

Michigan Tech's Title IX: Speak Up Sexual and/or Relationship Misconduct Survey

Background:

In April 2011, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) issued a Dear Colleague Letter, providing guidance to schools on their obligations to prevent and address sexual violence under Title IX.

Title IX is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex/gender in educational programs and activities. This includes gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual violence. Sexual violence is defined as any physical act which is sexual in nature that is committed by force or without full and informed consent of all persons involved and may include dating violence, sexual coercion, domestic violence, sexual battery, stalking, sexual assault, and rape.

All organizations/schools that receive federal funds are mandated to take immediate and effective steps to respond to sexual violence.ⁱ

Sexual violence is a significant challenge for colleges and universities nationwide, affecting the health, mental health, and academic success of students. Our hope is that assessment tools will help us to understand the scope or nature of the problem at Michigan Tech. Many institutions including ours are looking to "climate surveys" to fill this gap in knowledge.

Introduction:

The 2015 Michigan Technological University sexual misconduct climate survey, entitled the Title IX: Speak Up Sexual and/or Relationship Misconduct Survey, reflects the University's student voice and thoughts on sexual misconduct. In April 2015, the survey invitation was distributed to all currently enrolled students. The survey explored questions about students experience and views concerning Michigan Tech's sexual misconduct climate including information related to incidents of sexual violence, policy, reporting, training/programming/education, support, resources and prevalent perceptions and attitudes.

Key Points:

- Date Range Survey Completed: April 13, 2015 to April 20, 2014
- The survey was administered by Michigan Technological University, with the administrative assistance from Campus Labs: Baseline.
- The survey should have taken most students about 30 minutes or less to complete. Participation was voluntary, and students may have chosen to skip questions or stop responding at any point.
- The on-line survey was distributed via email to all currently enrolled graduate and undergraduate students. It asked questions about their views regarding campus climate, including information related to incidents of sexual violence, policy, reporting, training/programming/education, support, resources and prevalent perceptions and attitudes.
- A total of 6,597 survey invites were distributed. The number of respondents was 686 students, which is approximately 10% of the student population. Of these respondents, 21% were graduate students and 79% undergraduate students, 47% identified as female, 51% identified as male, 2% identified as transgender/gender non-binary. The survey was not distributed to anyone under 18 or any dual enrolled students.
- Responses were anonymous. Responses were reported in terms of groups of students rather than as individual cases.
- Students were made aware that by responding, they were not making an official report of the incidents(s).
- The survey questions used in the Michigan Tech survey were among the best currently available to institutions, recommended by the federal government's [Not Alone: Together Against Sexual Assault](#) website.

- We use the term “survey” to mean a standard set of questions given to participants, in a questionnaire, to assess different aspects of campus climate in regard to sexual and/or relationship misconduct.
- Students were asked about their experience in the **current academic** year, not prior history. This enables us to gauge scope and nature of the problems during their time as a student at Michigan Tech.
- Due to the sensitive nature of the questions, no questions “required response.” This means that students would sometimes skip questions, causing the number of responses to vary.

Why was a sexual misconduct climate survey conducted and why now?

The federal government has stated that conducting a regular climate survey concerning sexual misconduct/violence is a best practice response to campus sexual misconduct.

We know from decades of research that victims rarely report sexual assault to law enforcement. Many victims do not access formal services, like crisis centers. Thus, official statistics underrepresent the extent of the problem on any one campus. Further, campus response, intervention, and prevention efforts will be more successful if they are tailored to the needs of each campus community.

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

We believe that as an institution, we will see benefits from conducting climate surveys. For example, when campuses address sexual violence, victims may feel more comfortable coming forward, so the rates of reporting such violence might increase and importantly we can help victims heal from the trauma they have experienced, enabling them to stay in school, and feel confident in the school’s handling of the violence.

Ultimately a decision was made to conduct a survey for Michigan Tech because even though it is not required by the federal government at this time, the survey is a benchmark. It is important for us to

know what is happening on our campus. The survey offers us an understanding of the prevalence of incidents of sexual violence on campus and provides us with helpful information regarding students' thoughts and opinions of the sexual misconduct climate. As an institution, we have a responsibility to protect our students from sexual misconduct and to create a safe campus community.

What is the value of climate surveys?

[Not Alone: Together Against Sexual Assault](#), a federal government website, lists the following important points:

- Climate surveys can provide information about student perceptions, knowledge and attitudes relevant to sexual assault (violence).
- Incident rates assessed via confidential or anonymous surveys can be another source of data about the extent of the problem.
- Regularly administering surveys can show changes over time, such as decreases in sexual assaults (violence) and increases in awareness or reporting.
- Surveys can provide information about the problem in a particular campus community, enabling schools to tailor prevention and response efforts.
- Conducting a climate survey can demonstrate the university's commitment to addressing sexual assault (violence) and build trust with students, faculty, parents, and others.

Summary of Findings:

Sexual and/or relationship misconduct has been identified as a national problem that significantly impacts college and university students. Federal and state laws place requirements upon colleges and universities to address issues of sexual and/or relationship misconduct. The University is committed to educating students, faculty, and staff about this topic; and to working with the surrounding communities and resource centers to offer as great a variety of services as possible. The [University's Student Code of Community Conduct](#) expressly prohibits sexual and/or relationship misconduct. Sexual and/or relationship misconduct includes sexual harassment; sexual assault; sexual exploitation; domestic violence; dating violence and stalking.ⁱⁱⁱ

A 2007 campus sexual assault study by the U.S. Department of Justice found that approximately 1 in 5 women and 1 in 16 men are targets of attempted or completed sexual assault while they are college students. The [Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#) reports that college-aged women are four times more likely than any other age group to face sexual misconduct.^{iv} It also notes that sexual violence is underreported for all genders and gender identities.

Each year schools disclose the number of sexual assaults reported on campus in their [annual security reports](#), and to the U.S. Department of Education. In 2013, the requirements for schools were updated as part of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act (VAWA). Colleges and universities will now also disclose the annual number of domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking incidents reported.

For all these reasons, we are sharing some key findings of Michigan Tech's Title IX: Speak Up Sexual and/or Relationship Misconduct campus survey.

Key Findings:

- Overall, Michigan Tech students strongly agree or agree that faculty and staff are concerned about their welfare. They feel like they are a part of Michigan Tech and that Michigan Tech has a good support system for students going through difficult times.
- Approximately 97% (658 students) of Michigan Tech students who responded to the survey said that they feel safe on the Michigan Tech campus, and 91% (615 students) said they believe protecting the safety of students is a priority for the University.

Sample Survey Questions

- Question: "Since the beginning of this current academic year, has anyone had sexual contact with you by using physical force or threatening to physically harm you?" Eleven students said YES (2%) and 585 students said NO (98%).
- Question: "Since the beginning of this current academic year, has anyone attempted but not succeeded in having sexual contact with you by using physical force or threatening to physically harm you?" Fourteen students said YES (2%) and 583 students said NO (98%).

- Question: “Since the beginning of this current academic year, did you have sexual contact from someone when you were unable to provide consent or stop what was happening because you were passed out, drugged, drunk, asleep?” Twenty-three students (4%) said YES and 574 (96%) said NO. When a student responded YES to this question, they indicated the following occurred:

Count	Respondent %	Response %	
20	71.43%	39.22	Forced touching of a sexual nature
9	32.14%	17.65%	Oral sex
10	35.71%	19.61%	Sexual intercourse
2	7.41%	3.92%	Anal sex
7	25.00%	13.73%	Sexual penetration with a finger/object
3	10.71%	5.88%	Don't know

NOTE: This question said, “Check all that apply.” Therefore, 28 students produced 51 responses.

Analysis of Results

- It is important to acknowledge, as we did in the survey, that even if a student had been drinking, the student is in no way responsible for any sexual violence that may have occurred. That being said, 25 of the 28 students indicated that unwanted sexual misconduct incidents occurred under the influence of alcohol.
- More than two-thirds of nonconsensual sexual experiences occurred off or near campus. Approximately one-third occurred on campus.
- In most cases, students who had an unwanted sexual experience said another Michigan Technological University student was responsible. This is consistent with national data indicating that an overwhelming majority of victims know their attacker.
- Among students who said they had a least one unwanted sexual experience at Michigan Tech, 84% told someone else, most often a friend or a roommate. One in four of those students said they reported the incident to law enforcement or an official University resource, including

Counseling Services, Residence Hall staff and the Title IX Coordinator. (Note: Counseling Services is a designated confidential resource so reporting is not “mandated.”)

- When asked why they did not report their experience, most students who responded said they did not want to get the person responsible in trouble, felt it was a private matter, and/or wanted to deal with it on their own. A significant number of students also felt embarrassed or ashamed, and some said they did not have time to deal with it due to academics, work etc.
- Most students indicated they strongly agree or agree that Michigan Tech officials handle conduct incidents in a fair and timely manner.
- In regard to bystander intervention, 427 students (76%) felt “extremely confident” that they could, “express their discomfort if someone said that rape victims are to blame for being raped.” And 437 students (79%) felt “extremely confident” that they would “Ask a friend if he/she needs to be walked home from a party.”
- As for consent, 527 of the students who responded to the survey (96%) felt it “likely or extremely likely” that they would stop having sex with a partner if he/she says to stop, even if it started consensually. Additionally, 469 students responding (85%) said they were either “likely or extremely likely” to *not* engage in sex with a partner if he/she is drunk.

Preliminary recommendations:

In reviewing these Title IX: Speak Up Sexual and/or Relationship Misconduct survey results, we can now begin to assess the scope of the problem and the examine the effectiveness of our policies, procedures, reporting, training/programming/education, support, and resources. In general, it is clear that our students feel safe on campus and will “Speak Up” to assist a fellow student. This is encouraging, and also can be misleading in regard to the issues of sexual misconduct. Sexual violence happens on all college campuses, and our students need to be aware and educated.

Upon reflection on the survey results, we will continue to improve our awareness and educational programming, make the response and reporting processes easier to understand, and continue to focus

on increasing support and resources for victims of sexual misconduct. The data collected will help us in our prevention efforts and in creating a safer campus.

In the fall semester of 2015, the survey findings will be discussed in depth with the [Title IX Awareness Committee](#), as well as students and department representatives from all areas of the campus community. This input will further assist improvement of programs and response to sexual and/or relationship misconduct and recommendations for a safer campus.

ⁱ Dear Colleague Letter 2011---<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.notalone.gov/assets/ovw-climate-survey.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.mtu.edu/conduct/policies/student-conduct/sexual-misconduct/>

^{iv} <https://www.rainn.org/statistics>