

Gender Based & Sexual Violence Prevention & Response

Consultation Findings and Recommendations

*Prepared by: Chelsea Jaipersad,
Student Research and Policy
Assistant and Maya D'Alessio,
Research Coordinator*

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Methodology	2
Identified Themes	3
Key Recommendations	3
Discrimination and Harassment	4
On-Campus Housing	5
Disclosure and Resolution Support	5
Campus Safety	6



Introduction

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) is a student-led, provincial advocacy organization representing the interests of undergraduate students across Ontario. OUSA is run by a Steering Committee made up of elected student representatives from each member association, including the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA). These student representatives advocate to improve the accessibility, affordability, accountability, and quality of the post-secondary experience by engaging with decision makers to influence provincial legislation and policy. This advocacy relies on the creation of substantive, student-driven, and evidence-based policy recommendations on a given issue.

Twice a year, members of OUSA from all its schools come together to debate and approve the policy stances that will guide the organization's advocacy for the coming years. The policies are created by students for students and form the basis for all the work that OUSA does. Currently, OUSA is updating their policy stance on Gender Based Violence and Sexual Violence Prevention and Response.

Community engagement and consultation is an important part of policy development as it ensures that policies reflect the concerns and needs of all students. This allows OUSA to present provincial decision makers with comprehensive and evidence-based recommendations on complex issues.



Methodology

Throughout November, WUSA engaged in various consultation activities to learn more about the perspectives, opinions, and experiences of UW students on this issue. Undergraduate students were invited to participate in an anonymous online survey that had open ended questions inquiring about their experience on campus and in the Waterloo region around gender-based and sexual violence prevention and response. Students were also invited to participate in a 1.5-hour online focus group session on the topic.

Additionally, WUSA reached out to on campus partners, services, and offices that regularly work with students around issues of gender-based violence and sexual violence including the University of Waterloo Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office and the Women’s Centre at WUSA to conduct stakeholder interviews.

List of Activities

Online anonymous consultation form

- November 1-24, 2023
- 3 respondents

Stakeholder Interview

- November 8, 2023
- Amanda Cook, Director of the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office
- November 23, 2023
- WUSA Women’s Centre

Focus Group

- November 21, 2023, 5:15-6:45 pm (Online)

Biases and Limitations

The following summary is a combination of the opinions and experiences shared in all the consultation activities listed above. We consulted with students directly through the online consultation form and the focus group. We also consulted with staff in on-campus support units that provide services relevant to gender and sexual based violence prevention and response to provide a broader lens than an individual student’s experience and to understand wider systemic issues that the support unit might encounter in providing support to students. Our analysis and recommendations are limited by the engagement from students and staff that we received and cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the views of all students who identify with experiences involving gender-based and sexual violence.

It is important to note that some participants self-identified as survivors during the focus group session and shared their unique experiences, which may not be representative of all survivors at the University of Waterloo.

Identified Themes



Discrimination and Harassment



On-Campus Housing



Disclosure and Resolution Support



Campus Safety

Key Recommendations

1

Go above and beyond the current Ontario requirements and make training mandatory for all community members (staff, faculty, and students) on all identities present in the campus community that specifically addresses discrimination, diversity, and inclusion.

2

Creation of a clear University wide policy on monitoring social media channels for inappropriate comments or posts and how they will be addressed.

3

Mandatory educational programs should be carried out on gender-based and sexual violence prevention and available resources at the University of Waterloo for students in residences.

4

The SVPRO should further consult with survivors on their needs and how the SVPRO can support them throughout the entirety of the disclosure, investigation, and resolution process.

5

The SVPRO (and the University) need to reconsider the resolution process and how resolutions can be survivor-centered.

6

Implementation of a safety service to help all campus community members return home from campus at night (this should include main and satellite campuses).

Discrimination and Harassment

A goal of the University should be to ensure a secure and empowered environment for all members of the campus community. Every student should feel comfortable and valued in their field of study and have access to development opportunities throughout their educational journey. Students report experiencing dismissive and hateful comments and discrimination based on their gender identity from peers and instructors. There has also been an increasing presence of gender-based hate speech in the comments of University-affiliated social media posts. These micro and macroaggressions accumulate over time causing students of marginalized gender identities to feel unsafe and unwelcome on campus. These behaviours also reinforce patriarchal structures and ideology in the campus community which can influence and encourage gender based and sexual violence.

Concerns

- Students who identify as a gender minority have experienced gender-based discrimination (predominantly in STEM faculties) causing them to feel unwelcome and unsafe
- Students report not being aware of how to report gender related discrimination concerns or have reported concerns and feel they were not addressed
- Students who identify as a marginalized gender report their counterparts being offered more opportunities to advance in their education
- Repeated reports of discriminatory messages shared on University of Waterloo and affiliated social media pages (in comments and sometimes even in posts)
 - These comments are not consistently addressed or removed

Recommendations

1. Mandatory training for all community members (staff, faculty, and students) on all identities present in the campus community that specifically addresses discrimination, diversity, and inclusion
2. Further education and awareness on the University's policies on harassment and discrimination including a clear process for complaints and resolution process
3. Creation of a University wide policy on monitoring social media channels for inappropriate comments or posts and how they will be addressed

On-Campus Housing

Campus residences should be a home away from home for students, a safe space for them to build community. There is the potential for increased risk of conflict in this environment as students with different beliefs and values share the same spaces and for many of these students this is their first time living independently with others outside of their family. As a preventative measure, students must be well-informed about existing policies and protective measures against gender and sexual based violence. Unfortunately, reports indicate a lack of awareness among students regarding gender-based violence prevention strategies and available supports. This knowledge gap directly affects the safety and security within campus residences.

Concerns

- University residences identified as an area with increased risk of gender-based and sexual violence
- Residents of Campus Housing who have experienced gender-based or sexual violence do not feel appropriate action has been taken in response to these incidents
- Reports that perpetrators are not required to be moved to another community or evicted from residence

Recommendations

1. Mandatory educational programs should be carried out on gender-based and sexual violence prevention and available resources at the University of Waterloo for students in residences.

Disclosure and Resolution Support

The University of Waterloo has support services, including the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office (SVPRO) that are in place to support survivors of gender-based and sexual violence. Survivors have reported a dissatisfaction with their experiences interacting with the office both in the reporting and resolution process. Additionally, students have also identified Counselling Services as not meeting their needs due to long wait times.

Concerns

- Survivors report feeling that they were discouraged from pursuing the investigation and resolution process (did not feel heard or believed)
- Survivors report that resolutions are not satisfactory and require them to bear the onus of avoiding the perpetrator on campus
- The current approach to support students involves directing students to external resources as opposed to moving through the process with them
- Survivors expressed a need for support from SVPRO throughout the reporting process (in pursuing a complaint with the police, navigating the process of getting a rape kit, etc.)
- Long wait times at counselling service were identified as a barrier to getting support

Recommendations

1. The SVPRO should further consult with survivors on their needs and how the SVPRO can support them throughout the entirety of the disclosure, investigation, and resolution process
2. The SVPRO (and the University) need to reconsider the resolution process and how resolutions can be survivor-centered
3. Consider changing the approach of support programs for survivors of gender-based and sexual violence
4. Counselling services should work to provide decreased wait times to survivors of gender-based and sexual violence or expand the support options to include options that can be facilitated more promptly
5. Communicate the message of holding perpetrators accountable through university policy and procedures

Campus Safety

Ensuring campus safety remains a significant concern at the University of Waterloo, particularly following the June 2023 attack targeting students and staff in a gender studies classroom. Since the attack, students have raised concerns about their feelings of safety on campus, as well as with the safety procedures and emergency responses mechanisms. One of the most frequent concerns raised around gender and sexual-based violence was around navigating the campus and returning home from campus at night.

Concerns

- Students report feeling unsafe at night, and fear gender-based attacks
- Campus infrastructure (lack of help poles and lighting) was identified as contributing to feeling unsafe at night on campus
- There are limited transportation options available for students at late hours
- Current mechanisms of emergency communications were found to be inadequate during the June attack

Recommendations

1. Review and improve campus infrastructure with a lens of gender- and sexual-based violence prevention
2. Implementation of a safety service to help all campus community members return home from campus at night (this should include main and satellite campuses)
3. Continue to update current technologies, including the WatSAFE app, to ensure a better report of dangers in campus areas, and work towards increasing awareness among students of these technologies



THE
DRS

MY BOOT
MY CHOICE

MY BOOT
MY CHOICE

Own
the
Shadows

WATERLOO UNDERGRADUATE

WUSA
STUDENT ASSOCIATION