From: USC Student Health, Office for Health Promotion Strategy, backbone for the USC Well-being Collective

Title: Executive Summary of Spring 2020 Focus Groups on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct

Requested by: USC AAU Survey Task Force, appointed by The Office of the Provost

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In spring 2019, the Association of American Universities (AAU) led a national survey around Campus Climate on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct. USC was among 33 universities that participated in the survey, which was a follow up to a similar study done in 2015. On October 15, the AAU and all of the participating universities released results of the survey. The USC AAU Task Force shared the results of the survey at two town halls. The Office for Health Promotion Strategy in USC Student Health was charged with continuing to disseminate survey findings and gathering feedback from the student community. Focus groups were conducted with the goal of collecting feedback, suggestions and recommendations to be shared with AAU Task Force. Specific objectives of the focus groups were as follows:

- Share findings with selected student groups who experience disproportionately higher rates of sexual assault according to the AAU survey
- Hold space for reaction and acknowledge emotional impacts of the information
- Discuss various perspectives and interpretations of the findings
- Provide common language and shared understanding of the problems and what the group can address
- Facilitate discussion and generate ideas
- Collaborate to use group's respective knowledge to advance community change

METHODOLOGY

In order to gain a deeper understanding into student experiences of USC's climate on sexual assault and misconduct, seven focus groups were completed in spring 2020. Priority student populations were selected based on their disproportionately higher rates of sexual assault according to the AAU survey. Despite multiple outreach efforts on a variety of communication channels, one selected group did not express any interest in participating (students in Interfraternity Council fraternities.)

Student participants were recruited through email communication to their organization leadership. Relevant campus departments, such as Recreational Sports and Disability Services and Programs, also assisted in recruitment by distributing recruitment emails to their listservs. The recruitment message offered a $20 gift card for participation upon completion of the focus group.

Focus groups were facilitated by student Community Health Organizers (CHOs). These students received intensive training on qualitative data collection and analysis by the Office for Health Promotion Strategy, USC Student Health. The Community Health Organizers used a moderator guide to facilitate the focus groups. Key questions included:

- What education did you receive at USC about resources for sexual assault and sexual misconduct?
- Are there aspects of USC that you think promote harassment? How can these unfavorable aspects be changed?
- Is sexual assault or harassment discussed in your student community?
- How can we amplify topics of gender based violence and substance misuse at USC?
- In what places, spaces or locations on or around campus do you feel most safe?
- How can more people be engaged as allies to prevent gender-based violence?

Reach:

Focus Group	# of Student Participants
Student athletes in club or intramural sports	5
Students members of peer advocacy group VOICE (Violence Outreach Intervention and Community Empowerment)	5
Students in Panhellenic sororities	4
Students in professional fraternities (1)	10
Students in professional fraternities (2)	8
Students who identify as LGBTQ+	7
Students who identify as having a disability	11

For additional questions, please contact:

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Total	50

FOCUS GROUP EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dates: 3/9/20, 3/30/20, 4/1/20, 4/3/20, 4/6/20 (2), 4/8/20

Facilitators & Note Takers: Sabrina Rivas, Baktazh Azizi, Ruben Romeo, Hadiya Culbreath, Zachary Dunn, and Erela Datuowei

Report Authors: Lana Bridi, Yizhen Yang, and Zachary Dunn

Number of Participants: 50

Participant Description: Participants were from the following student groups: Intramural/Club Sports (athletics), LGBTQ+, Panhellenic sororities, Violence Outreach Intervention and Community Empowerment (VOICE) students from Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP), Professional Fraternities, and students registered with Disabilities Services and Programs (DSP).

Demographic Breakdown:

		Count	Percent*
Race/Ethnicity	American Indian/Alaska Native	1	2.00%
	Asian	22	44.00%
	Black or African American	1	2.00%
	Latinx/o/a or Hispanic	11	22.00%
	Middle Eastern, North African, or Arab	1	2.00%
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0	0.00%
	White	21	42.00%
	Other	1	2.00%
Sexual Orientation	Lesbian	2	4.00%

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	Gay	5	10.00%
	Bisexual	9	18.00%
	Queer	2	4.00%
	Questioning	1	2.00%
	Pansexual	0	0.00%
	Asexual	1	2.00%
	Straight / Heterosexual	32	64.00%
	Self-identify or Other	0	0.00%
	Prefer not to answer	1	2.00%
	No response	1	2.00%
Gender Identity	Cisgender Man	11	22.00%
	Cisgender Woman	36	72.00%
	Transgender Man	0	0.00%
	Transgender Woman	0	0.00%
	Genderqueer/gender non-conforming	1	2.00%
	Non-binary	0	0.00%
	Self-identify or Other	1	2.00%
	Prefer not to answer	1	2.00%
Class Standing	Undergraduate Year 1	3	6.00%
	Undergraduate Year 2	11	22.00%
	Undergraduate Year 3	18	36.00%

	Undergraduate Year 4	9	18.00%
	Undergraduate Year 4+	2	4.00%
	Graduate	7	14.00%
International/Domestic	International	7	14.00%
	Domestic	39	78.00%
	No response	5	10.00%
First Generation	Yes	12	24.00%
	No	38	76.00%
Registered with DSP	Yes	14	28.00%
	No	36	72.00%

*Sums of category percentages may exceed 100.00% due to participants' ability to select multiple responses

Research Questions:
1. How do students receive information regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment?
2. What role does USC's culture play with regard to sexual assault and sexual harassment?
3. What changes can be made to create a safer community with lower incidence of sexual assault and sexual harassment?

ASSERTIONS AND EVIDENCE:

Students report USC training, predominantly mandatory online training, as the primary source of education and resources on sexual assault and sexual harassment.

The AAU focus groups revealed that USC students receive education about resources for sexual assault and sexual harassment (SA/SH) from a variety of sources. While a breadth of potential avenues for education were cited, the vast majority of the participants received information from training provided by USC, including mandatory online modules as well as consent workshops, bystander intervention

workshops, and USC employment-related training. All seven of the focus groups and the highest total number of participants (28 out of 50) reported learning from one or more of these training sessions, 64% (18 out of the 28) of whom cited mandatory online modules as the training source. For some students, the USC training sessions are the full extent of their exposure to SA/SH resources. A participant in one of the Professional Fraternities stated, "I think for all incoming new students the only thing you're really exposed to was the initial Alcohol.Edu and sexual assault [online modules], but other than that I don't really know too much about other sources on campus" (Tiger, Professional Fraternities 1A). Another student, in the Athletics focus group, said that the online modules on SA/SH were lengthy, but ultimately concluded that the modules are "definitely a step in the right direction" (A.D., Athletics). The next most common form of USC training, reported by five students, was employment-related training, three of whom had been Resident Assistants (RAs) during their time at USC. Five students total also reported obtaining education from consent and/or bystander intervention workshops. The data from the focus groups suggest that mandatory online modules and other training sessions are effective mechanisms for educating the student body on SA/SH resources, although an emphasis on increasing awareness of SA/SH and participation in training outside the mandatory online modules may be warranted given that just over 50% of participants cited these trainings. It is likely that the USC mandatory training forms a strong foundation for developing students' knowledge on these topics, and the lessons learned can be reinforced and expanded upon in the sources discussed below. Several (six) respondents stated that the education happens all at once, with one student indicating, "I can't remember retaining a lot of it too well" (A.K., RSVP/VOICE). While mandatory, initial trainings can provide a basic understanding of SA/SH, continuous learning could increase knowledge about sexual assault and sexual harassment and related resources.

The next most common source of education, brought up in four focus groups, was from the classroom setting, in which professors or instructors review campus resources in the syllabus. While a prevalent method, it was noted in two focus groups that not all professors go over the resources outlined in the syllabus. A participant in the Sorority focus group stated, "My professors personally don't really go through that much" (Takis, Sororities) and in the Professional Fraternities focus group, a respondent said, "I think in all of my classes in the syllabus, it has a section with that. But I know not every professor goes over it" (Corgi, Professional Fraternities 2B). Faculty members' lack of discussing SA/SH resources suggest that faculty could amplify their efforts to provide the student body with more information about SA/SH. Thus, the role of faculty as communicators of information and resources related to sexual assault and sexual harassment may be an important strategy to pursue.

Students also identified other sources of SA/SH education, including orientation (two focus groups), Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) (two), official USC campus units (two), departmental meetings (one), and campus newsletters (one). It should be highlighted that only two focus groups voiced receiving

information from official campus units, which include but was not limited to RSVP/VOICE, Title IX, and DSP counselors. This lack of information dissemination from these campus units was noted in the RSVP focus group, with one participant stating, "USC has some really, really great advocacy resources that nobody knows about" (T.P., RSVP/VOICE) and another said, "No one ever knows about [RSVP]" (A.S., RSVP/VOICE). The DSP focus group was one of the two focus groups that mentioned gaining education from campus units. The students in this group named many campus units including RSVP, VOICE advocates, Title IX office, Counseling and Mental Health Services, and Lyft services through USC Transportation, whereas the Professional Fraternities focus group solely mentioned RSVP. Sadly, two participants in the DSP focus group stated that they received education on the resources available only after an assault had occurred (personally or to someone they knew). The minimal exposure of the focus group participants to SA/SH resources outside of USC training and syllabus review underscores the lack of awareness of several important campus entities. Increasing student awareness of official campus units may augment students' education on SA/SH. The minimal references to RSOs also indicate that introducing SA/SH material and discussions into RSO meetings may be another avenue to strengthen SA/SH knowledge. A parallel can be drawn to departmental meetings - only one focus group mentioned receiving SA/SH education through their department - and departmental actions can potentially broaden students' knowledge.

Overall, the majority of students receive their education on SA/SH from USC training, in particular mandatory online modules. Many students gain exposure to SA/SH resources through faculty members reviewing the syllabus, and less than one-third of the focus groups reported learning from other sources including official campus units, RSOs, orientation, department meetings, and campus newsletters. While online training and faculty syllabus review result in wider-reaching SA/SH education, it was noted that the education time window is brief and that not all faculty members address SA/SH in their classes. Taken together, the focus groups indicate that continuous education, cohesive faculty participation, increased marketing of official campus units, and recognition of SA/SH at RSO and department levels can amplify students' education on SA/SH.

Students report that lack of accountability and lack of institutionalized resources and education contribute to a culture that perpetuates sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Participants from the AAU focus groups indicated that the University has a culture that perpetuates and normalizes SA/SH, specifically mentioning aspects of student life such as party culture, dating life, Greek life, and football culture 19 times in six out of seven focus groups. One participant explained, "Dating culture and hookup culture at USC, and dating in general, is viewed as something you don't talk about, you don't define anything… where everything in a relationship is super blurry" (M.C., Athletics). While

students recognized this culture is partly beyond the university's influence, they reported that a lack of accountability, education, and institutionalized resources contributes to the perpetuation of this culture at the university. Furthermore, participants believed it is necessary to increase safe and inclusive discussions regarding SA/SH on campus to disrupt this culture.

Participant responses demonstrate that there are disparate levels of education on SA/SH and resources across campus. As mentioned in Assertion/Finding #1, the classroom is a common source of SA/SH education. However, this source is inconsistent as it depends on the faculty/instructor to review resources outlined in syllabi, some of which do not, as noted in two focus groups. For example, one participant recalled, "I think that the only time I really get educated on stuff like that is when it's the beginning of the school year and teachers are going through their syllabuses (sic)" (Hot Cheetos, Sororities), emphasizing the classroom as an important component of a more comprehensive SA/SH education strategy. However, another participant mentioned, "I've had a couple of professors bring it up in class with resources" (Wolf, Professional Fraternities 2B), indicating that not all of the student's professors consistently provide SA/SH education in the classroom. Such variability in SA/SH education, and more specifically the uneven distribution of education between sororities and fraternities was discussed in the Sorority focus group four times. It should be noted that no members from fraternities were able to be recruited, which could also indicate a lack of interest or willingness on the part of fraternity members to engage in these conversations. In another focus group with VOICE participants through RSVP, one participant commented on students' lack of knowledge regarding SA/SH, specifically bystander intervention: "It's really shocking to see how many people just generally do not know what to do in questionable situations" (C.A., RSVP/VOICE). This comment exemplifies how a lack of education could contribute to SA/SH. These participant responses underscore the need to improve and standardize SA/SH education efforts to ensure that students are equipped with the resources and tools to create a safer campus environment.

While a lack of education might perpetuate SA/SH, participants in five of seven focus groups also reported that a lack of accountability promotes SA/SH. Participants emphasized the university's lack of addressing SA/SH issues, and how USC community members are not aware of the consequences for SA/SH. One participant observed, "There's a lot of passivity and apathy towards [sexual harassment]" (T.P., RSVP/VOICE), and another commented, "There aren't as many consequences to these actions and sometimes sexual harassment, I think, becomes a norm" (L.E., Athletics). Furthermore, participants mentioned that faculty and administration need to take action -- with nine responses across three focus groups. One student emphasized this need: "Students are already pretty informed; there are wellness advocates, there are [RAs] on campus, there are many other organizations that are trained [regarding SA/SH], but I think the weight of the problem really falls on the university administration who aren't willing to do anything about this. Like it could be reported and there could be students who are bystanders who

are doing what they're supposed to, but when it's reported, I don't think it really goes anywhere" (Marla Singer, DSP). There is also a concern that faculty and greek community members are often not held accountable for SA/SH. One participant said, "It feels pointless to report a faculty member or a member of Greek life because their peers will stick up for them. And one just feels very outnumbered when trying to report one of those individuals. And unfortunately, I think those are the individuals, like members of Greek life and members of faculty, who get away with SA/SH behavior most often" (Marla Singer, DSP). This response demonstrates how students who experience SA/SH might not feel empowered to report or take action against perpetrators, especially if the perpetrator holds authority or has an extensive support group. Another participant also voiced similar concerns, stating, "I have spoken with friends or heard stories of students whose TAs aggressively pursue them or try to ask for personal information and things like that, and the student feels either worried they can't escape it because that's their TA and that's someone they have to see, who leads their discussions and things like that" (Okapi, LGBTQ+). Therefore, increasing accountability for and transparency of response to SA/SH across the university could help to ensure that students feel comfortable and supported to take necessary action.

"Greek life" (the term used by students) was mentioned frequently among focus group participants. This theme appeared seven times across three of seven focus groups when participants were asked about aspects that promote SA/SH. Moreover, Greek life was generally discussed 11 times across three of six focus groups. There were conflicting views on Greek life's role in perpetuating SA/SH. One participant shared, "[One fraternity] has a very bad [reputation] when it comes to sexual assault. In fact, they promote it. And their main goal, I think, is to just get with as many girls as possible, no matter the cost" (C.A., RSVP/VOICE). Yet another participant voiced a different view, stating, "People in Greek life get more kinds of consent and positive relationship training than the average freshman at USC" (T.P., RSVP/VOICE). Furthermore, the sorority focus group participants mentioned feeling that USC is especially hard on Greek life and that non-Greek life students are prejudiced against Greek life. A participant from the Sororities focus group noted that the fraternities have communicated and handled reported SA/SH complaints well: "I've had an experience where I've reached out and they handled it really, really well" (Takis, Sororities). These widely differing views highlight that Greek Life at USC consists of multiple different communities across houses, and there are likely different cultures, norms, and levels of education across the communities. There may also be a lack of general knowledge on the efforts Greek life is taking to disrupt this culture. Based on this finding, there may be an opportunity to facilitate peer-led community discussions within Greek life to identify the culture and reputation that want to establish internally and with the broader USC community.

Focus group participants also reported that a lack of support from faculty and staff amplifies SA/SH. When discussing professional staff and faculty roles, participants noted that although some USC faculty

and staff are supportive, others are dismissive of student needs. This response was recorded with a frequency of 11 times across three of six focus groups. Most of the responses were concentrated within the DSP focus group, which recorded seven of the 11 responses. Whereas DSP specialists and campus counselors were mentioned as supports specific to the DSP community, another student in the focus group mentioned experiencing difficulty and a lack of support with a professor: "I had to drop classes several times that I needed for my major and had to take them another semester with a different professor because of the kind of discrimination I faced. It was straight up discrimination. I had one professor ask me when I was going to stop using the crutch of my accommodations because the real world wasn't going to accommodate me the way the university is" (Wednesday Adams, DPS). In addition to the DSP focus group, the lack of support from allies at USC was further described by the LGBTQ+ focus group for a total of nine responses across two focus groups. No other focus groups mentioned they felt a lack of allies at USC. However, in the LGBTQ+ focus group, a student remarked that the support received felt more forced than genuine, stating, "Sometimes, I feel like people are forced to be allies, rather than willing to or just from who they are" (Jaguar, LGBTQ+). Participants also indicated distrust towards campus resources, which was reported in two of six focus groups. This criticism was centered around academic schools' lack of transparency with faculty misconduct and how responses to students' reports are not consistently effective and supportive. These responses further emphasize the need for increased administrative transparency and accountability, but also the need for educating faculty and staff on ways to improve their role as a support system for students.

In order to disrupt a University culture that perpetuates SA/SH, participants stressed the need for institutionalizing SA/SH prevention and education, identified 15 times across five of seven focus groups. One participant focused on the significance of education and raising awareness for the topic, stating, "Bringing [SA/SH] in as a theme in an education could be really important, even just starting with GEs, and making that part of the dialogue, rather than just completely ignoring that as a concept inside the classroom and leaving it to health professionals to do all of the legwork" (A.E., RSVP/VOICE). Participants would like to see more school-wide events, including open discussion events with guest speakers and outreach through social media. Some participants suggested resources such as RSVP to connect with and educate RSO leaders, as one participant recommended, " Implementing a school-wide thing where each org has to send two volunteers to participate in a workshop or program, that would be a good way to start getting students more involved and increase awareness" (Tiger, Professional Fraternity 1A). These suggestions emphasize the participants' desires for a supportive, inclusive, and prevention-oriented campus culture regarding SA/SH.

Students receive messages about and support through peer groups (formal and informal) regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment.

According to the focus groups, students receive messages about and support through peer groups regarding (SA/SH). This section will describe the formal and informal messages and support from peers reflected by the participants. Also, the section will touch on reasons why students utilize peer groups as a channel for SA/SH information, and what expectations they hold for future development.

Participants reported receiving both formal and informal messages from peer groups regarding SA/SH issues. The formal mechanisms included intra-organizational discussions, which was mentioned 19 times across four of six focus groups. Some peer groups have already established internal infrastructure to address SA/SH issues. For example, one student described their role on the consent task force: "I'm on the executive board of my professional fraternity and we have sort of like a consent task force, if that makes sense? So, it's various different members of e-board, and if there are issues of consent, we're the people to come to for members in the organization to talk to. And then we formulate a plan of action, whether that's to speak to the perpetrator or have them leave the organization or things like that, and really base it off of what the victim wants" (Golden retriever, Professional Fraternity 1A). This quote provides an example of a student organization setting formal infrastructure for intra-organizational discussion and problem-solving. Student organization leaders can particularly help establish formal and informal norms that promote healthy environment for its members, one sorority member recalled, "I think all the presidents, throughout all the years of my sorority, they've always made it very clear, yes, we have these social events, but, please, by no means feel forced to go. They make sure that there's so, so many other events, like sisterhood events available to sisters that don't necessarily want to drink." (Takis, Sororities). For informal mechanisms, interpersonal discussion was mentioned seven times in two of six focus groups. One notable characteristic of the discussions was that it was reactionary: usually, the discussion only occurred when or after incidents happen. This was mentioned five times in two of six focus groups. One participant said, "Myself and my really close friend both had experiences … that neither of us shared with each other until a year later" (Jellyfish, LGBTQ+). However, not every organization has established rules or discussions. Participants mentioned seven times in two of six focus groups that there was no informal or formal discussion in their organizations.

There are two main reasons reflected in the focus groups as to why the participants perceive peer groups as a source for SA/SH messages and support. First, students are influenced by their peer groups and think they are more relatable than other resources. One participant emphasized the credibility of their peers, stating, "I think that if these topics [gender based violence and substance misuse] were brought to light more in a smaller capacity with the [student] organization themselves...I would probably listen to my friends more than any USC candidate [USC administration]" (Elephant, Professional Fraternity 2B). The influence is especially visible when it comes to the leadership in student organizations, which was

described as a factor that affects social norms in three out of seven focus groups. One student said, "So I think the people running the organizations themselves have a lot of say over the culture and the way that people in the org feel" (Wolf, Professional Fraternity 2B), emphasizing that the leadership in peer groups affects the members. The participants also reported that sometimes peer groups become allies to prevent gender-based violence. Participants in three out of six focus groups described students in other organizations and communities as allies. The Sororities group cited the growing relationship between USG and Greek organizations six times, while the Professional Fraternities group mentioned student organizations three times. The second concern from participants was the lack of support from some university resources. In summary, students' responses have revealed their preference for peer to peer communication, especially in a smaller setting, as it may be more relatable and efficient than University administration messages. Also, students may turn to their peers for support because they do not perceive enough support from the faculty and staff.

When asked about how more people can be engaged as allies, the participants called for more interaction among peer groups in the future. They mentioned that students must be encouraged and empowered to help each other; this was brought up four times across four out of six focus groups. One quote indicates student organizations' influence on members' ability to handle real-life situations: "I do think that the bystander intervention trainings being basically systematic within every organization, every department, is really, really important because it's really shocking to see how many people just generally do not know what to do in questionable situations, and I think that's something that really needs to get normalized in our culture of peer pressure and coercion" (C.A., RSVP/VOICE). All in all, the participants reported support from peer groups as an important factor as they think of their peers as credible and relatable. Thus, the participants called for more bonding and empowerment among peer groups to deal with gender-based violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement a recurrent and mandated training for all USC students, regardless of class standing or time of enrollment to standardize personal skills development.
2. Establish and publicize a centralized resource that informs students of campus resources (eg. RSVP, DSP, DPS, Title IX, Student Health) to increase awareness and facilitate community action.
3. Train faculty and staff to disseminate a unified message regarding SA/SH, facilitate open dialog and review syllabi resources with a trauma-informed approach, as well as alcohol and substance in order to raise awareness and create a supportive campus environment.
4. Create a system/initiative to facilitate peer to peer open discussions regarding USC's party culture, hook up culture, greek life, drinking culture, football culture, and SA/SH issues to foster community action and facilitate advocacy efforts.
5. Establish a policy that all RSO executive board members undergo recurrent and mandated SA/SH training in order to raise awareness within student communities and support the personal development of student leaders.
6. Include a SA/SH response protocol in RSO constitutions to create a supportive campus environment and increase accessibility to campus resources if an incident were to occur.
7. Increase administrative transparency, decisive action, and accountability with regard to incidents of and response to SA/SH in order to establish trust between the student body and administration.