayton Kempf, Kēhaulani Lagunero, Jayvyn Lewis, Aili Limstrom, Gray Messersmith, Cal Quayle, Yadira Quintero, Michael Sze, Aaron Toussaint, and Sami Zepponi. Any errors are Alejandro Cerón's responsibility.

University of Denver

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# Executive Summary

## #DUSomething! A qualitative exploratory study to identify challenges and opportunities for improvement in DU's response to sexual harassment and assault

Edited by Alejandro Cerón for the Winter 2024 ANTH 3750: *Ethnographic Methods* course

The purpose of this course-based research project was to identify where DU has made progress in its response to sexual harassment, identifying challenges and opportunities for improvement, with the hope that the results will support the DU community's efforts to prevent, address, and eradicate sexual harassment. Sixteen DU staff and students whose roles give them direct experience related to sexual assault and harassment were interviewed in February 2024, and the interview transcripts were analyzed qualitatively.

In winter 2020, a group of DU students started the WeCanDUBetter movement, asking DU to improve its approach to sexual harassment and assault. In response, the chancellor published a plan scheduled to be achieved by the end of winter quarter 2020 and by the end of fall quarter 2020. Reports from April and October 2021 in *The Clarion* showed insufficient results.

Nationwide, scholars, and administrators have made calls to improve how institutions of higher education address sexual harassment. For instance, the Consensus Study Report *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine* offers the following recommendations aimed at bringing about the necessary change:

- Address the most common form of sexual harassment: gender harassment.
- Move beyond legal compliance to address culture and climate.
- Create diverse, inclusive, and respectful environments.
- Improve transparency and accountability.
- Diffuse the hierarchical and dependent relationship between trainees and faculty.
- Provide support for the target of harassment.
- Strive for strong and diverse leadership.

The main findings of our exploratory study coincide with these general recommendations while also offering insights that are specific to DU:

- Participants perceived that the plan that the Chancellor outlined in response to the #WeCanDUBetter student campaign was not fully implemented. Additionally, several participants said that they do not trust that the DU administration cares about these issues. Some participants said that there is a chronic lack of accountability and transparency from the DU administration.
- Participants said that specific Title IX and Equal Opportunity training has not been of consistent quality, and it may not be offering what frontline students and staff need in order to know how to act in response to specific incidents. Moreover, the survivors

- who have been part of the training expressed feeling like it was insensitive, unempathetic and dismissive of their experience.
- There seems to be a need to educate the larger community in ways that help reshape the climate and culture that surrounds sexual harassment and assault.
  - Research participants who had used the reporting system said that it was hard to access and confusing, and once the report was submitted, there was not enough communication about what had happened with their report, which nurtures a perception of lack of transparency; some people who had reported in the past said that they would not report again because they felt like it was useless.
  - Another concern that was mentioned was that there is a high staff turnover which impacts the consistency and quality of the training and reporting processes. Staff turnover increases the sense of lack of coordination and communication between different units or departments involved in the training and reporting processes.

These findings should be understood in the context of the exploratory nature of the study, and not as definitive findings that describe the current situation. However, the findings suggest some important avenues for the DU community to explore further or act. We reiterate that our hope with this course-based exploratory research project is to contribute to the efforts that the DU community needs to make, so that sexual harassment and assault are prevented and addressed in meaningful ways that are sensible and empathetic towards survivors, and that cultivate a culture of accountability and transparency.

# Introduction

by Alejandro Cerón

The purpose of this course-based research project was to identify where DU has made progress in its response to sexual harassment, identifying challenges and opportunities for improvement, with the hope that the results will support the DU community's efforts to prevent, address, and eradicate sexual harassment.

In winter 2020, a group of DU students started the WeCanDUBetter movement, asking DU to improve its approach to sexual harassment and assault<sup>1,2</sup>. In response, the chancellor published a plan, centered in three areas: (1) Prevention-education-training, (2) Policy review-procedures-personnel, and (3) Campus safety-security. The chancellor's plan had actions scheduled to be achieved by the end of winter quarter 2020 and by the end of fall quarter 2020<sup>3</sup>. Reports from April and October 2021 in The Clarion showed insufficient results<sup>4</sup>.

Nationwide, scholars, and administrators have made calls to improve how institutions of higher education address sexual harassment. For instance, the Consensus Study Report *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*<sup>5</sup> states in its overview that

*System-wide changes to the culture and climate in higher education are needed to prevent and effectively respond to sexual harassment. There is no evidence that current policies, procedures, and approaches – which often focus on symbolic compliance with the law and on avoiding liability – have resulted in a significant reduction in sexual harassment. Colleges and universities and federal agencies should move beyond basic legal compliance to adopt holistic, evidence-based policies and practices to address and*

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<sup>1</sup> "We can DU better" Instagram page ([link](#))

<sup>2</sup> [A look at gender-based violence on campus and the students fighting against it.](#) January 27, 2020, by Kiana Marsan; [DU silent protest spoke volumes for sexual assault survivors and students.](#)

February 6, 2020, by Olivia Farrar;

[How 3 student activists turned wecanDUBetter into a national movement.](#) March 9, 2020, by Kiana Marsan

<sup>3</sup> [A Call to Action: We Will DU Better.](#) January 27, 2020, by Jeremy Haefner; [Taking Action: We Will DU Better.](#) March 5, 2020, by Jeremy Haefner; [Do Better DU: committed to eradicating gender-based violence on campus.](#) April 12, 2022, by Ella Marsden; [Fall Update: Action Plan to Combat Sexual Assault.](#) Fall 2020, by Office of the Chancellor

<sup>4</sup> [One year later: DU's response to gender-based violence on campus.](#) April 12, 2021, by Tori Everson; [WeCanDUBetter to fight gender, racial and non-binary based violence.](#) October 11, 2021, by Ana Júlia Rodrigues Alves

<sup>5</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2018. *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24994>



*prevent all forms of sexual harassment and to promote a culture of civility and respect.*

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) identified three forms of sexual harassment: (1) gender harassment (sexist hostility and crude behavior), (2) unwanted sexual attention (unwelcome verbal or physical sexual advances), and (3) sexual coercion (when favorable professional or educational treatment is conditioned on sexual activity). The report also documented that gender harassment is by far the most common form of sexual harassment, but it is not well addressed by current legalistic procedures because it often “does not raise to the threshold defined by Federal policy.” The NASEM report offers the following recommendations aimed at bringing about the necessary change:

- Address the most common form of sexual harassment: gender harassment.
- Move beyond legal compliance to address culture and climate.
- Create diverse, inclusive, and respectful environments.
- Improve transparency and accountability.
- Diffuse the hierarchical and dependent relationship between trainees and faculty.
- Provide support for the target of harassment.
- Strive for strong and diverse leadership.

Similarly, scholars have pointed out the importance of organizational climate and culture. For instance, Dolamore and Richards<sup>6</sup> suggest a framework for examining the culture of institutions of higher education systematically. They define organizational culture as encompassing “the structural (i.e., space, policies, logos, etc.) and personal (i.e., leadership, socialization, learning) elements of an organization that influence individual behavior through the collective impact of each element. Dolamore and Richards propose seven domains that encompass organizational culture with the purpose of helping operationalize the concept and make assessment more realistic. The seven proposed domains are:

- Physical characteristics and general environment.
- Policies, procedures, and structures.
- Socialization.
- Leadership behavior.
- Rewards and recognition.
- Discourse.
- Learning and performance.

For DU in 2024, an understanding of how the plan outlined by the chancellor in 2020 has been implemented, and the perceptions of some of the actors who play a role in the implementation of the institutional response to sexual harassment is important

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<sup>6</sup> Dolamore, S. and Richards, T.N. (2020), Assessing the Organizational Culture of Higher Education Institutions in an Era of #MeToo. *Public Admin Rev*, 80: 1133-1137. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13179>

to help the DU community move forward towards more effectively preventing, addressing, and eradicating sexual harassment.

The purpose of this course-based research project is to identify where DU has made progress in its response to sexual harassment, identifying challenges and opportunities for improvement, with the hope that the results will support the DU community's efforts to prevent and address sexual harassment. The project was part of the ANTH 3750 Ethnographic Methods course (Winter 2024), and the sixteen students who took the class participated in the project's design, data collection, data analysis, and report writing. The project's design was exploratory, cross-sectional, and qualitative. We interviewed sixteen key informants who met the inclusion criteria of being students, staff, faculty, or administrators whose role at DU gives them first-hand insights into what DU is doing to prevent and/or address sexual harassment and assault on campus. We interviewed five individuals with staff or managerial roles at DU, and eleven students, including resident advisors/assistants, graduate teaching assistants, sorority/fraternity leaders, and students with roles in student government. We do not offer more details about student participants to keep their identities confidential. We conducted semi-structured interviews (see annex for the model interview guide that was adapted to match individual participants' roles), audio recorded and transcribed within one week. Audios were destroyed after transcription. No personal information was recorded, and audios and transcripts did not include any information with the potential of breaching anonymity. All interviews were conducted in February 2024. The project followed DU's Office of Research Integrity and Education's guidelines for course-related research.<sup>7</sup> The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

The main findings of our exploratory study coincide with the larger recommendations that have been made in the NASEM report and others<sup>8</sup> in the sense that universities need to address the campus climate and culture surrounding sexual harassment and assault, reporting procedures and the follow up process need to be sensible to the survivors and not overly focused on compliance, survivors need to be supported even if the situations they are reporting do not raise to the federal policy threshold, and universities need to develop transparency and accountability surrounding these issues.

Our findings also offer insights that are specific to DU, which I summarize here:

- The general perception is that the plan that the Chancellor outlined in response to the #WeCanDUBetter student campaign was not fully

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<sup>7</sup> University of Denver. Office of Research Integrity and Education. Course-related research.

<https://www.du.edu/orsp/research-compliance/human-subject-research/course-related-research>

<sup>8</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2018. *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*.

Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24994>; Dolamore, S. and Richards, T.N. (2020), Assessing the Organizational Culture of Higher Education Institutions in an Era of #MeToo. *Public Admin Rev*, 80: 1133-1137. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13179>

- implemented. Additionally, several students and staff expressed in different ways that they do not trust that the DU administration cares about these issues. Some participants said that there is a chronic lack of accountability and transparency from the DU administration.
- Regarding training, our findings suggest that specific Title IX and Equal Opportunity training has not been of consistent quality, and it may not be offering what frontline students and staff need to know how to act in response to specific incidents. Moreover, the survivors who have been part of the training expressed feeling like it was insensitive, unempathetic and dismissive of their experience.
  - There seems to be a need to educate the larger community in ways that help reshape the climate and culture that surrounds sexual harassment and assault.
  - Research participants who had used the reporting system said that it was hard to access and confusing, and once the report was submitted, there was not enough communication about what had happened with their report, which nurtures a perception of lack of transparency; some people who had reported in the past said that they would not report again because they felt like it was useless.
  - Another concern that was mentioned was that there is a high staff turnover, primarily due to low salaries, which impacts the consistency and quality of the training and reporting processes. Staff turnover increases the sense of lack of coordination and communication between different units or departments involved in the training and reporting processes.

These findings should be understood in the context of the exploratory nature of the study, and not as definitive findings that describe the current situation. However, the findings suggest some important avenues for the DU community to explore further or take action. We reiterate that our hope with this course-based exploratory research project is to contribute to the efforts that the DU community needs to continue making, so that sexual harassment and assault are prevented and addressed in meaningful ways that are sensible and empathetic towards survivors, and that cultivate a culture of accountability and transparency.

# Accountability and transparency

by Amanda Cali

## Accountability

The focus on accountability stems from DU and Title IX's insufficient efforts to hold perpetrators accountable for acts of gender-based violence and harassment, especially for incidents that fall outside of Title IX's legal definition of harassment. Students report to Title IX under the impression that their case will be taken seriously, their voice heard, and that their perpetrator will be held accountable and face repercussions, yet this has not been the case for many students at DU. Interviewee 10, a Resident Assistant (RA) at DU, details Title IX's failure to hold a perpetrator accountable:

“...last I heard from the person that has been open around me about being stalked there, the person that they actively brought to Title IX and everything like that...the person that actively stalked them still lives on campus and goes to classes. And nothing has changed in that and because there is like proof of this occurring and this person is open about it, it's horrifying to me that that person lives on campus, especially for them to live so close to the person that they stalked and harassed...but. I think that DU should be clear that harassment is not welcome on our campus and that being a student and following the Honor code is necessary to be a student on Du's campus. Because we all sign the Honor code, we all stress the Honor code and everything like that. But I don't think that people who have been proven to be harassers, and like doing these things that we have clearly made clear are not welcome on DU campus. Those students should not be welcome on DU campus. It is my firm opinion. But DU does not take that stance and I do think their punishments should be extremely severe on those students that are doing those things.”

As this excerpt demonstrates, although stalking and harassment are both serious issues, and fall under conduct prohibited by Title IX, there were no actions taken to intervene or prevent the student from being stalked and/or harassed from the Title IX office. Indicatively, their perpetrator was not held accountable, nor did they face any consequences or repercussions even though the victim went through the Title IX process and provided proof of the stalking and harassment. Not only does Interviewee 10 provide an incident where Title IX failed to hold a perpetrator accountable, Interviewee 10 asserts that DU has not made it explicitly clear that the University will not tolerate harassment and individuals proven to be perpetrators are

not welcome. The insufficient efforts of both DU and Title IX to adequately hold perpetrators accountable has an adverse effect on students, often discouraging students from reporting incidents to Title IX and/or the University. Interviewee 14, an employee of DU, shares their knowledge of DU and Title IX's insufficient efforts to hold perpetrators accountable:

“I know that those [Title IX criteria] exist for a reason. And I know that they [Title IX criteria] are another form of protection. But I know that students have felt uncomfortable in situations that don't fit their very, you know, prescribed notions of what would like document a sexual harassment case, which has left students feeling vulnerable, because there isn't a process for those cases. Yeah, there's an, and when it does sort of live in between something that's prosecutable and something that's totally okay. There's a huge gap. Yeah. That can leave students feeling really on their own. Yeah. And vulnerable. And they are. It's a justified feeling. And I don't think DU has a good response to that.”

This excerpt is an example of how DU fails to hold perpetrators accountable in situations that fall outside of Title IX's criteria of what constitutes a reportable incident. There is not a process in place for students whose cases, while serious, do not fit the Title IX criteria. Thus, their perpetrators escape accountability and do not receive consequences for their actions. Interviewee 7, an Ra, asserts “even if you do want to start an investigation, sometimes they [Title IX] tell us like nothing will even happen because there's like nothing they can do”, reiterating further that there is not a process in place for students whose cases do not fit Title IX criteria. This leaves students feeling vulnerable, alone, and helpless. Interviewee 5, a graduate student at DU who attended DU for their undergraduate degree, highlights the issue of accountability more broadly, asserting:

“And I can't speak for all students either, but from my input and other friends of mine who are also here at DU, it's really upsetting to know that this school is aware of the ongoing sexual harassment and assault happening to students from other students, but they just keep repeating the same overlining statements saying how they're going to change and fix it and improve, but honestly it's just bullshit because nothing happens from it. And I've been here for a while now as an undergrad and now as a graduate student, and there's been more and more students talking about it as well but still—it's like the school sends its hopes and prayers and then just does nothing else about it.”

Interviewee 5 highlights the University’s failure to hold perpetrators of sexual harassment accountable, as well as how the University continues to put out statements asserting that changes and improvements are in process, yet students indicate that there is a lack of noticeable change and improvement. It is important to note that this excerpt is from a student who attended DU for both their undergraduate and graduate degrees because it illustrates that the University has not implemented noticeable changes. Interviewee 5 continues:

“...lastly just actually DO something about it—no more blanket statements about how changes are happening but may take a while and then never give a time, no more “aww we support these voices but we can just review our policies on it and that’s all”, like—there should be a new hashtag floating again which is, “#DUSOMETHING” cause right now? Whoever those high-position people are on the board for stuff like this aren’t doing shit.”

Interviewee 5’s statement “no more blanket statements about how changes are happening but may take a while and then never give a time” indicates DU’s lack of transparency regarding the timeline of the changes. This excerpt is indicative of students’ justifiable frustration with DU and its repeated statements about doing better while not actually doing anything, hence the suggestion of a new hashtag, “#DUSOMETHING”, as opposed to the “#WECANDUBETTER” hashtag used in 2020, 2021, and 2022 to bring attention to DU’s shortcomings in their responses to gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. Transparency is an issue not just in regard to what the University is—or is not—doing to change and improve policies regarding these issues, transparency is also an issue regarding the Title IX reporting process as a whole.

## Transparency

The focus on transparency stems from, as mentioned previously, DU’s failure to be transparent about the timeline of changes and improvements in policies and procedures, as well as the lack of transparency from the Title IX office regarding the status of Title IX reports and the online reporting process as a whole. Multiple interviewees indicated that the Title IX reporting process is not straightforward and uses wording that makes students feel discouraged from submitting the report. Additionally, there is a lack of transparency about the issues going on on DU’s campus. Both Interviewee 5 and Interviewee 13 shared their frustrations with the Title IX reporting process. Interviewee 5 asserts:

“Yeah, and okay at first, I thought it was going to be a lot easier to make a report but it took me like 30-mins to navigate where to go on the website—the DU one for Title 9—and I was thinking if they made it hard on purpose or

something, and the report itself I was fucking confused writing it because I didn't know if I was like to include the name of the student who was doing it or the name of the student who was like—not involved but like also witnessing it, and honestly? It felt like I was writing a legal document or something and there was like questions afterwards asking if I was like 100% sure to make the report and stuff and that pissed me off.”

This excerpt is indicative of how the Title IX online reporting process is not fully transparent regarding what information to include in the report. Additionally, the Interviewee's statements “I thought it was going to be a lot easier to make a report”, “I was thinking they made it hard on purpose or something”, and “there was like questions afterwards asking if I was like 100% sure to make the report and stuff” highlight how the reporting process makes students second guess themselves and feel dissuaded from reporting a situation. The difficulties students encounter while creating the report itself are also clear. On top of the problematic reporting process, there is a lack of transparency regarding the status of Title IX reports, which Interviewee 13 discusses in their interview. Interviewee 13, a graduate student at DU, asserts:

“I definitely think that no matter how much information you give them or don't give them, they can have a more efficient process and be more communicable with you. Because they don't really communicate what's going on with your process, you have to be the one to reach out. Which is kind of horrible when you're in that situation because you don't want to keep reliving your experience.”

This excerpt provides evidence to support the notion that Title IX fails to be transparent about the Title IX process itself and the status of Title IX reports. The clear lack of communication between students who report to Title IX and the Title IX office itself is problematic. The lack of communication is an additional reason students hesitate to file Title IX reports. Interviewee 13 also illustrates that having to contact the office for an update on a report rather than the Title IX office itself making an effort to stay in close contact with the individual about their report leads to retraumatization. Interviewee 13 is one of several interviewees who indicated that the Title IX reporting process and the communication from Title IX needs improvement. Interviewee 13 asserts “It's easy to create more communication. It's sending an extra email. It's having an open form for communication.” An additional area where DU needs to improve its transparency is highlighted by Interviewee 12, who asserts:

“That is kind of DU's stance on the subject [gender-based violence, sexual assault, and sexual harassment] is like oh everything's great, everything's perfect, but they [DU] know it's not perfect, and they know it's affecting people. So just being transparent and um, like not hiding issues, and like putting out reports [reflecting the prevalence of these issues] and saying how like this is how we are doing better. That would help as well.”

This excerpt highlights DU's lack of transparency regarding both the issues that are prevalent on DU's campus as well as the ways in which the University is making an effort to “do better” and address issues of gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. It is important to note that Interviewee 12 also provides an example of how DU could improve its transparency. This excerpt also indicates DU's awareness of these issues and their impact on individuals, yet the University continues to push the narrative that these are not prevalent issues on DU's campus. Evidently, there is a disconnect between how DU is portraying the prevalence of these issues and what students are experiencing regarding these issues.

## Conclusion

Accountability and transparency are clearly two areas where both DU and Title IX have room for improvement. Interviewees expressed frustration over both DU and Title IX's lack of efficiency in holding perpetrators of gender-based violence, sexual assault, and sexual harassment accountable, even when individuals file reports with Title IX regarding incidents—such as stalking and harassment—that fall within Title IX criteria. Interviewees also indicated that DU does not know how to respond to situations that fall outside of Title IX's criteria as well as how problematic it is that there is not a process for individuals in situations that fall outside of Title IX criteria. Regarding transparency, interviewees indicated the need for increased transparency from Title IX about the Title IX reporting process as well as the status of Title IX reports. Students should not have to contact the Title IX office for updates regarding their case; Title IX should be regularly communicating with the student about the status of their report. In addition, interviewees indicated a lack of transparency from DU regarding the prevalence of gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault—despite the University's awareness of these ongoing issues—as well as how the University is “doing better” and the timeline of changes and improvements. Despite the University's continuous statements about improving and changing policies, interviewees indicate that there have not been any noticeable changes or improvements.



# “Better training”: Inconsistency in DU’s Training Process

by Briana Cox

## Introduction

“Better training,” or training that needs improvement or training that is missing qualities, for gender violence and sexual harassment and assault is a critique upon the University of Denver (DU) by students, staff, and faculty. The University’s plan in January 2020 commented on improvements to be made to departments and training in those departments but based off of the interviews taken in 2024 for Ethnographic Methods, those “improvements” seemed to have been made without little “ripple” in the training programs for departments and students. “Better training,” then, encompasses lacking in training, enforcement of training, recommendations and observations for training, and experience or examples of the training or process of training. I will be focusing on the main critiques (and the opposites – acceptance and happy with the process) surrounding the training programming implemented for gender violence and sexual harassment and assault and the quality of that programming for students, staff, and faculty. I will focus on the following commentary: memory and consistency, and possible ways to think about improving environment for training at DU through interviews, observations, and documents.

## Consistency Problems in Staff, Faculty, and Students Retention

A problem that is compounded often is consistency with memory. Consistency in this case refers to the continual or constant process in training, or in this case, lack of continual or constant training that then results in lack of memory retention. Though memory and inconsistency are highlighted here to point out the irregularity of training, the student body training versus that of student employees and faculty members training also seems to be irregularly balanced. This balance I point out showcases itself in different ways. A problem that two interviewees highlight with the training of staff, faculty, and students is due to something called turnover or retention. Turnover or retention indicates that the university’s population of students and employment of staff and faculty turning over due to the nature of campus. One interviewee commented on the staff retention and how that retention in turn effects training:

“I think you’re gonna hear this from everybody, but staff retention is a real issue across the university. And it has to do with a lot of issues ranging from career opportunities to pay to, like issues across there not being staff[ed] in

certain positions that make things harder and harder to do. And I think solving those problems would really help, like, know who to contact, know who you're supposed to reach out to. And then there's definitely cracks in the training program that have arisen because of that, because there's not anybody in specific roles. And like, that was sort of what you were saying, you're having a hard time reaching anybody in Title Nine. My first thought is, I don't know what sort of staff vacancies they have. The person that I went to give you their name doesn't work there anymore. And that happens pretty regularly across the university. So yeah, I would say like the gaps in coverage in different offices and things like that are a real weak point."

This interviewee points to retention as a part of the problem of consistency in training staff, faculty, and students at DU. A point that is also agreed upon by another interviewee, who states that you are "continually starting over" with staff that are in charge of disseminating that training for gender harassment and sexual harassment and assault, and also "starting over" with staff that have to do that training and receive that information. Just as the interview above pointed out, this retention causes a "crack" in the training program, meaning that it is possible that the training the staff and university administration implement may not have a thorough way of disseminating that information. It brings up the question of if the training made by DU has had any input from students here on campus? I especially ask this when I consider the inconsistent, meaning not regularly in place training, training for students that feel impersonal and rather like compliance.

## Consistency Problems in Staff, Faculty, and Students Training Received

However, consistency is not just staff retention and student retention, but is also in the problematic nature of the consistency of the training at DU. The training required at DU for incoming students is administered on their [the students'] first week of their freshman year. The training is done through a Canvas course. The course itself is brief. A similar comment by one interviewee concurs with me: "Since the freshman year training, I haven't received anything or heard of any other training things." Another interviewee mentions that the only thing they know about when it comes to training and Title 9 was due to the "quick training that happened during, I think, student orientation."

A residential assistant (RA) at DU mentioned that until they became RAs, they had not been exposed to or adequately told about university resources, such as CAPE and Title IX. The training received by RAs versus teaching assistants (TA) and students is thorough in quantity and quality. However, training received by RAs still needs to be improved. TAs and students are only required to do an online course once, and RAs are given training routinely in summers and sometimes winters. Even though I use the word "continual," the training offered to students and TAs, and RAs

throughout our interviews mention in-person training (though there is advocacy for more) with a Title IX officer. When I state inconsistency, I comment on the uneven amount of information given across the board when training students, faculty, and staff. TAs and students are not required to do more training than a single course, causing TAs and students to learn any information responsibly. This lack of routine training causes you to forget the information you learned over a year or even months ago due to not revisiting it.

## Better Ways to Consistency in Training: In-person and Routine Training

Improvements to consistency in DU's training for staff, faculty, and students can be broken down into routine and in-person training. This breakdown offers simple yet beneficial approaches to the training process for gender harassment and sexual assault and harassment. In-person training would be routine for a group of some size, ideally trained by a Title 9 worker, a CAPE worker, and a Thrive member. Other than a Title 9 worker, the reasoning for a CAPE individual is due to its use as a resource after someone has experienced harm. One interviewee commented that CAPE "is amazing, but it's the resource for after you've experienced harm. Which is obviously really important, because it can have a huge detrimental impact on your college experience, and your trajectory in life. It's amazing, but they obviously don't do prevention work."

By adding a CAPE worker, we are already introducing another resource that aids and converses about prevention by talking to someone who aids survivors with their trauma directly after their experience. By talking to someone from Thrive, an organization from the Health and Counseling Center (HCC) at the DU that promotes health and well-being, you are speaking with a staff member who focuses on the well-being and safety of others through educational programming for health, outreach, for sexual health, mental health, alcohol and other drug education, and interpersonal violence prevention (HCC 2024). This resource can be a part of prevention and a place to go after an incident. Thrive, brought up by an interviewee:

"But Intervene, yeah, it's still a required online course for first-year students. For like bystander intervention training, yeah they do still do. I don't know exactly what it is, but they do something in week 1 -- we did some sort of presentation or something, and I don't know if that looks differently now that it's not COVID. But then they have to do the Intervene 2.0 in the winter or spring. It's that second part of it, but what we've really been pushing for, like as part of that education... Because it's bystander intervention training, there's not a ton of nuance, like in-depth conversation about consent and interpersonal violence. And we have really been trying to get that expanded in

that curriculum. And Thrive is creating a bunch of education for it, but as far as getting it actually into like O-week and freshman curriculum, they're kind of running into some walls with that, just because there is limited time for freshmen."

By having a person from CAPE, Title IX, and Thrive, we are addressing gender harassment and violence, including sexual assault and sexual harassment, by training with individuals who should be proactively working to prevent, aid in the duration, and support and uplift after the incident. We are taking an educational and student-based approach with the addition of Thrive, we are taking a supportive and empathetic approach with the addition of CAPE, and we are including the office that reporting for incidents has to go through with Title IX. The hope is that by including all three of these figures, we are putting the survivor at the front of our training and placing importance on the resources, the information, and the survivor. I believe that by including these three individuals in routine, in-person training, we are showing students, student employees, staff, and faculty that training is supposed to be vital, making training necessary for routine.

## Conclusion

This paper discusses the relationship between consistency and training for gender harassment and sexual harassment and assault through the context of interviewees' need for improved training. The need to "tweak" the training by the additional individuals (as I have above) by making training more routine and consistent and by focusing on students and survivors is a way that we can move forward in a more thorough and understanding approach.

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# Sensitivity with conversations, training, and reporting

by Camille Cruz

## Introduction

When it comes to emotionally heavy topics like sexual assault, harassment, and gender-based violence, sensitivity towards the survivors and the problem are vital to supporting survivors and emphasizing the severity of the subject. In interviewing several members of the DU community, it became apparent that the degree of sensitivity reflected in actions of DU is a major issue when it comes to the support of survivors and the recognition of sexual assault, harassment, and gender-based violence as a presence on and off of campus. These actions include the stigma of talking about these problems and survivors voicing their concerns, the amount of care that the Title IX office takes with reporting survivors, and the emphasis of these issues in training of students, student employees, and faculty.

## Sensitivity with Conversations

The first aspect of sensitivity that I will be discussing is the presence of sensitivity in conversations between members of the DU community. Through many interviews with Resident Assistants (RAs) who explained their position as a ‘mandatory reporter,’ it became clear that having meaningful conversations with students is necessary to creating a safer, welcoming community that fosters support. However, with limited training and the increasing stigma of talking about sexual assault and gender-based violence, those conversations are more difficult to have, especially with people in leadership positions. As one of the participants explained, “They’re more likely to bring it up between friends about that.” Many other students echoed similar sentiments in the importance of approaching conversations concerning sexual assault and gender-based violence with sensitivity and empathy, but they also noted that they didn’t think they had proficient education or training to have such conversations.

A main point that I noticed when reading through the interviews was the hope for open discussions and the consensus that there are many ‘judgment-free’ people and areas for survivors to go to. According to another participant: “I try my best as a student employee to make it clear that I am there to support them and provide them with resources and that it's like a no judgment experience when they do talk to me and everything like that.” However, the amount of comfort that people have with talking to others about experiences with sexual assault and gender-based violence

is a major issue, as gleaned from the interviews, and affects the way in which the overall sensitivity that the campus population has towards sexual assault and gender-based violence. When there is limited support for survivors of sexual assault and gender-based violence, it became clear that people were less inclined to talk about their experiences, especially with people in leadership or power positions. And these leaders, particularly students, expressed frustration in not having the necessary training and resources to best support their peers.

### Sensitivity with Training

Therefore, not only is the application of sensitivity in conversations important but also the preparation for how to approach these conversations. As I mentioned before, student employees in particular did not feel adequately prepared to talk about sexual assault and gender-based violence with other students in an appropriate way. One participant expressed, “They really didn’t talk a ton about, like, informing us of the emotional states (of survivors) or informing us on those topics that like, might be more important for us to know as people who may have residents who were responsible for or have gone through this stuff.” It became clear that the focus of training for students was more on the policies surrounding Title IX on a larger community level rather than individual support. It’s this individual connection that participants expressed a lack of, such as with the disinclination for conversations to be had or support to be sought from leaders and people in power.

Additionally, a further disconnect between people in leadership positions and the community they serve was actually listening to survivors’ voices. One participant explained, “But, you know, I think it’s important for people to understand how those experiences affect people. To understand not just the numbers, but also just like, the qualitative aspects of going through those kinds of experiences. I think for RAs, maybe hearing from people who have seen or witnessed how these things affect people might be good to hear about so that we understand how important it is...” The lack of survivors’ voices and consideration to their experiences reflected a lack in the extent to which sexual assault and gender-based violence are understood in a more serious context, since they are extremely traumatic experiences which should be approached with the utmost support, sensitivity, and empathy. Therefore, it was found that the current training for faculty and students requires a more empathetic and emotionally informed approach to not only the policies and procedures but also how such trauma impacts people.

### Sensitivity with Reporting

The third aspect of sensitivity involves the processes of reporting sexual assault, harassment, and gender-based violence to the Title IX office. I found that several of the statements regarding the absence of sensitivity throughout the reporting process had to do with the way in which students felt while going through the process. It

wasn't only an issue of accessibility but also the need for consideration to how the process is mentally and emotionally difficult for the people who are reporting, and they shouldn't have to needlessly relive their trauma because the Title IX office had pre-existing parameters to follow through the reporting phase. One participant noted, "It was just like—super annoying, like I'm trying to fill out a report about gross sexual comments that a student was making in class and here is this report making me feel like I was unsure if I wanted to send it through or not..." A common phrase used in multiple interviews was 'burden' in the context of the exhaustive reporting process that constantly made reporters question whether they should, or could, report their experiences.

Another participant explained along similar lines, "It made it- it makes you jump through a lot of hoops to report. Um, you have to know, you don't have to, but they want, they ask you for your ID number, your perpetrator's ID number, and things that, like, I wouldn't know. And so, it makes it feel really disheartening when you're like filling that report out and explaining yourself when you shouldn't need to explain yourself." It is with requirements like this that disregards people's trauma and the importance of sensitivity and discretion, with taking the people's trauma into account. In relation to the previous issue of sensitivity training, participants of the interviews explained that the student, or whoever is reporting, shouldn't have the brunt of the responsibility put onto them, to the point where they become hesitant to go through the reporting process, or even to report in the first place.

## Conclusion

Overall, the University of Denver has exhibited a deficiency in sensitivity and empathy when approaching conversations, training, and reporting sexual assault and gender-based violence, from a student, faculty, and institutional standpoint. Without sensitivity, the larger implications of sexual assault and gender-based violence go unheard, particularly from the perspectives of survivors, which undermines the prevalence of the issues on and off campus. When the institution doesn't take the issues seriously, the interviews showed that students didn't feel comfortable with voicing their concerns and experiences to RAs and staff in the Title IX office. This related, then, to the absence of sensitivity in trainings provided to student employees and faculty when they did have conversations with others about sexual assault and gender-based violence. Ultimately, students shouldn't feel like they're not being taken seriously and that their experiences aren't validated. An initial step that DU could take to assure students of DU's supportive position is to demonstrate increased sensitivity to the severity of the issues and sensitivity towards the traumatic experiences of survivors.

# Support for Survivors of Uninvestigated Assaults

by Camryn Evans

## Existing University Resources and How They Fall Short

As survivors of sexual assault navigate and cope with experiences that are often life-altering and traumatic, it is necessary that resources such as specialized, interpersonal support are made available to these survivors to utilize if and whenever they need. While the Office of Equal Opportunity & Title IX is responsible for handling the objective, investigative side of sexual assault matters at the University of Denver, there are other established entities that are supposedly responsible for providing the aforementioned intrapersonal support. Some of these entities include Student Outreach and Support as well as the Health and Counseling Center as recognized by various communities' members of the DU community such as the Resident Assistant who shares the following:

“But we're supposed to fill them out if they have any issues with substances, if they have sexual assault, like any of those things come up in conversation, we are supposed to report that up. And so, we do fill out like what the resident has said to us. And then student outreach and support reaches out to them, and they're not obligated to respond. It is completely voluntary, but student outreach and support will keep reaching out until, like they get a response, or until a certain amount of time has passed because they do want a response from the student to find out that they are. Mentally well and doing. I don't want to say well but doing alright and everything.”

While Student Outreach and Support and the Health and Counseling Center are two of the most relevant entities responsible for providing the kind of necessary, intrapersonal support mentioned previously, it is clear that the support these entities offer is broadly applicable — general procedures that serve to address an entire community of sexual assault survivors without also including any specialized support for the unique individuals whose assaults go unreported or whose reports do not meet the criteria for Title IX investigation. This issue is detailed in the following excerpt from a DU graduate student:

“It's really upsetting to know that this school is aware of the ongoing sexual harassment and assault happening to students from other students, but they



just keep repeating the same overlining statements saying how they're going to change and fix it and improve, but honestly it's just bullshit because nothing happens from it. And I've been here for a while now as an undergrad and now as a graduate student, and there's been more and more students talking about it as well but still—it's like the school sends its hopes and prayers and then just does nothing else about it... [imitating the University] "Oh, we acknowledge that it's happening, and it's so awful! Good luck though."

It can be drawn from the above excerpts that while DU comprises certain entities that are designed to address sexual assault and its aftermath, such as the Title IX office, Student Outreach and Support, and the Health and Counseling Center, it is clear that some individuals still go unhelped in the wake of their sexual assault. Without resources specialized for these individuals, the University risks negatively impacting the wellbeing of its community.

### How the University's Shortcoming Impacts the Community

A lack of specialized resources for those who do not report or whose reports are dismissed can foster feelings of neglect and isolation within the DU community. This phenomenon is detailed in the following excerpt from a DU staff person:

"I know of students who've been involved in conversations with Title IX that haven't gone anywhere. I haven't been involved in them. I haven't, but just from, I'm close with students. I know, I know, the students. And I know, some of those conversations been frustrating. And I know it's very difficult to meet the standards of what Title Nine says is enough. And I know that those exist for a reason. And I know that they are another form of protection. But I know that students have felt uncomfortable in situations that don't fit their very, you know, prescribed notions of what would like document a sexual harassment case, which has left students feeling vulnerable, because there isn't a process for those cases. Yeah, there's an... and when it does sort of live in between something that's prosecutable and something that's totally okay. There's a huge gap. Yeah. That can leave students feeling really on their own. Yeah. And vulnerable. And they are. It's a justified feeling. And I don't think DU has a good response to that."

As recognized above, the phenomenon of feeling alone and vulnerable is oftentimes a reality for survivors who do not report or whose reports are dismissed. Evidently, these individuals might navigate and cope with their experiences differently than those whose reports are investigated by the University and potentially followed through on. As such, I believe it is crucial that resources designed specifically to address the unique experience of survivors with uninvestigated assaults are made readily available to the DU community.

It has been recognized by community members such as those referenced above that the University lacks this proper response to the loneliness and vulnerability of survivors with uninvestigated assaults, and some community members take on this supportive advocacy where they believe entities like Student Outreach and Support and the Health and Counseling Center have fallen short. These proactive individuals include University-employed Resident Assistants such as the following individual who describes their role in the aftermath of sexual assault incidents:

“Well, there's the personal element, right, that you could do as a resident assistant. I mean, it's our job and our pleasure to be a confidant, to be a friend, to be, another pillar in the university support system for all students available, so if it [the survivor's report] doesn't meet any of those type of requirements, we'll continue referring them to counseling and whatever it may be... .”

Individuals like these are aware that the University often drops the ball on providing sufficient resources for reporting and nonreporting sexual assault survivors alike, and they attempt to rectify this shortcoming themselves despite not receiving compensation for the time and effort spent on this endeavor which ultimately does not exist in their job description.

## Possible Reasons for the University's Shortcoming and How They Can Be Addressed

It is important to recognize that the lack of University support for those who do not report or whose reports are dismissed may in part be due to the University's recognized incapacity to take on more than what is already on its plate; the Office of Equal Opportunity & Title IX and its coordinating entities may not be equipped to extend specialized resources to those with uninvestigated reports as they are already handling the weighty task of addressing the reports that do qualify for investigation and providing support for those individuals. This sentiment is reflected by the following staff person from DU's Department of Student Affairs and Inclusive Excellence:

“...I know that folks in Title IX and CAPE and in other places are just at full capacity right now, just with like the amount of reports that we get. So, it's not only trying to respond to harm that's been done and conduct all those investigations and things like that, but then also like the prevention side of things. And having the capacity to do all of those....”

This same individual recognizes not only that the Office of Equal Opportunity & Title IX is at capacity in terms of its workload, but also that the changing nature of Title IX's

legal requirements is difficult to acclimate to and can often disrupt all facets of a given community.

“...[w]e’ve gotten so many different directions from the Department of Education as to how we need to enact this thing. And anytime you change policy around Title IX, it impacts students, it impacts faculty, it impacts staff, it impacts legal, it impacts everyone because you then have to adjust how you do trainings and things like that.”

Ultimately, it is up to the Office of Equal Opportunity & Title IX to handle reports of sexual assault at DU, but because this entity is often at full investigative capacity as well as constantly acclimating to the adjusted Title IX criteria that it receives with each new presidential administration, it struggles respectively to designate time and resources for addressing unqualifying assaults as well as develop consistent procedures and trainings. This of course not only affects the productivity of the Title IX office, but the wellbeing of the DU community’s sexual assault survivors who are trying to navigate the often-convoluted structure of Title IX. It is important that DU understands not only the objective Title IX criteria and its attendant procedures, but also the effect that these criteria and procedures have upon the community. How will it impact sexual assault survivors when they learn that their assault is not considered severe enough to be taken seriously? How can the University of Denver better support these individuals in a way that is specific to their unique experience of dismissal and loneliness?

# Burnt out and burdened: The story of responsibility on students regarding sexual assault and harassment

by Cyndal Groskopf

*The future belongs to those who give the next generation reason to hope.*

- *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

Students are the forces by which change occurs on the University campus. Voices of the new generations will always highlight the values and social norms that make up the culture of those individuals who will become leaders. The University of Denver is no exception to this rule. The awareness of topics such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, and gender discrimination have made their way into the broader strokes of daily life for students across the United States. Many universities now have student lead organizations to recognize not only these issues, but the ways in which universities are handling them on an administrative level. At the University of Denver, student lead organizations are gaining momentum in their efforts to raise awareness and voices of individuals who have experienced different levels of trauma from sexual harassment and assault, and gender discrimination.

However, does this reliance on student initiative on these issues create a subsequent hardship for the students involved? Are the responsibilities of student voices to create solutions and raise awareness asking for more bandwidth than the average student is capable of? The Ethnography Methods class at the University of Denver interviewed 16 people across campus to understand their role and knowledge surrounding issues of sexual assault and harassment at the University of Denver level. Many of these individuals were students in positions of power, such as resident advisors (RA's) or part of Greek life. Others were members of DU's faculty and administration. From the interviews that were gathered, a large number of people mentioned the reliance on students when it comes down to solutions for these issues, sparking my question of if we are asking too much from the students when it comes to the responsibility to handle campus wide issues of sexual harassment and assault.

## Students' ability to make change

Yes, there is no denying that students have such a large capacity to make changes at their local university level. The presence of this can be seen for decades, spanning back to large scale protests and gatherings about dozens of issues throughout history. Today, arguably students have even more reach with social media; they are able to communicate with other students, universities, and even political figures with their concerns.

The regularity with which social media has been used to promote the values and concerns of students today has in turn created a reliance on such methods to fully understand the issues that the student body identifies. Make no mistake, there of course is an expectation to voice these concerns when someone sees an issue, but the overall question here is why is the extreme methods of identifying and addressing these issues the student's responsibility at a university level?

University of Denver students put together an Instagram page in 2019 titled "We can DU better", which anonymously gave an outlet to those who have suffered from sexual harassment and assault on campus. This site called out the administration of DU to recognize that students were suffering from these issues and to make changes at a larger level. From this, DU was able to assign more training, do more academic research into these concepts, and to accept, overall, that this is a prominent issue with students and campus life.

## The stress and implications of relying on students to make the change

The start of these changes will, of course, be with the student body and those that are directly involved. However, throughout our interviews, it seems that there is a larger reliance on students to take part in solutions than might be reasonably expected. Especially in terms of RA's or those in Greek life; these are essentially students monitoring or training other students, which can be a double-edged sword when we are talking about significant issues such as sexual harassment and assault. Many of those interviewed even addressed the concept of adequate abilities of those that are placed in these positions of power. One RA stated "I'm not prepared, I'm not trained for that, I'm not adequately compensated for any of that. I have no experience, no knowledge, no expertise, and few RAs do. I don't... I'm not a student of psychology or social work or anything like that. That's why we do have the appropriate resources and, and our job is to report and refer to get people the professional help that the University can offer and the professional remedies. Like, sure you could train RAs to an extent, but I mean, you know, it's going to meet a point where it doesn't matter how many weeks of training we go through, we're not going to be as good as the professional resources and the people that actually receive salary

to deal with this kind of thing”. This addresses the major point in which I am referring to; students want to help, they want to address problems so that others may not have to go through the same trauma, however, these are still only students barely into adulthood and are not professionals who would know better how to treat the concepts of trauma or address solutions for which to handle the overall issue.

Another student commented “I want to strategically try to be a good partner to other folks, knowing that their bandwidth and their capacity might be full, and if I try to ask them for one more thing like that, just like on top of their already full-time responsibilities, that presents a challenge. So, I think everyone recognizes that this work is important, it's just trying to figure out the “how”. And in strategic partnerships and collaborations and things like that without trying to be so taxing on people.” Again, we are not just relying on young untrained students to provide aid to traumatized people, we are ignoring the aspect that these are still students who have their own studies, work, and personal lives to cope with.

I am not arguing that students should not be part of the solution, by all means, they already are taking those steps and initiating solutions on their own end. Additionally, this is not a statement of disregard for the process by which claims are made; those who are victims are of course the ones who must initiate the claim and seek help for themselves. The point to be made here is in considering what initiatives universities are taking now that the awareness of the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault have been made and doing so without adding stress on to already overworked student body.

## **Solution: More initiative on university administration**

While doing research, I was able to find a study done by The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) in Australia that mentioned their university implementing a 10-point plan on addressing sexual assault and sexual harassment (Elton et. al, 2019). Just like with the University of Denver, the students at this university acknowledged that there was a significant problem with understanding sexual assault and harassment, and that they wanted the university at an administrative level to take notice, support victim, and initiate solutions. One of the steps of this plan for UTS was to look to ‘senior working groups’ to develop and implement changes. Should DU follow this example, and potentially add to the curriculum ways to better address these changes? If students feel that this is already part of their life as students, the pressure to take action outside of class schedules might be lessened. Working within the classroom dynamic might also allow for a more diverse range of ideas to be put forth. The next step with that idea, however, would be the ways in which DU could reasonably adopt concepts that students want to see in their university.

Furthermore, in the Elton et. al research, they analyzed the notion that talking about these issues openly and honestly allowed for the taboo of recognizing sexual harassment and assault to be reduced. Right now, DU students still see these issues as private and individualistic, and of course the details should always remain up to the victim to disclose, but recognition that this happens to a large scale of people will make those effected feel less isolated and more likely to come forward.

Students have put forth their part of the solution, they have started their own organizations, they have addressed the issue on a student-to-student level, and they have voiced their longing to be recognized at an administrative university level. It is time for The University of Denver, among many others throughout the United States, to initiate plans of action to give back to their students. If these plans are being initiated, then open and honest communication with the student body will also go a long way in reassuring students that they are being listened to and acknowledged. Recognition of the limited bandwidth of those students who are in positions of power, and the subsequent mental toll it takes on them to be the reporting party might encourage others to take up the positions, if given the opportunity. Students are not ignorant; they do not expect solutions to take place overnight. Many only want a baseline acknowledgement of their struggles and open communication that solutions are being considered.

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# Distrust in DU: A campus-wide experience

by Ashley Joplin

## Introduction

While analyzing the interviews, several key themes have developed regarding the University of Denver. One such theme is distrust in the University of Denver. This theme appears on several different levels, including institutional & administrative distrust, and general animosity towards the University of Denver and the Title IX Office. As this distrust exists on several different levels, it will be analyzed in each of these as individual units for a more holistic analysis of these sentiments.

## Institutional distrust and general animosity

Compiling the information from the interviews, there is a clear theme of institutional distrust and general animosity towards the University of Denver, at the whole institutional level. This theme ranges from University students to staff alike, often being framed as a critique of the University. As many of the interviews discussed or touched on feelings of distrust in DU, it is important to note the number of interviews in which the feeling of distrust resonates. First, as stated by a DU employee based on their own experiences, “So I think as a higher education structure, there’s a lot of work to do to make things more equitable in terms of policy, procedures, and just kind of how the university is set up.”

This interview excerpt demonstrates the different ways in which the University of Denver is not alone in its need to change its response to sexual assault and harassment or its distrust from students and staff. This excerpt critiques the University of Denver while also highlighting that these issues are not unique to this institution. However, the prevalence of these issues does not preclude the University of Denver from being responsible for addressing them, which is a key point made by the interviewee. Thus, illustrating how the university is simply another statistic among college campuses but is also unique in its own campus climate and issues surrounding sexual assault and sexual harassment. Therefore, this excerpt disseminates feelings of animosity towards the University of Denver in its struggles to address issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Next, as commented by a DU student, “Well, to put it short, I think this campus is shit when it comes to reporting any type of discrimination—not just sexual harassment



but ALSO racism which shouldn't surprise me because this school is a PWI (predominately White institution) but still—I think DU provides really nice blanket statements regarding discrimination but nothing actually happens to fix anything. It's just like the school is saying, 'Oh, we acknowledge that it's happening, and it's so awful! Good luck though' with every statement they've released on sexual harassment, but I think most students don't really take those seriously because we KNOW nothing is going to actually come from it."

This interview excerpt demonstrates generalized feelings of animosity toward the university (and an overall distrust of the institution) by providing a critique of the University of Denver on several different topics while keeping the critique at the institutional level. The excerpt highlights how the University of Denver comes off as distrustful in regard to sexual harassment and racism, critiquing their response to these incidents. Examining the institution on this level by providing a generalized critique allows the interviewee to express sentiments and understandings of the University of Denver, keying into the climate of the campus and the experiences of everyday students.

Then, as mentioned by a DU faculty member, "So yeah, I would say like the gaps in coverage in different offices and things like that are a real weak point. And it does sort of leave you [the student] having to figure stuff out."

By critiquing the University based on its inherent weaknesses in addressing sexual assault and sexual harassment, this excerpt demonstrates feelings of distrust toward the University of Denver by providing clear faults within the processes of the institution itself. While noting the issues within the University of Denver, the interviewee keeps the response vague and generalized at the institutional level, not denoting one office or staff member as having more culpability than another. This echoes similar sentiments of distrust in the University of Denver, noting that there is a general institutional issue, but oftentimes, respondents were hesitant to identify and/or explicitly say what is causing these issues at this level and which processes could be amended to alleviate these issues.

### **Distrust in administration**

Next, there is a clear theme of distrust directed specifically at the University of Denver's administration. This includes figureheads such as the Chancellor but also extends to the administration in its entirety. First, referencing a statement from a DU student concerning their own experience with the University's administration, "I haven't really seen any like DU staff or like the administration entirely do anything to kind of combat it [sexual assault and sexual harassment]. I've seen them put out like

statements of like ‘we do not condone this,’ but never the actions to actually put their thoughts in their minds, their money.”

This interview excerpt demonstrates specific distrust toward the University of Denver’s administration concerning their response to sexual assault and sexual harassment. The excerpt is direct in its critique of the University of Denver; It draws on experiences relating to the on-campus instances of sexual assault and harassment. Specifically, this excerpt keys into distrust toward the University of Denver’s administration in terms of their statements (and reliance on these statements) as an adequate response to these issues. This highlights a distrust in the credibility and validity of the word of the administration of the University of Denver. Next, as stated by a DU student, “Yeah, because, like as much as I know, I don’t trust the administrator... But like, I don’t know, DU, and it’s like publicity of certain things within their department, especially with DSP has been very lackluster and has lied in the past.”

This interview excerpt explicitly states a distrust toward the administration. This quote draws beyond the administration and into the office of the administrator. Reflected in this statement is the inherent sentiment of underperformance and dishonesty about the program's work. Sadly, these issues are either not significant enough for the overall University leadership to recognize and address them, or perhaps even worse, are not even noticed as happening.

### **Distrust in the Title IX office**

Finally, there is a theme of distrust in the Title IX Office and the Office of Equal Opportunity. This theme presents itself primarily within populations who have had direct contact or experience with these offices instead of with the larger student and employee population, as seen in the distrust in the institution, the University of Denver. First, as stated by a DU student in reference to their own experience, “I think they [Title IX] could do better. I don’t really know what they could do besides training since they’re not. I don’t think they’re as hands-on with students.”

Here, the excerpt directly shows distrust in the Title IX office because the actions of the office are perfunctory at best and, most likely, are simply ‘going through the motions’. While the student provides a potential lifeline by stating that the most the office could do is training, this illustrates how far this office has fallen. Through their ineffectiveness, they have bred complacency in their student body, which realizes that despite the thousands of dollars spent and invested in education, the Title IX office cannot even hold itself accountable enough to be better.

As stated by a DU student in reference to their own experience with Title IX, “It wasn’t efficient [the Title IX Office]. It wasn’t positive in any way. Um, it wasn’t good from the standpoint that it’s like fitting their definitions of sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual insert-whatever-here. It’s basically their definition of it. If it doesn’t fit their definition of it, then it’s a no-go.”

This interview illustrates the direct distrust in the Title IX office based on the student’s experience. The student, in perhaps their most vulnerable state, is attempting to find an advocate in the University to support them. However, the Title IX office, they have chosen to limit its work to such a narrow definition of sexual harassment that it almost virtually guarantees that they will not need to do anything. Yet for the student who needs this resource, the lack of respite is overwhelming and tells them that you, the student, do not matter. This creates a line of distrust between the Title IX Office and the student body.

## Conclusion

Evaluating the entirety of these interviews and the emergence of the theme of distrust in the University of Denver, it is clear that the level of distrust is rampant throughout various levels of the University of Denver. Interestingly, most of the interview comments echoed a tone of resignation that illustrated no matter how dire the call to action is from students and staff, the culture of passive listening and engaging in solving the real and apparent issues facing this school is deeply rooted and unlikely to change anytime soon. It appears that the closer a staff member or student is to incidents of sexual harassment and/or sexual assault on campus the more likely they are to be distrustful of the University on any of the three levels of distrust identified.

For the individuals interviewed for this project, this message is yet another example of the distrust that exists.

# Bureaucratic process of reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault

by Clayton Kempf

## Introduction

One of the primary concerns and critiques that was unveiled from the interviews was the bureaucratic process of reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault. This ties into the policy that the university has towards addressing these issues. The majority of interviewees have expressed having or hearing of negative opinions towards the process of reporting and how the campus has handled the cases. This section will focus on Title IX and Campus Security procedures along with attitudes towards these procedures and offices.

## Title IX

The Title IX process begins when a student or faculty initiates a report via an online form or an in person “intake” meeting. This online form can be found on the DU Equal Opportunity and Title IX website under “Report Incident” You are taken to a page where you fill out your information, information of the perpetrator, information about the incident, and if you are reporting for someone or yourself. The reporter or survivor then has to wait for a response from the Title IX office on if they will take the case or not. If what described doesn’t fit under the Title IX sexual harassment or sexual assault definition, then the office will not take the case and the process through the university is ended. If the report is accepted, then an investigation will be opened into the incident and perpetrator. Title IX is the sole office on campus that deals with sexual harassment and assault. Whenever a report is made, an incident occurs, or a mandated reporter (all employees) is told of an incident, all of these cases get filed to the Title IX office.

## Campus Safety

The Campus Safety department will frequently get reports of sexual harassment and assault. The Campus Safety department holds a limited role in addressing the Sexual Harassment/Assault cases. The reports will all go to Title IX, but they are the people who handle any necessary urgent danger situations and medical needs.

“How it often works, although not always, is that this crime was initially reported on campus safety, and we respond and handle the initial response when that person needs some sort of medical attention. They may want law enforcement to be involved. Or they just want us to write a report and leave it

at that. Or maybe they want something like a no contact order. Or a room change, or something sort of like that. We would handle that initially and then we report our report to Title IX and let them take it from there because they have an applied process they have to follow for those crimes and that's kind of beyond campus safety's, you know, ability because the Title IX procedure."

They will conduct the intake process of acquiring the information about the reporter, the perpetrator, the incident and if the reporter is reporting for someone else or not. Once this intake information is collected then it gets turned over to the Title IX office for the rest of the process. The reporter will be informed that the information will be turned over to the Title IX office and a resource packet will be provided. The campus safety department will collect statistics on the amount of these reports. The statistics are delivered to the Campus Safety department on the number of reports filed and investigations carried out. The statistics are collected as part of the 'Clery Act' which allows college campuses to receive extra funding for reporting crime statistics. Crime statistics are publicly available from campus safety.

Campus Safety gets a lot of these reports showing that many people don't know how to reach out to the Title IX office for their reports. More information and training on the offices and the report process can help to destigmatize them while making people feel more comfortable if they ever have to use them. Reports going to the Campus Safety department adds another layer of information being filtered through an office that won't be the one to produce any results or consequences towards the perpetrator. Though the reporter is informed of the report being sent to Title IX there is no indication that the Title IX office reaches out with further information of their own.

## Sorority and Fraternity Disparities in Sexual Harassment/Assault Procedure

The Sorority and Fraternity life has an additional process to Title IX's. If sexual harassment or a sexual assault were to happen at one of their events or at the sorority/fraternity the case is brought before their judicial board of the Greek ruling body. If it is deemed that a sexual assault or harassment occurred that person is getting removed from Greek life.

"The administrative side of DU doesn't really like sorority and fraternity life. So, they tried to shy away from us in the public eye, purely because they represent an old standard for universities. Not defunding, but pretty darn close and their lack of support for our administrative side of everything has really shut off sororities and fraternities from the rest of the DU community. But I would definitely say that our ability to cross like our borders and talk to

each other and have constructive meetings with not only like our head members, but also...So like some something beyond just a straight administrative to administrative relationship, I think is really lacking especially in that basis of understanding and what we can help and add to sexual assault awareness within fraternity and sorority life.”

The university has a strained relationship with Greek life, keeping distance between the affairs that occur within. This leaves strained connections and difficulty accessing resources from the university. Within Greek life there is no mandatory sexual harassment or sexual assault prevention training. It is left up to the organizations themselves to find and provide those resources. These resources can be challenging to find and address as the leaders of Greek life organizations are also students in the university. The following is an excerpt from an interview:

Interviewer: Okay. Is there anything official through DU that DU makes fraternities do when it comes to trainings for this issue?

Respondent: \*shakes their head no\*

Interviewer: No?

Respondent: \*gestures no again\*

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I can bring that up if you want like (Omitted) so I can like bring that up at our next meeting.

Interviewer: I mean that that... That is up to you. I'm not trying to push policy or anything with this interview.

Respondent: That is a good idea and I just... You just made me realize that we don't actually do anything in my 2 years. Nothing from the school. Okay, yeah.

Fraternities are not required by the school to conduct any form of sexual harassment/assault training or awareness. In the case of this interview the fraternity member knows that there hasn't been any training in at least two years. During this time plenty of new fraternity members would have joined the organization and proceeded without any formal training focused on the Greek life community.

“I have a lot of younger members of my sorority that I'm connected to like through like the family within the sorority life and so, like, I always kind of warn them, and I'm like, “hey, if you're going out, I'm a call away” or like, if they're saying, like, “I'm going to this party” like, I just say “watch a drink” or something like that... I think we try to do our best. To kind of keep it in the open

(Sexual harassment/assault conversations), but the way our systems are structured and the way our administration, our nationals kind of goes about it, it can be kind of like closeting on those issues. But we do try especially because we are in a very liberal university to have a lot of understanding that if you need help or get help. Well, I aid you in what you need and if you do not want aid, that's OK. Like we're trying to be very open with understanding and supporting everyone, but also it can be very difficult to bring up a subject like that. They're more likely to bring it up between friends about that.”

Sororities often try to keep these conversations open and remind each other to watch out for any suspicious activity. Younger members who are likely still new to college won't have the experience of having to watch out for suspicious activities and it can be difficult to discuss these topics with people. Training provided by the university and higher Greek life organizations surrounding these topics can help prepare new students. However, the Greek life organizations stay closed off towards these issues while the universities keep a distance from Greek life organizations.

## University Staff

University staff have expressed a lack of regular and updated trainings regarding sexual harassment and assault.

“I would have to go back to the beginning of my employment and look at it. I'm sure there was like a PowerPoint training that I had to do... I probably had some trainings. But the fact that I don't really remember them is probably indicative that we could use better training and more training. And so, this is on your recording, also, like the resources that I have here in my office are from 2013. So, they're out of date, at the very least. And, yeah, that's basically so like, the trainings that are required of me are pretty few and far between. And I would feel more empowered as a supervisor if there was a lot more. I would feel like I would have a hard time managing a significant concern if one came up.”

Employees that have been working at the university for a longer period of time don't remember the training that they went through and the information that they have is often outdated. Having information from 2013 for reference is as good as useless and any of the resources listed would have changed. This leaves the employees without the proper resources or knowledge to handle a situation if it were to arise. Sending out the proper updated resources and holding mandatory training would help keep the staff refreshed on information.

“I think you're gonna hear this from everybody. But staff retention is a real issue across the university. And it has to do with a lot of issues ranging from career opportunities to pay to, like issues across there not being staff in certain positions that make things harder and harder to do. And I think solving those problems would really help, like, know who to contact, know who you're supposed to reach out to. And then there's definitely cracks in the training program that have arisen because of that, because there's not anybody in specific roles”

Staff retention being low means that the people who work in the resources that are provided to students are constantly changing. Employees won't know the appropriate people to get in contact with or the appropriate resources that are still available. The staff changes break the communication chain and updated information doesn't reach everywhere that it needs to.

### Attitudes Towards the Handling of Sexual Harassment Cases

The majority of interviewees expressed negative opinions towards the reporting process and expressed a lack of trust and faith in the university to handle sexual harassment and assault cases. Perpetrators are unlikely to be kicked out of school or receive adequate repercussions, this disillusions the other parties involved. Those part of the process feel they are not sufficiently involved or informed of the status of the report. Because of inadequate consequences and failure of transparency, survivors and the community want stronger repercussions for perpetrators of sexual harassment and assault.

“It made it- it makes you jump through a lot of hoops to report. Um, you have to know, you don't have to, but they want, they ask you for your ID number, your perpetrator's ID number, and things that, like, I wouldn't know. And so, it makes it feel really disheartening when you're like filling that report out and explaining yourself when you shouldn't need to explain yourself.”

The report asks for the perpetrator's student ID and information about the perpetrator that may be unknown, making it disheartening to report and even potentially stopping the person from reporting.

“It was just like—super annoying, like I'm trying to fill out a report about gross sexual comments that a student was making in class and here is this report making me feel like I was unsure if I wanted to send it through or not, and I was a freshman at the time and I only knew about the Title IX office because of a quick training that happened during I think student orientation? And it was my



3rd week of my first semester, so I was already overwhelmed and then hearing that gross shit and then having trouble reporting? Yeah I was PISSED \*laughs\*”

This student struggled with the reporting process and was very frustrated by the process, making them second guess if they wanted to continue reporting all together. They tried their best to remember what was told to them early in their college career about how to report but felt like they were not adequately informed of the steps to take. This is the time when students need to be presented with this information frequently and thoroughly.

The first resource that is provided to on-campus students for reporting an incident is their Resident Advisors (RA). The following excerpt is from an RA:

“I think the thing that I didn't like about the presentation was that it was very just about like their process. Like it was kind of just like, if you make a like report, this is what we'll do. It's like, okay. Like, I don't know, it was pretty You call that like bureaucratic and like so it was kind of interesting actually to figure it to see you what they have to do, what they have to take into consideration, but I feel like for my practicality like as an RA it was not the most helpful training about title nine.”

The RAs are provided training on how to make a report to Title IX and have a day where some of the trainings look at how to identify and address a potential sexual assault or harassment situation. Though the focus is on the report process itself rather than being able to diffuse and aid the people in need. RA's think that more training is needed and could be useful. As well as allowing input into the system from RA's and a more empathetic approach that catered to the individual cases and needs of the survivors. The following excerpt is an RA talking about what training is provided about sexual harassment/assault:

“Yeah, just mainly like, what the different steps are to the Title IX process. They really didn't talk a ton about, like, informing us of the emotional states (of survivors) or informing us on those topics that like, might be more important for us to know as people who may have residents who were responsible for or have gone through this stuff.”

RA's feel that the training regarding handling the emotional states of the survivors would be just as, if not more important to learn alongside the Title IX reporting

process. Having those skills will make the situations easier on the RA's and on those who are seeking help.

## Conclusion

Students and faculty are confused, frustrated, and have outdated information regarding the sexual harassment and assault procedures that take place here at DU. They often have outdated information or a lack of sufficient training to know how to handle situations. Students and faculty don't know who to contact or often what department, leading to an atmosphere of confusion surrounding the process. This leads back to the Title IX office due to them being the only office where these reports get processed and where communication breaks down with those who reported. The community wants people to be held accountable but after so many examples of negative experiences with the process and with those in these offices, trust and faith in their handling of these issues is minimal to non-existent.

# DU's response to #DUBetter

by Kēhaulani Lagunero

Upon examination of the diverse array of interviews conducted regarding the #DUBetter Instagram initiative and the University of Denver's (DU) approach to addressing instances of gender-based and sexual violence on campus, a recurring theme emerged: while a significant portion of the participants had undergone what can be termed as "corrective" training, there was a noticeable dearth of "preventive" training. Each interviewee disclosed that they had received some level of training pertaining to Title IX regulations, encompassing aspects such as identifying gender-based harassment and sexual violence, directing affected students towards available support resources, and gaining insight into the circumstances warranting the filing of a report. However, the overarching emphasis of these training sessions leaned heavily towards reacting to incidents as opposed to proactively averting them.

This theme originates from the shared experiences of all participants, who discussed their familiarity with training protocols associated with various roles at Denver University, including being a mandated reporter, employee, student, faculty member, or staff member. As the interviews were transcribed, a prominent theme emerged: the concept of "corrective" training. This pertains to the training procedures referenced by participants, which are intended to address incidents of harm or harassment that have already taken place, whether directed towards themselves or others. The discussions highlighted the importance placed on post-incident training as a means of response and prevention within the university community. Participants described various aspects of this training, including its methods and objectives, underscoring its role in fostering a safer and more supportive environment on campus.

The responses from participants unveiled a spectrum of sentiments towards the efficacy and comprehensiveness of the training they had undergone. Some individuals found it to be optional, lacking in practical utility, convoluted in its delivery, brief in duration, or simply not memorable. When asked if they were involved in training for gender-based and sexual harassment prevention, one participant explained the following:

“Yes we have summer training for like two weeks before the school year starts in August and during that we have I think it was one day that was dedicated to title nine like a portion of the day like it wasn't the whole day it might have been like in two hour maybe a most training where we had someone from title nine

come in I forget who she was but she worked for them I think she was like a caseworker or something And they went through like the process from like someone makes a complaint to the possible outcomes. And that was pretty much our training.”

When a different participant was asked if the training they received was helpful, they replied the following:

“I would say like, that’s really like, a real weakness across a lot of areas at DU. And I would say this is probably one of them, just like not knowing who to contact and not knowing what the right thing to do is. I know, at one point, I did do some research into this. And like, there were some resources that said things like, I’m a mandated reporter, and things like that, that like, no one necessarily told me, I needed some of that I could kind of figure it out. You know, if you’re not paying attention, if you’re not alert to certain things, definitely more training would be helpful and more like, just guidelines on how to solve problems, which would be great.”

A common observation within these trainings was that the trainings primarily equipped those completing them with the means to refer survivors to the appropriate support services, rather than furnishing them with comprehensive knowledge and tools to actively prevent the recurrence of such incidents in the future. Recognizing that deterring this behavior through various methods poses a significant long-term challenge, failing to establish preventive measures may lead to a rise in reports of harm. When inquired about potential recent initiatives or adjustments aimed at instituting preventive measures, a participant with professional expertise in both student affairs and Title IX at DU responded as follows:

“But I know that folks in Title IX and Cape and in other places are just at full capacity right now, just with like the amount of reports that we get. So, it’s not only trying to respond to harm that’s been done and conduct all those investigations and things like that, but then also like the prevention side of things. And having the capacity to do all of those, I don’t know where we are with that. But I know that there’s a lot of different factors that come into play when thinking about Title IX as a whole, just because we’ve gotten so many different directions from the Department of Education as to how we need to enact this thing.”

This identified gap in the training framework assumes paramount significance, especially considering the multifaceted role expected of DU's Title IX Office.

While the provision of aftercare and support in the aftermath of incidents is undoubtedly crucial, it is equally imperative for educational institutions to invest resources into cultivating a culture of prevention. Thus, the current training paradigm appears to be somewhat lopsided, skewed towards reactive measures rather than proactive initiatives aimed at fostering a safer campus environment. It is acknowledged that DU's efforts in addressing gender-based and sexual violence are actioned through some instances of training, there exists a compelling need for a more balanced approach that places equal emphasis on both corrective and preventive measures.

# Disconnection of communication: Barriers to addressing sexual harassment and assault at DU

by Jayvyn Jakai Lewis

## Introduction

This unit analyzes perspectives from students, staff, and faculty at the University of Denver (DU) that illuminate a consistent theme of Disconnection of Communication regarding the institution's response to sexual harassment and assault. An excerpt from a sorority member ("I haven't really seen any like DU staff or like the administration entirely do anything to kind of combat it...") encapsulates the perceived disconnect between the university's stated commitment and lack of tangible actions taken. Despite DU's chancellor outlining a plan in 2020 to improve prevention, policy, and campus safety after the "WeCanDUBetter" student movement, data from these interviews, as well as On-Campus sexual assault statistics, suggests a pervasive sense that little substantive progress has been made, in part due to communication breakdowns (Office of Equal Support & Title IX, 2022).

There appears, to me, to be a lack of transparency and follow-through from the university administration on this issue. A graduate student recounted difficulties simply finding the proper website to report an incident, questioning if "they made it hard on purpose or something." Notably, a university office employee who works directly with survivors acknowledged DU processes over-rely on "institutional memory" rather than formalized training, highlighting inconsistencies in how policies are understood and enforced across the university. This aligns with scholarly critiques that institutions often prioritize "symbolic compliance with the law and avoiding liability" instead of enacting systemic cultural reforms (National Academies 2018). The lack of clear action from DU suggests a failure to heed recommendations to "move beyond basic legal compliance" in addressing issues like pervasive gender harassment.

## Disconnect Between Front-line Staff, Students, and University Procedures

Furthermore, there seems to be a disconnect between front-line staff-like resident assistants (RAs) and the university's formal procedures for handling reports of sexual

misconduct. Multiple RAs described feeling out of the loop after filing reports, with one stating "you just kind of send it...and then it's usually...over" with no follow-up. Another RA lamented the "weird disconnect in the chain of command" on high-stakes cases, indicating breakdowns in protocol and information-sharing that impede the ability to properly support survivors. The lack of adequate training and communication for those taking initial reports creates an environment where RAs cannot consistently create a safe, well-informed space for students affected by sexual harassment or assault.

Compounding these issues are significant communication gaps between students and university leadership. According to one perspective, there appears to be a disconcerting lack of coordination, with a fraternity member claiming no official DU training on sexual assault for Greek life. This highlights the perpetuation of power imbalances where student voices are lacking in processes meant to address issues directly impacting their communities. Most notably, a leader of a related student activism group revealed having virtually no direct contact with the chancellor's office - underscoring a fundamental divide between those demanding reform and the senior leadership responsible for institutional change. With both Greek life and a prominent student organization feeling disconnected from decision-makers, it is clear there are substantial communication barriers preventing coordinated action.

In my examination, the perspectives shared in these interviews illustrate how fractured communication networks at various levels of the university can hinder efforts to create an environment that properly prevents and responds to sexual harassment and assault. The lack of transparency, inconsistencies in policy enforcement, and inability to fully engage student voices and experiences represent significant obstacles for DU to overcome. Establishing consistent, open communication channels appears to be a necessary first step before substantive cultural and procedural changes can take root across the campus community.

### **Confidentiality and Liability Concerns**

Certain perspectives highlighted how barriers related to confidentiality and concerns over liability can further exacerbate communication breakdowns. An employee with intimate experience acknowledged having internal meetings "with their boss to discuss your [the victim's] case" before deciding if it meets requirements for action. This distancing of survivors from a process intended to support them underscores how a focus on managing institutional risk can take precedence over fostering transparency. Additionally, an RA pointed to negative perceptions that the Title IX process often does not yield "sufficient results or justice." Such skepticism of official channels undermines trust and prevents open communication between impacted parties and those responsible for policy implementation.

These issues reflect broader critiques that institutional responses frequently prioritize mitigating legal liabilities over substantive reforms to address underlying cultures and climates permitting sexual misconduct. While protecting confidentiality is undoubtedly crucial, practices that place unilateral decision-making behind closed doors and breed cynicism about accountability contradict recommendations to improve transparency as a means of driving positive cultural shifts (National Academies 2018). From the perspectives shared here, there are indications DU may be falling short in this regard.

## Policy & Culture Misalignment

Collectively, the reflections from students, staff, and faculty illustrate how turnover, power imbalances, isolation of information, and deviations between codified policies and institutional cultures all contribute to the breakdown of communication pathways needed to create an integrated, cohesive response to sexual harassment and assault. An employee candidly stated "a lot of DU processes rely on...institutional memory...you learn as you go" rather than through standardized training pipelines.

This fragmentation perpetuates the misalignment between the "structural and personal elements" comprising an organization's culture identified by scholars as undermining substantive reform (Dolamore & Richards 2020). Multiple excerpts suggest such a disconnect exists at DU, with divergences between how procedures are documented and how they actually unfold, often to the detriment of initiatives aiming to foster open dialogue and community-driven solutions.

In light of these patterns of miscommunication, re-establishing reliable, open communication channels appears to be a foundational imperative if DU intends to make authentic progress in addressing sexual harassment and assault. The commentary has aimed to show how the fracturing of communication networks, exacerbated by opaque procedures and power imbalances rooted in confidentiality practices, has eroded trust while impeding efforts to create an environment of accountability, prevention, and trauma-informed support.

To enact the substantive cultural shift required, DU must find ways to empower all stakeholders - students, staff, faculty, and administrative leadership - as equal partners with a voice in shaping solutions, rather than creating scenarios where certain groups feel marginalized as abstractions in an insulated bureaucratic process. Uprooting longstanding patterns and tendencies to prioritize liability management over community transparency will likely prove a prerequisite before the



sweeping reforms recommended by the National Academies (NAESM) and others can take root.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, the perspectives shared by the DU community reveal an organization struggling to bridge the gap between high-level policy and the realities of its informal cultures and climates shaping day-to-day experiences. Rebuilding an ethos of open communication, where all parties can engage as fully informed and respected contributors, emerges as both a pressing need and a potential catalyst for a comprehensive cultural overhaul approach. By directly addressing the disconnects exposed, DU can lay the critical groundwork for fulfilling its stated commitments to preventing and responding to sexual harassment through sustainable, community-aligned strategies.

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# Insight into sexual assault training and education on DU's campus

by Aili Limstrom

Training is a key part to joining any sort of organization. Sexual assault and harassment training is one of the first things that students do when they arrive at DU its efficacy and what it entails were the main topics that I was researching with this theme. Students and staff being required to do this training might have different views on its content and efficacy based on how much they remember, but using several interviews we are able to get a general view of how sexual assault training functions at DU. Understanding the perceived quality and content of the current training is key to understanding what can be done to improve it.

## Residential Advisor Training

The interviews with the residential advisors (RAs) provided important insight into the expectations of students and student employees in the process of filing a report. The RAs said that they had two weeks of training before classes started with one day dedicated to Title IX. The Title IX day was spent learning the bureaucratic processes behind submitting a report as well as the resources that they could refer students to if a student came to them for help. These trainings also involved role play or 'Behind Closed Doors' situations. These situations were portrayed by other RA's and usually depicted scenes with domestic violence and substance use. One of the RA's said that it was possible that there was a situation concerning sexual assault, but they were not sure and did not want to give out false information. The interviews all had similar points, about them being 'Responsible Employees' that have to report something if they are concerned about a resident. They were very conscious of their own limitations and how they are not medical professionals or lawyers that could assist directly with title IX reports.

"I'm not prepared, I'm not trained for that, I'm not adequately compensated for any of that. I have no experience, no knowledge, no expertise, and few RAs do"

## Student Training

While not many students were interviewed solely for their designation as a student, some of the interviewees were able to provide insight into the training that they received as a student at DU. One of the RA's said that they did not really receive any training as a student and that they believe that students are not adequately informed of resources. With educational events such as 'Sex-stravaganza' being one of the more popular ways of informing students of resources. The other interviewees that were familiar with the DU student training discussed how it was mostly online with Canvas modules. The training is also not regular, and most people had not reported doing sexual assault training since Freshman year.

Since Greek life and parties can provide a space where sexual assault and harassment is likely to take place, it was important to interview fraternity and sorority members about their sexual assault training. A sorority member that was interviewed said that they have some training that they are lining up that is administrative, but she is unsure of whether or not the chancellor is requiring it. One member of a fraternity on campus said that the training was mostly left up to the person in charge of education and that it was a high trust job, where changes could be made to the curriculum with ease. The training that was required from the fraternity came from the larger fraternity organization that was not affiliated with the school.

“That’s in the culture but it’s very informal. Like we haven’t had any formal trainings or anything. Like and that’s mostly the fault of like the risk management because... I mean he’s just like for lack of a better word he’s just like not really doing that great of a job.”

## Staff Training

An individual that works with campus safety discussed their training and how it is quite variable. With the trauma informed training (mentioned in the plan from the chancellor) being done by someone that had experience working with the Department of Defense. They have a lot of staff turnover, and it is difficult for them to do in-person training because they would have to coordinate schedules so a lot of it is done online.

“Um, as far as campus safety training, um, we have the same challenges with the university as far as, you know, turning staff over. But we do have some constants, so we just need to make sure that we’re constantly training and, and staying abreast of all of the new, um, uh, the training and, and, and, uh, different modes of delivering and training to our office.”

A student employee discussed the canvas module that they had to do that detailed their role as a mandatory reporter. Another employee says that a lot of the stuff you learn has to be learned on the job.

## Ideas for Improvement

While discussing the training a lot of the interviewees provided ideas for improvement. The RA's suggested that they have smaller group training so they can ask more questions since sexual assault is not black and white. They also thought that it was too bureaucratic and that they wished the training would be more empathetic. One of the frat members that was interviewed wanted to bring in more guest speakers for the training. When he became aware of the lack of DU mandated fraternity training, he also wanted to bring this up to the Interfraternity Council. The student employee that was interviewed wished that they had more communication with the professor of the course in their training. One of the employees that worked with students wanted more practical training that had to do with working with students on a day-to-day basis. Another staff member thinks that providing the tools for students to recognize where their masculinity shows up in their day-to-day life might be the key to changing DU's culture around SA.

“So, I think equipping folks with the right language and the skills to be able to navigate conversations about what it means to promote a healthy version of it is going to be critical to creating a more inclusive campus environment.”

## Conclusion

The sexual assault training at DU is seen in many different ways by our interviewee's. With conflicting views on its efficacy and what can be done to improve it. From what I can tell, the biggest issues with the training were the impersonal feeling surrounding bureaucratic focused Title IX training and online modules that do not leave room for questions. The lack of repeat training could also lead students to forget about resources when the time comes that they need them. While more involved training could be seen as a beneficial thing for all students and staff, there may still be people that see it as an inconvenience or just as something for a checklist. Training is very difficult to curate and the insight gained is usually up to the individual, but hopefully DU will be able to DU Better.

# Accessibility and transparency of Title IX Processes

by Michael Sze

## Introduction

When reflecting on their interactions with the Title IX Office, one element that seemed to heavily influence the interviewees' experience was the accessibility and transparency of the reporting process. Students and staff alike seemed to repeatedly encounter a sense of stonewalling from the department, either due to an unfamiliarity with legal jargon and processes or a lack of transparency from the office during an investigation. These recurring elements of the process have created a somewhat cautious and skeptical attitude towards Title IX on the DU campus, despite the improvements of training models since Chancellor Haefner's action plan was released in response to the WeCanDUBetter social media campaign in 2020. The following analyses examine interviews that reflect these findings, highlighting the need for the department to further increase its modes of accessibility to better foster an atmosphere of security and safety for students on campus.

## Process of Title IX

The Title IX Office is the campus institution responsible for the investigation process of a possible occurrence of sexual or gender-based violence/harassment. They are the body that deals with the details of a given case, interviewing those who have filed reports to the office as well as the perpetrator mentioned in those reports; after gathering evidence and facts they write a report and notify the parties involved of the outcome. Title IX's process is a legal one, which creates barriers of accessibility for two main reasons. The first pertains directly to students: the legal nature of the process was found by many students to be intimidating, confusing, and most importantly discouraging, lessening their likelihood of reporting to the office. One interviewee referred to the office as "daunting to take on as an individual, if you don't have a support system." An RA who had gone through the experience of reporting an incident to Title IX expressed frustration with the legalistic aspect of the process, stating that they "thought it was going to be a lot easier to make a report but it took me like 30 minutes [...] I was [wondering] if they made it hard on purpose or something." This grievance remained consistent across student employees such as TAs and RAs. The second barrier comes from the lack of transparency of the office itself during ongoing investigations. An anonymous graduate student thought that "it should be easier to communicate with them [...] they don't really communicate what's going on with your process, you have to be the one to reach out." Furthermore, the same student, commenting on the process itself, mentioned that:

“You meet with a counselor at Title IX, and then they meet with their boss to discuss your case, if it fits their requirements. [...] I don’t think there should be a meeting without you to discuss if your case meets the requirements.”

This aspect of the process, bearing much more weight on the outcome itself, is perceived as isolating survivors from participating in their own investigations. Both of these barriers contribute to a sense of insecurity among students, who are confronted by a legal process that is perceived as only somewhat comprehensible and regularly uncommunicative.

### Transparency and Experience of Title IX

A lack of transparency was felt by both student and staff; a campus safety officer described this lack as inherent within the relationship between campus safety and Title IX, saying, “we report our report to Title IX and let them take it from there because they have an applied process they have to follow and that’s kind of beyond campus safety, you know, ability because [of] the Title IX procedure.” RAs in particular felt a lack of involvement when they were asked to report an incident via Title IX. “There’s not a lot of interaction we have directly with the Title IX process,” said one RA when asked about their experience with Title IX, “unless we’re, like, witnesses to something.” Another, reflecting on their own training, said, “We’re not trained in law. We can’t do Title IX [...] so a lot of their advice to us is going to be to report up and to share [the] information with the offices that need to know.” In the case of the graduate student, the office’s transparency, or lack thereof, heavily colored the respondent’s opinions/reflections on their experiences with the investigation. “I have a lot of animosity towards Title IX [...] it wasn’t positive in any way.” Because interaction with their own investigations is so limited, students feel as though they lack control or input in the outcome of their cases. This further contributes to a sense of insecurity and skepticism among students.

Apart from the legal exclusion faced by students, the office was noted by many as being particularly hard to reach during investigations. “Folks at Title IX [...] are just at full capacity right now, just with the number of reports that we get,” noted an anonymous health counselor, commenting on the resources of the department. An RA commented, “there are times when you might not be contacted or like nothing will come from it even if you are.”

### Conclusions

The analyses of these interviews are not meant to suggest that the legal nature of Title IX investigations is inherently problematic, but that relying on this legal process alone is an insufficient support system for the survivors of gender harassment/assault;

additional resources are necessary to comprehensively improve the environment of safety for survivors. This sentiment was reflected in one interview, in which one student remarked that “the reporting process should be more [...] survivor based.” In addition, these interviews highlight the importance of accessibility when it comes to reporting an incident to the office; improving modes of accessibility for students covers a wide range of potential measures, from the streamlining of reporting forms for third parties such as RAs or improved training models for campus security, RAs and other staff. With regards to this last point, interviewees did note improvements from 2020, when WeCanDUBetter was initially launched. An RA commented that “I’ve heard from people who were returning RAs [...] that this year’s training on more serious topics like [Title IX...] were a lot better than they were last year.” Still, when asked about the focus of gender harassment training, RAs reported that training leaned towards the bureaucratic aspects of the Title IX reporting process. This overlooks the emotional support needed by survivors for whom the experience of reporting an incident is traumatic. As for transparency, a more survivor-based model would maximize the opportunities a survivor has to involve themselves in their own investigation process, rather than increasing degrees of separation between the reporter/victim and the officer evaluating the case. Removing barriers of communication between the office and the student body at large will help build trust and security between the two.

# Disconnect

by Sami Zepponi

Ethnographic methods are a powerful tool in anthropological research. What sets this tool apart from other theoretical approaches, however, is its tangible application within contextual frameworks. In order to generate a better understanding of this practice, my classmates and I embarked on our own ethnographic research project. The objective of this project was to examine the University of Denver's response to cases involving sexual harassment and abuse utilizing the Title IX code of conduct. Each student, including myself, conducted a semi-structured interview with individuals either associated with the Title IX office, or those holding authoritative positions at the university. Questions asked of interviewees were framed around the University of Denver's policies, trainings, and current efforts around issues concerning sexual misconduct. Upon compiling these transcripts, various themes began to emerge. Of particular interest was the idea of *disconnection*.

The University of Denver is made up of multiple moving parts from the administrative office to the study body. The space in-between these two groups is filled with other factions related to the University. As such, the University of Denver is constructed from a plethora of operative bodies, that in collaboration with one another, produce and maintain a multi-million-dollar institution. Yet with this fragmentation comes vital consequences, especially in regard to accountability and campus-wide community culture. As a result, this environment serves as an ideal landscape for behaviors related to sexual harassment to thrive. The greater the degrees of separation between the students and Title IX office, the more difficult it is to implement palpable measures of culpability. As demonstrated in the class collection of ethnographic interviews, this disconnect and lack of awareness on behalf of the University of Denver has perpetuated a shocking standard of tolerance and acceptance for cases regarding sexual assault.

In general, the larger an institution is, the harder it becomes to pinpoint specific issues. Therefore, by design, the University of Denver has made itself into an ambiguous governing body that uses its anonymity as a means of evading accountability. The inability to acknowledge this dynamic as a core defect makes it so that when procedures are instigated, such measures prove to be unsustainable and ineffective.

As one interview displayed, the initial reporting level is often the most difficult one to move forward. This produces a great source of distrust between the student body and



the subsequent resources following the primary reporting process. Knowing what information is relevant and how to handle such cases is largely miscommunicated:

“I do the reports and I like call my supervisor and stuff and then it feels like they’re mad at me because I didn’t do it right or something the next day or the next week or whatever and it so it feels like there’s this like weird like disconnect in the chain of command like when something high stakes kind of happens that there’s a lot this like miscommunication... because you know the person you call is you know, you’re just one supervisor above you on call and Sometimes they’ll give you information that maybe the department didn’t want to hear something or like they don’t understand what’s going on I don’t know. You know what I mean?”

The interviewer later went on to explain that part of the problem is the difficulty in getting from point A to point B. The ‘middlemen’ embedded within this process make the experience of reporting all the more confusing for the individual.

The University of Denver has been unable to successfully address issues related to sexual assault mainly due to this form of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance in this context has been used as a way to diffuse responsibility. As author Blake McKimmie states: “Consistent with the “new look” interpretation of dissonance (Cooper & Fazio, 1984), Cooper and Stone (2000) concurred that diffusion of responsibility is the reason that social support reduces dissonance. The presence of others with a shared group membership acting in the same counter-attitudinal manner allows people to feel less personally responsible for the aversive consequences.” (McKimmie 2015: 207) This concept can be evidenced further in the lack of communication initiated by the University of Denver with the general student body.

One individual addressed this concept through a counter-intuitive approach which utilizes group strategizing as a potential solution for the sense of disconnection.

“You need to talk to students to figure out how to go about it. I can’t sit here and say, ‘this is the one way we should do it because that’s based on my experience.’ We should sit and have a conversation with students who have had these experiences and say, ‘how should we go about it as a group?’ Not as an individual organization. So, I really think it’s like a group effort. More subjective, not objective.”

This expert draws attention to an interesting idea in that such fragmentation within the University of Denver population can paradoxically serve as one possible answer to this problem.

Data collected in these interviews exemplifies the issues that arise with the various groups that coexist within the University of Denver, and how the lack of accurate communication between these bodies can heighten issues surrounding sexual misconduct. However, in this separation lies a viable opportunity for connection. With different groups comes different perspectives. As such, having the ability to document and account for these perspectives can generate new procedures related to the Title IX process.

More than anything else, this ethnographic project has revealed a significant gap between students/faculty and the overall university administration. The process of reporting therefore; has to go through various different stages, and much like a game of telephone, this information becomes more and more challenging to decipher or even more shocking, to express. As such, the most sustainable solutions to issues such as these are ones that can be easily integrated into the pre-existing structure of an institution. My suggestion is to create a more direct line of communication between these factions. Given the lack of student representation, it would be crucial to frame this idea as student oriented. This is not to suggest adding on another position or creating another training program. In fact, it appears that most interviewees see little value in adding more educational measures; believing these steps to be easily overlooked and fairly impractical when applied to real situations.

It has become evident that actionable measures can be taken, these include but are not limited to, creating a more direct line of communication, increased interaction between students/faculty with the University of Denver administration, and more providing a more inclusive and applicable framework for reporting. There is no single solution to an epidemic such as this. This multi-faceted issue must be met with a multi-faceted response. If the goal is to create a safe and community-focused space for the student body, the University of Denver has failed. Such failure, however, can be redefined and utilized as a tool for positive change. The main factor that will contribute to this shift is whether or not the University of Denver decides to listen.

## References

McKimmie, Blake M.

2015 “Cognitive Dissonance in Groups.” *Social and personality psychology compass* 9.4: 202–212.

# Appendix 1. Signed consent for course-related research project

## **Would you like to be involved in a classroom research project at the University of Denver?**

I am Alejandro Cerón from the Department of Anthropology and I invite you to participate in my course-related research project entitled *DU's Response to sexual harassment and assault: a qualitative exploratory study to identify challenges and opportunities for improvement*. This research is being conducted as a classroom project in ANTH 3750 Ethnographic Research. You were selected as a possible participant because of your experience working close to this issue at DU and/or because your institutional role is relevant to this issue.

Your participation is completely voluntary so you don't have to answer any question, and you can stop at any time. If you do choose to participate and then change your mind, you won't be penalized in any way.

## **Please read this document and ask me any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.**

**What is the purpose of this course-related research project?** The purpose of this project is to identify where DU has made progress in its response to sexual harassment, identifying challenges and opportunities for improvement, with the hope that the results will support the DU community's efforts to prevent and address sexual harassment.

**How many participants will be in this project?** About 16 people will participate, including DU's students, staff, faculty, and administrators whose work is related to this issue.

**What will I be asked to do?** If you agree to be in this research, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that asks your views about DU's progress in the prevention and response to sexual harassment, as well as where you see challenges and opportunities for improvement. If you accept to participate, the interview will be audio recorded. The audio will be transcribed within one week and the audio will be destroyed. We will not record any information that could identify you because we will treat your participation and the transcript as confidential. We will write a report that aggregates the results of the 16 interviews.

**How long will this take?** Your participation will take about 30 minutes.

**What are the risks and/or benefits if I participate?** There are no risks and no benefits to you from participating in this research.

**Will I be compensated for participating?** You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this research.

**Who will see my information?** In reports presented in class or within the university, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you. We will write a report that aggregates the results of the 16 interviews. The results of this study will not be published or presented outside of the university. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers will have access to the records. The instructor of our course may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis.

**Do I have to participate?** No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't have to answer any

question and can stop participating at any time.

**Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints?** If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than individuals on the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the instructor of the course that is sponsoring this project:

[Alejandro.CeronValdes@du.edu](mailto:Alejandro.CeronValdes@du.edu), or (206)427-1284.

*You will be given a copy of this document for your records.*

*By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.*

Participant Signature	Print Name	Date
Signature of Student Researcher Obtaining Consent	Print Name	Date

# Appendix 2. Semi-structured interview guide

## Introduction

The purpose of this project is to identify where DU has made progress in its response to sexual harassment, identifying challenges and opportunities for improvement, with the hope that the results will support the DU community's efforts to prevent and address sexual harassment.

In winter 2020, a group of DU students started the WeCanDUBetter movement, asking DU to improve its approach to sexual harassment and assault. In response, the chancellor published a plan, centered in three areas: (1) Prevention/education/training, (2) Policy review/procedures/personnel, and (3) Campus safety/security. The chancellor's plan had actions scheduled to be achieved by the end of winter quarter 2020 and by the end of fall quarter 2020. A report from April 2021 in *The Clarion* showed insufficient results.

1. Tell me about improvements you know of, related to addressing sexual harassment and sexual assault on campus, which have been made over the past three years in the areas of Prevention/education/training, Policy review/procedures/personnel, and Campus safety/security.
2. Some of the recommendations from WeCanDUBetter students, captured in the chancellor's plan included improving how survivors are treated by the institution when they decide to report an incident. The general idea was to make available support services, finding alternative and less formal ways to record information about an incident, and implementing approaches that prevent the survivor from experiencing fear of retaliation. How would you say DU is doing in these aspects related to offering a survivor-centered response? Do you see challenges and/or opportunities to make progress?
3. Another recommendation involved moving the institution beyond legal compliance to address institutional culture and climate and creating respectful and safe environments. This involves improving training, social marketing campaigns, reporting procedures, as well as some infrastructure like improved lighting and emergency phones. How would you say DU is doing in these aspects? Do you see challenges and/or opportunities to make progress in these areas?
4. A 2018 report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) identified three forms of sexual harassment: (1) gender harassment (sexist hostility and crude behavior), (2) unwanted sexual attention (unwelcome verbal or physical sexual advances), and (3) sexual coercion (when favorable professional or educational treatment is conditioned on sexual activity). The report also documented that gender harassment is by far the most common form of sexual harassment, but it is not well addressed by current legalistic procedures because it often "does not raise to the threshold defined by Federal policy." How would you say DU is doing in addressing gender harassment beyond what is

- strictly required by Federal policy? Do you see challenges and/or opportunities to make progress in this area?
5. Finally, the NASEM report asks institutions of higher education to improve transparency and accountability, by formally monitoring the situation through regular surveys, offering annual reports of reported incidents, evaluating and improving training programs, and actively looking for the most effective ways to change climate, and reduce and prevent harassment. How would you say DU is doing in advancing transparency and accountability? Do you see challenges and/or opportunities to make progress in these areas?
  6. Is there anything you would like to add?