

TESTIMONY

“Campus Safety: Improving Prevention and Response Efforts”

The Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate

Submitted for the record
by

Melynda Huskey
Interim Vice President and Dean of Students
Washington State University

July 13, 2016

Mr. Chairman, Senator Murray, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Melynda Huskey and I serve as the Interim Vice President of Student Affairs at Washington State University. We are proud to have Senator Murray as an alumna and I am honored to be invited by the committee and Senator Murray to participate in the roundtable today on the extremely important issue of campus safety and the prevention of all forms of violence on college campuses. Today, I am here on behalf of Washington State University's leadership and more than 29,000 students.

WSU is Washington's land grant institution. Through our five campuses, four research centers and WSU extension, WSU is physically present in every county in the state, delivering education, research, and core services that benefit Washingtonians in their communities every day. As a premiere tier one research university, WSU drives education and innovation in our communities to support and grow the state's economy.

WSU is led by President Kirk Schulz, who joined our Cougar family in June. We are pleased that he supports the WSU land grant mission of advancing, extending and applying knowledge through local and global engagement.

As Interim Vice President and Dean of Students, I oversee the offices and programs which support students in all of their out-of-the-classroom activities and circumstances—everything from residence life and dining to student involvement and engagement to student conduct to health and wellness to fraternity and sorority life.

I have been asked to share with you the efforts we are making on our campus to prevent violence, and the approach we have chosen to take. Like many universities, our campus has experienced incidents of:

- hazing,
- bullying,
- fighting, and more recently
- cyber-bullying.

We are also deeply concerned with ongoing issues of sexual violence, dating and intimate partner violence, and stalking. Sexual violence, in particular, requires a redoubling of effort in order to reduce the incidence on all college campuses. At WSU, student survey data, produced by the National College Health Assessment from the 2014-2015 school year, indicates that 10 percent of undergraduate

students had experienced some form of interpersonal violence (sexual assault, dating violence, stalking) in the previous 12 months. This is unacceptable.

WSU is committed to enhancing the safety of our students, faculty, staff, and visitors at all of our campuses.

To increase campus safety, WSU is engaged in focused efforts across four main areas to further reduce sexual violence, including:

1. improved education and communication regarding acceptable standards and conduct;
2. increased focus on prevention and intervention;
3. an enhanced reporting and response infrastructure that will provide victims with safe and reliable options for ensuring their needs are met; and
4. deeper collaboration with area non-profits and law enforcement to ensure the university is engaging in best practices in confronting and reducing sexual violence on our campuses.

The university has also prepared, and made available, university policies, procedures, statistics, and information relating to campus safety, emergency management, and the health and welfare of the campus community. This includes information on student standards and conduct policies, mental health and counseling services, safety and security policies/procedures for University housing, harassment policies, and sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking policies. In all of these cases, we continue to evaluate how well we are serving distinct populations: veterans, members of the LGBT community, ethnic and racial communities, international students, students with disabilities. Guidance from the Office of Civil Rights and Department of Education has helped us meaningfully focus and refine these efforts.

As a research institution, we are deeply committed to using the best evidence-based practices available. For this reason, we have adopted a public health model for violence prevention. As many of you know, in this model, multi-disciplinary teams — in our case, health care providers, human development experts, prevention scientists, student affairs practitioners, law enforcement, compliance officers, community members, and students — work together to define the nature and extent of violence on our campus, identify risk and protective factors, develop and implement interventions, evaluate their effectiveness, and oversee their broad implementation. Within this model, we look at the societal, community, relationship, and individual factors which support healthy choices, and those that support violence, and work to intervene at all levels to promote a healthy campus. This approach allows us to address violence in all its forms—from bullying in residence halls to the most serious cases of assault or sexual violence.

Our hazing prevention efforts are interdisciplinary and distributed across campus. While a few organizations are likely to come to mind — fraternities and sororities, marching bands — the fact is that hazing can occur in any organization, and once established as a cultural practice, can be exceptionally resistant to change. We provide preventative training and information to all student organizations on the issue, offer anonymous reporting, and work with advisors and mentors locally and nationally to identify the risk and protective factors which can change outcomes for students.

Bullying and other kinds of harassment are covered under our Standards of Conduct for students. We are committed to a fair, educational, and developmental student discipline process, recognizing the difference between legal proceedings outside our institution and our internal responsibilities to support students' ethical development and accountability to our university community.

We are also committed to the prevention of another serious form of violence on campus: suicide. With support from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), in partnership with the Washington State Department of Health, WSU and more than 15 other institutions of higher education across the state are creating and refining comprehensive, research-based suicide prevention plans. Again, the public health model helps us in defining the scope of the problem, the risk and protective factors, and the prevention strategies — from limiting access to potentially lethal means to promoting strong social connections among students and exploring new technologies for delivering support and mental health evaluations to the “digital native” generation of students.

We have been very fortunate to receive federal funding to support our efforts. Since 2011, our work in the area of sex- and gender-based violence has been supported, in part, by competitive funding from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women Grant to Reduce Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking on Campus. Our on-campus Violence Prevention Center has supported policy review and revision, mandatory training for employees on the university's policy prohibiting discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual misconduct, as well as on reporting obligations. We have implemented a suite of required trainings for all incoming students, which include face-to face small group workshops on sex- and gender-based violence, bystander empowerment and intervention strategies, and alcohol and drug impacts on sexual decision making. We continue to evaluate and refine these efforts for effectiveness.

WSU also recognizes that the best way to increase safety on our campuses, and to support institutional efforts, is to engage directly with our students and community stakeholders in this process. Our student body has created a program called “It's on Cougs,” led by students to encourage bystander intervention. The program includes trainings, workshops, and social media campaigns around ways to engage in campus safety.

At Washington State University, we are committed to creating a safe, supportive environment free from violence, in which all our students can focus on learning, and in which they can graduate as educated citizens who will contribute to the state, the nation, and the world.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about issues we take very seriously at WSU. I look forward to answering any questions and to working with you going forward.