



Campus survey addresses sexual assault climate

572 words

4 May 2016

U-Wire

UWIR

English

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University of Texas - Dallas ; Dallas, TX - news

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Professor leads research team to gather, analyze data from student population

The UTD criminology program has created and sent out a survey to all student emails to address the campus' climate regarding sexual assault.

Associate Professor of Criminology Denise Boots is the lead researcher on the project.

Boots said the survey was created with the diverse characteristics of the student body in mind. Unlike other surveys conducted on sexual assault, Boots' form includes a section on the cultural background and upbringing of the participant.

"We wanted every student to feel like their voice mattered and that their experiences mattered to the research team," she said. "We have a large number of international students here, and so culture matters when we talk about issues like sexual victimization."

The survey presents questions about students' awareness of the Title IX office on campus, if students have experienced or been a bystander to a sexual assault and how they felt about the university's response to the incident.

"We ask ... about the lifetime prevalence of sexual victimization in our student body, which has never been asked, to my knowledge," she said.

Last fall, UTD distributed a questionnaire called the Cultivating Learning and Safe Environment survey, which dealt with a similar topic. CLASE asked broader, general questions about the campus climate, Boots said, and had a different focus than her team's survey.

"I think the surveys are very different and I think they should complement one another," Boots said. "Even if there's some repetition, that's a good thing."

The ultimate goal of the survey is the creation of an executive summary report, which will include what the team found and what those results suggest about best practices. Boots expects that report to be completed by next fall.

Boots said the idea to do the survey came from her history as an advocate for victims of sexual assault. Her areas of specialty in teaching and research revolve around women and violence.

"We had never done a campus climate survey like this before, and so that was the main impetus for the study to happen," she said.

Along with Boots, Assistant Professor of Criminology Nadine Connell and Clinical Assistant Professor of Criminology and the Director for the Institute of Urban Policy Research at UTD **Timothy Bray** are working on the research team. The team is joined by outside researcher and Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Wayne State University Jennifer Warehem, with whom Boots has worked in the past.

To create the survey, the team pored over a thousand pages of questionnaires put out by universities.

"It's been great to have a collaborative initiative on the research team where we're all looking at that from different perspectives," she said. "It's created a very rich instrument, very rigorous in the measures."

As Title IX has rolled out, Boots said, guides dictating best practices are coming in from other universities and institutions. She said this survey was an opportunity for UTD to use that information to create its own guide.

"I wanted UTD to be a leader in this, and not wait for another school or even system to be the voice for our campus," she said.

The survey will be open to all students until around May 13.

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Document UWIR000020160504ec54001uc