

# An Update from the President's Council Action Team

June 2014

INCLUSIVE SAFETY  
**CONSENT**  
RESPECT SOCIAL CHANGE EDUCATION  
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## An Update from the President's Council Action Team

Orientation week 2013 at Saint Mary's University included a chant that led to public outrage. Shortly afterwards, a similar situation arose at the University of British Columbia - both incited national and international media coverage. These chants were described as highlighting the prevalence of sexualized violence, and raised issues of safety and respect for all members of the university community.

This very troubling event happened on our campus, and left us with many unanswered questions. For Saint Mary's, the chant challenged our core values and what we stand for as an institution. The University and broader community needed to understand why it happened. Most importantly, people wanted to know what we were going to do. We took full responsibility, and through a call to action, Saint Mary's made a commitment to effect change. To this end, a group was formed known as the President's Council. The Council was charged to provide recommendations to the President of the University to foster cultural change. Such change helps prevent sexualized violence, inspires respectful behaviour and creates a safe learning environment.

In December of 2013, the President's Council released a report entitled '**Promoting a Culture of Safety, Respect, and Consent at Saint Mary's University and Beyond.**' The report presented a series of recommendations that were grouped into three categories:

- **Build a Foundation for Cultural Change**
- **Drive Cultural Change**
- **Demonstrate Accountability**



# RESPECT

Two immediate action items were executed by the end of January:

- **The University's public commitment to action and to implement the report;**
- **The formation of the Action Team**

On January 30, 2014, the President of the University and the Chair of the Board of Governors issued a public statement. It outlined how Saint Mary's would move forward to promote a culture of safety, respect and consent. This public statement was foundational.

In February, the Action Team embarked upon its challenging task to 'drive and monitor the progress of the implementation of the recommendations.' The President's Council Report and its recommendations at first glance were challenging. While they represent an ambitious agenda for Saint Mary's University, we soon discovered the desire of the broader University community to move beyond the unfortunate event of last September and to look forward.

The President's Council report calls for the Action Team to provide six-month updates on this three-year project. 'The University community and all stakeholders deserve to know what progress is being made on the prevention of sexualized violence and the promotion of a safe and respectful environment for students, faculty, and staff.' This is our first update and we are pleased to share some highlights of our progress. More detailed information may be found [here](#).



## Where We Are

### Education

#### Learning About Consent

Many people have been affected by sexualized violence. As a University, we have a major role to play in addressing this issue. The liberal education at the heart of the University shapes young people's values and attitudes, and inspires all of us to build just and safe communities. In this way, education is the key to preventing sexualized violence. We have a commitment to value diversity and to encourage compassion, empathy, and respect. The University has a responsibility to ensure all members of our community understand healthy sexuality and the meaning of consent. The University also needs to dispel the victim-blaming rape myths that often discourage victims of sexualized violence in coming forward and reporting.

Creating cultural change requires all members of the University community to understand the meaning of sexualized violence and its effects on people. We also need to understand policies around the prevention of sexualized violence and building a respectful environment for all members of the campus. The Action Team is developing on-line training modules that will serve as a foundation for creating cultural change and highlighting the university's core values.

Consent will be one of the key topics that will be covered in this educational program. The

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University understands this is only one part of broader education that is required around this very important issue. To that end, we are:

- **Incorporating educational sessions around consent and healthy sexuality into student orientation**
- **Building on existing peer-to-peer training programs**
- **Developing awareness and education programs and we have identified opportunities to collaborate with other universities, and the provincial government.**
- **Including the definition of consent into our sexual assault policy**
- **Ensuring that understanding consent is part of all bystander training.**

Other topics covered in the on-line program will include: code of conduct, definition of sexual assault, alcohol and drug use, and how to be an effective bystander.

Through reviewing best practices, the Action Team identified a model from the University of Montana and will adapt this for the Saint Mary's community. The University hopes to share the modules with the broader community and identify opportunities for collaboration. The modules will be introduced in the fall/winter and the University will work toward making the modules mandatory for 2015-2016.

## Student Orientation

The University has established the Orientation Steering Committee to oversee the development and execution of orientation activities at Saint Mary's University.

Support for student success is a longstanding commitment at the University. The University's Senate adopted a report in 2006 entitled ***'Promoting Student Success: Shared Goals, Shared Responsibilities.'*** This document is the foundation for designing an effective learning environment and has been used in the development of our new student orientation.

The Orientation Committee has adopted the thinking that orientation at Saint Mary's will be about transitions: into the University, through the University, and moving out to the broader community. As such, 'orientation' is an on-going experience beyond the first week in September, and includes activities throughout the year. For the first week, the University will host 'Welcome Week'. The ongoing orientation will focus on a combination of academic and social integration thereby creating diverse opportunities for both incoming and existing students.

Highlights of new orientation will include featured events to promote healthy interpersonal relationships. Letters will be sent to all new students and their families to assist with a better



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understanding of roles and responsibilities - but most importantly, the resources available for students. Integration of international and domestic students will be a critical component of orientation and will foster intercultural learning. The Orientation Committee has formed various sub-committees comprised of staff, faculty, and Saint Mary's University Student Association (SMUSA) representatives and the University now has a dedicated full-time orientation coordinator.

## **Bystander Training**

We know that all members of the University have a role to play when it comes to ensuring the safety of friends, fellow students, and colleagues. Providing education so that people understand the predatory nature of sexualized violence and equipping them with effective strategies are some important first steps to preventing sexualized violence.

The University looked at some best practices and recommendations that came out of the President's Council Report relating to Bystander Training. The Action Team identified a bystander training program known as "Bringing in the Bystander" from the University of New Hampshire as a prominent training program in this regard. The University of New Hampshire is one of three universities that are currently sitting on the White House Task Force to address sexualized violence on US campuses.

In the fall of 2013, Saint Francis Xavier University introduced this model of training which was very well received.

Our Action Team has been working with Students NS and the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre to develop training in Nova Scotia. The University of New Hampshire will be at Saint Francis Xavier from July 9-12 and Saint Mary's will send delegates for the training. These individuals will then train student leaders at Saint Mary's in preparation for the fall semester.

In the early fall, Saint Mary's will bring the University of New Hampshire program to the University so that all student leaders and Student Services staff will take the training. We have reached out to the broader community and would like to share this resource with other local universities, Women's Centres, the Department of Community Services, and other service organizations. The University will also be offering a bystander training program to faculty and staff.

## **Alcohol Policy**

The University has reviewed and has updated its alcohol policy using the Acadia University Strang report and Student Safety in Nova Scotia report by Students NS as a guiding reference. Saint Mary's will introduce a renewed version of our award-winning DRAFT (Drink Responsibly

and Feel Terrific) Team and Student Services will engage a wide range of students in the delivery of peer education. The alcohol policy will be supported by SMUSA through its wellness campaign and ongoing alcohol project. We will promote more alcohol-free events and we have reached out to the broader community to tackle the issue of alcohol and drug use.

## Saint Mary's University Sexual Assault Policy & Core Response Team

Saint Mary's University is developing mechanisms to make its sexual assault policy and procedures more visible and accessible.

The Resource Guide for Ontario Colleges and Universities conveys that an institution that has a separate sexual assault policy is sending a strong message this issue is being taken seriously, and will be dealt with in such a manner. The Action Team identified the University's sexual assault policy and procedures needed to be more visible on the Saint Mary's website. We are making improvements to our website to ensure all members of the University community have quick access to resources on and off campus.

## Climate Surveys/Research

We have heard that the University community wants to understand the scope of the problem around sexualized violence - people are looking for more information. The Action Team has moved forward in identifying a research tool that will help shed light on the situation. Climate surveys are useful tools because they can provide a more accurate story of what is really going on and at the same time they also create awareness about an issue. Addressing the issue of sexual assault through climate surveys often helps victims feel more comfortable in coming forward and reporting an incident. Saint Mary's is well equipped to conduct this research. Using in-house expertise, a core group of faculty and students are developing a survey that will be ready for the fall semester.



# Work in Progress

- Saint Mary's University has a longstanding commitment to respectful behaviour. We are moving toward a university-wide code of behaviour for all members of the university community that include faculty, staff, students, contractors, and visitors. The code of behaviour will reflect our core values and will align with the existing Saint Mary's policies. We will engage the university community in declaring their commitment.
- The University is currently having its sexual assault policy reviewed by legal counsel as well as the current structure of the core response team. After preliminary research, it appears that most university models tend to deal with reported incidents of sexual assault and leave more formal proceedings to the criminal justice system. The University will conduct more in-depth research to assist in the identification of best practices as it relates to formal investigations and adjudication.
- Every member of the University has a role to play in preventing and responding to sexual violence - the Action Team will clearly articulate these roles so they are understood.



- An external review of Student Services is underway.
- The University embraces the idea that the well-being and safety of our students needs to be central to formalizing any type of relationships between the University and its student associations. To this end, we have retained the services of an external consultant to review best practices relating to the formal relationship between student associations and their parent universities. We have drafted a memorandum of understanding between the university and Saint Mary's Student Association based on best practices.
- We are developing a comprehensive sexualized violence communications plan and are establishing standards for all campus advertisements/communications to eliminate any messaging that is not consistent with the University's core values.
- We are launching a student-oriented research initiative so we better understand rape culture.
- We are reviewing the University's relationship with the Women's Centre.

Saint Mary's is committed to the prevention of sexual violence and the promotion of a safe, inclusive and respectful learning and working environment.

The purpose of liberal education is to cultivate in students a broad knowledge base, skills of enquiry across the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, appreciation for the importance of historical and cultural contexts, and respect for truth and ethical conduct.

A clear and pervasive commitment to social responsibility enriches the educational experience of current students, inspires prospective students to choose Saint Mary's University as the place to study, and contributes significantly to their development as active citizens.

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