

UNBC receives sexual violence report, recommendations

[Samantha Wright Allen](#) / Prince George Citizen

September 26, 2016 12:06 PM

Updated: September 26, 2016 10:04 PM



After two years of work, the University of Northern B.C.'s sexual violence task force has 13 recommendations to tackle the problem.

From disclosure training to a streamlined approach to managing reports to a new subcommittee to continue the task force's work, UNBC's president called it an action-oriented report.

"They really fall into these different themes, looking at our policy and procedures, looking at responsibilities that our faculty and staff have how do we report and how do we manage when there are reports and then what are some of the strategies that we can use to be proactive in supporting our students," said Daniel Weeks of the task force's work, which started in spring 2014. "Our goal here is have no incidents."

The subcommittee - made up of faculty members, the northern women's centre, human resource manager and assistant director of student affairs - will offer "very open dialogue and a transparent process," Weeks said.

UNBC still needs to create a stand-alone sexual assault policy by next May, a requirement after B.C. passed a bill in April that all public post-secondary institutions create sexual-misconduct policies.

"UNBC I think has taken the first step to really reach out to the community and begin this process well in advance of what the rest of the province is doing."

UNBC had one assault on record, in 2013, according to a CBC report last year, looking at campus assaults across Canada between 2009 and 2013. UNBC didn't have updated numbers by print deadline.

Ending Violence B.C., which last year developed guidelines to help post-secondary institutions address sexual assault reporting, will be working with four mid-sized universities, including UNBC, on policy development and training. Tracy Porteous, the executive director of the advocacy group, said she's been impressed with UNBC's level of engagement.

"They're already well along the path," she said. "I think there's a huge level of enthusiasm amongst their administration and faculty and the security office," said Porteous, adding it's important the university has worked with Elizabeth Fry Society and Surpassing Our Survival as local groups that work with survivors. "We're of the mind that rather than people replicate the wheel, work with your subject matter experts that already exist."

The key will be in the training, because of the gap in knowledge around how to best handle disclosure.

"We are at a very powerful point in our social consciousness around social justice and social policy and we're in this together," said Porteous. "I don't fault UNBC for not being further along. They got involved as soon as it started coming to light across the country and survivors at institutions started demanding that they be helped and that be served and that they be heard."

Although a student doesn't sit on the steering committee, Northern BC Undergraduate Student Society's president said the university has acknowledged it must create meaningful student engagement.

"I'm feeling very optimistic that this is going to be a positive experience and it's very timely for our campus," said Arctica Cunningham, calling UNBC proactive in its approach. "This is a really important issue for society as a whole but I think universities have a higher duty to respond to the issue of sexual violence."

The current approach is quite "high level," so Cunningham said she'll wait to see the action items that emerge after the group meets.

"I'm more interested to see the research and engagement and feedback that comes out of these recommendations," she said. "It's a really great start." Weeks said the report made it clear that students need multiple points of contact.

"There is no one path," he said. "Should a student experience something they wish to disclose, there have to be many pathways: everything from student resident coordinators all the way to medical and health personnel perhaps even law enforcement.

"All of these pathways exist but what's key is having a coordinated and seamless way in which students can then interact with the system to ensure we're able to guide them and support them in the best way possible."

The university won't be releasing the actual report, Weeks said, but UNBC will likely make public his report in response to it.

"This can be a very sensitive topic. Just the recommendations themselves can be somewhat disturbing to some individuals and we want to make sure we're sensitive to some of the language that's in these reports and making sure that individuals are comfortable with it."

The Task Force's recommendations:

Determining the occurrence of sexual violence

1) Within a year, UNBC develop a seamless protocol for receiving both confidential and non-confidential disclosures