

The Public Face of Responses to Campus Sexual Assault: A National Study of Campus Websites

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Introduction

Campus sexual assault and the responses of institutions of higher education (IHEs) to it have received unprecedented attention in the last 10 years. IHEs are required to make detailed information regarding sexual assault and the related institutional policy public, particularly via the institution's website (Campus SaVE Act, 2013). This is based on an assumption that IHE websites are a primary source students use to gather information. Researchers have taken advantage of the availability of this information to conduct systematic studies of IHE policies. For example, Richards (2016) updated research conducted by Karjane, Fisher, & Cullen (2002) and found provision of information has drastically improved over time. IHE websites were highly likely to include their Title IX and Sexual Misconduct policies on their website, but that did vary by type of IHE.

This presentation takes the perspective of a reporting student to evaluate if what they may want to know is commonly available on IHE websites: Can I get help without reporting? How do I report? What happens after I report? Who investigates? Who decides? What is my role?

Study Sample Institutional Characteristic		% (n)
Type of IHE	Public	37.1 (347)
	Private, Non-Profit	57.6 (539)
	Private, For-Profit	5.3 (50)
Total Enrollment	Very Small (< 1,000)	17.8 (167)
	Small (1,000 to 4,999)	42.4 (397)
	Midsize (5,000 to 9,999)	13.4 (125)
	Large (10,000 to 19,999)	14.2 (133)
Locale	Very Large (20,000 or more)	12.2 (114)
	Urban	52.4 (490)
	Suburban	22.6 (212)
	Town	19.7 (184)
	Rural	5.3 (50)
Religiously Affiliated		33.5 (314)

Methods

Procedures: Part of a larger project on the investigation and adjudication of campus sexual assault cases.* In spring 2016, undergraduate research assistants gathered data on over 150 variables related to reporting, investigation, adjudication, support resources, and programming from IHE websites. Information was gathered from webpages and embedded documents, such as Annual Safety Reports required by the Clery Act, student handbooks, and sexual harassment and sexual misconduct policies. Students coded if information could be located and the content of the information that could be found.

Sample: National sample of 969 4-year accredited degree granting IHEs drawn from the 2013 IPEDS dataset. Thirty-three schools had no information located for a definition of sexual assault, Title IX, reporting, or investigation and were excluded from the findings. The final sample was 936 IHEs.

Conclusion

Findings: Most IHE websites provided answers to basic questions reporting students may ask. IHEs evidence different approaches to investigation, adjudication, and sanctioning based on who is involved. Information and approaches vary by type of IHE, with websites of public IHEs more likely to provide information and websites of very small IHEs less likely to. Additional research is needed to explore how these different approaches are actually implemented, including fidelity to the written policies, and strengths and challenges of different approaches, particularly how those may be related to IHE characteristics such as size based on total enrollment.

*Does not total to 100 because more than one option could be selected.

Results

		% (N)	IHE Type	Total Enrollment
Title IX Reporting	Info Found	89.9 (841)	Public more likely	Very Small less likely
Reporting to Counseling	Confidential	65.4 (612)	Public > Private > For Profit	Very small < Small < Midsize & above
	Conditional	8.9 (83)	ns	ns
	Not Confidential	8.5 (80)	For Profit more likely	Very Small & Large > Very Large Small < Midsize & Very Large
	Info Not Found	17.2 (161)	For Profit more likely	Very Small more likely Small & Midsize > Very Large
Reporting to Health Services	Confidential	54.0 (505)	Public > Private > For Profit	Very Small more likely Small < Midsize & Very Large Large < Very Large
	Conditional	8.0 (75)	ns	ns
	Not Confidential	9.4 (88)	For Profit more likely	Very Small > Midsize & Very Large Small > Midsize, Large, & Very Large
	Info Not Found	28.6 (268)	For Profit > Private > Public	Very Small more likely Small > Very Large
Title IX Coordinator	No Other Title	40.3 (377)	ns	Very Small > Small & Very Large Small < Midsize & Large
	HR/EEO title	28.3 (265)	Public & Private > For Profit	Very Large more likely Large > Very Small
	Student Affairs/ Other Admin Title	29.1 (272)	For Profit > Private > Public	Small more likely Very large less likely
	Other Title/Not found	2.4 (22)	ns	Very Small > Small & Very Large Medium & Large > Small
Who investigates reports ¹	Title IX	85.9 (804)	Public > Private	Very Small less likely Large & Very Large > Small
	Dean of Students	40.8 (382)	For Profit > Public	Very Large less likely
	Campus Police	38.5 (360)	ns	Very Small < Small < Midsize Large > Very Small & Very Large
	Local Police	22.4 (210)	ns	Large > Very Small, Small & Very Large Midsize > Very Small
	Independent Investigator	17.8 (167)	ns	Midsize > Small & Very Large Small > Very Small
Victim must participate in investigation	Yes	17.6 (165)	For Profit more likely	Very Large less likely Very Small > Midsize & Large
	Not Found	42.1 (394)	ns	Very Small > Small, Midsize & Very Large
Who adjudicates	General Conduct Board	24.4 (228)	ns	ns
	Sexual Misconduct Board	28.3 (265)	ns	Small & Large > Very Small Large > Midsize
	Admin Panel	16.5 (154)	Public less likely	ns
	Sole Administrator	16.7 (156)	Ns	ns
	Investigator	9.4 (88)	ns	ns
	Not Found	4.8 (45)	Public less likely	Very Small more likely Small > Large
Who sanctions?	General Conduct Board	23.0 (215)	Public more likely	Midsize, Large, Very Large > Very Small Large, Very Large > Small
	Sexual Misconduct Board	19.0 (178)	ns	ns
	Admin Panel	18.3 (171)	For Profit > Private > Public	Very small & small > large
	Sole Administrator	19.4 (182)	ns	ns
	Not found	20.3 (190)	ns	ns

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