



1-2016

What's AHEAD Poll # 8: Sexual Violence on Campus

Laura W. Perna

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/ahead_papers

This report summarizes the results of a poll administered to the alumni of the Executive Doctorate program in Higher Education Management at the University of Pennsylvania (n = 251). 140 alumni responded during the 9-day period in which the poll was open (December 1 through December 9, 2015). About half (56%) of respondents work at private not-for-profit four-year institutions, 18% work at public four-year institutions, 6% at public two-year institutions, 4% at for-profit institutions, 1% in administrative units (e.g., system offices), and 2% at non-US-based universities. The remaining respondents (12%) work in organizations other than colleges and universities. Additional commentary is available at <https://ahead-penn.org/commentarypoll8>

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/ahead_papers/15
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

What's AHEAD Poll # 8: Sexual Violence on Campus

Keywords

Sexual violence on campus, perceptions of college leaders

Comments

This report summarizes the results of a poll administered to the alumni of the Executive Doctorate program in Higher Education Management at the University of Pennsylvania (n = 251). 140 alumni responded during the 9-day period in which the poll was open (December 1 through December 9, 2015). About half (56%) of respondents work at private not-for-profit four-year institutions, 18% work at public four-year institutions, 6% at public two-year institutions, 4% at for-profit institutions, 1% in administrative units (e.g., system offices), and 2% at non-US-based universities. The remaining respondents (12%) work in organizations other than colleges and universities.

Additional commentary is available at <https://ahead-penn.org/commentarypoll8>

Copyright/Permission Statement



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

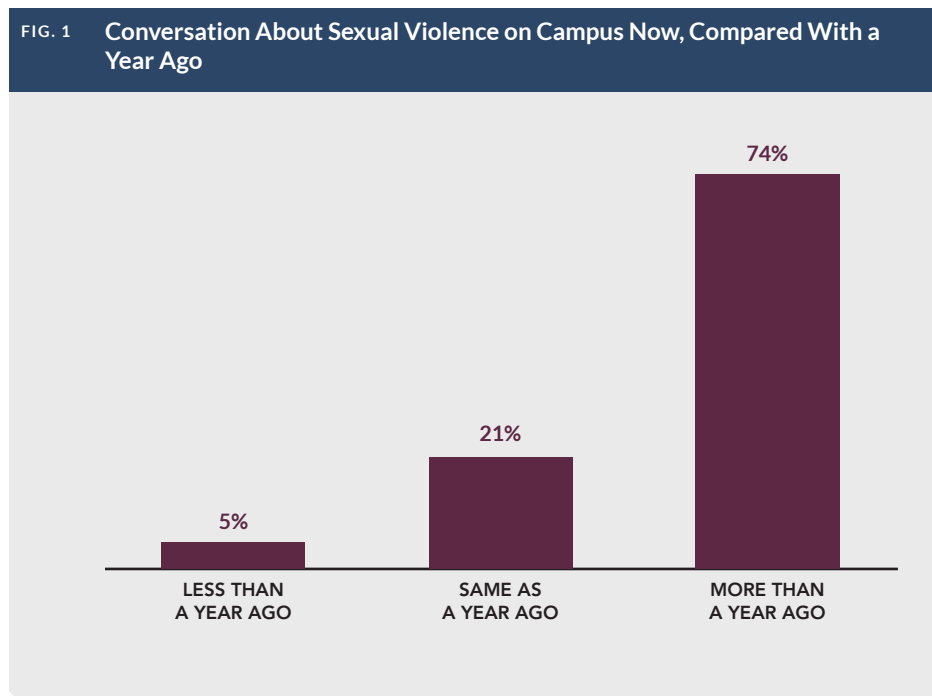


What's AHEAD draws on the expertise of higher education trend-spotters to offer insights into important issues in higher education management. In this poll, we asked higher education leaders to share their perceptions about sexual violence on campus.

Sexual violence is a common topic of discussion among higher education leaders. Most leaders agree that colleges and universities require distinct policies for sexual violence. While most also believe that their institution's policies are clearly communicated, nearly half report that more needs to be done to prevent sexual violence on campus. A noteworthy minority of leaders raises questions about the adequacy of available data for understanding sexual violence on their campus. Federal regulations are an important source of changes in institutional policies pertaining to sexual violence, but complying with federal regulations is not without challenge, at least for some institutions.

Sexual Violence is a Topic of Conversation Among Higher Education Leaders

Most responding higher education leaders report more conversation about sexual violence on campus now than a year ago (74%).



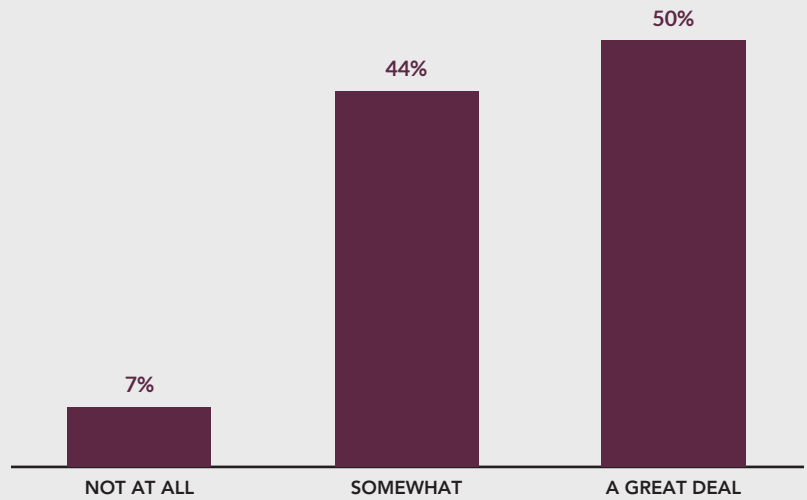
Nearly all (94%) respondents who are working at a college or university report that leaders at their institution are talking at least somewhat about sexual violence on campus. Half (50%) report that institutional leaders are talking about this topic “a great deal.”



University of Pennsylvania
Graduate School of Education
St. Leonard's Court, Suite 120
3819 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

ahead-penn.org

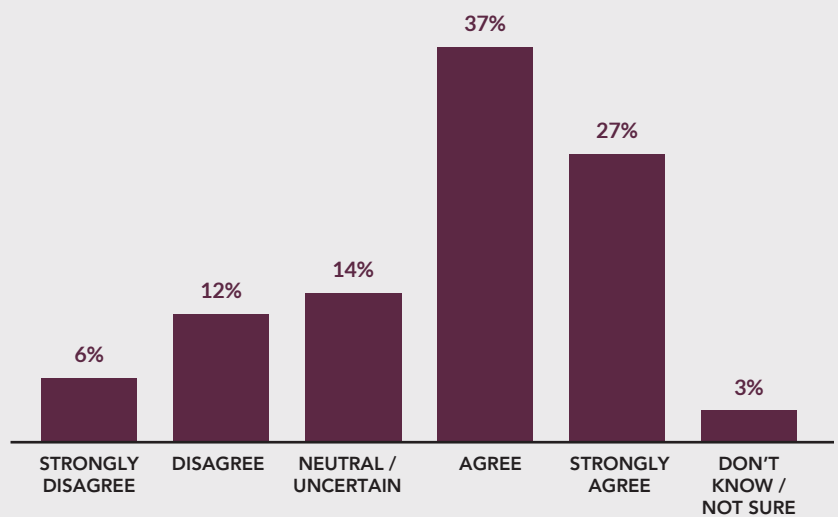
FIG. 2 Leaders at My Campus Are Talking About Sexual Violence on Campus*



Distinct Policies Are Needed for Sexual Violence

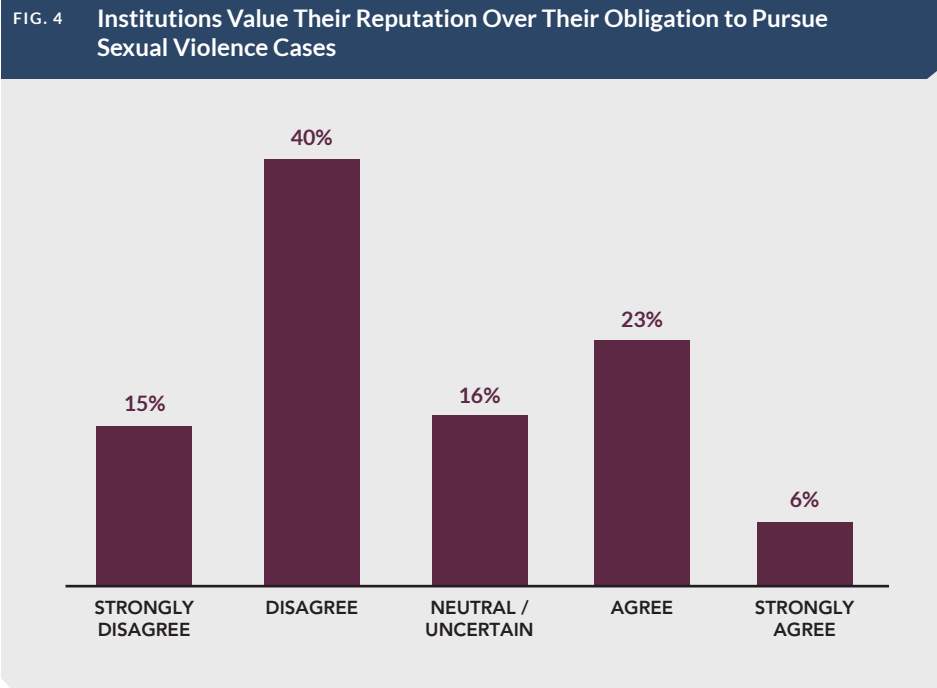
Most respondents (64%) agree that sexual violence policies should be distinct from policies on other types of violence and/or harassment.

FIG. 3 Sexual Violence Policies Should be Distinct From Other Policies



Institutions Recognize Their Obligation to Respond to Sexual Violence Cases

Only a minority (29%) of responding higher education leaders believe that higher education institutions value their reputation over their obligation to pursue sexual violence cases.

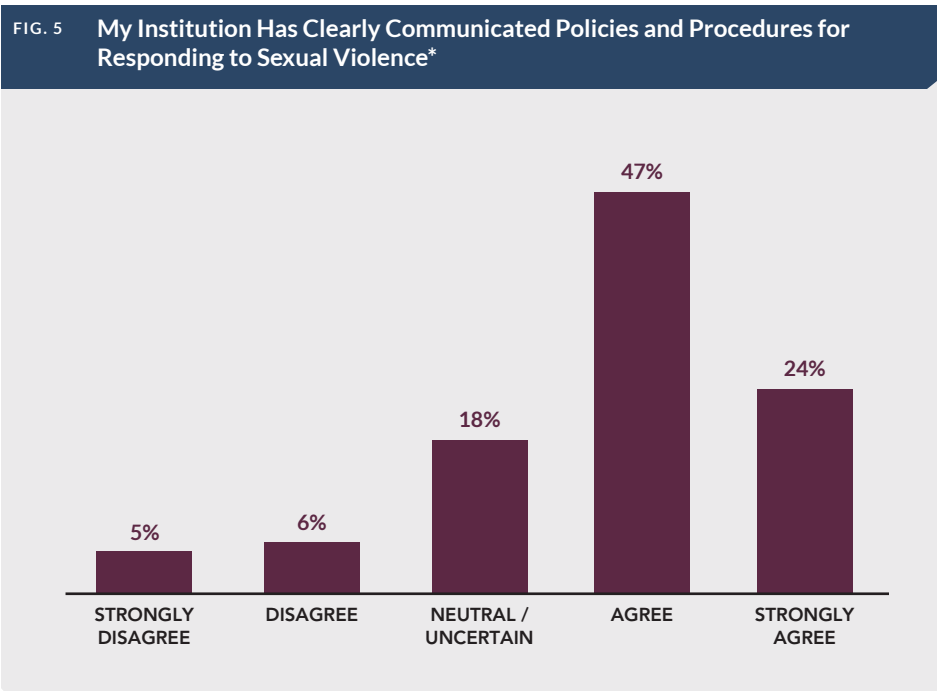


Most Believe Institutional Policies Are Communicated Clearly

Most respondents (71%) agree or strongly agree that their institution has clearly communicated policies for responding to sexual violence.

Nonetheless, a few respondents commented on the need for more “education” of students, faculty, and staff. One leader commented:

I'm sometimes really surprised at the lack of understanding about what is acceptable or unacceptable behavior. We need better education of students, faculty and staff to clarify these issues, especially as our demographics in all of these groups continue to change.



Higher Education Institutions Should Do More to Prevent Sexual Violence

Nearly half (43%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that their institution should do more to prevent sexual violence on campus.

While a few respondents reported that their institution has had policies pertaining to sexual violence in place for many years, one higher education leader commented on the importance of an approach that changes the institutional culture:

At my institution we have much infrastructure in place but until now there has not been an effort to streamline, coordinate all aspects of the work around sexual violence and Title IX. This is key to developing a comprehensive approach that can impact the climate and culture of an institution. Prevention efforts must be a priority—not solely compliance.

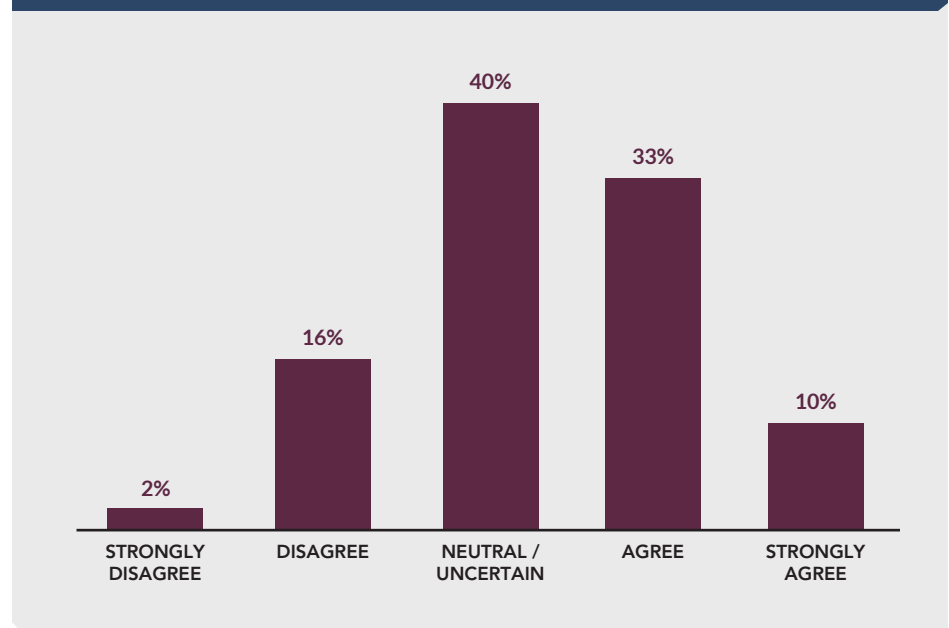
One respondent perceives the benefits of training:

Title IX training on our campus is having a significant impact on awareness of sexual violence on campus and the responsibility of college employees to take action upon learning of incidents.

Suggesting the time required to change the institutional culture, another leader commented:

This issue is an ongoing one and will require the full attention of institutional leaders for years to come. Changing campus culture is not easy and will require ongoing educational efforts. I think the approach that Teresa Sullivan employed at UVA is on target—she worked with student leaders, especially those in fraternities and sororities, to develop a campus-wide strategy.

FIG. 6 My Institution Should Do More to Prevent Sexual Violence on Campus*



Some Question the Adequacy of Available Data

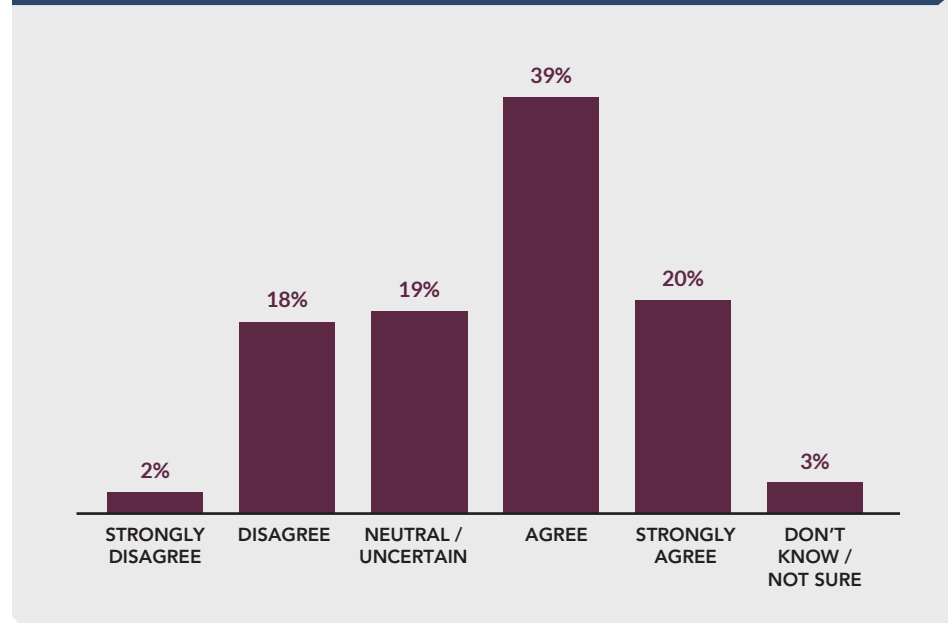
More than half (59%) of leaders working at colleges and universities agree or strongly agree that available data provide a good understanding of sexual violence on campus.

A noteworthy share (20%), however, disagrees. One respondent commented, "There appears to be a silent epidemic of sexual violence on campuses today, and a reluctance to report incidents to police or administrators." Another explained: "There is confusion over reporting crime stats for the Cleary Act as to what constitutes sexual violence and understanding why instances have increased because of reporting."

A third explained:

As with sexual violence in all areas of society it is very difficult to get accurate data. My institution conducted a survey last spring to learn more about patterns of Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence on campus and released the results through many public meetings throughout the fall. The response rate was good for a survey (34.4%), but this means that two thirds of the students did not take time to share information.

FIG. 7 Available Data Provide a Good Understanding of Sexual Violence*



Federal Regulations Are an Important Source of Changes in Institutional Policies

Most respondents (76%) reported that institutional leaders are the first (31%), second (26%) or third (19%) most important entity influencing changes in institutional policies pertaining to sexual violence on campus. Other entities believed to be influencing changes in institutional policies pertaining to sexual violence are the federal government and students.

Several leaders commented on the challenges associated with complying with federal regulations. One leader wrote:

The increased regulations are making it very difficult for our smaller, independent colleges and universities to commit the needed human resources in order to manage it all.

Another noted that, although there is now more “awareness, open discussion, balanced policies and procedures” regarding sexual violence:

The increased regulations placed on institutions by state and federal legislation often are not done with experts at the table resulting in complex compliance standards that require dedicated staff at the expense of other pressing needs (e.g., mental health counseling, support for students on the autism spectrum, etc.).

FIG. 8 Most Important Entity Influencing Changes in Institutional Policies Pertaining to Sexual Violence*

ENTITY INFLUENCING CHANGE	PERCENT
Institutional Leaders	31%
Federal Government	25%
Students	16%
Media	9%
Court Cases	8%
State Government	5%
Don't Know	4%
Faculty	1%
Accrediting Agencies	1%
Local Law Enforcement	1%

NOTE: * Responses in these figures are limited to leaders working at a college or university.

About This Poll

We invited alumni of the Executive Doctorate program in Higher Education Management at the University of Pennsylvania to participate in the poll (n = 251); 140 alumni responded during the 9-day period in which the poll was open (December 1 through December 9, 2015). About half (56%) of respondents work at private not-for-profit four-year institutions, 18% work at public four-year institutions, 6% at public two-year institutions, 4% at for-profit institutions, 1% in administrative units (e.g., system offices), and 2% at non-US-based universities. The remaining respondents (12%) work in organizations other than colleges and universities.

Suggested Citation

Perna, L. W. (January 2016). *Sexual Violence on Campus* (What's AHEAD: Key Trends in Higher Education No. 8). Philadelphia, PA: Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania.

About AHEAD

The **Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy (AHEAD)** is dedicated to promoting the public purposes of higher education in fostering open, equitable, and democratic societies. Located within the Graduate School of Education of the University of Pennsylvania, AHEAD applies what is known from our own and others' research to improve institutional practice and public policy through technical assistance and professional development activities. For more information see: www.ahead-penn.org