

Presidential Advisory Committee on Sexual Assault Annual Report 2014-2015

The Presidential Advisory Committee on Sexual Assault (PACSA) is one of several Columbia University initiatives to address gender-based misconduct. This initiative is complementary to several other projects at the University to address these issues. The Committee is tasked with advising the President and engaging the Columbia community in conversation about sexual assault, gender-based misconduct, and sexual respect on campus.

After the amendments to the membership rules and procedures of the Committee in 2013-2014, the primary focus of the Committee during the past year has been two primary tasks: to organize its activities and to create and implement ways to inform and seek the views of the University community.

More specifically, the Committee achieved three main goals during the past year:

1. The clarification of its mission and purpose,
2. The internal organization of the committee, and
3. The creation of a structure robust enough to solicit and respond to feedback in future years when the feedback may not be as forthcoming.

Mission and Purpose

PACSA discussed in plenary the appropriate text to be used and distributed to describe its mission and purpose. The Committee arrived at the following text, which will also appear on its website:

The Presidential Advisory Committee on Sexual Assault is charged with advising the president on issues related to the prevention of and response to gender-based misconduct, including sexual assault. The Committee continually works with partners and experts across the University to evaluate policies and procedures and solicit feedback from the Columbia community with the goal of eliminating sexual assault and other forms of gender-based misconduct from our community.

Roles within PACSA

The Committee deliberated on the best way to structure its work and foster discussion and implementation. For these purposes in 2014-2015, it was decided to organize the Committee into four sub-committees. These are: Communications, Feedback, Forum, and the Annual Report. All of these sub-committees' activities reflect the importance the Committee places on communicating with, and learning from, the broad Columbia community. In addition, several members of the Committee, including Suzanne Goldberg, play an important role in updating the group on the many activities at the University. The diverse members of the Committee bring their own unique perspectives related to their constituents.

Recommended Feedback Mechanisms

One of the most important tasks of the Committee is sensing the pulse of the community. The Committee discussed a number of ways to gather this information and has proposed two mechanisms to receive feedback on an ongoing basis. First, the Committee has created a Feedback Form on its website that will be available for the community to provide feedback directly to the Committee. This will be reviewed by a sub-committee of the Committee and shared in aggregate with the full Committee on a regular basis. The full Committee will discuss themes and content of this feedback together and include aggregated, non-identifying information in future annual reports, as appropriate.

Secondly, the Committee is considering hosting forums to gather community feedback in an in-person setting. These forums would be hosted by Committee members and are intended to be spaces to hear concerns and proposals rather than decision-making spaces. As with the Feedback Form submissions, the ideas discussed in the forums would be brought back to the full Committee for discussion. The Committee discussed if these forums should focus on specific topics rather than being open forums; the Committee decided to review the specific format during the 2015-2016 academic year.

Questions for Future Consideration

As the Committee continues to evolve, there are some important questions that it will consider to ensure it best serves the needs of the community, such as:

- How can the Committee best solicit feedback from the community?
- How should the make-up of the Committee continue to shift and evolve?
- How should the Committee ensure it is up to date on the initiatives and pulse on campus?
- What is the most effective way to synthesize feedback into recommendations?