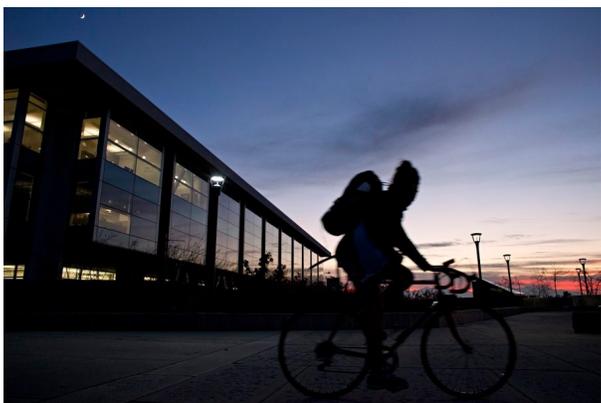


The Salt Lake Tribune

Few University of Utah students who experience sexual assault report to campus officials, new survey shows



(The Salt Lake Tribune file photo) A cyclist passes by the Marriott Library on the University of Utah campus at sunset.



By Courtney Tanner



By Erin Alberty

Published: 2 hours ago

Updated: 2 hours ago

Not many University of Utah students — 12 percent of the nearly 32,000 who take classes there — filled out the school’s latest survey on campus safety.

But of those who did, more than half said they believed there was some likelihood they would experience sexual assault or misconduct on campus or at an off-campus school event. And more than a quarter of undergraduate women indicated that they had already been sexually assaulted.

Most of those, at least 80 percent, did not report the assaults to the school when they happened.

“That is not surprising,” said S. Daniel Carter, president of Safety Advisors for Educational Campuses, LLC. “The scope of the problem is still significantly underreported.”

The university's 2018 Campus Climate Survey, which was quietly released last week, showed that most victims who responded — 70 percent — did not report sexual assaults because they did not believe the matter was serious enough to make a formal complaint.

The U. is concerned about that reasoning and the fear of experiencing assault.

“Hopefully, we can see improvements moving forward,” said spokeswoman Annalisa Purser. “This is really important for us because we’re committed to understanding what’s happening on our campus.”

At least some of the responses from victims seem to suggest that they think the school wouldn't do anything if they reported. About 25 percent said they chose not to say something about their assault because they figured nothing would be done about it and the perpetrator wouldn't be punished.

About a quarter of all of the students who responded to the survey also said they don't believe the university does enough to protect the safety of students.

The questionnaire was sent out campuswide and was completed between Jan. 30 and March 7 last year. That was before a University of Utah student was killed on campus in the fall by a man she previously dated, but after a different woman had reported being raped at gunpoint by a masked man in her truck on Halloween in 2016. The school was criticized for how it responded to that, including for not sending out a campus alert until two hours after police were alerted about the case.

The U.S. Department of Justice began recommending campus surveys in 2016 to gauge not only student safety but also students' views on the prevalence of violent crime and awareness of school resources for victims. The surveys' response rates have varied widely at Utah colleges; 45 percent and 43 percent have filled out the surveys at Utah State University and Brigham Young University, respectively.

Meanwhile, 10.5 percent of Utah Valley University students responded to their latest survey, and Westminster has not released results after two attempts due to poor participation. It won't conduct another questionnaire until the 2019-20 school year.

The U. results, while largely representative of the makeup of the student body, were based on a smaller sample than the first campus climate survey, in 2016. This year, 3,736 students responded. Two years ago, 4,104 did (just over 14 percent).

"The larger the sample size, the more accurate the information will be," Carter said.

Nationwide, most schools see response rates between 15 and 30 percent and many have tried incentivizing students — with gift cards and drawings — to participate. The University of Utah did not do that, but sent out the survey and reminders to student email addresses. And of the more than 3,700 it counts, 721 didn't finish answering the questions after the first page.

"It takes a much more dedicated campaign than that to get higher response rates," Carter added.

Purser said the response rate was "well above what is necessary to trust the survey's data and make useful inferences." The school plans to use the answers to conduct more targeted trainings for students and faculty.

Among those who responded at the U., awareness of sexual violence and prevention was substantially higher than in 2016.

The percentage of respondents who had discussed the topic of sexual assault with friends rose from 44 to 58 percent. Nearly 50 percent of 2018 respondents had seen crime alerts about sexual assault, up from 30 percent in 2016. Roughly 46 percent had seen or heard about sex assault in a student publication or media outlet, up from 33 percent in 2016.

Carter said that reflects increased attention and increased support for the issue. But, he noted, the rate of victimization has not appeared to change despite awareness campaigns.

About 35 percent of respondents who said they were assaulted also said that they were unconscious at the time. And about 20 percent of students who said they were assaulted either suspected or knew for certain that they were given alcohol or drugs without their consent.

Because it was a survey, the school doesn't have more details about that drugging percentage.

More than half of all sexual assaults described by respondents involved alcohol, according to a survey summary.

"It's a predatory tactic," Carter said. "The alcohol is not the cause of the assault."

Additionally, the survey provides a breakdown of how victims described their perpetrator's affiliation to the university. Most assaults, according to the results, were carried out by other students. But about 40 percent of the cases described as "sexual touching when coerced" were reportedly done by a teacher or instructor. That's the highest percentage for that category.

The reluctance or fear to report assaults — which is seen nationwide — is complicated by many factors. For one, more than half of students said they were not aware of university support resources related to sexual assault response.

Most reported to a roommate or a close friend. Often, those accounts aren't shared with police.

Carter added: "What we've done is not enough" to encourage more reporting.



ctanner@sltrib.com

 Follow @CourtneyLTanner



ealberty@sltrib.com

 Follow @erinalberty