

Anaconda: I Don't Want None Unless You Got Consent Hun – Creating a Culture of Consent Enthusiasts

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“I like consent and I cannot lie,
you other brothers can't deny
that when a girl walks in
with an itty bitty waist
and a round thing in your face
you seek consent!”

Consent is a hot topic on college campuses, and it should be! The January 2014 announcement of the establishment of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault opened by stating, “about one in five women is a survivor of attempted or completed sexual violence while in college. In addition, a substantial number of men experience sexual violence during college” (The White House, 2014). This task force joined together many legal and advocacy experts, including representatives from our fraternal community. Their report in late April of this year contained guidelines on preventing sexual misconduct, addressing the issue, and supporting victims. In addition, a [website](#) and public service announcement were created to provide useful and empowering information to victims. This presidential initiative joins many other resources, like the 2011 Office of Civil Rights “Dear Colleague Letter” and the campus SaVE Act, designed to assist educational institutions in reducing and eventually eliminating sexual violence, intimate partner abuse, and gender discrimination. The hope in achieving this goal is rooted in the ability to engage campus communities.

From a risk prevention perspective, the safest place on a college campus should be with fraternity and sorority members. Due largely to the leadership and educational opportunities available to them, our fraternity men and sorority women are among the most prepared to handle high risk situations. However, prevention programs often focus on high risk behaviors surrounding alcohol and drug use, but neglect to include information about sexual assault and consent.

In an effort to create an informed and empowered student body, universities across the country have developed or enhanced their approach to reaching students with messages of risk reduction, consent and bystander intervention. Fraternity and sorority communities must be a part of this educational movement.

New Laws & Policies

Although one of the simplest definitions of sexual misconduct is sexual behavior or contact without consent, the word consent had been missing from many legal definitions of rape and sexual assault. However, in 2012, after decades of criticism, the FBI changed the Uniform Crime Report's definition of sexual assault to include the phrase “without the consent of the victim” (FBI, 2013). California recently passed SB 967 that defines affirmative consent as “affirmative, conscious and voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity” (Grinberg, 2014). In addition to these federal and state laws, many campuses have crafted student code of conduct policies that require verbal consent for sexual activity. This long-awaited shift in the definitions of rape and sexual assault has further empowered educators to take a consent-centric approach to sexual assault prevention programming.

What Does a Consent Culture Look Like?



Many students are coming to our campuses having little education or information on the meaning and importance of consent. This is still an issue that is largely not discussed in high school health classes or by parents or guardians. When talking about the Birds and the Bees, parents are forgetting to include the big C.

One of the most significant methods for reducing and eliminating sexual misconduct is to create a culture of consent enthusiasts, where students understand the meaning and role of consent. A consent culture is not one devoid of sexual misconduct. Instead, it is a culture that has mature and respectful conversations about sexual violence and intimate partner abuse. It is a community that recognizes the role each of us can play in ending violence and abuse, and visibly shows its intolerance for inappropriate behavior and support of victims. A consent culture is one of respect and empowerment where victim blaming is minimized and bystanders feel empowered to intervene when they witness inappropriate situations. Social media sites are used for good, not evil, and the access to resources, information, and support is student friendly.

The Role Consent Plays on Campus

The foundation for creating a culture of consent enthusiasts is education and empowerment. This transformation does not take place overnight, but is built by educational programs, awareness campaigns, intentional conversations and taking advantage of teachable moments.

One approach to education is through engaging awareness campaigns designed to rally students around a common theme and arm them with relevant and relatable information students can use to educate their peers. Campaigns like [Green Dot](#), the [Red Flag Project](#) and [No More](#) are just a few examples of national campaigns that have motivated students to take action and show support.

Shippensburg University launched a Ship Says No More campaign in April of 2014. This initiative is twofold. We created an inclusive website and brochure of the university sexual misconduct policies and resources. In addition, using posters, pencils, pins and cellphone wallets all proudly bearing the Ship Says No More logo, we gave our campus community a tangible way to show their support for ending sexual assault and domestic violence.

Educating the Fraternity/Sorority Community about Consent

In the fraternity and sorority community, consent education should be as detailed and consistent as other risk prevention and management programming, and should reinforce the foundation of consent education on campus. Consistent programming, education, and conversation are necessary to create and to maintain a culture of consent enthusiasts.

Consent education does not need to be difficult, nor does it require reinventing the wheel. In 2010, the Shippensburg University Office of Fraternity & Sorority Life partnered with the campus Women's Center to develop sexual assault and consent programming to be included in the new member education series. Called "Consent is Sexy/Mandatory," this program is presented each semester to all fraternity/sorority new members.

"Consent is Sexy/Mandatory" is a 75-90 minute program that presents the basic definitions of sexual assault, sexual misconduct, and consent. During the program, participants are actively involved in texting polls, role playing and group discussion. Through the use of popular movie clips, fraternity and sorority members are asked to identify where and how consent was shown or not shown in those examples. Fraternity and sorority members discuss the role of alcohol in sexual situations, bystander behavior and intervention, and resources available on the campus

and in the community. Throughout the program, fraternity and sorority members are challenged to reevaluate how they view sexual assault and consent, and what role they can play—proactively and reactively—in preventing and confronting sexual assault.

After four years of consistent programming, we have seen marked improvement in the fraternity and sorority community around the topics of sexual assault and consent. Survey results have shown students have a greater knowledge on the topics of sexual assault and consent. Students indicate they are more informed about what to do to prevent sexual assault, as well as more likely to step in and help a friend, brother, or sister. Since the introduction of this program, fraternity and sorority members have sought out additional education on risk management topics related to sexual assault and consent, including healthy relationships and bystander behavior.

The inclusion of consent and sexual assault education has created a larger platform for discussion of preventative risk management in all forms. Informal discussion with fraternity and sorority students has shown that preventative programming not only educates and empowers the student but also creates a stronger relationship between fraternity and sorority leadership and the fraternity/sorority advisor. Informed student leaders feel more comfortable reaching out before there is a problem because prevention has been reinforced. They feel they are less likely to be “in trouble” and report feeling more in control when discussing all risk management topics and challenges.

How to Create a Culture of Consent Enthusiasts

Creating a culture of consent enthusiasts really begins with creating a culture of consent education. Although this can seem to be a daunting task at first, with some thought and collaboration, the task is more manageable.

1. **Find an Expert:** That may not be you—and that is okay. A sexual assault and consent program should be presented by someone who is well versed in current trends, laws, and policies on a local and national level. Ideally, this person should also have completed a 40+ hour training/certification program on sexual assault response. Look for campus resources in your Women’s Center, Health or Counseling Centers, or among faculty, staff, and chapter advisors. If no one on your campus is able or available, look in your local community for resources.
2. **Know Your Audience—Men Are Part of the Solution:** When selecting a presenter, have conversations with them in advance so they can become familiar with their audience. You may decide to include all students in one presentation or divide them by gender, however, make sure your presenter is inclusive of male students. Our fraternity men need to be included as part of the solution. They should understand their vital role in creating a culture of consent enthusiasts, and they should be empowered to create safe spaces for all people.
3. **It Gets Better:** One program will not solve all of your problems. Consistency is key is creating a culture of consent enthusiasts. If the first time the program is presented it is not received well, just keep going! Change and buy-in take time. With consistent programming and messaging the perception and conversation will shift.

Conclusion

Consent and sexual assault programming, like other risk management programming, cannot be an effort from a single source or office if it is to be meaningful, successful and have an impact

on the fraternity/sorority community. Instead it must be a repeated part of a dialogue from all areas of campus. Fraternity and sorority professionals should be a large part of this dialogue as we continue to work with our students to create better fraternity and sorority communities. A united effort contributes to a safer campus/university community for all students.

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