

Carleton College
Institutional Research and Assessment

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To: Interested Parties
From: Jim Ferguson
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Subject: An overview of the 2015 HEDS Sexual Assault Survey results

Survey Background: In the spring of 2015, Carleton and 56 other institutions participated in a Sexual Assault/Campus Climate Survey hosted by the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS). All on-campus Carleton students were surveyed, with 461 participants and a response rate of 24%. The national survey produced nearly 24,000 responses, with an overall response rate of 19%. HEDS provided Carleton with its own data (stripped of all personal identifiers), a comparison report with selected results for six participating Carleton planning peers and all 44 HEDS participants, and a frequency report with aggregate responses from Carleton and all 57 national institutions.

The survey began with a series of *questions for all students* about campus safety, and perceptions about institutional responsiveness to sexual assault or unwanted sexual contact. It then branched out, so that *only students who indicated that they had been sexually assaulted* on campus or on a campus-sponsored off-campus activity since entering college were asked to continue with a series of follow-up questions about the assault(s).

The fact that there was usually a high degree of consistency in response patterns and frequencies across nearly 24,000 participants helps to compensate for the generally low institutional response rates. However, there are some key differences across colleges in perceptions about institutional responses to sexual assault and in the reported circumstances by those who said they were assaulted. Some of the major findings are summarized below, with indications about how Carleton differs from the national patterns.

Large majorities of students feel “safe” on campus and are satisfied with general campus climate: Across all institutions, 82% students said they agree/agree strongly that they “feel safe” on campus, but women consistently felt somewhat less safe than men. *Carleton students were much more likely to report feeling safe* (95% overall, 97% of men, and 94% of women). Strong majorities also agreed that college employees were genuinely concerned about students’ welfare, that they treat them fairly and respect what they think. Strong majorities felt “part of the community”, close to others on campus, and valued in the classroom/learning environment. Students are seen as looking out for each other. *Carleton women and men had much more favorable scores than those at the six peers or other HEDS institutions on the composite campus climate/safety variable that summarizes this group of related questions.*

Many have experienced “unwanted sexual contact”, but infrequently: “Unwanted sexual contact” is defined as unwanted verbal or nonverbal behaviors or unwanted *brief* physical contact. An experience of “unwanted sexual contact” *at any time* was universally much more frequent than sexual assault. At Carleton, “unwanted verbal behaviors” were experienced *at some time* by 67% of women and 27% of men; “unwanted nonverbal behaviors” by 19% of women and 7% of men, and “unwanted brief physical contact” was experienced by 51% of women and 25% of men. *However, the frequency of unwanted contacts was low.* Fewer than 8% of women overall (or 5% at Carleton) said that they had experienced any of these behaviors “often or very often”.

Only a small proportion reported a “sexual assault”: “Sexual assault” is defined as unwanted and nonconsensual sexual touching, or sex of an oral, vaginal, anal, or of penetrative nature with other body parts or

objects. At Carleton, 40 respondents reported being assaulted (N=30, or 11% of women; N=8, or 4% of men, plus 2 “other”); 3% of women or men were “unsure” that an incident was an “assault”. *The prevalence of reported assaults (split by gender) was very similar across institutions.*

There is considerable variation across institutions in the circumstances of victims of sexual assault:

- **Drug and alcohol involvement:** Victims across HEDS institutions reported that almost three-quarters of their assailants were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the assault, and about three-fifths of the victims admitted that they had been consuming alcohol. *Carleton victims reported higher levels of drug involvement by assailants* (22% at Carleton vs. 12% peers vs. 18% all HEDS), but *lower drug involvement on their own part* (5% at Carleton vs. 8% all institutions). No Carleton victims reported being drugged unknowingly.
- **Incapacitation:** 39% of victims from HEDS institutions and 45% at Carleton said that they were *unable to provide consent* due to some form of incapacitation.
- **Assailants:** Compared to other HEDS institutions, victims from Carleton said that they were *more likely to be assaulted by students from their own institution* (99% vs. 93%), *in a campus residence* (86% vs. 75%), and that they were *less likely to have been assaulted by multiple assailants* (13% vs 20%).
- **Use of force:** 46% of victims at HEDS institutions reported some use of force in the assault, compared to 41% of victims at Carleton.

Few victims report assaults to an official who can take action: Across all institutions, most victims eventually told *someone*, but this was usually a friend, roommate, or romantic partner. Few victims told a parent, or told a campus or local official with authority to take action about the assault. *Fewer than 20% of victims at all institutions used “official campus procedures” to make a “formal report” of an assault, and this figure was particularly low (12%) at Carleton.*

Most feel educated about sexual assault, but fewer understand the process for dealing with it: Nationally, large majorities of respondents said that they had received education or information about recognizing, preventing, and reporting a sexual assault, *and these percentages were higher at Carleton.* Most remembered the education, or much of it. *However, just over a third reported receiving information about the procedures for investigating an assault* (35% at Carleton vs. 37% at all other institutions.)

There are mixed perceptions about institutional responses: Carleton women are more likely than the six peers or HEDS members to give the College high scores on the composite scale that reflects how the College would respond to “*a difficult or dangerous situation*” (protecting students from harm, handling a crisis, handling incidents fairly and responsibly, responding quickly, and providing a good support system). However, both Carleton men and women tend to give less favorable scores on the scale reflecting how the College would respond to an actual “*report of sexual assault*” (take it seriously, support and protect the reporter, conduct a careful investigation, take action against the offender). However, if one looks more closely at the detail of the five point scale for each question (from strongly disagree to strongly agree), *there are majority “agree/strongly agree” percentages for all questions except “campus officials would take action against the offender(s)”.* Here, *only 40% of Carls “agree/strongly agree” compared to 61% of all respondents.* In most questions related to institutional responses to dangerous situations or reports of sexual assault, women tend to give less favorable ratings than men, non-whites tend to give lower ratings than whites, and persons who identify as something other than heterosexual (about 25% of respondents at Carleton) tend to give lower ratings than heterosexuals.

Open-ended comments: Respondents also provided 13-pages of open-ended comments about sexual assault and campus climate that add perspective (both positive and negative) to the quantitative responses. HEDS reviewed each comment and redacted any that would identify any individual. The comments remind us that any incident of sexual assault or unwanted sexual contact can have serious and lasting effects on the victims.