

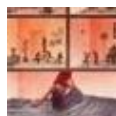
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More funds urged to stop sexual assaults

Experts say colleges fail to commit enough to address the problem

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JULY 20, 2014



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ARTICLE	COMMENTS (2)	BACK TO TOP
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HANOVER, N.H. — While an increasing number of colleges are taking steps to overhaul how they combat sexual assaults, many are still failing to commit adequate financial resources toward addressing the problem, according to national experts.

Some institutions have relied too heavily on outside funding, including taxpayer-funded grants, to pay for efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence on their campuses, the experts say.

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“Historically, higher education leadership has not stepped up,” longtime campus sexual assault researcher David Lisak said at a five-day conference on the issue at Dartmouth College last week. “For too long, the fight against sexual violence has been left to small cadres of highly motivated, but understaffed, underfunded, and underpowered individuals.”

Campus officials overseeing initiatives to tackle sexual violence “need to have budgets they can rely on to build comprehensive, multiyear programs,” added Lisak, a clinical psychologist who recently retired from teaching at the University of Massachusetts Boston. “It is often said that if you want to understand what an institution’s priorities are, study the budget. I think that applies here.”

In a subsequent interview, he said he believes colleges have been reluctant to invest more toward addressing campus sexual violence because of a perception that “they’ll be seen as having a unique problem, a bigger problem than other schools and their neighbors.”

A recent survey of some 440 four-year colleges, including some of the nation’s largest public and private institutions, illustrated that while colleges have improved in some areas, many still lack resources.

Nearly one-third of schools said they do not provide sexual assault training for students and about half do not offer a hot line for victims, according to the survey conducted by the office of US Senator Claire McCaskill, a Democrat from Missouri.

The American Council on Education, a higher education lobbying group, rebutted the notion that colleges are not investing enough.

“Schools are reaching deep to find what they need in order to

Funding to prevent sexual violence

Largest amounts granted to Massachusetts colleges to reduce sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking awarded since 1999 by the Office on Violence Against Women:

College	Amount	Number of Grants Awarded to School
Tufts University	\$1,362,649	4
University of Massachusetts system	\$1,091,759	3
Clark University	\$796,950	2
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	\$492,956	2
Fitchburg State College	\$300,000	1
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth	\$300,000	1

SOURCE: Office on Violence Against Women OLIVIA HALL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

provide the resources that are being required,” said Ada Meloy, general counsel for the organization. “The federal grants are few . . . [and] many schools are facing decreased funding from their state higher education funders and other institutions are under



financial pressure, but I believe that addressing the sexual assault issue is a high priority for every campus.”

Researchers, federal officials, and even some campus administrators say they have not tracked precise figures on what colleges spend to tackle sexual assault. Officials at some local colleges said it is difficult to calculate because funding is spread over a number of budgets.

Among several dozen area schools contacted by the Globe, only one, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, provided figures.

UMass spokesman Daniel Fitzgibbons said the college allocated \$1.2 million last year for campuswide sexual assault prevention and related programming. In addition, the school used \$400,000 in federal grants.

Experts expressed optimism that campus administrators are becoming less apprehensive to act — and spend — to address the issue as they set up task forces, hire specialists, and launch awareness education programs, among other actions.

Lisak said that as he and others tried to organize the Dartmouth conference, they repeatedly received

enthusiastic support from campus administrators. But it took about three years for the grass-roots group to find a school that would agree to fund the summit, which he estimated cost around \$100,000, he said.

Dartmouth officials said the figure “was in the ballpark.”

In February, the University of Virginia held a two-day session on confronting assaults that also sought to foster a national discussion.

Dartmouth dean Charlotte Johnson, who helped Lisak secure the backing for the conference at that school, said that while “money is not necessarily the end all, be all” to confronting campus sexual assault, “resources are important to any of the work we do.”

“Dartmouth has invested significant amounts of resources — money and staff,” she said.

Harvard University has been at the forefront nationally and this month created a centralized office to investigate allegations. Specialists also credit the University of New Hampshire for developing a nationally-recognized bystander intervention program.

Laura Palumbo of the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, said many colleges fail to take advantage of low-cost collaborative options, including partnering with other colleges, nonprofits, or students groups.

Colleges can also pay for sexual assault initiatives through modest grant programs run by the US Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In its 15-year history, the program of the Office on Violence Against Women has awarded \$139 million to colleges — an amount less than what many schools today spend on a single new academic building or dormitory.

Tufts University has received four grants through the program totaling \$1.36 million, the most of any college in New England.

Tufts spokeswoman Kimberly Thurler said the college could not provide exact figures of what it spends to combat sexual assault. But, she said, “we have devoted substantial resources to this effort,” and “in the last few years, we have substantially intensified our efforts.”

At the recent Dartmouth summit, Lisak implored more colleges to step up.

“We the institution of higher education are facing an historic decision point, one that will define us,” he said.

“We will either define ourselves as just another corporate institution, focused on self-protection, self-aggrandizement, and self-promotion, focused only on the bottom line. Or we will define ourselves as an institution worthy of the label ‘higher education.’ ”

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