



students active for ending rape

Press Contact:

Margaret Mikkelsen, Executive Director
(347) 293-0953 (office)
(646) 898-6901 (cell)
<http://www.safercampus.org>

For Immediate Release

Building SAFER Campuses:
SAFER Launches Campus Activist Mentoring Program

New York—This month, Students Active For Ending Rape (SAFER) launches its new Campus Activist Mentoring Program. Developed in response to student requests, the Activist Mentoring Program will pair a student group with an experienced organizer for one-on-one conversations about the specific details of developing a campaign to change how sexual assault is prevented and responded to on their campus. This new program is part of SAFER’s ongoing response to the pervasive campus rape epidemic and the frequent unwillingness of college administrators to recognize the problem. SAFER is committed to providing students with resources to hold their colleges accountable for combating sexual assault in their on- and off-campus communities. SAFER will offer student groups up to 36 hours of mentoring free of charge.

“Through this service, the group can assess their community’s readiness to develop a grassroots movement against sexual violence, strategize about how to gain allies and a critical mass of supporters, develop a complete and campus-specific list of goals for a revised sexual assault policy, and brainstorm solutions to organizing roadblocks as they occur,” said Executive Director Margaret Mikkelsen. “This service allows students to draw on knowledge provided by experienced organizers while tailoring our support to their busy schedules and the specificities of their campus situations.” SAFER will continue to offer the programs it already has in place to support students, including the training manual *Change Happens* and on-site training programs, as well as its website and blog.

“Our goal is to ensure that every college puts in place prevention and education programs, crisis services, fair and transparent disciplinary procedures, and community outreach programs,” Mikkelsen said. “Sexual assault is the number one violent crime on college campuses.

About 20 to 25 percent of college women will be victims of sexual assault or attempted sexual assault at some point during their college years. Yet current college policies are often inadequate and ineffective, tend to retraumatize survivors, and exclude students and community members from input.”

To date, SAFER has worked with a range of college communities ranging from Skidmore College and Simon’s Rock College of Bard to Georgetown University and Harvard University. “We believe that our new Campus Activist Mentoring Program will help us assist more students every year,” said Jeff Senter, SAFER co-founder and board of directors member. “We’re very excited to bring the expertise of our organizing mentors to students in the most accessible and personal way possible.”

SAFER’s blog, www.safercampus.org/blog, has recently drawn national attention through an online editorial posted on the *LA Times* website. “In our blog, we report on current events related to sexual violence and highlight quality media about sexual assault, especially stories written by students. We also share insights into the challenges of organizing on campus and connect students to other resources for combating sexual violence on their campuses,” said Nora Niedzielski-Eichner, a graduate student at Stanford University and member of SAFER’s board of directors. “Our blog helps create a sense of community among activists from different schools and keeps students from feeling like they are working in isolation.”

Also in response to student requests, SAFER is currently developing a database of college sexual assault policies nationwide, with comments on specific positive and negative policy elements. This database will enable students to be better informed about the various policy options available, and to see how their school compares to similar schools.

SAFER began as a student group at Columbia University in 1999, organizing a successful grassroots student campaign that culminated in a new office devoted to sexual assault prevention and education, a range of committees devoted to improving the school’s response to campus sexual violence, and improved disciplinary procedures with greater oversight and transparency. “We began receiving emails from students at colleges across the country asking for advice and guidance on how to build a movement to improve their own sexual assault policies,” said Sarah Richardson, SAFER co-founder and board of directors member.

SAFER was incorporated as a 501(c)3 non-profit led by students and recent graduates in 2000 and offered its first organizing training for students in 2001.

Students can change policy!

Highlights of Successful SAFER-assisted Campaigns

Skidmore College: Students at Skidmore College had been working for a more accessible sexual assault policy and better prevention programs for years. After a weekend-long SAFER organizing training, the longstanding group rewrote its mission and renamed itself SAFER-Skidmore. With SAFER's help, the group found out that the college's committees on sexual assault and campus safety had never met. Using organizing tactics from the training to publicize this fact, Skidmore's organizers found themselves sitting in committee meetings within weeks, and pushing through their proposal for a new Safe Sex office and rape crisis center in their student center. These students formed the hiring committee for the new full-time staff person who runs the office.

Middlebury College: On the train ride back from SAFER's New York organizing training, five Middlebury College students hammered out a plan to reform their campus sexual assault disciplinary procedures. The students used the specific tactics practiced at the organizing training. The Middlebury group publicized the problems with the policy using witty and hard-hitting posters that got students talking. In response to the call for reform, the university created a Sexual Assault Policy Working Group, and students won an anonymous reporting system.

Simons Rock College of Bard: At Simons Rock College of Bard the S.R.C (Safe Relationship Coalition), an age-diverse group with support from C.H.I; Women's Center, ADAH (Anti Discrimination and Anti- Harassment Task Forces); Queersa; Community Council; Health and Counseling Services; and the BSU, succeeded in creating a sexual assault policy where none had existed.

Georgetown University: At Georgetown, the student group AFIRMS (Advocates for Improved Response Methods to Sexual Assault) succeeded in having the school sexual assault policy revised. The old policy inappropriately categorized some cases of rape as sexual misconduct, did not provide for sensitivity training, had insensitive hearing procedures and inadequate disciplinary actions. It also had a nondisclosure policy that required victims of assault to remain silent regarding the results of related hearings. Georgetown was found by the federal Department of Education to be in violation of federal law because of this confidentiality requirement.

Harvard University: The Coalition Against Sexual Violence (CASV) drew national attention to a 2002 change to Harvard's sexual assault policy that required the presence of independent corroborating evidence before it would investigate allegations of sexual assault. CASV pressed for reform, and succeeded in have a committee created to examine sexual assault at Harvard. The student movement resulted in the creation of the Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, which provides 24-hour support and educational prevention programs.

SAFER's programs

Change Happens: The Grassroots Organizing Manual

To bring about change, SAFER provides promising student leaders with the training and support they need to effectively advocate for improvements to their campus's sexual assault policies. Our work with students begins with our comprehensive manual on creating change on campus through grassroots organizing, *Change Happens*. An electronic version of the manual is distributed for free to students and student resource centers across the country, or a print version is available for a small fee.

For some students, particularly those who already have experience with campus organizing, the manual is enough, and we hear news of successful events and changes won. Many students are looking for more specific guidance, however, and SAFER has three ways of assisting students to create a plan of action for their own campuses.

The Campus Activist Mentoring Program

The first is a consulting service, where an interested student or student group can work with one of our organizers for up to 36 hours, free of charge. Through this service, the student can assess her or his community's readiness to develop a grassroots movement against sexual violence, strategize about how to gain allies and a critical mass of supporters, develop a complete and campus-specific list of demands for a revised sexual assault policy, and brainstorm solutions to organizing roadblocks as they occur. This service allows students to capitalize on the knowledge provided by our trainers while tailoring our support to their busy schedules and the specificities of their campus situation. Consulting sessions may be especially helpful in difficult situations such as a large-scale media attack by an opposition group, a change in college leadership, or conflict between activists.

The Teach-In and Weekend Organizing Training

SAFER also offers two training programs for students: the SAFER Teach-In and the SAFER Weekend Organizing Training. For students who haven't recruited a group yet and aren't quite sure what they want to change about their sexual assault policy, the SAFER Teach-In is a 2-hour interactive presentation that educates students about their sexual assault policy, helps them analyze its weaknesses, and works with them to develop their first key goals for changing the policy. The Teach-In encourages students to examine the ways in which students and other community members of many different backgrounds may be affected by the policy.

The SAFER Weekend Organizing Training is an intensive, weekend-long program that provides student leaders with the concrete skills they need to win policy reform. For students who have recruited a core group of at least 10 seriously committed students and have a clear idea of the changes they would like to make to their school's sexual assault policy, the Weekend Organizing Training works with participants to develop a concrete strategy to achieve their goals. The training lasts 10 hours over the course of two days, and covers issues in depth, such as effective use of the media, dealing with backlash movements, and effective recruiting techniques.

For information on working with a SAFER trainer or bringing a SAFER event to your school, email organizers@safercampus.org.

Resources for Students: The Policy Database, the SAFER Blog, and SAFER Merchandise

To support their organizing efforts, SAFER provides key resources for students:

- In response to student requests, SAFER, in collaboration with other non-profit organizations, is developing a database of college sexual assault policies and programs, with comments on specific positive and negative policy elements. This database will enable students to be better informed about the various policy options available, and to see how their school compares to similar schools. Policies will be analyzed based on the basic components that a better sexual assault policy should contain, as well as on compliance with relevant legislation. Students will also have the opportunity to enter information about their own experiences. The database will enable student groups to connect with groups at other schools to share best practices and to collaborate. The database will be released late in April, 2008.
- Our website introduces students to the issue of sexual assault on campus and suggests steps that they can take to change their campus environment. In our online blog, we report on current events related to sexual violence, foreground quality media, especially by students, about sexual assault, make available resources for students who want to combat sexual violence on their campuses, provide insight into the challenges of organizing on campus, and keep readers updated on SAFER's current projects. Our blog helps create a sense of community among activists from different schools and keeps students from feeling like they are working in isolation. We expect 80,000 website visitors this year.
- SAFER produces materials for students to incorporate into their local organizing efforts. SAFER posters, T-shirts and buttons feature messages that inspire students to take action and challenge administrations that fail to address sexual assault.

What makes a good sexual assault policy?

A good policy must meet the needs of your unique campus community. It is impossible to create a “perfect policy” that will fit every campus, but there are basic guidelines that should be met in constructing a workable sexual assault policy.

- **Student Input:** Students representing a diversity of communities should have a formalized way of communicating their concerns about a policy to administrators, and an effective, democratic means of changing the policy if it does not suit their needs.
- **Accessibility:** Policies should be easy to understand and use. Administrators should effectively publicize policies and ensure that students understand how they work. Students should be able to use services and disciplinary procedures regardless of income, disability or identity.
- **Due Process:** Disciplinary procedures should be standardized and consistently enforced. They must be transparent and include oversight measures. Procedures should include provisions that protect students accused of sexual assault and measures to ensure fair treatment of those who come forward with complaints of sexual assault.
- **Fairness:** All services should be available to students regardless of sex, ethnic background or sexual orientation. All disciplinary procedures should be fair and impartial.
- **Oversight:** All policy components should have formalized means of oversight. No one carrying out a policy should have absolute authority, and students should have a formalized way to ensure that policies are being carried out properly and effectively.
- **Prevention and Education:** Policies should include meaningful efforts at educating students in the dynamics of sexual assault, the effects it has on survivors, and the many factors that allow it to continue. These efforts should challenge sexism, homophobia, racism and other oppressions rather than reinforcing them.
- **Crisis Intervention:** Survivors should have crisis services available to them 24 hours a day, every day of the school year. Free emergency contraception, antibiotics and post-exposure HIV prophylaxis should be available in school health centers.
- **Long Term Counseling:** Colleges providing counseling services for students should provide survivors with access to unlimited free counseling.

A profile of the issue

Imagine that you are 18 years old and you've just been raped. You arrived at college only three weeks ago and you are confused and deeply traumatized. Not knowing where else to turn, you report the assault to your dean. When you finish recounting the painful details of the rape, the dean immediately asks you whether you were wearing "suggestive" clothing at the time, how many sexual partners you have had, and why you don't have any bruises. He says that in light of the fact that you don't have visible injuries, he does not feel that your story is plausible enough to require an investigation.

For too many survivors of sexual assault, this humiliating experience is a reality. Untrained administrators carry out ad hoc, hastily pieced together policies with little or no oversight for preventing mishandling of cases. Prevention programs and crisis counseling services are rarely present, and those programs that do exist are insufficient and severely under-funded.

Women ages 18 to 24 are in the highest risk group for sexual assault, and about 43% of women this age are enrolled in college. Some researchers argue that college women are even more vulnerable than their non-student peers. Recent studies have found that approximately 3% of college women are raped each academic year, usually by someone they know, and that 20 to 25% of college women will be victims of sexual assault at some point during their college years. In the majority of these cases, the perpetrator is a fellow student. Male students are also victims.

Despite these startling statistics, many colleges choose to protect their reputations by sweeping incidents of sexual assault on campus under the rug. While sexual violence is the number one violent crime problem on college campuses, current college sexual assault policies commonly do not include primary prevention efforts, have no student input, further traumatize survivors, and ignore issues of sexism, racism and homophobia as they relate to sexual violence. By maintaining these policies and resisting student demands for change, colleges create an atmosphere that condones gender- and minority-based violence and silences survivors.

Findings from a recent study showed that only 37% of colleges and universities nationwide reported crime statistics that fully complied with the requirements of the Clery Act, a landmark federal law passed in 1998 that requires colleges to disclose statistics about crime. According to a 2005 study by the National Institute of Justice, only half of all schools spell out specific sexual assault policy goals; 64% of schools do not provide new students with sexual assault awareness education; fewer than 2 in 5 schools train campus security personnel to handle sexual assault; only 46% of schools provide the option of anonymous reporting; and less than 50% of schools tell students how they can file criminal charges. Schools are required by federal law to have and to disseminate a written sexual assault policy that addresses prevention of sex offenses and informs students of their rights and of the services available to them should they be assaulted. Not all schools meet this requirement.

Campus sexual assault is hugely underreported to authorities. Part of the problem is that many survivors do not call their experience rape even though it meets the legal criteria, but colleges also often encourage victim-blaming through prevention programs that focus exclusively on risk-reduction behavior by potential victims (such as avoiding alcohol, going out in groups, or carrying a whistle). Drug and alcohol abuse policies that do not include some immunity for victims of sexual assault can also hinder reporting. Not having access to confidential or anonymous reporting also reduces the number of victims who will come forward, as does a belief that the perpetrator will not be punished.

In addition, many schools ignore issues of sexism, racism and homophobia as they relate to sexual violence. Effective sexual assault prevention programs must address broader issues of societal contempt for women, people of color, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people. However, most current prevention programs do little more than provide women with a few cautionary words. Men are rarely addressed, and if they are, it is assumed that they could never experience assault themselves. When survivors report their assaults, school officials often treat women of color who have experienced sexual assault as less reliable than white women. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered survivors are often overlooked or mistreated, and male survivors are almost universally ignored, and the minimal crisis services that are available are often provided exclusively for women.

Schools have a pragmatic as well as an ethical interest in ending sexual assault in their communities. In addition to problems like sexually transmitted disease (acquired as a result of rape by 40% of victims) and chronic physical or mental health problems (affecting 80% of victims), survivors of sexual assault often suffer academic difficulties and are more likely to leave school. Colleges must remember that students are not isolated on their campuses. College students who perpetrate sexual violence can victimize their fellow students or members of the non-campus community. But students can also become leaders for change in their communities.

While schools develop comprehensive programs to curb binge-drinking, prevent plagiarism and promote fire safety, they consistently fail to take responsibility for sexual assault on campus. The result is a campus environment that enforces silence surrounding sexual assault, and sends the implicit message that sexual violence is ignored, and even excused, on campus. By working with students to build strong grassroots movements for improvements to campus sexual assault policies, SAFER seeks to create an environment in which all students can receive an education free from fear. College efforts to prevent sexual violence are inadequate and do not reflect the needs of all students, but we have seen students achieve real, measurable changes to school policies when they have access to the right training and resources.

Facts about the issue

Scope

“Rape is the most common violent crime committed on college campuses.”¹

The National Crime Victimization Survey found that about 3% of college women are raped each academic year,² usually by someone they know. The National College Women Sexual Victimization study estimates about 20 to 25% of college women are victims of sexual assault or attempted sexual assault during their college years.³

College students, because of their age, are a group at high risk for sexual assault, and some researchers believe that college women are more vulnerable than their non-student peers.⁴ The National Crime Victimization Survey found no statistical differences in rape and sexual assault rates between women at college and women of the same age who are not students.⁵ The finding of higher risk is based on the National College Women Sexual Victimization survey⁶ which used a different methodology.

“Women ages 16 to 24 experience rape at rates four times higher than the assault rate of all women,”⁷ making the college (and high school) years the most vulnerable for women.⁸

About 9 in 10 college women who are victims of rape or attempted rape know their assailant.⁹

Less is known about the sexual assault of men, but research suggests that up to 10 percent of campus acquaintance rape victims are men, usually raped by other men.¹⁰

The first few weeks of the first and second years of college is the period when college students are most at risk of being sexually assaulted.¹¹

¹ P. Finn (1995). *Preventing Alcohol-Related Problems on Campus: Acquaintance Rape—A Guide for Program Coordinators*. Newton, Mass.: Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention. www.edc.org/hec/pubs/acqrape.html.

² National Crime Victimization Survey 1995-2000: Violent Victimization of College Students (2003), *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*, December 2003 (NCJ 196143).

³ Bonnie Fisher, Francis Cullen, and Michael Turner, (2000) *The Sexual Victimization of College Women*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice and Bureau of Justice Statistics. (NCJ 182369)

⁴ Heather Karjane, Bonnie Fisher, and Francis Cullen, (2005) *Sexual Assault on Campus: What Colleges and Universities Are Doing About It*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

⁵ National Crime Victimization Survey (2003)

⁶ Bonnie Fisher, Francis Cullen, and Michael Turner, (1999) “Extent and Nature of the Sexual Victimization of College Women: A National Level Analysis,” final report to the National Institute of Justice, Dec. 1999 (NCJ 179977): 1–2.

⁷ S. Humphrey and A. Kahn (2000), “Fraternities, Athletic Teams and Rape: Importance of Identification With a Risky Group.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 15(12): 1313–1322.

⁸ Sampson, Rana. (2002) *Acquaintance Rape of College Students*. <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/mime/open.pdf?Item=269>

⁹ Fisher, Francis and Turner (2000)

¹⁰ D. Benson, C. Charton and F. Goodhart (1992). “Acquaintance Rape on Campus: A Literature Review.” *Journal of American College Health* 40:157–165.

Only one in five of female college rape victims reported sustaining additional injuries, most often bruises, black eyes, cuts, swelling or chipped teeth.¹²

Nearly 70% percent of female victims of attempted rape and 55% of female victims of rape reported using physical force against their assailant to protect themselves. Most also told the person to stop.¹³

34% percent of rapes and 45% of attempted rapes of college women take place on campus. Almost 60% of the rapes that take place on campus occur in the victim's residence, 31% occur in another residence, and 10% occur in a fraternity.¹⁴

Private colleges and major universities have higher rates than the national average, while religiously affiliated institutions have lower than average rates.¹⁵ Students at two-year institutions (15.6%) were more likely than those at four-year institutions (11.1%) to report they had been forced during their lifetime to have sexual intercourse.¹⁶

College women fear stranger rape more than acquaintance rape, and do more to protect themselves from it, though acquaintance rape is much more prevalent.¹⁷

In a 1985 survey of 6,159 students from 32 colleges and universities, one out of every 15 male students admitted they had raped, or tried to rape, a female student during the preceding year.¹⁸

In studies in the early 1980s and 1990s, approximately one-third of college men reported they would rape a woman if they knew they would not get caught.¹⁹

¹¹ C. Ostrander, and J. Schwartz (1994). *Crime at College: The Student Guide to Personal Safety*. Ithaca (New York): New Strategist Publications.; M. Schwartz, and W. DeKeseredy (1997). *Sexual Assault on the College Campus: The Role of Male Peer Support*. Thousand Oaks (California): Sage Publications.

¹² Fisher, Cullen and Turner (2000)

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Sanday, P. (1996). "Rape-Prone Versus Rape-Free Campus Cultures." *Violence Against Women* 2(2): 191–208.

¹⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1997). *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance: National College Health Risk Behavior Survey—United States, 1995*. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Adolescent and School Health.

¹⁷ S. Hickman and C. Muehlenhard (1997). "College Women's Fears and Precautionary Behaviors Relating to Acquaintance Rape and Stranger Rape." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21:527–547.

¹⁸ M.P. Koss, C.A. Gidycz and N. Wisniewski, (1987) "The scope of rape: Incidence and prevalence of sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample of higher education students." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 55:162-170

¹⁹ B. Fisher and J. Sloan III (1995). *Campus Crime: Legal, Social and Policy Perspectives*. Springfield (Illinois): Charles C. Thomas.

We do not know how many college rapists repeat their crime, since most go unpunished. Koss et al.'s survey found 187 rapes to have been committed by 96 men.²⁰

Impact

Survivors of sexual assault often suffer academic difficulties and are more likely to leave school.²¹

40% of victims acquire a sexually transmitted disease as a result of rape.²²

80% of victims suffer chronic physical or mental health problems.²³

Reporting

Campus sexual assault is hugely underreported to authorities, with fewer than 5 percent of college women who are victims of rape or attempted rape reporting it to police.²⁴ Part of the problem is that many survivors do not call their experience rape, though it meets the legal criteria,²⁵ but colleges also often encourage victim-blaming through prevention programs that focus exclusively on risk-reduction behavior by potential victims (such as avoiding alcohol, going out in groups or carrying a whistle).²⁶ Drug and alcohol abuse policies that do not include some immunity for victims of sexual assault can also hinder reporting.²⁷ Not having access to confidential or anonymous reporting also reduces the number of victims who will come forward, as will a belief that the assailant will not be punished.²⁸ Fear of reprisal by the assailant or others also prevents victims from reporting, as does fear of going through the legal process.²⁹

Only half of the schools included in a recent survey provided the option of anonymous reporting. Less than half tell students how they can file criminal charges.³⁰

²⁰ M., Koss, C. Gidycz and N. Wisniewski (1987). "The Scope of Rape: Incidence and Prevalence of Sexual Aggression and Victimization in a National Sample of Higher Education Students." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 55(2): 162-170.

²¹ Connie J. Kirkland (1994). *Academic Impact of Sexual Assault*. Fairfax, VA: George Mason University.

²² Melissa Holmes, Heidi A. Resnick, Dean G. Kirkpatrick and Connie L. Best (1996). "Rape-related pregnancy: Estimates and descriptive characteristics from a national sample of women." *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 175(2): 320-325.

²³ American Medical Association (1995). "Strategies for the treatment and prevention of sexual assault." Available at www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/386/sexualassault.pdf.

²⁴ Fisher, Cullen and Turner (2000).

²⁵ National Crime Victimization Survey 1995-2000 (2003).

²⁶ Karjane, Fisher and Cullen (2005).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Fisher, Cullen and Turner (2000)..

³⁰ Karjane, Fisher and Cullen (2005).

The law

Schools are required by federal law to have and to disseminate a written sexual assault policy that addresses prevention of sex offenses and informs students of their rights and services available to them, should they be assaulted.

Federal legislation requiring reporting of crime statistics and mandating certain campus policies was a step forward, but a recent study found only 37% of campuses' reports were fully compliant with the law.³¹

Security on Campus argues that Title IX requires colleges to eliminate the hostile environment caused by campus sexual assault.³² Finn (1995) also argues that a college can be held liable for not protecting students against a foreseeable crime, such as acquaintance rape.³³

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Security on Campus, Inc. (2005) "Title IX Requires Colleges & Universities To Eliminate The Hostile Environment Caused By Campus Sexual Assault." <http://www.securityoncampus.org/victims/titleixsummary.html> (accessed December 5, 2006)

³³ Finn (1995).