

# Sexual Assaults on College Campuses: Practices that Can Fix the Problem of Underreporting

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## Abstract

This project identifies certain trends that lead to higher rates of reporting of sexual assaults on college campuses, using the timing of the 2011 Department of Education Dear Colleague Letter about Title IX as a springboard. Recent studies indicate that at least 20 percent of women and 5 percent of men are sexually assaulted during college. However, the number of students reporting these assaults to universities is drastically lower. Thus, the driving question behind this project investigates the relationship between formal Title IX policies, campus culture, and reported sexual assaults, and what factors explain the differences in reported sexual assaults across universities. Using a multi-methodological approach through statistical analysis and in-depth case studies, this paper identifies three characteristics that have an interesting relationship with the rate at which students report sexual assaults: elite status, Greek Life, and compliance with the Dear Colleague Letter mentioned above. Key findings indicate that campus climate surveys surrounding sexual assault, high levels of student activism about sexual assault awareness, and changes in sexual assault education pieces lead to higher rates of reporting of sexual assaults on college campuses. Important policy recommendations urge schools across the country to do the following: allow for student activism, understand sexual assault on campus through surveys, and ensure students receive effective sexual assault education.

## Statistical Analysis

Dependent variable:	
Rate of Assault	
DCL Compliance	-0.416** (0.181)
Greek Life	-0.021 (0.014)
Division I	0.007 (0.299)
Public	-0.344 (0.350)
Religious	0.254 (0.383)
Elite Ranking	-0.006*** (0.002)
Constant	3.173*** (0.689)
Observations	100
R <sup>2</sup>	0.183

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

## Primary Sources

**Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1972:** Title IX is a federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity.

**The Clery Act of 1992:** The Clery Act requires all colleges and universities to have comprehensive crime prevention strategies in place and also compile and publish crime data.

**Dear Colleague Letter (DCL) of 2011:** As a revision to Title IX expectations, the DCL directs institutions to implement four specific practices/standards: (1) use a preponderance of evidence standard of proof, (2) allow accusers to appeal not-guilty findings (a form of double jeopardy), (3) work towards a 60-day maximum for adjudication of claims, and (4) strongly discourage cross-examination of accusers.

## Hypotheses

**H<sub>1</sub> – Dear Colleague Letter Compliance:** The goal of the DCL was to clarify the reporting process and trickle down to make it more accessible to students. Therefore, we should see a positive relationship between DCL compliance and the number of reports.

**H<sub>2</sub> – Religion:** I believe that religion will play a role in the rate that students report. Given the cultural and ideological governance of religious institutions, I believe there will be a lower rate of reporting at religious schools, given the heightened sense of shame and guilt.

**H<sub>3</sub> – Elite Status:** The research suggests that schools with “elite status” will write different policies than non-elite policies and create a better culture surrounding sexual assault reporting. I hypothesize that elite status this will lead to higher rates of reporting; however, I do not know if there is a way to determine if these reporting numbers stem from administrative or student actions.

**H<sub>4</sub> – Greek Life:** Greek life on campus poses distinct problems of partying and sex without consent. Therefore, I believe that there might be higher self-identified rates of assault for members of Greek Life, and there will be an increase in the dependent variable of levels of reporting.

## Findings

From the statistical analysis I arrived at three relationships between and independent variables and the dependent variable worth case study. These variables are: elite status, DCL Score, and Greek Life. I analyzed the definition of consent in each of the policies and spent time reading through the school's newspaper website to identify any specific events or stories about sexual assault that may be significant and linked to a shift in culture about sexual assault reports. This resulted in a media analysis of the school newspapers to understand campus conversation.

Through the qualitative study, I found three causal mechanisms that increase the likelihood to have higher rates of reported assaults: (1) campus climate surveys, (2) on the ground activism, and (3) changes in sexual assault education. While conducting the case studies I identified any actions or changes on campus that could fall into these categories and then compared across schools that share the same characteristic.

## Policy Recommendations

Given all of these results, colleges and universities must implement top down changes and allow space for bottom up changes. The first step a school can take is conducting a campus climate survey and analyzing the results with the student body. After, the school can modify its sexual assault education procedure and ensure it is current and relevant. Finally, schools need to allow for the opportunity for students to express their opinions and frustrations about the process, even if that includes critical language.



## Case Study Results

	Elite Status	Reporting	Campus Climate Survey	On the Ground Activism	Change in Sexual Assault Education
<b>Elite</b>					
Mass. Institute of Technology	Yes	High	YES		YES
University of Pennsylvania	Yes	Low	YES		YES
<b>Non-Elite</b>					
University of Vermont	No	High		YES	
California State University, Fresno	No	Low	YES		

  

	DCL Compliance	Reporting	Campus Climate Survey	On the Ground Activism	Change in Sexual Assault Education
<b>DCL Compliance</b>					
UC Santa Cruz	2	High	YES	YES	
University of Arkansas	4	Low			YES

  

	Greek Life	Reporting	Campus Climate Survey	On the Ground Activism	Change in Sexual Assault Education
<b>Greek Life</b>					
Tulane University	Yes	High		YES	YES
Boston College	No	High		YES	YES
Wichita State University	Yes	Low			
Yeshiva University	No	Low			