

Announcement: Sexual Assault Task Force Report

Sexual assault of university students is an issue of considerable national concern. It is an issue that has been highlighted by elected officials, and one on which we have received guidelines and advisory information from the United States Department of Education. A particular point of attention has been on the protections extended under the provisions of Title IX.

Ferris State University has for many years worked to carefully investigate cases of sexual assault with special concern for the victim and a goal of having a safe environment for our students, faculty and staff. In this context, last year I convened a Sexual Assault Task Force and charged them with reviewing our efforts to prevent incidents of sexual violence, to properly address such incidents when reported, and to present recommendations to implement recent guidelines and best practices.

The task force has issued a draft report, which I want to share with you to solicit your thoughts and suggestions. I encourage you to read this report carefully. It is important that every member of our campus community be knowledgeable about our responsibilities and obligations. The report outlines a number of sexual violence policies and procedures, many relating in one way or another to Title IX, and provides an aggressive timetable for adopting the proposed recommendations. Even as we continue to review this information we are also moving forward with several proposed recommendations.

While the report's action items are based primarily upon resources available at the Big Rapids campus, this report is a template for reproducing our efforts on each of our campuses across the state. Along with the release of this report I am also asking campuses outside of Big Rapids to develop addenda to this report to detail location-specific information for their areas.

The report contains a number of Appendices that provide additional information. Appendix 2 of the report lists the proposed recommendations by their target completion date. Appendix 3 is a university-generated document that outlines federal recommendations and requirements regarding sexual violence. Appendix 4 provides observations of Ferris resources from a targeted survey conducted by the task force. The report is available here - http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/administration/adminandfinance/docs/Sexual_Assault_Task_Force_Report_with_Appendicies_Added%208-29-14.pdf.

One of the task force recommendations was to create a website to bring together resources in a single place for easy access. Together with the release of this draft report we have created a new university Title IX webpage, at www.ferris.edu/title-ix. These pages were developed to assist members of the campus community in filing a complaint, getting support, understanding Ferris policy, and providing additional information.

At this time of year, especially, there cannot be too much awareness of the problem of sexual violence. At least one report cited by the National Violence Recourse Center found that sexual assaults were most likely to occur on campus weekends, September through November, and that first and second-year students were most vulnerable. Nationally, this is a very under-reported crime. There are some statistics that suggest one in five college women students will be the victim of sexual violence. This is unacceptable.

I want to thank the membership of the task force for their very good work:

Shelly Armstrong, Vice President, University Advancement & Marketing

Bruce Borkovich, Director, Public Safety

Sandy Gholston, News Services, University Advancement & Marketing

Lisa Ortiz, Assistant Director, Residential Programs

Ken Plas, Attorney, Governmental Relations and General Counsel

Renee Vander Myde, Director, Counseling and Health Center

Jeanine Ward-Roof, Vice President, Student Affairs

Erik Wessel, Director, Student Conduct

Leroy Wright, Dean of Students

Jerry Scoby, Vice President for Administration and Finance, Chair

As the task force's report describes, we will be completing a number of different recommendations throughout the year. Please take a look at the report and the website. Knowing where to turn and who to contact can be important in quickly accessing resources for someone in need, as well as preventing subsequent assaults. While aspects of this issue are complex, the primary message is simple – sexual assault has no place in the life of our university.

I encourage you to send your observations and suggestions on the task force report to the chair, Vice President Jerry Scoby. Thank you for taking time to become familiar with these resources. More importantly, thank you for being a part of the solution to this problem.

David L. Eisler, President