

# 2016-2017 Campus Climate Survey on Student Sexual Misconduct Executive Summary

## INTRODUCTION

In compliance with Article 129-B of the New York State Education Law, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute conducted a Campus Climate Survey on Student Sexual Misconduct during the 2016-2017 Academic Year.

The purpose of the survey was to evaluate students' knowledge and awareness of: sexual assault prevention; bystander intervention strategies; Rensselaer's policies and procedures for reporting and addressing sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking; and the supportive resources available to Rensselaer students who experience sexual misconduct.

Rensselaer used a survey tool developed by EVERFI, Inc. Higher Education Group. The Campus Climate Survey was jointly administered by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, the Student Health Center and the Division of Human Resources to 7,192 full-time undergraduate and graduate students enrolled on the Troy Campus during the Fall 2016 Semester from November 10 through November 23, 2016. A total of 1,624 students completed the survey for a response rate of 22.6%.

A large majority of respondents: reported feeling safe at Rensselaer (77%); expressed a belief that the Institute would take a report of sexual assault seriously (76%); expressed a belief that the Institute would maintain a reporting student's privacy (83%); and expressed a belief that the Institute would take corrective action against the offender (65%).

Almost all students responding to the survey indicated that they had received some training in sexual assault prevention (92%), and most indicated that they had been educated on how to report sexual assault (87%), the availability of confidential supportive resources (89%), the procedures used to investigate a complaint of sexual assault (80%) and which behaviors are defined as "sexual assault" (93%). However, a significant number of participants (24% to 26%) indicated the training was "not useful" or only "slightly useful."

Furthermore, of the respondents who reported they had experienced non-consensual sexual contact since becoming a student at Rensselaer, just 11% stated they had used the Institute's formal procedures to report the incident.

Students responding about their likelihood to engage in active bystander strategies stated they: would be "somewhat likely to very likely" to confront someone who would plan to give someone alcohol to get sex (75%); would be "somewhat likely to very likely" to take action if they saw someone being taken advantage of sexually (83%); would be "somewhat confident to completely confident" to do something to help a drunk person who was being brought to a bedroom by a group of people (86%); and they would be "somewhat confident to completely confident" to speak to someone who was minimizing or making attempts to excuse having forced someone to have sex with them (91%).

Rensselaer takes sexual violence seriously, and is committed to maintaining a safe and healthy learning, living, and working environment in which no member of the community is excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination or harassment in any Institute program or activity on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The results of the 2016-2017 Campus Climate Survey reflect an understanding and appreciation of this commitment among our students. The results also reveal areas where Rensselaer can better serve the campus community, and that information is already being used to guide refinements of Rensselaer's educational efforts regarding sexual misconduct.

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## Method

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute participated in the 2016-2017 *Campus Climate Survey* offered by EVERFI, Inc. The *Campus Climate Survey* asked students about several aspects of the campus climate related to sexual misconduct. All enrolled undergraduate and graduate students of Rensselaer on the Troy campus over the age of 18 (n=7,192) were invited to participate in the survey via an email invitation sent jointly by the Executive Director, Student Health and Wellness and the Director of Employee Relations/Title IX Coordinator. The survey was available over a two-week period (November 10 through 23, 2016). Students who had not yet responded received up to three emails prompts reminding them to complete the survey. Students were informed that after completing the survey, they would have access to a separate questionnaire to enter into a drawing to receive one of ten \$100 gift cards to the Rensselaer Collegiate Store. The survey process was administered jointly by the Student Health Center, the Office of Institutional Research and the Division of Human Resources. The Rensselaer Institutional Review Board reviewed the survey protocol and granted the project Exempt Status.

## Results

A total of 1,624 students completed the survey for an overall response rate of 22.6%. The distribution of responses of various student subgroups mirrored the distribution of these subgroups in the general student population. For example, first-year students comprise 23% of the entire student body, and the response rate among first-year students was 24%. This consistency, however, was not noted in the distribution of responses by gender. Forty-seven percent (47%) of the respondents were female, yet, female students comprise 32% of the student body. An overview of the data gathered from this survey is provided below.

### ***Perceptions of Personal Safety and the Problem of Sexual Violence***

Students were asked about their perception of how significant a problem sexual violence is on campus and how safe they felt at Rensselaer. Survey responses suggest that a large majority of student survey participants (67%) think sexual violence is a problem on campus. Only one-third of respondents (33%) indicated that they ‘somewhat agree,’ ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the statement “I don’t think sexual violence is a problem at my school.” Male respondents were more likely to report feeling that sexual violence was not a problem than female respondents (41% of males versus 25% of females). Despite perceptions of sexual violence as a campus problem, a large majority of students (77%) reported feeling safe; however, less than half of respondents (46%) felt the school does enough to protect the safety of students. These items differed by gender as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Statement	Percent Responding ‘Agree’ or ‘Strongly Agree’		
	Total	Females	Males
I feel safe at this school.*	77%	72%	83%
My school does enough to protect the safety of students.**	46%	39%	53%
<small>* Scale Anchors: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree  ** Scale Anchors: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree,  0=I don’t have any knowledge or experience around this to offer a response</small>			

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## *Expected Campus Responses to Reports of Sexual Misconduct*

A number of survey items assessed students' perceptions of campus administrators' and other students' likely responses to reports of sexual misconduct. A sample of these results are summarized in Table 2. A large majority of respondents indicated campus administrators would take a report of sexual misconduct seriously (76%) and that they would restrict knowledge of the report only to those who need to know (83%). Overall, the responses reflected a belief that administrators would take appropriate action with regard to the complainant and the accused. Specifically, 65% of respondents indicated administrators would take corrective action against the offender and 66% indicated administrators would take appropriate steps to protect the person making the report. It is noteworthy that these results differed by gender of the respondent. For example, 33% of female respondents reported believing that administrators would take corrective action against the accused (versus 75% of male respondents). Also, 57% of female respondents reported believing that administrators would take steps to protect the person making the report from retaliation (versus 73% of male respondents).

**Table 2<sup>1</sup>**

Statement	Percent Responding 'Moderately Likely' or 'Very Likely'*
Administrators would take a report of sexual assault seriously.	76%
Administrators would restrict knowledge of the report to those who need to know.	83%
Administrators would take corrective action against the offender.	65%
Administrators would take steps to protect the person making the report from retaliation.	74%
* Scale Anchors: 1= Not at all Likely, 2= Somewhat Likely, 3=Moderately Likely, 4=Very Likely	

## *Bystander Intervention*

Students were asked if they had observed a situation that they believed was, or could have led to, a sexual assault and how they intervened in the situation. Only 11% of respondents indicated they had observed a situation in the current academic year that they believed was, or could have led to, a sexual assault. Of those who observed one of these situations, 77% reported responding to the situation with an active bystander intervention action (e.g., asked the person if they needed help, created a distraction, asked someone to intervene). Additionally, students were asked about their likelihood and confidence in engaging in active bystander behaviors. Samples of responses are outlined in Tables 3 and 4 below.

**Table 3**

Statement	Percent Responding 'Somewhat Likely' to 'Very Likely'
Would confront a friend who plans to give someone alcohol to get sex.	75%
Would take action if they saw someone trying to take advantage of another person sexually.	83%
*Scale Anchors: 1=not at all likely; 4= somewhat likely; 7=very likely	

<sup>1</sup> Data excludes participants who did not respond to survey questions numbers 19 and 20.

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**Table 4**

Statement	Percent Responding 'Somewhat Confident' to 'Completely Confident'*
Would do something to help a very drunk person who is being brought to a bedroom by a group of people.	86%
Would speak up to someone who is minimizing or making attempts to excuse having forced someone to have sex with them.	91%

*\*Scale Anchors: 1=not at all confident; 4= somewhat confident; 7=completely confident*

### ***Knowledge of Campus Policies, Procedures and Resources***

Students were asked to indicate agreement with statements about their knowledge of campus policies, procedures and resources related to sexual violence. The majority of respondents indicated an awareness of where to get help for sexual assault (59%), where to find confidential support (66%), where to find 24/7 support (51%), and how to report a sexual assault (51%). Lower levels of awareness of campus resources are noted in their understanding of formal procedures (42%) and their knowledge of where to seek interim measures and accommodations (37%). See Table 5 for further details.

**Table 5**

Statement	Percent Responding 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree'*
I know where to go to get help regarding sexual assault at my school.	59%
I understand my school's formal procedures to address complaints of sexual assault.	42%
I understand how to report a sexual assault at my school.	51%
I understand where I can find confidential support at my school.	66%
I understand where I can find 24/7 support related to sexual assault.	51%
I know where to seek special accommodations at my school if I was assaulted.	37%

*\* Scale Anchors: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree*

### ***Prevention, Training and Awareness***

The survey asked students about their participation in and the usefulness of campus trainings on sexual misconduct. Responses indicate that while most students rate the usefulness of training low, a large majority of them report having received training on a wide range of topics. These data are summarized in Table 6.

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**Table 6**

Training Topic	Percent Reporting Training in this area was “moderately useful” or “very useful” <sup>**</sup>	Percent Reporting “I have not received training in this area.” <sup>**</sup>
Which behaviors are defined as “sexual assault?”	49%	7%
How to report a complaint of sexual assault?	42%	13%
The availability of confidential on-campus resources to help victims of sexual assault?	44%	11%
The procedures followed to investigate a complaint of sexual assault?	36%	20%
Prevention of sexual assault?	47%	8%
* Scale Anchors: 1=Very Useful, 2=Moderately Useful, 3=Somewhat Useful, 4=Slightly Useful, 5=Not Useful, 0=I have not received training in this area		

### ***Prevalence of Non-consensual Sexual Contact***

A number of survey items asked about students’ experience of non-consensual or unwanted sexual contact. Sexual contact was defined to include touching of a sexual nature, oral sex, sexual intercourse, anal sex, or sexual penetration with a finger or object. The items addressed when (before/after becoming a student) and where (on- or off-campus) the contact occurred and who the contact was with (student, co-worker, stranger, etc.). Seven percent of respondents (n=143) indicated they experienced sexual contact with another student without their consent, through actual or threatened physical force, since they became a student at Rensselaer. Most, but not all, of these individuals were female (86%) with the majority of incidents (60%) occurring at on-campus locations.

The survey asked students about their use of campus services following an incident of sexual misconduct. In general, a low percentage of students reported using campus services. Specifically, of those who responded to these items, only 6%, 15%, 8%, and 11% respectively, sought medical, counseling, advocacy and reporting services as outlined in Table 7 below.

**Table 7<sup>2</sup>**

Following the non-consensual or unwanted sexual contact did you...	Yes	No
Seek medical treatment for the incident? (n=110)	6%	94%
Seek counseling services as a result of the incident? (n=110)	15%	85%
Seek advocacy services as a result of the incident? (n=110)	9%	91%
Use the formal procedures available at your school to report the incident? (n=99) <sup>**</sup>	11%	89%
<sup>**</sup> 11 respondents indicated ‘not applicable’		

<sup>2</sup> Data only includes participants who responded “yes” to both survey questions 30 and 43.

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The survey also contained a list of potential reasons why a person would not tell someone else about an incident of non-consensual or unwanted sexual contact. Respondents were asked to indicate all that applied to them. The top five (5) reasons identified by the 39 students who answered this questions were:

1. I didn't think what happened to me was serious enough to talk about (59%)
2. I was ashamed/embarrassed (41%)
3. It's a private matter– wanted to deal with it on my own (41%)
4. I didn't think others would think it was serious (38%)
5. I wanted to forget it happened (33%)

### ***Prevalence of Sexual Harassment, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Stalking***

The survey inquired about students' experience of sexual harassment, intimate partner violence and stalking within romantic or intimate relationships they've had since becoming a student at Rensselaer. The data in the tables below report on a sample of these experiences for those respondents who indicated any experience with sexual harassment, interpersonal violence or stalking within romantic or intimate relationships while enrolled at Rensselaer (n = 299). While not highly prevalent, these behaviors within romantic or intimate relationships appear to be impacting both males and females.

**Table 8<sup>3</sup>** – Female Respondents

<b>Estimate of how often your partner has used any of the following behaviors in your current or previous relationship(s) since you became a student at this school</b>	<b>Never/Rarely</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Frequently/Very Frequently</b>
Called you a name and/or criticized you	67%	21%	12%
Threatened to hit or throw something at you	94%	3%	3%
Pushed, grabbed, or shoved you	91%	6%	3%
Accused you of paying too much attention to someone or something else	62%	18%	20%
Pressured or forced you to “sext” or take naked photos	86%	9%	5%
Checked up on you	85%	7%	8%
Physically forced you to have sex	97%	1%	2%

<sup>3</sup> Data excludes participants who responded “not applicable” to survey question number 75.

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**Table 9<sup>4</sup>** – Male Respondents

Estimate of how often your partner has used any of the following behaviors in your current or previous relationship(s) since you became a student at this school	Never/Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently/Very Frequently
Called you a name and/or criticized you	67%	17%	16%
Threatened to hit or throw something at you	91%	5%	5%
Pushed, grabbed, or shoved you	95%	2%	3%
Accused you of paying too much attention to someone or something else	60%	18%	22%
Pressured or forced you to “sext” or take naked photos	97%	3%	0%
Checked up on you	92%	4%	4%
Physically forced you to have sex	98%	1%	1%

### Limitations

Although the overall survey response rate was 22.6% and the distribution of responses of various student subgroups mirrored the distribution of these subgroups in the general student population, there was some concern regarding the overrepresentation of female survey respondents. To determine whether the overrepresentation of female respondents materially affected the survey results, we carried out analyses on both the complete data set and a modified data set. The modified dataset included a smaller, randomly selected group of female respondents that more accurately represented their occurrence in the Rensselaer student population. The analyses produced the same basic pattern of results and therefore, all of the results reported above are from the complete data set.

Additional limitations include the survey completion rate and item clarity. The overall survey completion rate was 64 percent, which will impact the results. That is, the nonresponse associated with survey attrition may have biased some of the estimates reported above. Further, the validity of the results may be impacted by undefined or unclear terms in the survey (e.g., the survey did not define terms such as ‘formal procedures’). The above data should be interpreted with respect to these limitations.

### Conclusion

These results, which appear to be consistent with data reported in the nationwide EVERFI 2016-2017 Climate Survey of four-year Institutions, will be used to guide continued refinements to campus policy and education regarding sexual misconduct at Rensselaer.

### Appendices

2016-2017 Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Campus Climate Survey  
 2016-2017 EVERFI Campus Climate Survey of Four-Year Institutions  
 Contact Information for Campus Title IX Coordinators  
 Campus Confidential Care and Support Services and Resources  
 Data Details for Tables 2, 7, 8 and 9

<sup>4</sup> Data excludes participants who responded “not applicable” to survey question number 75.