

UA's 2019 Climate Survey results indicate prevalence of misconduct similar to other universities

Background

The University of Alaska conducts annual systemwide climate surveys to determine the prevalence of sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence among university students and gather feedback on institutional response and overall perceptions of campus climate

A report with the results of the 2019 University of Alaska Climate Survey is now available for review [HERE](#).

The 2019 Climate Survey, conducted in conjunction with Brad Myrstol of the UAA Justice Center, used the survey instrument developed by the Administrator Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative (ARC3). The open source survey is nationally recognized for utilizing vetted methodology, and, importantly, allows the university to compare its results to other universities across the country. In fact, the survey found that UA's rates of sexual misconduct are similar to other public universities.

The ARC3 survey was distributed to a sample of 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students between March 18 and April 15, 2019. Reminders to the group were sent four times via email. There was an 8.4 percent response rate.

The sex/gender identity of UA student respondents was used as the primary point of comparison rather than specific campus data. The experiences focused on in the survey are heavily gendered experiences, and with minor exceptions, there was no significant difference in responses from students at UAA, UAF and UAS.

Research consistently shows that while people of all sexes/genders experience sexual harassment, stalking, dating violence and sexual assault, those who identify as female or gender non-conforming (GNC) experience victimization at much higher rates than those who identify as male.

Findings

The survey revealed the prevalence of sexual harassment, stalking, dating violence or sexual assault victimization experienced by UA students. The research indicates that potentially thousands of UA students may have been victims of one or more forms of sexual misconduct since enrolling at the university, including on- or off-campus incidents.

A comparison of UA's prevalence rates with universities that have conducted campus climate surveys using the same ARC3 instrument -- the University of Colorado, Boise State University, Pennsylvania State University, Tulane University, and the University of Wyoming -- shows that UA's results are not atypical for universities across the nation.

These similarities are important not only because they show that UA is not unique with respect to students' experiences with sexual misconduct victimization, but also because they highlight the dramatic degree to which sexual misconduct incidents are under-represented in official reporting data.

Understanding other climate issues, such as students' knowledge about reporting policies and resources for victims, their attitudes about prevention and their perceptions about how their community addresses the problem of sexual violence, are critical pieces of information for improving campus responses and prevention programs.

Key Findings/Sexual Harassment

The data demonstrate that sexual harassment is widespread among UA students. Overall, an estimated 53.9 percent of UA students—more than 10,000 individuals—have experienced one or more types of sexual harassment since enrolling at the university. The sorts of sexually harassing behaviors that UA students encounter differs widely, but typically takes the form of sexist or sexually offensive language, gestures or pictures.

Sexual harassment committed by university faculty, instructors or staff was measured using 16 separate items falling within one of four categories: (1) sexist or sexually offensive language, gestures or pictures, (2) unwanted sexual attention, (3) unwanted touching and (4) subtle or explicit bribes or threats.

An estimated 27.8 percent of UA students experienced at least one instance of sexual harassment by faculty, instructors or staff since enrolling at the university. Nearly two-thirds of incidents involved sexist or sexually offensive language, gestures or pictures. Notably, irrespective of a student's self-reported sex/gender identity, the least likely reaction to sexual harassment by faculty, instructors, or staff was to report the person.

Sexual harassment committed by fellow university students was measured using 12 items. The 12 items used to measure sexual harassment by fellow students also fell within one of four categories: (1) sexist or sexually offensive language, gestures or pictures, (2) unwanted sexual attention, (3) unwanted touching and (4) subtle or explicit threats.

Nearly half of UA students (47.9 percent) reported experiencing sexual harassment perpetrated by fellow students. Less than five percent of UA students indicated that they told the person to stop, or that they reported the person.

A large majority of the sexual harassment incidents experienced by UA students occurred at an on-campus location. Among students who were sexually harassed by university faculty, instructors or staff, approximately 85 percent reported that the incident occurred on campus. A smaller percentage of students who were sexually harassed by fellow UA students—an estimated 72.4 percent —reported that incidents occurred on campus.

Key Findings/Stalking

Overall, approximately 1 out of every 4 UA students (26.1 percent) experienced at least one instance of stalking since enrolling at the university. Female UA students are significantly more likely than male or gender non-conforming students to experience stalking. Slightly more than half of stalking perpetrators were identified by victims as being fellow UA students, and less than half of stalking incidents occurred on campus.

Stalking victimization was measured using 10 survey items including how many times one or more people did the following: (1) watched or followed respondents from a distance, or spied on respondents with a listening device, camera, or GPS; (2) approached them or showed up in places such as their home, workplace, or school when the respondent didn't want them to be there; (3) left strange or potentially threatening items for the respondent to find; (4) sneaked into a respondent's home or car and did things to scare them by letting the respondent know they'd been there; (5) left the respondent unwanted messages, including text or voice messages; (6) made unwanted phone calls to the respondent, including hang-up calls; (7) sent the respondent unwanted emails or instant messages, or sent messages through social media apps; (8) left the respondent cards, letters, flowers or presents when they knew the respondent didn't want them to; (9) made rude or mean comments to a respondent online; or, (10) spread rumors about the respondent online, whether they were true or not.

If a survey participant indicated that they experienced *any* of these behaviors since enrolling at the university, they were coded as having experienced stalking.

Key Findings/Dating Violence

An estimated 14.9 percent of UA students—roughly 3,000 individuals— experienced at least one incident of dating violence since enrolling at the university. Female UA students are significantly more likely than male students, but not gender non-conforming students, to experience dating violence victimization.

Nearly 9 out of 10 dating violence victims indicated that the perpetrator was a current or former intimate partner or spouse. Less than one-fourth of victims reported that dating violence perpetrators were fellow UA students, and only about 10 percent of victims indicated that the dating violence incident that impacted them the most occurred at an on-campus location.

The survey asked respondents to indicate dating violence committed by “any hook-up, boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, or wife you have had, including exes, regardless of the length of the relationship, since you enrolled at the University of Alaska.” Dating violence prevalence was measured if respondents indicated experiencing any of these five things, not including horseplay or joking around: (1) the person threatened to hurt the respondent and the respondent thought they might really get hurt; (2) the person pushed, grabbed or shook the respondent; (3) the person hit the respondent; (4) the person beat up the respondent; or, (5) the person stole or destroyed the respondent’s property.

Key Findings/Sexual Assault

An estimated 20.6 percent of UA students—approximately 4,100 individuals— experienced some form of sexual assault since enrolling. An estimated 11.2 percent of UA students—approximately 2,200 individuals—have experienced at least one instance of completed nonconsensual sexual penetration. Female students experience sexual assault—and, in particular, instances of attempted or completed nonconsensual sexual penetration—at significantly higher rates than male and gender non-conforming students.

The survey asked respondents about their sexual assault victimization experiences since enrolling at the university. The survey measured three types of sexual assault: (1) nonconsensual sexual touching; (2) attempted nonconsensual oral, anal or vaginal sex; and (3) completed nonconsensual oral, anal or vaginal sex.

In excess of 90 percent of UA students who were sexually assaulted knew the perpetrator; only 7.9 percent of victims indicated that the perpetrator was a stranger to them. An estimated 46.5 percent of sexual assault victims reported that the person who assaulted them was a current or former intimate partner or spouse. Sexual assault perpetrators are typically not fellow UA students (34.7 percent), and sexual assault incidents are much more likely to occur off-campus than on-campus (14.6 percent).

UA Response to instances of sexual misconduct

Overall, only approximately 1 out of every 6 UA students (16.6 percent) who experienced sexual misconduct disclosed to anyone. It was rare (less than 5 percent) for UA students to

report their experiences to university employees. Only 2 percent reported to the Title IX Office, and less than 1 percent reported to campus police.

These rates of disclosure are important for understanding students' perspectives on, and experiences with, UA's institutional response because they suggest that students actually have very limited direct contact with university resources (e.g. faculty and staff) following an instance of sexual misconduct.

Very few UA students who experienced sexual misconduct since enrolling at the university reported non-supportive institutional responses.

Key Findings/UA Campus Climate

Overall, data suggests that UA students are not tolerant of deceptive or coercive tactics when it comes to dating and sexual relationships. UA students understand the importance of obtaining affirmative consent in sexual encounters, and UA students are generally supportive of their friends and peers who experience and/or report incidents of sexual misconduct. In addition, UA students are willing to support and intervene on behalf of others in risky situations in which sexual misconduct or other forms of violence may occur.

At UA there appears to be a robust student culture that understands and values respectful sexual and dating relationships, and that prioritizes social and emotional support for victims of sexual misconduct and dating violence.

While a majority of students indicated they thought the university would support students who experienced and/or reported incidents of sexual misconduct, a sizeable minority did not agree that the university would provide such institutional support. Findings suggest that a potential obstacle to reporting is a lack of belief on the part of students that the institution is serious about responding to sexual misconduct.

In general, UA students said that they feel safe from sexual harassment, stalking, dating violence and sexual violence at the university. The challenge for the university, then, is to demonstrate and communicate to students that it does not tolerate sexual misconduct in any form, that it will take action when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, and that students who are the victims of sexual misconduct are believed and supported.