

SUNY Cortland Sexual Assault Talking Points

It's a serious problem

Nationally, studies indicate that at least 1 in 5 college-age women experience unwanted sexual contact. At SUNY Cortland, that would amount to hundreds of students. Last year, three SUNY Cortland students reported they had been raped on campus and three reported they'd been raped off campus. Nationally, it is believed that only about 5 percent of all rapes are reported.

It's on us

All members of the campus community have a responsibility to prevent sexual assault.

- For students, this means taking care of each other and interrupting situations that look sketchy or potentially dangerous. Students should:
 - Steer potential victims away from possible predators at parties, go out – and come home – in groups, and speak up when they think someone who is incapacitated or unwitting may be about to make a mistake.
 - Step in to stop friends or acquaintances from taking action that could make them perpetrators. Peer pressure should be used to discourage sexual assault and create an atmosphere in which persistent, unwanted sexual advances are not socially tolerated.
 - Be aware that there is an amnesty policy for reporting potential sexual assaults. If students have been drinking or are engaged in almost any normally prohibited behavior when they witness a possible assault or become a victim themselves, they can report the assault without fear of punishment by the college.
- For faculty and staff this means talking with students about the issue at appropriate moments, raising awareness of the issue and how it is handled at SUNY Cortland. If a victim tells his or her story to faculty or staff members, they should:
 - Take the student seriously, and listen without judgment
 - Avoid any suggestion that the victim is responsible for the assault or should have acted differently to avoid it.
 - Assure the person that they will be treated with respect and their privacy will be protected.
 - Notify the campus Title IX coordinator of any sexual assault or harassment allegation within 24 hours. Let the student know you have an obligation to report and encourage him or her to contact the Title IX coordinator directly.

Title IX: more than sports

Title IX was enacted in 1972 to prevent sex discrimination in educational programs. Since sexual assault is considered an extreme form of sex discrimination, Title IX gives campuses an obligation to promptly respond to all reports of sexual assault or harassment to limit its negative effects and prevent them from happening in the future. It applies to all members of the campus community – students, employees, visitors and volunteers. And it applies to all incidents involving students, whether on campus, off campus or while they are studying abroad. In regard to sexual assault, SUNY Cortland's Title IX coordinator:

- Manages the College's interactions with victims so they are treated with caring respect and are not asked to unnecessarily repeat descriptions of the event.
- Provides information to victims on available resources such as medical services, counseling and rape crisis advocacy.

- Fully explains to victims their options for reporting incidents to the police, the student conduct system, human resources, or not reporting at all.
- Arranges interim measures to help victims, such as changing their academic schedule, housing or employment to ensure safety and prevent retaliation.

Most students probably know a rapist

Nearly all reported sexual assaults at SUNY Cortland involve people known to the victims: friends, acquaintances, former romantic partners, people the victims feel are not a threat. Nearly all Cortland incidents also involve alcohol. National studies suggest that some college perpetrators are serial rapists, responsible for assaulting several different victims during their time on a college campus. Many consider their actions to be acceptable, or excusable because they acted under the influence of alcohol. They therefore do not consider themselves to be rapists. They are wrong. The College will hold them responsible for their actions. Students should know that failing to understand how SUNY defines consent could ruin their college careers and cast a shadow across their futures.

Students: When in doubt, don't do it

It's not as complicated as it may seem. SUNY's uniform definition of consent – which is essentially the same definition SUNY Cortland has used for years - means that all parties involved in sexual activity must clearly and specifically indicate that they want the activity to occur before anything happens.

- Silence, or lack of resistance is not consent. Neither is an affirmative indication given because of coercion or intimidation.
- A person who is intoxicated or otherwise incapacitated is not able to give consent. So if a student is drunk and agrees to sexual contact, then another student acting on that apparent "consent" might still be committing sexual assault. That's true even if the initiator is drunk or high as well.
- It does not matter if the people involved have had consensual sexual contact in the past. Affirmative consent must be given every time there is sexual contact. Consent to one form of sexual contact does not mean consent to all forms of sexual contact.
- Consent can be withdrawn at any point and must be respected. If that happens, sexual activity between those involved must stop.
- If there is any doubt AT ALL about consent, the wisest course of action is not to engage in sexual activity.

It doesn't matter what the victim was wearing

How a victim acts, dresses or dances – or how much they've had to drink - should never be considered an invitation to assault. Victims will not be blamed for being victims. SUNY Cortland staff and faculty are committed to protecting the privacy of possible victims. The College will investigate all allegations, but will only take action with a victim's consent. The College is required to publically report all campus crimes, including rapes, regardless of the final disposition of the case. That reporting will never identify the victim. Alleged perpetrators are only publicly identified if criminal charges are brought.

SUNY Cortland's interim Title IX coordinator is Nan Pasquarello. She can be contacted:

- By phone at 607-753-4550 or 607-753-2201
- By email at nan.pasquarello@cortland.edu or titleix@cortland.edu