

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

September 24, 2015

Dear 2014 University Task Force on Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence Members:

First, although I expressed this at our meeting on August 31, 2015, I want to take this opportunity to formally thank you for your hard work and your willingness to contribute to the work of the 2014 Task Force on Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence. The assessment and recommendations outlined in your report will prove to be vitally important to MSU's continued commitment to creating the safest possible campus community for all Spartans and advance gender equity and non-discrimination under Title IX and University policy, including the Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct Policy (RVSM).

At our meeting, I alerted you to the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) conclusion of its investigation and anticipated report, which was received on September 1. Since the issuance of OCR's 2011 Dear Colleague Letter, MSU has accomplished much that we can be proud of—but, there is more work to be done. I shared my belief that the Task Force Recommendations set the stage for Michigan State moving forward and as we do so, our work will be influenced by evidence-based practices, and by data obtained from various sources including climate assessments. I shared with you my perspective that the AAU campus climate survey and the forthcoming reports later this month, provide data that may inform our next steps to prevent, intervene, and educate the campus community on relationship violence and sexual misconduct, but that this survey is not the sole source of data that will inform the work we do. I also offered my continued support for other suggested methods and means for data gathering, including alternative assessment strategies.

We also provided the Task Force with a brief summary of changes made over this last year, including:

- Revisions in the comprehensive RVSM policy completed over the summer
- The establishment of the new Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) that is charged with investigating allegations of relationship violence and sexual misconduct, as well as ensuring university compliance with state and federal non-discrimination laws ([www.oie.msu.edu](http://www.oie.msu.edu)).
  - OIE complaint procedures have been revised



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- Student conduct hearing procedures have been revised and additional members have been appointed to hear student conduct cases
- Mandatory eLearning for all employees based on the revised RVSM policy was launched in spring 2015
- The mandatory SAFE eLearning for incoming students, first implemented in fall 2011, was revised and emailed to the fall 2015 incoming class in August 2015

At the final meeting of the Task Force on April 14<sup>th</sup> I indicated that we would review more closely the Task Force Recommendations. I support the themes that underpin many of the recommendations – broader education efforts, stronger prevention strategies, consistent and meaningful training for members of the campus community, and evaluative metrics to measure the progress and effectiveness of programs and services. When you review the responses, there may be references to the need for additional review, or an indication that more information is needed before we can proceed. It is important that I make you all aware that where this occurs it is after careful consideration of the recommendation.

The input of the campus community and content experts is integral to the continued development and improvement of our processes that are intended to prevent and address relationship violence and sexual misconduct. If any of you believe that I have overlooked vital and important information, please share that information with me, or MSU's Title IX Coordinator.

Sincerely,



Lou Anna K. Simon, Ph.D.  
President

cc: June Youatt  
Satish Udpa  
Paulette Granberry Russell  
Denise Maybank

Attachment

### **Response to Task Force Recommendations**

*The Task Force Executive Summary outlined four overarching recommendations considered to be the most important ‘next steps.’*

- 1) ***Climate survey/committee.*** *The 2014 Task Force Survey Sub-committee reviewed campus data sources, such as the biannual National College Health Assessment, and discovered that several critical variables related to campus SA and RV climate were not assessed. To address these needs, a climate survey offered by the AAU will be conducted in April 2015 and an alternative survey will be offered in the fall of 2015. Results from these surveys should be shared with campus experts and the findings should be compared across surveys in order to create a plan for a regularly administered survey to assess change over time and identify campus needs.*

**Response:** As you know, MSU participated in the Association of American Universities sexual assault climate survey that was sent to MSU students on May 1, 2015. The MSU survey report is imminent. Not unlike the national and campus data sources referenced by the Task Force, the AAU survey results provide an additional data source for this work at MSU. Our data collection efforts will continue even after the results of the AAU survey are released and shared with the campus community, including campus experts. Such data informs our efforts, including prevention education, intervention strategies, and programmatic changes. Discussions among campus experts on gaps in RVSM data is encouraged after the release of the AAU survey results, and further recommendations on next steps, including alternative assessments, or additional data gathering using alternative approaches may be proposed to the University.

- 2) ***Choose Evidence Based Practices that best meet the specific needs of MSU’s campus.*** *Using climate survey data identify the greatest campus needs and related evidence based practices. Implementation of these evidenced based practices should follow rigorous methods and their results evaluated. A ‘kick off’ summit to share the data and to bring experts in to discuss the EBPs is recommended as a mechanism to broaden awareness and collaboration.*

**Response:** The use of data to identify areas of need and evidence based practices to meet the needs of the campus is expected. The best way for collecting and sharing the data (e.g., climate survey data) can be determined in consultation with the Task Force recommended ***Sexual Violence Advisory Committee*** that will be established and include representation from the various campus constituencies (students, faculty, and staff) . The first meeting of the Advisory Committee will be in fall 2015. More details on the Committee will be provided below.

The Task Force has recommended that MSU strengthen our education efforts modeled after evidence-based ‘best practices’ and while we have made improvements in our educational programs directed at students, faculty, staff, and administrators, further assessment of such programs, or development of new programs will lead to further improvements.

MSU currently evaluates whether our required eLearning for students and employees is achieving desired outcomes, and the University will also conduct additional Title IX training for students and employees at *regular intervals*. Current training that is provided for first responders, and investigators, hearings board members, registered student organizations

(including sororities and fraternities that are registered student organizations), and student athletes will be reviewed and revised, as necessary to ensure that the content is consistent with University policies and procedures, and appropriately encourages reporting, intervention, and otherwise complies with Title IX . We currently provide training for non-university affiliated organizations including surrounding, local law enforcement agencies and sororities and fraternities that are not registered student organizations, and will continue to offer and provide these services upon request.

Education that is responsive to the unique, cultural needs of our growing international student population, MSU's LGBTQ community, students with disabilities, and students of color will be developed and assessed to determine if we are achieving desired objectives, including prevention, reporting, and intervention. Input from students within these identity groups will be a priority, working in consultation with MSU's International Studies and Programs, Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities, Student Affairs and Services, including its LGBT Resource Center and Office for Cultural and Academic Transitions. In addition, input from other relevant campus units, faculty experts, and recommendations of the SVAC will be considered as well.

- **SAFE eLearning**, which was revised this year to include the changes in the RVSM Policy, will now be mandatory for all undergraduate and graduate students on an annual basis. Fall 2015 incoming students have already been notified of their requirement to complete SAFE eLearning. All other 2015-2016 enrolled students (including those who previously completed SAFE between 2011 and 2014) will be notified of the requirement to complete the revised SAFE eLearning. Beginning fall 2015, to ensure that students comply with this requirement, the University will develop consequences for not viewing SAFE.
- The **SARV Prevention Program** will continue to be required for all new incoming undergraduate and transfer students who live in the residence halls. Strategies to increase student participation will be considered and recommended by the Advisory Committee.

The recommendation of the Task Force that “educational/training efforts should be evaluated to determine if they are effective and user-friendly, particularly for those staff that are less computer-literate” is an expectation and consistent with our goals.

- 3) ***Support campus service/program staff.*** *In 2004 the Task Force forewarned of increasing demand for support services and recommended enhancing the financial support of these programs. Data indicates that there has been a significant increase in service demands and lengthy wait lists for survivors. It is critical that sufficient funding and staffing be provided to bridge the gap between the need for services and the capacity to fill these needs.*

**Response:** Investments in staffing for support services have been made in the area of counseling services through the hiring of additional counselors to reduce the backlog and increase support for survivors. The need for additional counseling support services and the capacity to fill those needs with existing counseling center staff is currently under review. It should also be noted that the new Office of Institutional Equity hired additional investigators and revised internal complaint procedures, intake and file management, and documentation procedures that supports prompt and timely investigations and enhanced data collection and reporting.

- 4) ***Appointment of a 'President's Council' that engages in, and provides oversight for, a strategic planning/visioning process.*** *There are two major distinctions between campus activities surrounding SA and RV: investigation/sanction and prevention/treatment. Although these functions can and should be in separate 'silos', the campus wide efforts should be coordinated and integrated through this council. Although the new mandate of the Title IX Coordinators is relatively clear, inclusive visioning and greater synergy across all relevant SA and RV programs and units is needed.*

**Response:** As the Task Force is aware, there is no one unit on campus that is responsible for the various programs that ensure compliance with law and MSU policy, or provides support services for students and employees, or educates the campus community in this area. Our overall efforts require coordination, ongoing monitoring, greater transparency, and reporting. The expectation is that units work collaboratively and provide, in a coordinated fashion, the best services possible to respond to the needs of the campus community. Such work should be informed by input and feedback of the campus community.

A ***Sexual Violence Advisory Committee (SVAC)***, with broad representation of the various campus constituencies will be established to provide recommendations to the University, and its first meeting will be held prior to December 2015. The SVAC will identify strategies for the prevention of sexual and gender-based harassment, assault and violence incidents, including climate checks, outreach and educational activities. It will hold at least one public meeting each academic year to identify student concerns, and gather other relevant input/feedback, including strategies to address the concerns/needs of LGBT students, students of color, students with disabilities, and international students. The University will support the work of the Committee, and the final report of the SVAC will be made to the Title IX Coordinator annually by not later than the end of the academic year.

The Title IX Coordinator will develop a monitoring program to assess the effectiveness of the University's overall RVSM efforts. In developing this monitoring program, the University will take into consideration the recommendations and suggestions made by SVAC, consider data based on climate checks, or data compiled by the various units, including, for example, OIE, MSU PD, and Student Affairs and Services, including the SARV Prevention Program, Sexual Assault Program, and Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution Services.

Highlighted below are responses to additional recommendations or themes presented in the Task Force report. This is a reminder that recommendations made by the Task Force that are not specifically addressed, should not be interpreted as a rejection of the recommendation, but are subject to further review by the University.

- **Create two separate centers to perform the two major SARV functions**

**Response:** Michigan State University has recently established the Office of Institutional Equity, which will assume responsibility for the investigation of reported sexual assault and relationship violence, along with its overall responsibility for ensuring university compliance



with the Anti-Discrimination Policy/RVSM Policy, state and federal non-discrimination law. Prevention and treatment will remain a coordinated campus effort among Student Affairs and Services departments that include counseling services, the SARV Prevention Program, and other related programs, including MSU's Safe Place. These units are expected to also work collaboratively with other units with responsibilities in this area, including Olin Health Center, the MSU Police Department, Office of Institutional Equity, and the Title IX Coordinator/Office for Inclusion.

Additionally, it was recommended that we provide physically separate services for offenders and victims. This recommendation will require further review, specifically with input of the MSU Counseling Center and Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Denise Maybank.

- **Develop an expanded comprehensive communications strategy.**

**Response:** This is an area where broad engagement of students, faculty and staff is essential and further input from the Sexual Violence Advisory Committee will be helpful going forward. A recommendation for an expanded comprehensive communication strategy should be student centered and student focused, but should not ignore the needs of the campus workforce with regard to these issues and should also ensure that the expanded communication strategy keeps in minds the unique challenges of our diverse campus community, including students and employees of color, the LGBTQ community, and students/employees with disabilities.

- **Provide greater transparency of data.**

**Response:** As indicated throughout this response, greater transparency of data is an expectation. In addition, a separate Title IX website will be launched in early fall semester 2015. This website will function as the central source for Title IX related information, including applicable laws, and provide links to institutional policies, procedures, educational resources, data reports, as well as links to the various programs and initiatives administered by other campus offices, including the Office of Institutional Equity and Student Affairs and Services.