

Findings from the 2015 HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey

Charles Blaich and Kathy Wise
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In this report we summarize findings from the 43 HEDS institutions that participated in the 2015 administration of the HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey (SACCS). Specifically, we will:

1. Briefly summarize the overall findings,
2. Review the ground rules for sharing data from the HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey, and
3. Provide a more detailed review of the findings from the survey.

Summary

- The longer students were on campus, the less favorable their views were on aspects of campus climate that are related to unwanted sexual contact and sexual assault.
- Women have less favorable views than men on these aspects of campus climate across all four years of college.
- The proportion of students who experience unwanted sexual contact increases over four years of college, but women are much more likely to experience unwanted sexual contact than men at all points during college.
- The proportion of students who experience sexual assault either once or multiple times increases over four years of college. However, women are far more likely to experience sexual assault than men.
- The majority of women who are sexually assaulted experience multiple sexual assaults. One implication of this fact is that using the proportion of men and women who report experiencing sexual assault as a campus measure underestimates how often sexual assault takes place.
- Alcohol use was connected with a large proportion of sexual assaults.
- There is significant between-institution variation in the number and character of sexual assaults. While sexual assault, as well as unwanted sexual contact, occurs at every campus, it is much more prevalent at some campuses than at others.

Data Sharing Ground Rules

Institutions that participated in the HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey agreed to a stricter version of the consortium's data sharing agreement. We list the points of this agreement below.

- HEDS institutions will use these data only for internal planning and management, not for external publication.
- HEDS staff will not publicly identify participating institutions.
- HEDS staff will not publicly present any findings from this survey.
- HEDS survey liaisons should only identify participating institutions to select individuals on campus.
- In written reports and public presentations HEDS institutions should:
 - a. Not identify other participating HEDS institutions or display the data from any single HEDS institution, even if that institution is not identified; and
 - b. Ensure that any pooled comparison groups contain at least five institutions.

We encourage you to share this report internally at your institutions. It follows the guidelines above and can be shared internally as you see fit. However, please do not distribute it publicly outside your institution or post it on publicly accessible websites.

Findings

18,658 undergraduate students from 43 HEDS institutions completed the HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey in spring 2015. The mean response rate for HEDS institutions was 27%. This is in line with the HEDS Alumni Survey and HEDS First Destination Survey, and lower than HEDS surveys such as the HEDS Senior Survey and HEDS Research Practices Survey, which are often administered in classrooms or in settings in which participation is mandatory. Before we discuss findings from the HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey, it is important to note that one of the most powerful qualities of data from this survey was the exceptional degree of between-institution

variability. While what we describe below is true of the aggregated data from participating HEDS institutions, the variability by institution was notable. This highlights the importance of carefully reviewing your own data, perhaps following some of the same analyses we describe below.

Campus Climate

The HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey includes five scales that measure different aspects of campus climate surrounding sexual assault and unwanted sexual contact:

1. General Campus Climate (8 statements, Chronbach’s $\alpha = 0.85$)
2. Response to Difficult or Dangerous Situations (5 statements, Chronbach’s $\alpha = 0.89$)
3. Views on Sexual Assault at Your Institution (3 statements, Chronbach’s $\alpha = 0.79$)
4. Views on Institutional Response to Report of Sexual Assault (5 statements, Chronbach’s $\alpha = 0.89$)
5. Frequency of Unwanted Sexual Contact (3 questions, Chronbach’s $\alpha = 0.79$)

While all students generally have favorable views on the first of the four measures of campus climate listed above, their views become less favorable the longer they are in college. Furthermore, at every point during their time at college, women had less favorable views of these elements of campus climate than men. Below we have included the statements in each of the scales, as well as students’ responses to the scales broken down by gender and class year. Students selected one of the following response options for all of the climate statements in these four scales:

- 5 = Strongly agree
- 4 = Agree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 1 = Strongly disagree

Hence, an average of 4.2 indicates that students typically agreed with all of the statements in the scale while an average of 3.8 indicates that students usually responded between “agree” and “neither agree nor disagree” to the statements.

Table 1. Average Student Response to General Campus Climate Scale

Below are statements about your views on the general climate at your institution. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each:

- Faculty, staff, and administrators respect what students at my institution think.
- Faculty, staff, and administrators at my institution are genuinely concerned about students’ welfare.
- Faculty, staff, and administrators on this campus treat students fairly.
- Students at my institution are genuinely concerned about the welfare of other students.
- I feel valued in the classroom/learning environment.
- I feel close to people on this campus.
- I feel like I am part of this campus’s community.
- I feel safe on this campus.



Table 2. Average Student Response to Campus Response to Difficult or Dangerous Situations Scale

Below are statements about your views on your institution's response to difficult or dangerous situations. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each:

- Campus officials do a good job protecting students from harm.
- If a crisis happened here, I am confident campus officials would handle it well.
- Campus officials response quickly in difficult situations.
- Campus officials handle incidents in a fair and responsible manner
- There is a good support system at my institution for students going through difficult times.

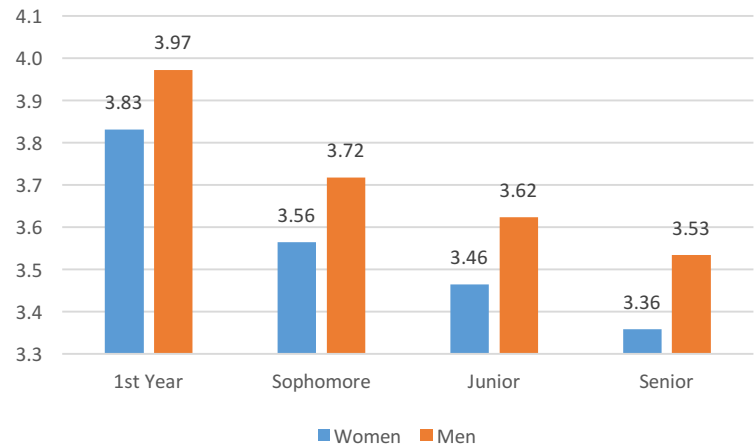


Table 3. Average Student Response to Views on Sexual Assault at Your Institution Scale

Below are statements about your views on sexual assault at your institution. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each:

- I believe that the number of sexual assaults that occur on campus at my institution or during off-campus events or programs sponsored by my institution is low.
- I do not believe that I or one of my friends is at risk for being sexually assaulted on campus at my institution or during off-campus events or programs sponsored by my institution.
- I believe that students at my institution would intervene if they witnessed a sexual assault.

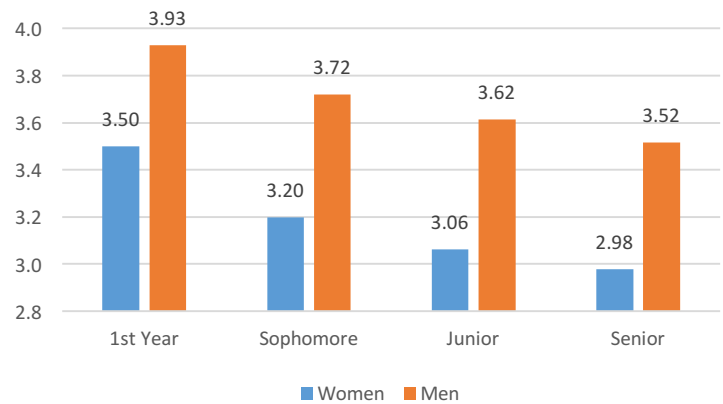
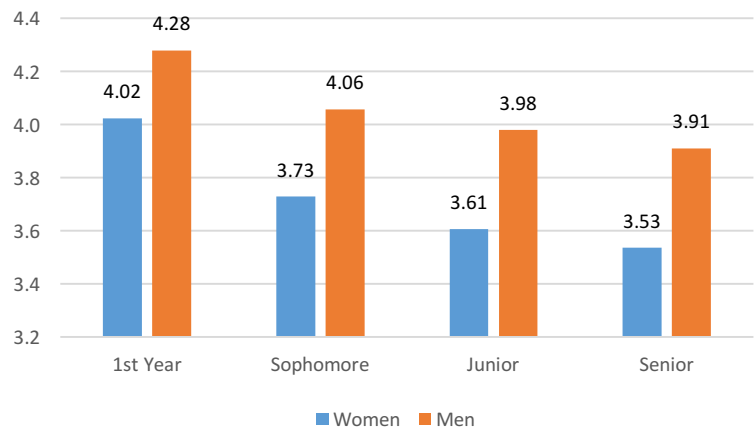


Table 4. Average Student Response to Views on Institutional Response to Report of Sexual Assault Scale

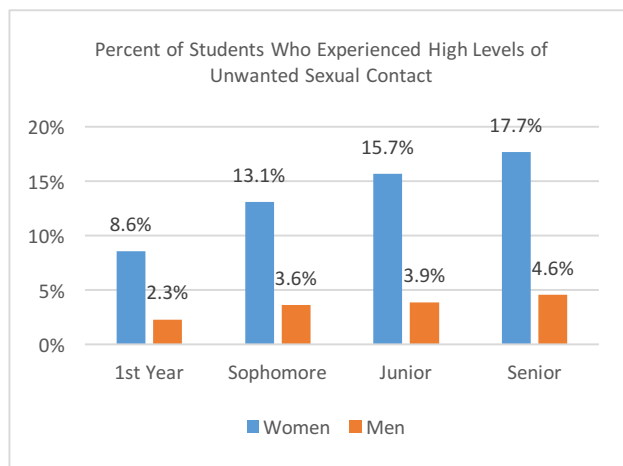
Below are statements about your views on what might happen if someone were to report a sexual assault to an official at your institution. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each:

- Campus officials would take the report seriously.
- Campus officials would support and protect the person making the report.
- Campus officials would conduct a careful investigation in order to determine what happened.
- Campus officials would take action against the offender(s).
- Students would support the person making the report.

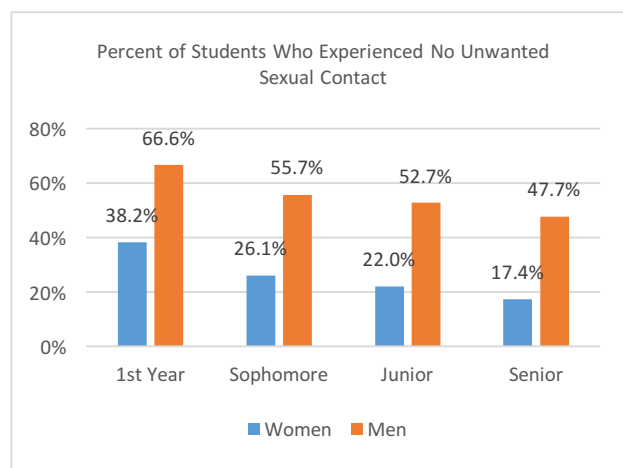


Our fifth measure of campus climate was how often students reported experiencing unwanted sexual contact. The HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey included a detailed definition of unwanted sexual contact that students read prior to responding to the survey questions about unwanted sexual contact. This definition included three different forms of unwanted sexual contact:

1. *Unwanted verbal behaviors* – Someone making sexual comments about your body; someone making unwelcome sexual advances, propositions, or suggestions to you; or someone telling you sexually offensive jokes or kidding about your sex or gender-specific traits
2. *Unwanted nonverbal behaviors* – Sending you sexual emails, texts, or pictures; posting sexual comments about you on blogs or social media; showing you sexually offensive pictures or objects; leering at you or making lewd gestures towards you; or touching oneself sexually in front of you
3. *Unwanted brief physical contact* – Someone briefly groping you, rubbing sexually against you, pinching you, or engaging in any other brief inappropriate or unwelcome touching of your body



We asked students to indicate whether they had experienced each of these forms of unwanted sexual contact. Their responses could range from “never” to “very often.” We categorized students who experienced any one of these three forms of unwanted sexual contact “often” or “very often” as experiencing high levels of unwanted sexual contact. While the proportion of both women and men who experienced high levels of unwanted sexual contact increased the longer students were in college, women were far more likely to experience high levels than men. (See top figure on the right.)



Correspondingly, the proportion of men and women who experienced no unwanted sexual contact declined the longer that students were in college, with nearly half of all senior men experiencing no unwanted sexual contact and only 17% of women experiencing no unwanted sexual contact. (See lower figure on the right.)

Sexual Assault

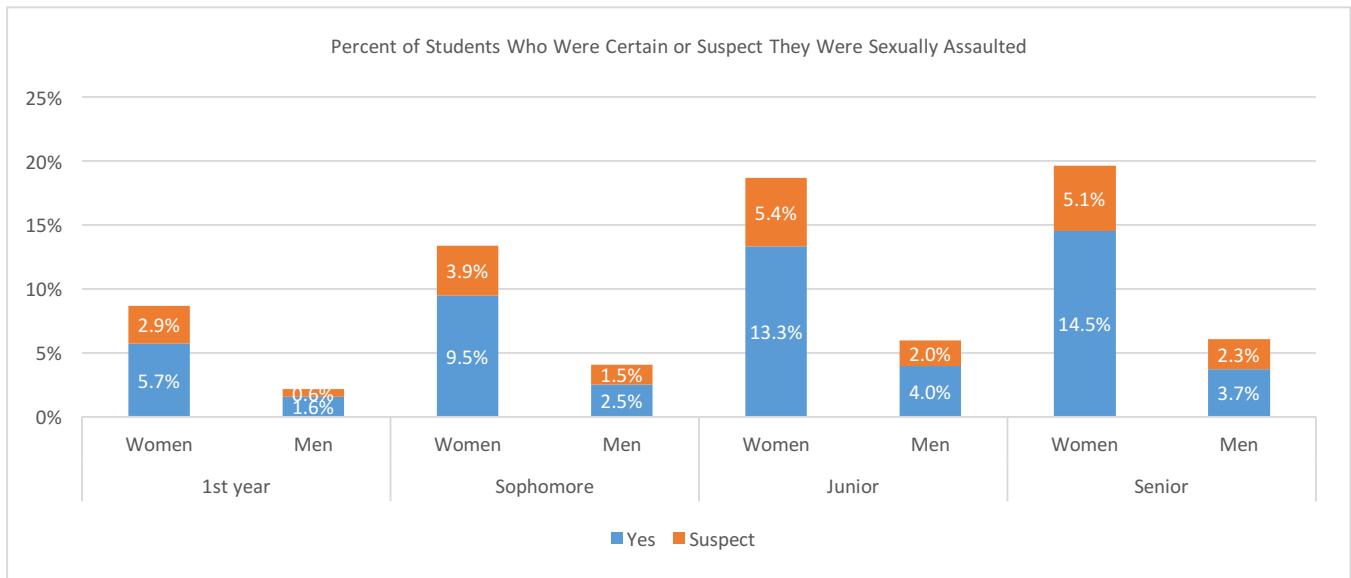
As we did when asking students about unwanted sexual contact, we preceded our questions about sexual assault with details about five different kinds of sexual assault:

“In the next set of questions we ask about experiences you may have had with sexual assault on campus at [Institution Name] or during off-campus events or programs sponsored by [Institution Name]. When we ask about sexual assault, we are referring to five specific types of sexual contact, which you **did not want** or for which you **did not give consent**:

- Touching of a sexual nature (kissing you, touching of private parts, grabbing, fondling, rubbing up against you in a sexual way, even if it was over your clothes)
- Oral sex (someone’s mouth or tongue making contact with your genitals, or your mouth or tongue making contact with someone else’s genitals)
- Vaginal sex (someone’s penis being put in your vagina, or your penis being put into someone else’s vagina)
- Anal sex (someone’s penis being put in your anus, or your penis being put into someone else’s anus)
- Anal or vaginal penetration with a body part other than a penis or tongue, or by an object, like a bottle or candle”

We then asked students, “Since starting at your institution, have you been sexually assaulted while you were on campus or while you were off campus during an event or program sponsored by your institution?” They could select “Yes,” “No,” or “I suspect that I was sexually assaulted, but I am not certain” in response to that question.

As we saw with unwanted sexual contact, women are far more likely to experience sexual assault than men. Moreover, the proportion of women who experience sexual assault increases the longer women are in college. (See figure below.)



In Tables 5–7 below we describe the relationship between sexual assault and other demographic variables.

Table 5. Percent of Students Who Were Certain or Suspect They Were Sexually Assaulted by Gender
275 students identified their gender as something other than man or woman. These students were more likely to experience sexual assault than students who identified as men or women.

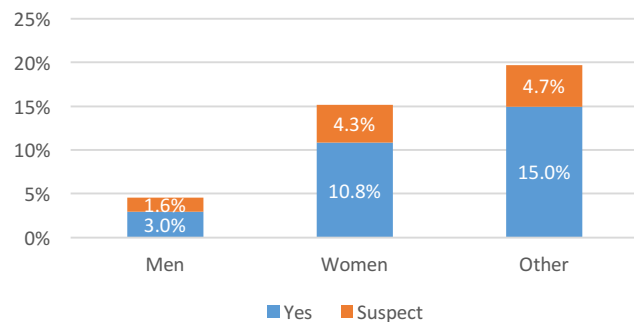


Table 6. Percent of Students Who Were Certain or Suspect They Were Sexually Assaulted by Sexual Orientation

For the most part, students who identified with a sexual orientation besides heterosexual were more likely to be sexually assaulted than students who identified as heterosexuals.

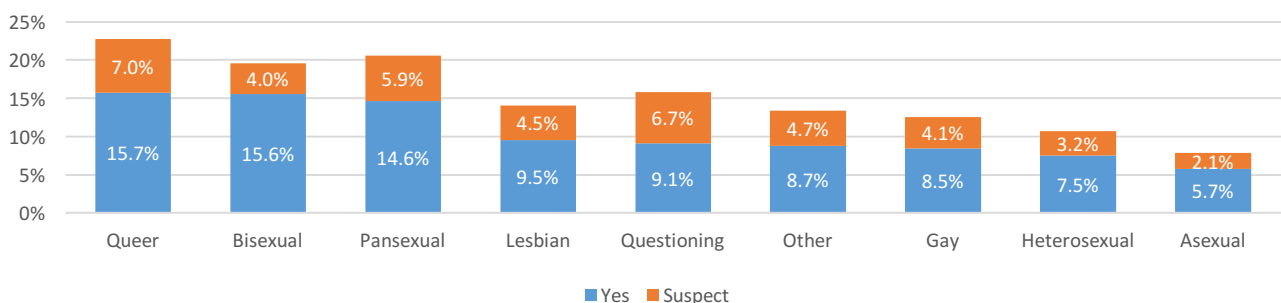
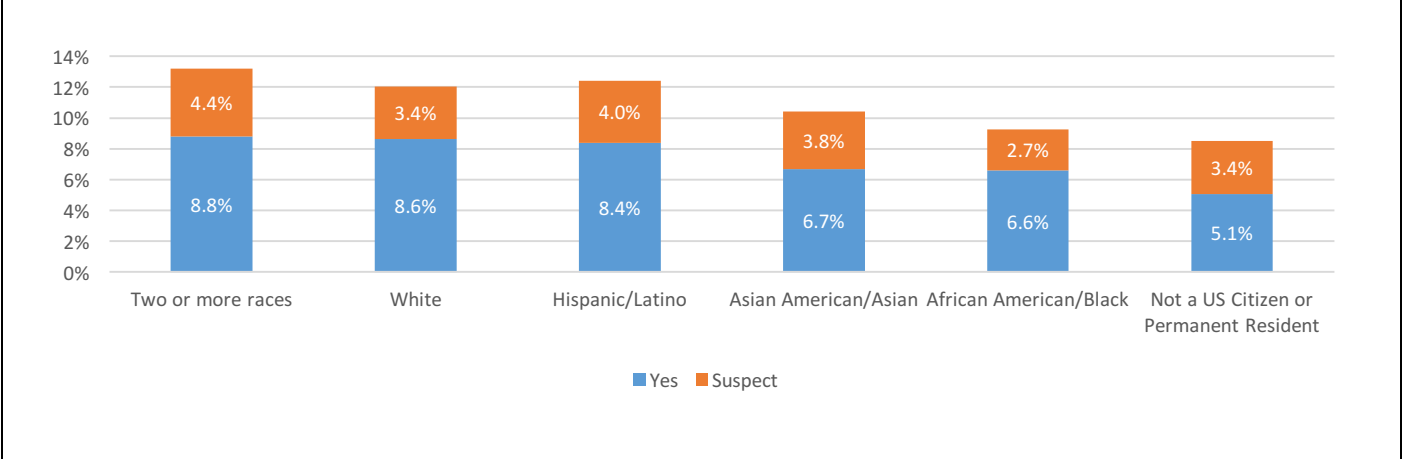
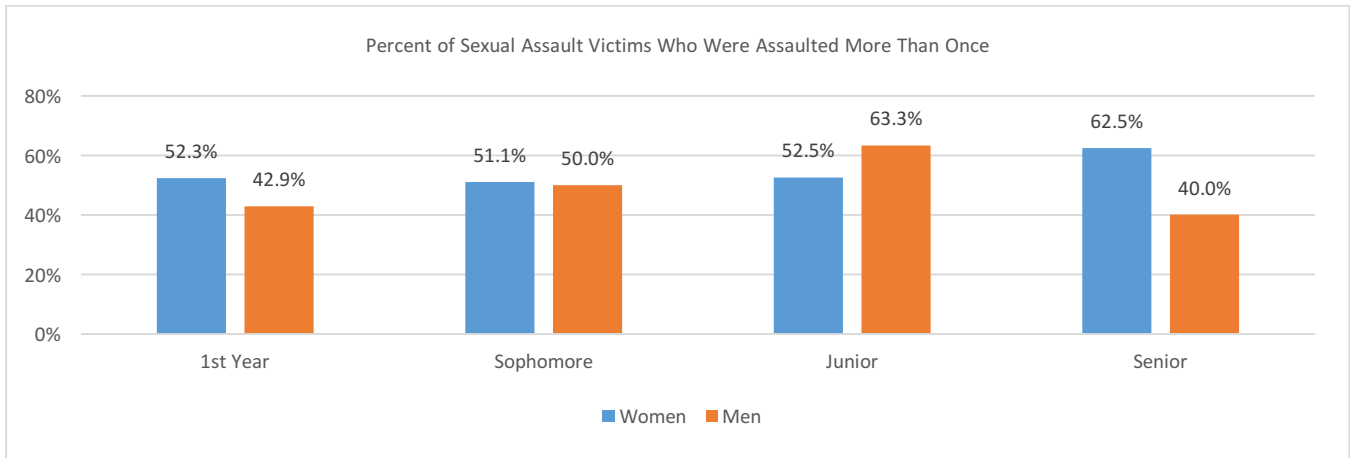


Table 7. Percent of Students Who Were Certain or Suspect They Were Sexually Assaulted by Race/Ethnicity

There was little variation in the proportion of students who experienced sexual assault across different races and ethnicities.



One of the most striking findings from the survey is the number of students who experienced multiple sexual assaults. As shown in the figure below, the majority of women who were victims of sexual assault were assaulted more than once. The proportion of men who were assaulted more than once was also high, but not as high as it was for women. Moreover, the women in our sample were far more likely than men to be victims of sexual assault, regardless of the number of assaults. Of the students from HEDS institutions who responded to our survey, over 1,300 women were sexually assaulted compared to about 180 men.



Over 44% of all women who were sexually assaulted were assaulted two to three times, and 9% of women who were sexually assaulted were assaulted more than four times. Since a high proportion of people who were sexually assaulted were repeatedly assaulted, simply looking at the proportion of people who were sexually assaulted *substantially underestimates* the incidence of sexual assault on our campuses. Earlier in this document we reported the following about the proportion of women from different class years who were sexually assaulted:

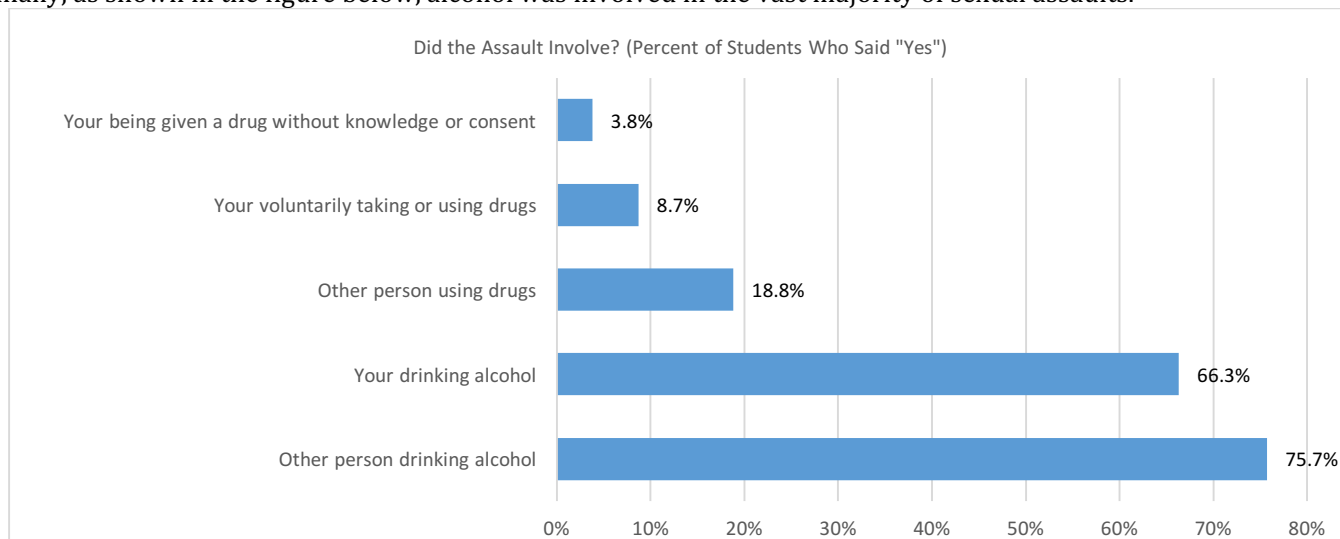
- First-year students – 5.7% or 5.7 women in 100 were sexually assaulted
- Sophomores – 9.5% or 9.5 women in 100 were sexually assaulted
- Juniors – 13.3% or 13.3 women in 100 were sexually assaulted
- Seniors – 14.5% or 14.5 women in 100 were sexually assaulted

But if we examine the number of sexual assaults rather than the proportion of people who were assaulted, we find that the prevalence of sexual assault among women who participated in our survey is far greater. For example, 47 senior women reported that they were sexually assaulted more than four times. If we make the conservative assumption that each of these women was sexually assaulted five times, together they experienced a total of 235

sexual assaults. Using similar calculations to take into account the number of sexual assaults that women who participated in our survey experienced leads to the following assault rates:

- First-year students – 331 assaults or 10.5 assaults per 100 women
- Sophomores – 548 assaults or 18.3 assaults per 100 women
- Juniors – 729 assaults or 25.3 assaults per 100 women
- Seniors – 999 assaults or 31.3 assaults per 100 women

Finally, as shown in the figure below, alcohol was involved in the vast majority of sexual assaults.



Themes from Open-Ended Comments

In addition to our quantitative analyses, we also reviewed all of the open-ended comments from every completed survey. We did this primarily to ensure that students did not identify any individuals by name in their comments. However, as we reviewed the open-ended comments, we identified a number of themes across institutions. We outline these below. (Note: Misspellings in quotes are from the original survey comments.)

- There was a norm of excessive alcohol consumption expressed in students' comments across most campuses.
- Students repeatedly complained about institutional efforts to reduce partying and drinking and argued that such efforts would increase sexual assault by forcing parties to "go underground."
- There were clear instances of predatory behavior leading to sexual assaults. For example, an alumnus who acquired a keycard, went into a living unit, and entered the room of a student whose door was unlocked. In another instance, an assailant forced his way into the room of a student as she was returning from the shower. Here are some other situations that students described:
 - "My door was unlocked and I was sitting on the futon and the drunk individual came in and locked the door."
 - "He slipped something into my drink (which was nonalcoholic) and none of my "friends" bothered to help me. I woke up on the floor of my room the next day and I found out it happened because he was telling people about it, but I couldn't remember. I just know I had bruises around my neck and a bump on the back of my head."
- In some situations, victims who were assaulted felt deeply conflicted and confused about what happened to them. One student even referred to it as a "blurred line situation." Another student talked about her assault this way:
 - "The circumstance where I was a victim of unwanted sexual contact involved heavy alcohol and marijuana consumption, and my memory of the event is unclear, so I'm not sure to what extent I was initiating or resisting the contact. Even though I remember initiating certain things, I also remember coming into more consciousness later and expressing doubts. The next day I felt completely

disgusted and terrified and emotionally destroyed by what happened, but I didn't report the incident because I don't feel like the man who did it had any malicious intent, and I don't think he knew how terribly intoxicated I was at the time. I take personal responsibility for my actions but I also feel traumatized by what happened and I don't know how to navigate this grey area. Basically, I think the intoxication factor really complicates the concept of consent, and should be carefully considered as a factor in shaping policy."

- Men were afraid of campus processes that were biased against them and lacked due process. They also expressed concern about the damage that false accusations could do to their reputations.
 - "I think the whole sexual assault program is incredibly biased towards men and opens it up to exploitation. Sexual assault is no longer the man who forces himself upon a woman, but has now opened up to included situations where a woman may regret engaging with sexual assault with a man the night before and consequently accuses him of sexual assault. I know sexual assault does happen, but you universities across the U.S. are really making life for men dangerous, and are giving all the power to the woman."
 - "Men are far too often guilty until proven innocent."
- There was also a significant amount of victim blaming, especially from men.
 - "Lots of women drink and want to hook-up. It's not the guy's fault."
 - "I think sexual assault is over reported. Being drunk, engaging in sexual conduct and regretting it the next morning is not rape."
- Many students expressed concern over the lack of punishment for sexual assault, asking why plagiarism is punished more severely than sexual assault on college campuses. They also were deeply concerned that victims had to experience ongoing contact with people who assaulted them.
 - "[This institution] does a terrible job of disciplining perpetrators and protecting survivors. Multiple perpetrators have violated their no-contact orders and minimal or no action has been taken. Multiple perpetrators have been allowed back on campus after a brief break, and often their survivors are still on campus. [This institution] either doesn't take action at all, doesn't take severe enough action, or waits too long in taking action. A perpetrator should not be allowed to remain on campus. They are a threat to others and a constant painful reminder to their survivors. Having perpetrators on campus hinders the personal and academic development of survivors, and no-contact orders are not effective as they can be overridden by 'required' activities (such as the opera). This is unacceptable. Plagiarism can result in expulsion, but rapists can stay on campus. That is truly unjust."
- Many students expressed deep distrust of the administration, and sometimes the staff, on their campuses. They felt that administrators at their institutions were more concerned with protecting their institution's reputation than protecting students. This distrust was heightened if the administration had engaged in attempts to stem drinking.
 - "Sexual assault is a big problem on most college campuses, yet schools try to sweep it under the rug because they are afraid to gain notoriety for these incidences. THIS TRADE OFF IS NOT OKAY; sacrificing student safety, invalidating victim experiences, and implicitly condoning assault to protect the institution's reputation is callous and repugnant."
- A number of students expressed concerns about mandatory reporting, saying it was "excessive and disrespectful to students," "creates an atmosphere of distrust," and "creates a more damaging environment" since students do not know who they can talk to without engaging an institution's reporting process.
 - "I HATE the rule that RA's must tell about sexual assault. My best friend is an RA. Her and I were supporting another friend who was sexually assaulted and because of that DUMB rule she had to tell. What if I had been sexually assaulted? I couldn't confide in my best friend? That sucks."
- It was also clear that a few incidents of sexual assault can have a large impact on students' perceptions. Many of the open-ended comments started with "I know someone who was . . ." and then went on to describe a friend or acquaintance who was raped, or who was falsely accused of assaulting someone, or who got very drunk and was assaulted, or who made a report and had a very difficult time with someone from the

administration, etc. Students didn't have to experience sexual assault themselves to make an attribution about their institution or the people who lead institutional programs.

Finally, one constant refrain that we hear in quantitative analyses of multi-institutional data on student learning or student experiences is that "the variation within institutions is much larger than the variation between institutions." In reviewing the data from the HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey, we certainly saw significant variation within institutions. It was not uncommon to read comments saying, "Fraternities are good" and "Fraternities are a cesspool," or "Parties are not the problem" and "I've learned to stay away from parties because they are so dangerous," or "This school is very safe" and "I don't feel safe here" from students at the same campus. This is not unusual because these comments represent the views and experiences of different groups on campus. However, what was unusual about both the student comments and the quantitative data from this survey is how much institutions varied from one another. In reviewing institutional data files, we could see recent high profile incidents on a campus ripple through the comments, hear about the particular party culture of a campus and anger about institutional efforts to curb that culture, discern institutionally specific political and ideological stances, and see large variations in the extent to which people from the local community or nearby campuses were a concern. Likewise, the variation between institutions in the number of sexual assaults, the level of unwanted sexual contact students experienced, and how often victims experienced multiple assaults was much larger than what we have seen in other surveys. We take this to mean that the factors surrounding unwanted sexual contact and sexual assault are, to a large degree, connected with the specific structures and cultures of our campuses, and that reducing unwanted sexual contact and sexual assault will require each of us to investigate and learn more about our respective institutions so that we can create responses that are unique to our institutions.

Participants

18,658 undergraduate students from 43 HEDS institutions participated in the HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey including:

- Gender
 - 12,256 Women (66.0%)
 - 6,043 Men (32.5%)
 - 275 Other (1.5 %)
- Race/Ethnicity
 - 639 African American/Black (3%)
 - 826 Asian American/Asian (4%)
 - 1,051 Not a US Citizen or Permanent Resident (6%)
 - 1,388 Hispanic/Latino (8%)
 - 887 Two or more races (5%)
 - 13,550 White (73%)
- Sexual Orientation
 - 959 Asexual (5%)
 - 1,186 Bisexual (6%)
 - 345 Fill in (2%)
 - 367 Gay (2%)
 - 14,174 Heterosexual (77%)
 - 221 Lesbian (1%)
 - 370 Pansexual (2%)
 - 415 Queer (2%)
 - 406 Questioning (2%)
- Year in College
 - 4,786 First-year students (26%)
 - 4,494 Sophomores (24%)
 - 4,502 Juniors (24%)
 - 4,782 Seniors (26%)

Our analyses for this report did not include 239 graduate students and 191 students who chose “other” to identify their year in college.