



# Task force works to refine its campaign

By Kylee Reid

▷ A new sexual violence task force comprised of Texas A&M students and faculty is gearing up for an awareness campaign, but specific plans have yet to be announced.

A sexual violence task force, which began just over a month ago, was created to face the issue of sexual assault and violence head on. The Texas A&M University Sexual Violence Campaign aims to make the Texas A&M community aware of this sexual assault on campus.

José Luis Bermúdez, associate provost for strategic planning and faculty advisor for the task force, said this committee stems from the need of a larger effort to take a stand as a university.

"We have many organizations on campus in things related to sexual violence campaigns," Bermúdez said. "But what is missing is a really concerted campus-wide effort that draws on Texas A&M's values and making people willing to take a stand on kinds of behaviors that seem to be much more discussed on college campuses."

Student Body President and task force member Kyle Kelly said the campaign will focus on two main tactics — awareness and positive peer pressure.

"We want to have a very Aggie message — kind of like our code of honor, 'An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal or tolerate those who do,' — in which we do not ... tolerate certain things for all Aggies," Kelly said. "We take care of our own, we watch out for each other."

In a survey released to the members of the task force, two different campaign options were presented. The survey emphasizes that both the wording and the messages of the campaigns are in the works and liable to change, but they want to get feedback on what they have so far.

The first campaign, "Start the Stop," focuses on the message of uniting to tackle sexual violence.

An accompanying statement in the survey states, "It starts with you. And you. And you. Putting a stop to sexual violence and sexual harassment starts with each and every one of us. But we can't do it alone. We must work as one, lead as one and learn as one. Through education, awareness, people and programs, we can 'Start the Stop.'"

The second campaign, "Be in the NO," chooses to focus more on specific goal and outlines.

Its statement reads, "To stop the unnecessary, senseless acts of sexual violence, education and awareness are key. We must be informed and knowledgeable. We must be able to recognize the signs. And in the event that we are victims ourselves, we must know what to do to protect ourselves physically and emotionally."

Kelly said the task force is also working closely with a Dallas-based production company, Belmont Icehouse, on an awareness video. Kelly said students could expect the video to be released late this semester.

"We want it to be engaging," Kelly said, "Ultimately we want it to make a statement on a national stage. As A&M does in so many respects — we want to lead on this issue."

The campaign is still in the works, and a lot of work is anticipated on the issue. Along with the video, there has been talk of campus events and a booth during Gig 'Em Week.

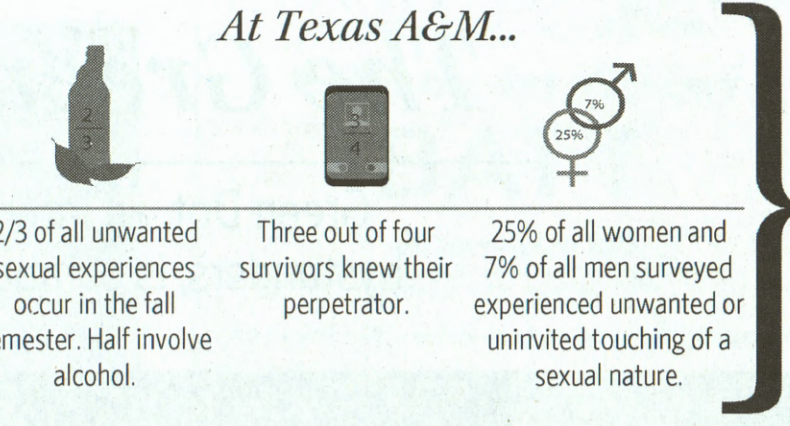
Information on how to get involved will be sent out soon.

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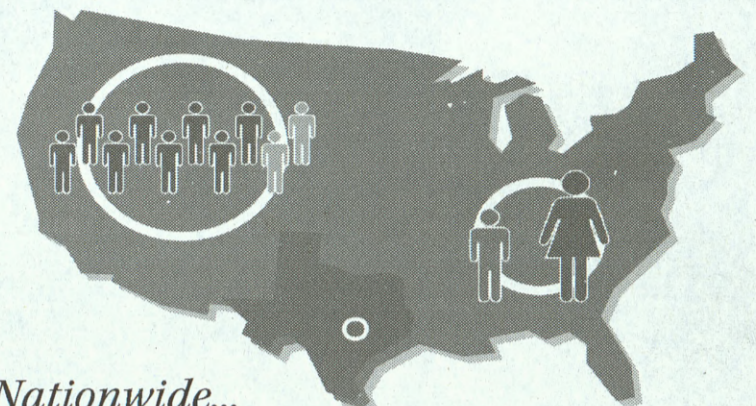
speak with her decide to report with UPD afterward, but the decision of whether to report can be a complicated issue because of the nature of the crime.

"By trying to force somebody to report, we are thinking, 'Hey, we can get the rapist — make justice happen,' but you can't force anyone to report it because that would be taking that power away from them again," McBride said. "We want to give survivors of sexual assault back that power."

McBride said victims cope with sexual



Data for the above graphic comes from a survey by the Offices of the Dean of Student Life in Spring 2013. The data for the graphic below come from reports on the Title IX information website.



Infographs by Sydney Farris — THE BATTALION

assault differently, but that reporting can empower some victims. In general, she said reporting can serve as a deterrent to attackers.

"A lot of times repeat offenders will feel like, 'Well, I got away with it the first time, I can just keep doing this,'" McBride said.

### Victim shaming

Because sexual assault is debilitating, many people, including survivors, unintentionally look for faults in the behavior of victims as a way of establishing a sense of control,

— fight, flight or freeze, McBride said. While the freeze response is very common, many victims who freeze come to blame themselves for the attack.

"You think, 'I didn't say no,' 'I didn't fight back,' or, 'Why didn't I do more?' And you start to question if it was even rape at all," McBride said. "And sometimes that takes a while to process and to define that to yourself as rape. Until you start coming to that conclusion, it makes it hard to report."

McBride said these misconceptions about freeze response serve as barriers to reporting.

such, McBride said entering a relationship is not the same as long-standing consent.

"So either somebody doesn't have the capacity to consent, either they are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs or they are not old enough to consent, they don't have the mental capacity to consent, there are a lot of different scenarios that could happen," McBride said. "Okay, maybe I gave consent for kissing, but I didn't give consent for this." "I gave consent to this touching, but not this."

Bierman said establishing consent can be fundamental to healthy relationships.

"Students need to be thinking of con-

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"People don't really understand and blame themselves a lot of the time," McBride said. "I should have done more" is a big barrier to reporting because you have so much guilt and self-blame going on and that's just reinforced by a society that blames victims."

### Masculinity on the line

This stigma associated with being a victim tends to be magnified for males, said McBride.

"I think men in general are a lot less likely to report it," McBride said. "They have this whole other level of stigma. Because when a woman is sexually assaulted, it doesn't call your femininity into question, but when a man is sexually assaulted it calls your masculinity into question."

McBride said many males fear they will be called gay and do not realize that a physical stimulus, such as an erection, does not constitute consent.

"The biggest barrier is that they don't report it, so that perpetuates the idea that it doesn't happen," McBride said.

### The ambiguity around consent

In the time she's worked with UPD, McBride said every victim with whom she has spoken has had some prior association with their attacker.

"Whether it's somebody they thought about dating, or maybe had a previous relationship with, maybe they were flirting and ended up going home with somebody, but then things turned wrong — in all of those cases, they knew them to some degree and at some point they decided, 'I don't want to have sex with you,'" McBride said.

Sometimes this association leads to victims feeling guilty about the fact that they could possibly ruin another person's life if they say anything, Winkler said.

"Some students can be concerned, 'I don't want to report, because I don't want to ruin someone's life,' which kind of comes down to themselves maybe taking some blame," Winkler said. "Part of our conversation is to explain that they didn't do anything wrong, it's not ruining someone's life if they have taken an action that is a violation of student rules. They have taken that action and now it's just about holding them accountable."

Tied to these feelings of guilt is a general ambiguity around consent. McBride said clear and affirmative consent can be given and taken away at any time. As

sent, and they don't," Bierman said. "It's a good relationship builder, it strengthens a relationship, but it also puts control back on people and it protects."

### The reporting process

McBride said many students are not aware of how much power they have in reporting.

In balancing the responsibility of the safety of the community with empowering the victim as much as possible, McBride said UPD tries to give victims options.

McBride said there is always the option to remain anonymous or to submit an official record in case the victim decides at some point to pursue legal action.

"[There is] that idea of, 'This is what happened, I was raped,' and by the time you come to that conclusion you feel like, 'Well, that was too long ago, now I can't do anything about it,' or, 'I've moved on past it, now I'm not going to do anything about it,'" McBride said.

In the Department of Student Services, victim advocates like Bierman and Winkler work internally in the university to help with immediate needs, such as moving the victim to a different residence hall or out of the same class as the attacker, if possible.

Bierman said she always tells students who come in to see her about a sexual assault that they should consider counseling, even if they just go in for one or two visits.

"It has to be when they are ready," Bierman said. "And I'm honest, you may think you don't need it now and then two weeks later something is going to happen and it's going to trigger something and you're going to be in a panic and they don't believe me until that happens."

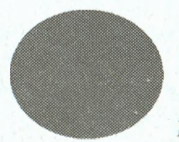
No matter what office a victim goes to, advocates approach each situation by believing the victim.

"False reports are extremely low, but there tends to be this kind of gut feeling where trauma is involved and people recognize that and kind of confuse it with lying or, 'Well, what do you mean you don't know exactly what happened?' So coming at it from a place of believing eliminates a lot of that victim blaming that can go on during a reporting," McBride said.

Bierman said the services available to students in these situations are a phone call away.

"We're kind of the people [that] people don't want to know until they need us, and that's okay," Bierman said. "We're here."

SHOULD I REPORT?



McBride said. "Anybody can be a victim and it is a crime of power and control," McBride said.

"So we try to say, 'Hey, no, I have control over this situation. If I don't do this then I won't get raped.' It's our way to try and control these scenarios."

McBride said that this aspect of victim blaming is at times shared by other sexual assault victims.

"You'd think they'd be the most understanding, but at times it's like, 'Well, why didn't you do this, why didn't you fight back more, why didn't you just leave?'" McBride said.

When a sexual assault occurs, the victim typically has one of three responses