

[#Career Advice \(/advice\)](#)

[#Conditionally Accepted \(/Career-Advice/Conditionally-Accepted\)](#)

Sexual Assault on Campus

A Sound Prevention Base for Addressing Campus Sexual Violence

While institutions must investigate and respond to sexual assaults in an efficient and consistent way, we would do well to focus more time and energy on prevention and education, write Brian Van Brunt and Amy Murphy.

By [Brian Van Brunt and Amy Murphy](#) // August 4, 2017

[1 COMMENT \(/ADVICE/2017/08/04/PREVENTING-SEXUAL-VIOLENCE-IT-OCCURS-ESSAY#DISQUS_THREAD\)](#) 

ACCEPTED*

As former university administrators, specifically a dean of students and a director of counseling, we have a distinct perspective on issues of sexual violence impacting college campuses. Speaking frankly, investment in prevention is not as exciting as investing in Title IX coordination and investigation. In our work, we have found the most effective strategy to mitigate risk is not only to fund crisis intervention and post-vention efforts such as investigations and clear due process but also to develop prevention and assessment efforts to better identify early behaviors, attitudes and beliefs that have the potential to escalate into an attack.

Frequently, however, the temptation of people in dean of students and director of counseling roles is to respond to immediate fires rather than to take the time to pull together a comprehensive, evidence-based approach. That is not an effective way to eliminate sexual violence on college campuses.

Think of the investment a community fire department puts into its work. While purchasing new fire trucks and having the latest in thermal imaging technology may help respond more effectively to fires, a more efficient way to deal with a fire is to prevent it by identifying risky hot spots (Christmas trees, space heaters, fireworks and so on) and educating community members how to prevent a fire before it begins. Similarly, what we need in the Title IX world is a Smokey Bear-style investment in stopping the fire before it starts.

Important Risk Factors

In our 2016 book, [Uprooting Sexual Violence: A Guide for Practitioners and Faculty](https://www.amazon.com/Uprooting-Sexual-Violence-Higher-Education/dp/1138960624) (<https://www.amazon.com/Uprooting-Sexual-Violence-Higher-Education/dp/1138960624>) (Routledge), we offer such prevention strategies to reduce incidents of sexual violence and create campus environments that support healthier attitudes, behaviors and relationships. Sexual violence is not just a series of incidents perpetrated by individuals. It is also a broader societal issue that is better addressed by considering systemic attitudes and environments that support the reoccurrence of sexual assault, stalking and intimate partner violence.

We cannot make casual assumptions about where the epidemic of sexual violence might be coming from, but we can look at the roots of the problem that are buried deep within our institutions, organizations and societal values. It is by digging at these root risk factors that we can have the best chance of developing targeted and efficient educational strategies.

The first group of risk factors may be the toughest with which to wrestle, because we see examples of these underlying attitudes and beliefs in our daily lives. They include objectifying and dehumanizing other individuals, misogynistic ideology, lack of empathy, and hardened points of view. Some people see these root contributions to sexual violence as “political correctness” gone amok or even an attack on individual freedoms. But these attitudes and beliefs are regularly connected to the research on violence and tend to

feed upon other similar attitudes. In fact, in group environments such as fraternities or athletic teams, these attitudes become implicit approval to think of others as less than oneself.

The second group of risk factors involves behaviors that relate to our treatment of others related to sex: using substances such as drugs or alcohol to obtain sex, behaviors that falsely lure others into feeling safe, ultimatums, and other patterns of escalating threat strategies. These factors may be used at the individual or group level to lessen supportive communication, isolate people and lower their self-esteem and ability to defend themselves.

The last group of risk factors focuses on experiences that escalate our risks related to sexual violence. How do we learn about sex? What are our past experiences with sex? Students with an obsessive or addictive focus on pornography, and who have developed no alternative narratives around how sex occurs, may be influenced negatively by exposure to pornography. Other past experiences as well as sensation-seeking and obsessive behaviors can also contribute to attitudes about sex. Unfortunately, many students have not had access to adequate sex education and are left on their own to understand consent for sexual activity and other issues of healthy sexual relationships. Colleges and universities are often left to fill this information gap for students.

Recommendations

In our favorite episode of the TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, “Once More, With Feeling,” the cast comes together to sing the concluding song “Where Do We Go From Here?” (See a snippet on YouTube [here \(https://youtu.be/7XdAQpq_1Xw\)](https://youtu.be/7XdAQpq_1Xw).) That is a fair question.

Here is what we suggest:

- **Monitor social event planning.** A higher education institution should devote equal time and energy to appropriate planning and implementation processes for events that include alcohol. Administrators need to actively monitor the social environment and address the opportunities for perpetrators to take advantage of others. They should ask themselves questions like “How is the event being promoted and what messages are being sent?” “How is the safety of the attendees considered?” “What lessons have we learned from past events to ensure everyone has a safe and fun time?”
- **Teach otherness and empathy.** The teaching of empathy is best tied to the overall mission of the college. For many liberal arts institutions, this mission involves teaching students to think critically and diversely about the world around them. To that end, faculty and staff members could reasonably teach basic empathy and perspective-taking skills to students in their classes, workshops and orientation events. This directly impacts the root risk factors of objectification, misogyny and hardened points of view.

▪ **Challenge hardened viewpoints.** Critical thinking is the hallmark of liberal education. It cannot be just about content knowledge, but must also be about teaching students *how* to think. Following that logic, there is little room for inflexible thoughts or entrenched points of view. We need to challenge students' thoughts that center on women being worth less than men, that other people are objects to be enjoyed regardless of their agency, or that you just have to ask more aggressively when someone says no to sexual activity.

▪ **Teach consent.** Simply identifying the “bad” and developing programs to reduce at-risk and concerning behaviors is not sufficient to stem the tide of sexual violence on our campuses. We also must teach sexual consent and relationship health in a continuing, affirmative -- and, quite frankly -- engaging and entertaining format. Specifically, we recommend:

- creating dialogue, not monologue, when teaching students;
- knowing your policy and conduct code;
- using technology to help engage students;
- teaching students that good sex begins with good communication; and
- embracing the prevention year, not the prevention month (such as Sexual Assault Awareness Month during the month of April).

▪ **Teach healthy relationships.** Healthy relationships, in all their wonderful diversity, are based on concepts of open communication and respect for each other's autonomy and connectedness. In healthy relationships, people cultivate each other's worth, as well as demonstrate willingness to reach a middle ground and to contribute to the betterment of the other. Colleges can support healthy relationships by helping students build their skills around practicing active listening, empathy and equanimity; focusing on the other's happiness; and fostering social connection and mutual respect.

While institutions must investigate and respond to incidents in an efficient and consistent way, and often put out fires, we would do well to focus more time and energy on prevention and education. We need to find the time and resources to prevent those fires before they begin.

So what next? Again, we turn to the end of the TV series *Angel*, the companion series to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, to offer some guidance.

Spike: “And in terms of a plan?”

Angel: “We fight.”

Spike: “Bit more specific?”

Angel: “Well, personally, I kinda wanna slay the dragon.”

Bio

Brian Van Brunt ([@brianvb](https://twitter.com/@brianvb) (<http://twitter.com/@brianvb>)) is the executive director of the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association. He served as director of counseling at New England College and Western Kentucky University. (For more information, see www.brianvanbrunt.com (<http://www.brianvanbrunt.com>) or contact him at brian@nchem.org (<mailto:brian@nchem.org>)). Amy Murphy ([@DrAmyLMurphy](https://twitter.com/@DrAmyLMurphy) (<https://twitter.com/@DrAmyLMurphy>)) is an assistant professor at [Angelo State University](http://college/222831/angelo-state-university) ([/college/222831/angelo-state-university](http://college/222831/angelo-state-university)), where she teaches graduate courses in the student development and leadership in higher education master's program. She previously served as the dean of students at Texas Tech University (amy.murphy@angelo.edu (<mailto:amy.murphy@angelo.edu>)).



Read more by [Brian Van Brunt and Amy Murphy](#)

 [jump to comments \(#comment-target\)](#)



[\(/print/advice/2017/08/04/preventing-sexual-violence-it-occurs-essay?width=775&height=500&iframe=true\)]((/print/advice/2017/08/04/preventing-sexual-violence-it-occurs-essay?width=775&height=500&iframe=true))



[Be the first to know.](#)

<https://www.insidehighered.com/content/sign-inside-higher-eds-newsletters>

Get our **free** daily newsletter.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/content/sign-inside-higher-eds-newsletters>

INSIDE
HIGHER ED | INSIDE
DIGITAL
LEARNING

Inside Digital Learning

THE LATEST NEWS ON
TECHNOLOGY AND THE
LEARNING EXPERIENCE

[Subscribe Now](#)



A new global benchmark in higher education.





[_ \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

Browse Jobs by Category

Faculty Jobs (<https://careers.insidehighered.com/searchjobs/?>

[Keywords=&radialtown=&LocationId=&RadialLocation=20&NearFacetsShown=true&CountryCode=&Faculty=&utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs](https://careers.insidehighered.com/searchjobs/?Keywords=&radialtown=&LocationId=&RadialLocation=20&NearFacetsShown=true&CountryCode=&Faculty=&utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs))

[Arts & Humanities \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/arts-and-humanities/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/arts-and-humanities/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Education \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/education/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/education/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Engineering & Mathematics \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/engineering-and-mathematics/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/engineering-and-mathematics/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Health & Medical \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/health-and-medical/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/health-and-medical/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Professional Fields \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/professional-fields/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/professional-fields/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Science & Technology \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/science-and-technology/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/science-and-technology/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Social Sciences \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/social-sciences/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/social-sciences/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Technical & Vocational Fields \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/technical-and-vocational-fields/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/jobs/technical-and-vocational-fields/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

Administrative Jobs (<https://careers.insidehighered.com/searchjobs/?>

[Keywords=&radialtown=&LocationId=&RadialLocation=20&NearFacetsShown=true&CountryCode=&Administrative=&utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs](https://careers.insidehighered.com/searchjobs/?Keywords=&radialtown=&LocationId=&RadialLocation=20&NearFacetsShown=true&CountryCode=&Administrative=&utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs))

Executive Administration Jobs (<https://careers.insidehighered.com/searchjobs/?>

[Keywords=&radialtown=&LocationId=&RadialLocation=20&NearFacetsShown=true&CountryCode=&ExecutiveAdministration=&utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs](https://careers.insidehighered.com/searchjobs/?Keywords=&radialtown=&LocationId=&RadialLocation=20&NearFacetsShown=true&CountryCode=&ExecutiveAdministration=&utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs))

Jobs Outside Higher Education (<https://careers.insidehighered.com/searchjobs/?>

[Keywords=&radialtown=&LocationId=&RadialLocation=20&NearFacetsShown=true&CountryCode=&JobsOutsideHigherEducation=&utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs](https://careers.insidehighered.com/searchjobs/?Keywords=&radialtown=&LocationId=&RadialLocation=20&NearFacetsShown=true&CountryCode=&JobsOutsideHigherEducation=&utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs))

– Hide comments

Opinions on Inside Higher Ed



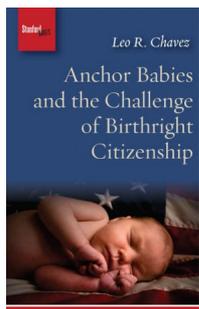
[\(/views/2018/06/12/criticism-anti-semitism-awareness-act-opinion\)](/views/2018/06/12/criticism-anti-semitism-awareness-act-opinion)

[What's Wrong With the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act \(/views/2018/06/12/criticism-anti-semitism-awareness-act-opinion\)](/views/2018/06/12/criticism-anti-semitism-awareness-act-opinion)



[\(/views/2018/06/11/essay-emerging-culture-patronage-michigan-state\)](/views/2018/06/11/essay-emerging-culture-patronage-michigan-state)

[Creating a Culture of Cronyism \(/views/2018/06/11/essay-emerging-culture-patronage-michigan-state\)](/views/2018/06/11/essay-emerging-culture-patronage-michigan-state)



[\(/views/2018/06/08/review-leo-r-chavez-anchor-babies-and-birthright-citizenship\)](/views/2018/06/08/review-leo-r-chavez-anchor-babies-and-birthright-citizenship)

[Anchoring an Argument \(/views/2018/06/08/review-leo-r-chavez-anchor-babies-and-birthright-citizenship\)](/views/2018/06/08/review-leo-r-chavez-anchor-babies-and-birthright-citizenship)

Inside Higher Ed's Blog U

[Just Visiting \(/blogs/just-visiting\)](/blogs/just-visiting)

[An Act of Academic Self-Preservation \(/blogs/just-visiting/act-academic-self-preservation\)](/blogs/just-visiting/act-academic-self-preservation)

[Confessions of a Community College Dean \(/blogs/confessions-community-college-dean\)](/blogs/confessions-community-college-dean)

[The Persistence of Procrastination \(/blogs/confessions-community-college-dean/persistence-procrastination\)](/blogs/confessions-community-college-dean/persistence-procrastination)

[Technology and Learning \(/blogs/technology-and-learning\)](/blogs/technology-and-learning)

[The Prime Real Estate of a Library Address \(/blogs/technology-and-learning/prime-real-estate-library-address\)](/blogs/technology-and-learning/prime-real-estate-library-address)

[Conversations on Diversity \(/blogs/conversations-diversity/\)](/blogs/conversations-diversity/)

[The Masterpiece Cakeshop Decision and Higher Ed's Approach to Religion \(/blogs/conversations-diversity/masterpiece-cakeshop-decision-and-higher-eds-approach-religion\)](/blogs/conversations-diversity/masterpiece-cakeshop-decision-and-higher-eds-approach-religion/)

[Technology and Learning \(/blogs/technology-and-learning/\)](/blogs/technology-and-learning/)

[The Precision of Simon Winchester's 'The Perfectionists' \(/blogs/technology-and-learning/precision-simon-winchesters-perfectionists\)](/blogs/technology-and-learning/precision-simon-winchesters-perfectionists/)

[GradHacker \(/blogs/gradhacker/\)](/blogs/gradhacker/)

[Summer Professional Development \(/blogs/gradhacker/summer-professional-development\)](/blogs/gradhacker/summer-professional-development/)

WHAT OTHERS ARE READING

[Calif. finalizes performance funding formula for its community colleges](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/12/calif-finalizes-performance-funding-formula-its-community-colleges)

[\(/https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/12/calif-finalizes-performance-funding-formula-its-community-colleges\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/12/calif-finalizes-performance-funding-formula-its-community-colleges)

[UMass Dartmouth Wants to Boot Chairs From Union](https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/06/12/umass-dartmouth-wants-boot-chairs-union)

[\(/https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/06/12/umass-dartmouth-wants-boot-chairs-union\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/06/12/umass-dartmouth-wants-boot-chairs-union)

[Justice Department opposes University of Michigan bullying policy](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/12/justice-department-opposes-university-michigan-bullying-policy)

[\(/https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/12/justice-department-opposes-university-michigan-bullying-policy\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/12/justice-department-opposes-university-michigan-bullying-policy)

[Study: Editors of major political science journals demonstrate no systematic bias against female authors](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/12/study-editors-major-political-science-journals-demonstrate-no-systematic-bias) [\(/https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/12/study-editors-major-political-science-journals-demonstrate-no-systematic-bias\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/12/study-editors-major-political-science-journals-demonstrate-no-systematic-bias)

[Guild Education creates business as broker for employer-financed college degrees](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/12/guild-education-creates-business-broker-employer-financed-college-degrees)

[\(/https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/12/guild-education-creates-business-broker-employer-financed-college-degrees\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/12/guild-education-creates-business-broker-employer-financed-college-degrees)

[Education Department Investigates USC](https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/06/12/education-department-investigates-usc)

[\(/https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/06/12/education-department-investigates-usc\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/06/12/education-department-investigates-usc)

[Syracuse suspends fraternity students after racist, homophobic, anti-Semitic videos surface](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/11/syracuse-suspends-fraternity-students-after-racist-homophobic-anti-semitic-videos)

[\(/https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/11/syracuse-suspends-fraternity-students-after-racist-homophobic-anti-semitic-videos\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/11/syracuse-suspends-fraternity-students-after-racist-homophobic-anti-semitic-videos)

[California Higher Ed Leaders Oppose PROSPER Act](https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/06/12/california-higher-ed-leaders-oppose-prosper-act)

[\(/https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/06/12/california-higher-ed-leaders-oppose-prosper-act\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/06/12/california-higher-ed-leaders-oppose-prosper-act)

[BACK TO TOP](#)