

Summary

2016 Bowdoin Experiences and Attitudes about Relationships and Sex (B.E.A.R.S.) Survey

Community Behaviors and Attitudes

The first section of the survey focused on community behaviors and attitudes in order to understand what is happening on campus. The vast majority of respondents know where to get help for a sexual assault and have favorable views of how reports of sexual assault would be handled by the administration (responses are “agree” or “strongly agree”).

- 86 percent feel they know where to get help on campus for a sexual assault.
- 82 percent agree that Bowdoin would take a report of sexual assault seriously.
- 81 percent agree that Bowdoin would take steps to protect the safety of the person making the report.
- 78 percent agree Bowdoin would support the person making the report.
- 14 percent feel the College would not ensure a fair process for the person accused of sexual assault.

This is a community that cares for and watches out for one another.

- 96 percent of respondents agree that it’s important to get consent before all sexual activity.
- Nearly half of respondents (47 percent) have participated in a formal training or conversation related to sexual assault beyond first-year orientation programming that all first-year students participate in.
- Over 75 percent of respondents always or usually help an intoxicated friend get home safely.
- When the situation arises, 96 percent of respondents will talk to a friend who plans to hook up with an intoxicated person.

Students at Bowdoin are not naive. They are aware that sexual assault and sexual misconduct occur on college campuses, including their own.

- Only 4 percent of respondents believe that sexual assault or misconduct doesn’t occur at all at Bowdoin.
- 14 percent of respondents believe that it is extremely or very likely that they will experience sexual assault or sexual misconduct while at Bowdoin.

Relationships

The majority of respondents (81 percent) are in or have had a romantic or sexual relationship since coming to the College, either with another Bowdoin student or with someone elsewhere. This makes it essential for students to understand what constitutes a healthy relationship and how to recognize relationship behavior that is unhealthy or intimate partner violence (IPV). The

survey provided valuable learning in this area that will inform our initiatives going forward. Among respondents who have/had a relationship with a fellow Bowdoin student or with someone elsewhere:

- 32 percent have stayed in a relationship because it's too hard to end the relationship;
- 8 percent have had a partner yell at them in public or in private in a way that made them feel unsafe;
- 8 percent have had a partner make decisions for them (what to eat, what to wear, etc.);
- 10 percent have had a partner send repeated and unwanted emails, IM's, or messages through websites; and
- 13 percent said that a partner forced them to engage in unwanted sexual activity.

Stalking and Harassment

Although students may not necessarily realize it, certain behaviors they may have engaged in or experienced at Bowdoin are considered stalking and harassment. Stalking refers to behavior that would cause a reasonable person to fear for their safety or suffer substantial emotional distress, while sexual harassment means unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature. These behaviors create an environment where students feel uncomfortable or even unsafe. We must continue our work to educate all students to recognize these behaviors and eliminate them from our campus.

- 3 percent of respondents have received persistent, unwanted phone calls, e-mails, or messages from someone that made them afraid for their personal safety after asking the person to stop contacting them.
- 2 percent of respondents have had someone spy on, watch, or follow them, either in person or using devices or software, in a way that made them afraid for their personal safety.
- 9 percent of respondents have had someone ask them repeatedly to go on dates, to dinner, or to get a drink even after they have said no.
- 1 percent of respondents have had a romantic partner threaten to post or make public sexually explicit photographs of them.
- 28 percent of respondents have had someone at Bowdoin tell them about their sexual experiences when they did not want to hear about them.

Sexual Misconduct

At Bowdoin, sexual misconduct is a broad term that includes sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, nonconsensual sexual contact, and nonconsensual sexual intercourse. It can occur between acquaintances, people involved in an intimate sexual relationship, or strangers, and it can be committed by someone of any gender. Survey respondents were asked very specific questions about incidents that meet Bowdoin's definition of sexual misconduct. We learned that:

- 13 percent of respondents reported that someone had used physical force or the threat of physical force to kiss or touch them in a sexual way; and
- 20 percent of respondents reported that someone kissed or touched them in a sexual way without their active, ongoing, voluntary agreement.

Sexual Assault

In the survey, 9.2 percent of respondents (14.5 percent of women and 3.2 percent of men) reported sexual assault involving completed or attempted penetration of the vagina or anus or oral sex involving physical force or threats of physical force; or the inability to consent because of being passed out, asleep, or incapacitated due to alcohol or drugs (see appendix for comparative data). In addition, 6.6 percent of respondents (10.0 percent of women and 2.7 percent of men) reported penetration of the vagina or anus or oral sex without their active, ongoing, voluntary consent.¹ Respondents who report sexual assault outline the following details of the incident:

- 89 percent reported that the person who committed the assault was a man;
- 90 percent reported that at least one of the assailants was a Bowdoin student;
- 74 percent reported that they knew their assailant (peer, friend, partner, former partner, etc.);
- 82 percent reported that the assault took place in a residential building;
- 50 percent reported that the assault took place during their first year at Bowdoin and 87 percent said it happened during their first or second year at Bowdoin;
- 77 percent of the time, the person committing the assault had been drinking; and
- 79 percent of the time, the person who was assaulted had been drinking.

Telling and Reporting

Respondents who experienced sexual assault were asked if they shared information about the experience with anyone. Nearly three-quarters of those who reported experiencing sexual assault (73 percent) told someone informally about the incident. Among those who told someone:

- 97 percent told a friend;
- 22 percent told a family member;
- 21 percent told someone at the Counseling Center; and
- 16 percent told a member of Safe Space.

¹ Bowdoin defines "[effective consent](#)" as words or actions that show a knowing and voluntary agreement to engage in mutually agreed-upon sexual activity. Effective consent cannot be gained by force, by ignoring or acting in spite of the objections of another, or by taking advantage of the incapacitation of another, where the respondent knows or reasonably should have known of such Incapacitation. The use of alcohol or other drugs will never function to excuse behavior that violates this policy. Effective consent is also absent when the activity in question exceeds the scope of effective consent previously given. In addition, certain states have designated a minimum age under which a person cannot give effective consent.

Because students are turning to their friends, effective and comprehensive peer training on counseling and available resources is essential.

We know from national data that it is very difficult to report sexual assault, and this is reflected in our data as well. Only 11 percent of respondents who experienced sexual assault formally reported it (told someone in an official capacity with the expectation that action would follow). It is not clear why the use of formal reporting channels is not higher, but the College will work to understand the reasons and will work to increase awareness and understanding around the options available to students.

Approximately 26 percent of students who experienced sexual assault did not tell anyone (formally or informally) about the incident. The reasons most frequently cited were:

- “Did not think the incident was serious enough to share”;
- “Not clear that harm was intended”; or
- “It’s a private matter—I wanted to deal with it on my own.”

Going Forward: Prevention, Reporting, and Relationships

Guided by these survey results, our programming this academic year will be focused on the following specific areas:

Promote Education and Awareness—We will spend more time with first- and second-year students talking about sexual assault and sexual misconduct specifically and supporting those students who might not be ready to report formally. We are launching new interventions focused specifically on the Class of 2020 because they are not only new to campus but also because they did not participate in February’s B.E.A.R.S. Survey. We want to see if our efforts can help change the trends surrounding sexual and relationship violence. For more information about specific first-year efforts please check out [the Title IX website](#).

Encourage Reporting—We will work to understand and address the barriers to formal reporting and then to increase formal reporting to both confidential and private resources on campus. As a College, we believe it is important for an individual to decide if and when to tell their story, but we believe strongly that reporting has real value both for the individual and for the community. Not all students will want to talk to the Title IX coordinator or a member of the residential life staff, but we hope that if something happens (or has happened), they will check in with Counseling Services or another of the very qualified staff members who will keep the matter confidential. Telling friends is valuable but telling a staff member will provide help in a different way. To this end, we are launching the “Tell Two” program. The goal is to have

everyone who discloses not just tell a friend or peer but also find someone on campus (confidential or otherwise) to talk to and learn about options available for support.

Promote Healthy Relationships—Lastly, we will increase our dialogue around healthy relationships, dating violence, and stalking. Bowdoin is a safe campus made up of thoughtful people. We need to live out that ideal daily, including in our interpersonal relationships. To help accomplish this task, we will be focused more on naming unhealthy relationship behaviors and distinguishing ways in which to build healthy ones.

In addition, we also hope to see more students trained as active bystanders who expect healthy relationships as a matter of course.

APPENDIX

As noted on page three of this report, the 2016 **B.E.A.R.S. Survey** found that 9.2 percent of respondents (14.5 percent of women and 3.2 percent of men) indicated that they experienced sexual assault involving completed or attempted penetration of the vagina or anus or oral sex involving physical force or threats of physical force; or the inability to consent because of being passed out, asleep, or incapacitated due to alcohol or drugs.

These findings compare with the following national studies:

- The 2015 [Association of American Universities \(AAU\) Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct](#) found that 14.6 percent of undergraduate respondents (23.1 percent of women) across twenty-seven universities reported experiencing nonconsensual sexual contact by physical force, threats of physical force, or incapacitation since they enrolled at their university. While the response rate of the survey among undergraduates was only 17 percent, given the large university enrollments, more than 92,300 undergraduates completed the survey.
- The 2015 US Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics conducted a nine-school pilot test to develop a campus climate survey that collects school-level data on sexual victimization of undergraduate students. More than 23,000 undergraduate female and male students completed the [Campus Climate Survey Validation Study \(CCSVS\)](#). Key findings include:
 - For undergraduate females in any year of college, the average prevalence rate for sexual assault since entering college at the nine schools was 21 percent, though the rates varied from 12 percent to 38 percent.

- The average prevalence rate for fourth-year female undergraduates attending four-year schools was about 25 percent, or one out of four reporting that they had experienced sexual assault since entering college.
- For undergraduate males, the average prevalence rate for sexual assault since entering college at the nine schools was 7 percent.