

# From Outrage to Action

## Countering the Institutional Response to Sexualized Violence on University Campuses

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*C'est dans la foulée des événements survenus à l'Université de Saskatchewan quand deux femmes furent agressées par des personnes à l'extérieur du campus, que sont ressorties les contradictions et les tensions inhérentes aux stratégies accessibles à celles et à ceux qui travaillent à promouvoir un changement social progressiste sur les campus universitaires. Ce texte intéressera toute personne qui désire canaliser son outrage et rendre nos institutions de haut savoir socialement responsables, en les informant et en les éduquant sur la violence sexualisée.*

Over the past few decades the increase in women attending university has been one of the most significant changes on university campuses. Attending university is a time of academic and personal growth but is also a time of potential danger, as women on campuses are at an increased risk of sexual assault relative to other women. Estimates of the prevalence of sexual victimization among Canadian female university students range from 15 per cent (Newton-Taylor, DeWit, and Gliksman) to approximately 33 per cent (DeKeseredy, Schwartz, and Tait). Despite the alarming rates of sexual violence on Canadian campuses, universities are often unprepared and unwilling to take appropriate preventative action or provide a supportive response when sexual assault does occur.

This paper presents a case study of one university's response to two high-profile sexual assaults and the community counter-response that followed. This analysis is provided not to showcase this particular university, but rather as a means of exploring the potential strategies available to those working to bring about progressive social change within, and outside of, institutional structures. This paper does not attempt to speak on behalf of all women or all who have experienced violence, as it is recognized that the particular experiences and socio-cultural location of the authors are not representative of all women. Instead, by offering the personal reflections of three women, involved in different ways with the events that followed these sexual assaults, this paper explores some of the struggles, outcomes, and outstanding issues faced when countering sexualized violence on university campuses.

The University of Saskatchewan is a medium-sized Canadian university with a balance of liberal arts programs and professional colleges. Although the university has a hundred-year history of providing accessible public education and serving public interests, like many other Canadian universities it is now vigorously pursuing a research-intensification agenda. This current preoccupation with the commercialization of knowledge has left institutional policies and practices

notably silent on equity and other pressing social issues, including gender-based violence. For example, the University of Saskatchewan has one of the largest Aboriginal student bodies anywhere in Canada (University of Saskatchewan 2010). One of the overarching goals of the University's recent Integrated Plan (University of Saskatchewan 2007) is "to engage more fully with Aboriginal peoples." Yet, there has been no attention paid to the differential needs of Aboriginal women who have experienced sexual assault on campus. Indeed, there has been little effort made to address the impact of sexual violence on the student body at all.

These developments are highly problematic since, like many other Canadian universities, the University of Saskatchewan is a regular venue for sexual assault. In a recent study, nearly one-quarter of University of Saskatchewan students reported experiencing sexual assault and/or abuse since starting university, with over one-tenth of these incidents occurring on campus (Haffner<sup>1</sup>). Despite the prevalence of sexual assault among its students, the University of Saskatchewan has a shameful history when it comes to addressing sexual violence.

This was clearly illustrated in 2003, when two separate stranger sexual assaults were committed within months of each other on the University of Saskatchewan campus. The first as-

sault occurred in July 2003, in broad daylight, at a local historical site less than 100 feet from one of Saskatoon's main city streets. The woman who experienced the sexual assault<sup>1</sup> was a university student employed by the university for the summer, and was performing her work duties when she was violently attacked by a stranger. This brutal assault was met with shock and outrage by many in the

She knew not to go out in the dark without a friend.

I thought she had the best of all possible summer jobs a university student could have, providing guided tours to the public in a charming and quaint historical building on campus. In my mind, it was certainly much safer than working late-night hours at some convenience store where she could get robbed, or in some indus-

extensive "file" with Campus Security, detailing a history of openly declared misogyny and threats against his professors who held feminist views. For these activities, he had been expelled from university and yet there were no steps taken by administration or security to prevent him from coming back onto campus. My concerns were met with little other than an incessant, insulting chant that "our university

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campus community, feelings that were compounded when a second public sexual assault was committed a few months later. In November 2003, a female student studying on campus was attacked by an unknown assailant in a heavily trafficked washroom in the College of Arts and Science. Both of these women showed enormous courage and resilience in the face of these violent attacks and their stories touched the lives of many.

Rather than providing a distant, disinterested recounting of the events following the assaults, we offer the following recollections of the ways in which we, the authors, were individually affected and changed by them. Following these recollections, we reflect upon the broader community response and resulting changes that occurred on the University of Saskatchewan campus, as well as the initiatives that have yet to be fully realized.

### **Individual Responses**

#### ***Recollections of a parent (Elizabeth Quinlan)***

I thought she would be safe. Like most other women on campus, my daughter knew enough not to walk alone along the path by the river or in any other remote and isolated place.

trial plant where she would breathe in dangerous pollutants.

But she wasn't safe. Stationed alone in a building that had no telephone and only one door (serving as both entrance and exit), with archaic walkie-talkie equipment that would require much more time to activate than a person can afford in the middle of an assault, she was far from safe. When the perpetrator attacked her, she had no way to escape and no way to call for help except to scream and holler. Even though the building was in a high-traffic area of the campus, nobody responded to her calls. As a result of those horrific few moments, her life and my life have been permanently altered.

I was enraged by the response I received from the university's senior administration when I approached them with my concerns about the safety of my daughter, as well as other students and workers on campus. They nonchalantly cited some bureaucratic technicality to explain why they, as her employer, should bear no responsibility for her safety, in total disregard of the intent, if not the specific provisions, of the Occupational Health and Safety legislation. They were dismissive when I brought to their attention the fact that the man who assaulted my daughter had an

is an extremely safe place."

The administration's flagrant denial and disrespect was a flashpoint. I organized a meeting with a small group of concerned women and we gave birth to CASA (Coalition Against Sexual Assault – University of Saskatchewan), a group that proved influential in lobbying for institutional change and improved anti-violence measures on the University of Saskatchewan campus.

#### ***Recollections of a former security officer (Joanne Horsley)***

As a University of Saskatchewan Security Officer, I came to know about the first public sexual assault in 2003 when a co-worker and I apprehended the perpetrator for an unrelated property crime. After the arrest, we returned to the Security office and, quite by accident, matched his image from a surveillance videotape to a sketch that had been hand-drawn by the assaulted woman the day before. The connection was made between the two crimes and the local police were able to hold and charge the perpetrator, who was later convicted of both the sexual assault and mischief charges.

Campus Security was notified once again after the second assault occurred in the Arts and Science Building later

that fall. After this attack, rumours about the woman inventing the story started very early within the Security department. These rumours flew in the face of the facts: a rape kit had been done, DNA evidence had been recovered, other physical evidence was found at the crime scene, and one of our own security officers was the first to find the woman after the attack. Despite this evidence, acceptance of these “rape myths” grew and speculations about how and why the woman lied circulated among Security staff and department directors. Some suggested that perhaps she had lied about the assault to get out of writing exams and avoid failing her classes. These suggestions were never proven and I remember feeling that this woman was being attacked all over again, this time in the court of public opinion. It angered and frustrated me that my fellow officers, who took an oath to protect people, were now blaming the woman for having been assaulted. The victim-blaming became so blatant and pervasive that even the officer who was first at the scene, who still believed the woman’s report, no longer felt comfortable voicing this belief to his fellow officers.

Concerns about personal safety were a priority for many women following these brutal attacks. Many were concerned about the lighting and lack of safety in the campus washrooms and I remember receiving calls during my shifts from students requesting that a security officer stand outside of the washrooms during evening hours. In early 2004, a public forum was held to address safety concerns on campus. There were many students in attendance that day, all of them angry at the University administration and Security for allowing an assault like this to happen on our campus. A number of students spoke out at this forum, including the woman who was attacked in the Arts and Science washroom. As a woman, I was heartened by the courage shown by the assaulted woman and her ability to stand up in front of this room full of people and share her experience.

As a security officer, an employee of the University, I was disconcerted and embarrassed by the lack of support shown by the Administration, who had sent only one person to speak to the issues brought forward by the incident. This person was not in a position of power to really change anything on campus, and she bore the brunt of the anger of the students that day. If a senior administrator had been at the forum to experience the raw emotions of the students, their fear and their anger, I would like to think that they would have taken the incident more seriously. However, their lack of attendance suggested that they simply did not care.

The experience of being involved with these incidents ignited the feminist within me, and I became more outspoken and involved with gender and sexualized violence issues on our campus and beyond, because of them. It was also the beginning of the end of my tenure as a Security Officer as, for these reasons and more, I could no longer be the silent cog in the institutional machinery that they wanted me to be. I have since changed careers, becoming a Social Work student and later the University of Saskatchewan Students’ Union Victim Advocate.

### ***Recollections of a student (Allyson Clarke)***

I was a student, working toward an undergraduate degree in psychology, the year that these two sexual assaults took place. I remember feeling shocked that these acts could occur in the places that I frequented, to women who were not so different from me. I was suddenly very aware of my own vulnerability in a way that I never had been before. Prior to these incidents, I had not given much thought to the issue of sexualized violence and the myriad of ways that sexual assault, whether experienced personally or by others in our communities, can affect us all. This all changed as a result of the incidents on campus that fall and the response that followed.

Around the time of these events,

I had recently begun volunteering at the university Women’s Centre and it was through this experience that I become aware of the prevalence and impact of sexual assault. The amazing staff at the Women’s Centre was closely involved following the campus assaults, providing support to the assaulted women and their families and advocating to hold the university accountable for protecting its students. As a volunteer, I was witness to these activities and the strain and frustrations that accompanied them. A personal turning point for me was when one of the assaulted women came in to the Centre one afternoon during my shift. I did not know this woman but seeing her standing there forced me to put a face to this violent crime that I previously had the privilege of remaining distanced from. I remember going home that day and crying for this woman and the countless others whose lives have been marked by violation and degradation. Following this, my eyes and ears were opened and I was shocked to realize how many women in my own life were silent survivors. The statistics that I had always felt rather removed from suddenly felt very real.

With safety concerns pressing on my mind, I was appalled to realize that my university devoted more resources to protecting its property than its students. I began to pay close attention to the ways in which sexual violence issues were handled by the university administration and local media, growing more and more enraged by the myths and re-victimizing propaganda that was being spun. I was outraged by the university’s denial of sexual violence on its campus and among its students, and the ways that they attempted to assuage their own responsibility by casting blame and calling the credibility of the assaulted women into question. These events were a catalyst for me, stirring my compassion and firing up my feminist activist spirit. Seeing the lack of support available to women who

are assaulted, both on campus and in the community, motivated me to seek work in this field, first through a volunteer crisis line and later through the newly created Victim Advocate position on campus. These experiences continue to inform my professional and academic efforts, directing my ongoing research on rape myths and informing my work as a burgeoning counsellor.

are assaulted and their families. In addition to discussing this issue and offering practical suggestions about safety reform, the attendees at the forum displayed a refreshing willingness to engage in open discussion of the larger issues that underlie sexual assault, such as men's attitudes towards women. Especially encouraging was the participation of a number of young men at the forum who spoke

for the content and format of safety alerts (e.g. avoiding the use of words such as "alleged" sexual assault), in consultation with members of the university community, particularly women's advocacy groups; 6) Ensuring that safety alerts are posted electronically, via e-mail, within 24 hours of the incident being reported to Security; 7) Creating an Advisor to the President on the Status of Women

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### Community Responses

#### *External safety audit*

While we each had our own individual response to these two sexual assaults, there was also a clear sense of shared outrage among many in the campus community and a spoken need for collective action. Public concern continued to rise in the months following these incidents and the issue of safety on campus was on the minds of many. In response to these concerns, the recently formed Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CASA) developed a petition to press the University of Saskatchewan for an external audit of their security procedures, collecting over 1,000 hand-written signatures in support of this proposition. To give further voice and recognition to the community's growing apprehension and increase the pressure on the university administration, CASA then sponsored a public forum where all members of the university community were given an opportunity to express their concerns and offer suggestions for improvements to security on campus.

A strong theme that emerged at the forum was the widespread dissatisfaction with the university's highly institutional, "robotic" and emotionless response to women who

publicly about the small steps they were taking in the developmental process of expanding their awareness. This dialogue, especially between the men themselves in response to each other's comments, generated a feeling of hope for significant change.

Following the forum, the University agreed to conduct an external safety audit. Representatives from CASA met with the reviewers and presented 36 recommendations, compiled from the forum, for improving safety on campus. Notable recommendations included: 1) Implementing a student-run Victim Advocate position, designed to provide public education on sexual violence and specialized support and advocacy services to those who had experienced gender-related violence; 2) Re-focusing the duties of the Security Constables to reflect greater attention to community policing, rather than the existing focus on parking enforcement; 3) Extending the Safe Walk program (a program providing accompaniment to students walking alone on campus) by making it available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and financially compensating SafeWalk volunteers for their work; 4) Installing security alert boards in strategic places throughout campus (e.g., residences, washrooms, elevators); 5) Developing guidelines

position, recruited from faculty on a part time, two year rotational basis, to coordinate and chair the President's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women and the President's Advisory Committee on Personal Safety; 8) Changing academic requirements such that all incoming students must include an introductory Women's and Gender Studies course in their program of study; and 9) Demonstrating leadership in addressing gendered violence issues by having senior administrators be the first to take anti-oppression training.

While we recognized the limitations of these recommendations, as many focused more on concrete safety issues than efforts to address the systemic causes of sexual assault, our decision-making was strategic. Considering the political climate at our university, we knew that our chances of obtaining institutional support were greater if our initial recommendations were more tangible and less threatening to the status quo. As such, at this stage we sought the changes we felt we could reasonably expect to be implemented, with the understanding that this was not the "ideal" set of changes possible.

The external safety review was conducted by an outside agency and many of these recommendations were

reiterated by the auditors in their final report. However, the last two suggestions, dealing with education on gender issues, were notably absent from their list. As expected, the focus of the auditors' recommendations was on worthwhile, but limited, tangibles such as the creation of a 24-hour safe study area available during exam times and the installation of many more security cameras on campus.

described later in this paper, a Victim Advocate position has been created and implemented by the University of Saskatchewan Students' Union. Although the creation of this position is seen as a positive step toward supporting those who have experienced sexual violence and has resulted in an increase in awareness activities on sexualized/gender-related violence, there are still insufficient resources

the constant harassment she faced from the media and police who were repeatedly forcing her to relive her experience in the hopes of helping them catch her still-unknown assailant, a front-page story appeared in the local newspaper strongly insinuating that she had fabricated the details of her assault to further her own interests. This insinuation was based solely on speculation and rape

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Perhaps unsurprisingly, these recommendations were some of the first to be put into operation by the university administration.

In the six or so years since these recommendations were put forth, some progress has been made. The job profiles of the Security Constables were adjusted to allow more resources to be devoted to community policing, as opposed to parking enforcement. Security alert boards were posted across campus, although they have fallen out of use in recent years. Other recommendations continue to be works in progress or have been forgotten altogether. For example, although safety alerts are sent on occasion to the university community via email, concerns remain about their timeliness and the language used. Outside of the regular student run hours, Safewalk duties are now performed by Campus Security staff, making it available 24 hours a day. However, this program remains primarily volunteer-driven. New university-wide committees have been created with the stated purpose of addressing personal safety, gender issues, student advocacy, and sexual violence, but their contribution to the campus community is inconsistent and fluctuates year to year depending on member participation. Finally, as

(monetary and staff) devoted to this effort and, as subsequent discussion in this paper will highlight, the future of this position is uncertain at this time. Further, the University of Saskatchewan has yet to adopt any proactive requirements regarding mandatory education or feminist, anti-oppression training for its students or staff. In sum, while some improvements have been made, the work is still far from complete. The lack of concerted effort on the part of the university administration to changing the climate on the campus for women is the main barrier to progress.

#### **Media Response**

The two stranger-perpetrated sexual assaults that took place in 2003 quickly caught the interest of the campus student newspaper and the local media. As is often the case, this interest proved to be part blessing and part curse. While media attention served to keep pressure on the university administration and forced them to be accountable for addressing safety concerns on campus, the quality of the coverage was often poor and heavily laden with myths and re-victimizing statements. For example, when the second assaulted woman requested a reprieve from

mythology, with no factual evidence to support it. This accusation was not only devastating for the woman and her family, but also served to silence other women from coming forward in the future. Indeed, when a White, middle-class woman attacked by a stranger in her place of learning, with obvious physical injuries, medical reports, and DNA evidence to support her case, is labelled a liar by the public media, the confidence that other assaulted women have in receiving assistance from these channels is understandably shattered. Further, by denying the validity of this woman's claim (and, by extension, the claims of all other assaulted women), the University of Saskatchewan was able to further the illusion that their campus was a safe place and avoid addressing the issue of sexual violence in a proactive way.

This front-page article represented a final straw for many who were already disgusted with the biased media coverage of the assaults. There were few options available through formal channels of redress since Saskatchewan does not have a press council with which to file formal complaints and the paper's Editorial Board was resistant to meeting with members of the community regarding this matter.

Therefore, in the days following the publication of the article, a number of efforts were made to address this issue through grassroots activities including developing and circulating an open letter to the journalist and the editor of the newspaper asking that the newspaper act responsibly by retracting the story and apologizing to the assaulted woman herself and the campus community as a whole.

In the months following the assaults, CASA considered various avenues of redress and advocacy, including the filing of official complaints to the Saskatchewan Department of Labour's Occupational Health and Safety department and bringing legal charges against the university for abdicating their duty to protect their students and staff. However, as one CASA member succinctly stated: "We are probably not going to win the battle through those formal channels of redress. Instead, we are going to win this battle in the court of public opinion." It was clear to us that the university administration was more worried about their reputation than they were about their social responsibility to protect and educate the public on pressing social issues such as sexual assault. Therefore, change would only come about through public pressure. This required a strategic use of the media.

Over time, CASA learned how to work with the media. With every CASA-led event, a press release was produced and distributed to the local radio, television, and newspaper media outlets. An ally was found within a community-based newspaper and this person wrote a number of articles criticizing the University of Saskatchewan's response to sexual assault, despite being threatened with a lawsuit by the University President. In spite of the often negative coverage provided by the media, it still proved a useful tool of change. Although the coverage was not always helpful, and sometimes downright damaging, without the media's attention the university's actions would not have been held up for public scrutiny

and change would not have been possible.

### **Public Awareness Activities**

In addition to advocating for changes through official channels, CASA also advocated for social change outside of the institutional structure through a number of public events on campus and in the broader Saskatoon community. In a city in which close to one in ten people are of Aboriginal descent, we specifically sought out connections with First Nations women and women's organizations that were sensitive to the disproportionately higher rates of assault among Aboriginal women. In partnership with the on-campus Women's Centre and several community-based organizations, CASA organized several annual Take Back the Night events and December 6<sup>th</sup> vigils in the years following the sexual assaults. A cleansing ceremony held on the site of one of the assaults was led by a well-respected Aboriginal elder and attended by many women from the university and larger community. These events served to mark the assaults that occurred on campus, honoured all women who experienced gender-based violence, and raised public awareness, both on and off campus, about violence and our right to be safe through a number of methods, including the popular education technique of Forum Theatre. Collectively, we shared our remembrances of those we have lost and inspired each other to continue to work together for a violence-free future. We took heart from the number and diversity of people these events attracted. Attendance from the larger community was often high, with representatives from legislative assemblies present.

After working for some time to raise awareness about sexual assault on campus, we moved our organizing off campus to extend our reach into the larger community and partnered with a number of Aboriginal women's and marginalized youth groups to raise

awareness about the social problem of gender-based violence. One activity in particular enjoyed a large turnout: in collaboration with the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre, a ceremony to honour women who had experienced gender-based violence was organized and brought together cultural groups often segregated from one another for a broad-based dialogue about sexual assault. These activities were beneficial not only as a means of change for the community but also as a source of hope for the organizers, as they represented a coming together and an acknowledgement of the value of the struggle.

### **The Creation of the Victim Advocate Position**

At the time of the two high profile assaults in 2003, efforts were already under way for the establishment of a Victim Advocate position on campus. At this time, there was a lack of specialized services for women who experienced sexual violence and the Victim Advocate position was envisioned by female students at the Women's Centre to fill this gap by providing a free and confidential support service to students who had survived sexual assault and gender-based violence. The need for this service was solidified following the public assaults in 2003 and lobbying efforts began in earnest. Letters of support were collected from various departments on campus, recommendations for the implementation of this position were included in the external safety audit report, and funding was sought through the provincial Status of Women office. The position was officially implemented in May 2004 as a part-time student-staffed position within the University of Saskatchewan Students' Union (USSU), with a mandate to provide support, information, referrals, and advocacy to those affected by sexual violence, and to create a centralized community model of response to unwanted sexual experiences. In addition, the position was charged

with providing proactive public education to the campus community through presentations, awareness events, various poster campaigns, and theatrical productions.

To date, the Victim Advocate has provided direct services to approximately 275 clients, with countless others reached indirectly through public awareness activities. In the nearly six years since its implementation, the position has undergone a number of changes. It has relocated from its original location within the Women's Centre to a private and confidential office space, making the service much more accessible, particularly for male survivors and others who did not feel comfortable accessing support through the Women's Centre due to concerns about confidentiality, inclusivity, or other reasons. The funding of the position, originally provided by Status of Women Canada, has now been fully taken over by the USSU. Over the past few years, the Victim Advocate has spearheaded and collaborated on many projects, including an educational play for first year students with content on sexual violence, and the implementation of a *USSU Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights* and the *USSU Sexual Assault Protocol*, documents that are both now published annually in the *USSU Student Rights Handbook*. Most recently the Victim Advocate has been included in the University of Saskatchewan Administration's "Crisis Prevention Working Group," which is tasked with developing various proactive ways to 1) revise the threat assessment process and related documentation, communication, and training; and 2) inform the campus community about prevention resources, as well as ways to identify and respond to potential crises or threats.

Although significant gains have been made within the Victim Advocate position, there are a number of challenges that remain. The position continues to be student-run, a decision that has both advantages and disadvantages. While having a

student in the position allows the service to feel less intimidating to many individuals who access it, its "non-professional" status means that the legitimacy and authority of the position remains limited in the eyes of many. As such, the protocols created by the Victim Advocate remain mere guidelines rather than formal policy. In addition, while membership on university-wide committees such as the Crisis Prevention Working Group represent an important step toward having the legitimacy of the position recognized, it remains uncertain exactly how much weight the Victim Advocate's opinions and contributions will be given.

While the University Students' Union has taken responsibility for the funding of the Victim Advocate, budget issues remain an ongoing point of contention and the mandate of the position is currently under attack. Of particular significance is the recent decision made unilaterally by the USSU General Manager and Executive to eliminate the advocacy functions of the Victim Advocate. This is highly problematic, as the original proposal for the position included a strong statement regarding the necessity for advocacy functions, along with the provision of support, information, and referrals to counselling and other services. Over the past five years, the direct advocacy functions of the Victim Advocate have included contacting professors on behalf of students who have been affected by sexualized violence to request extensions or deferrals of academic assignments; accompanying students who experienced sexual assault to meetings with university personnel; intervening and speaking on behalf of the individual (when requested) as a means of protecting their rights from being violated; and notifying university personnel of potential safety concerns. These services have been identified by women and men who have experienced assault as being extremely valuable, as the knowledge of campus protocols and conventions that the Victim Advocate

possesses, not to mention her specialized knowledge regarding sexual violence issues, can be extremely useful when one is attempting to navigate the university system.

The USSU justifies these changes by claiming to have concerns about potential "liability issues" associated with performing advocacy functions. However, these motives appear to be more about political interests than legal responsibilities. Indeed, by providing advocacy to survivors, the Victim Advocate is making sexual assault visible to the administration and forcing them to be accountable for their actions and policies. Although being situated within the Students' Union affords the position some autonomy from the broader institutional agenda, these recent events suggest that the Victim Advocate is subject to the whims of the political interests of those controlling the available resources on campus. While the creation of this position can be seen as a step forward in addressing sexual violence, the instability and continual threat that the Victim Advocate faces in maintaining its status and resources suggests that the gains are tentative.

A number of efforts have been undertaken in an attempt to challenge these changes and reinstate the advocacy functions to the position. When initial attempts to go through internal means failed, two of the paper's authors, Joanne Horsley (the Victim Advocate at the time) and Allyson Clarke (a former Victim Advocate) contributed to a news article in the university's student newspaper, in an attempt to rouse public interest in this issue. The political quickly turned personal, as the day after this article appeared on newsstands, Joanne was fired from her position as Victim Advocate. When the job was posted, advocacy was noticeably absent from the list of duties.

Calling on their collective experience dealing with institutional changes and rhetoric, the authors of this paper, along with a group of outraged students, mounted a campaign to educate the student and

university population as to exactly what they would be losing if the changes were allowed to proceed. A follow-up article was commissioned and a Facebook group was started immediately. A petition was created and circulated on and off campus, collecting over 470 signatures. This petition was presented to the University Student Council on March 19, 2009, to little effect.

have taken place. The external safety audit led to a number of improved safety measures on campus. For example, lights in most washrooms are now left on permanently; close to 1,000 security cameras have been installed; and security personnel are no longer burdened with parking functions. Other changes, such as the implementation of a Victim Advocate on campus and some ef-

priorities. Perhaps now more than ever, our activism needs to be vigorous and energetic.

We are not in a position to offer advice or a comprehensive list of best practices for creating change on university campuses. We realize that as white, middle-class, educated women, we are coming from a place of relative privilege and we do not wish to speak for the needs of all

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As of the writing of this paper, the name of the position has been officially changed from Victim Advocate to Student Crisis Support Service, and the job description and policy have been officially altered to reflect the change of mandate. While some useful and relevant services were kept, such as the ability of the support worker to accompany students to meetings with institutional personnel, many vital advocacy services have been eliminated. Further, although the position was temporarily filled after the adoption of these changes, it currently sits empty following the resignation of the most recent support worker and its future is unclear. These changes have left many feeling frustrated, disillusioned, and unsure what course of action to pursue. The responsibility to continue the fight to reinstate advocacy functions now rests in the hands of the students at the University, and it is our hope that the desire and need for such services will be recognized in the future.

**Reflection on Struggles, Successes and Issues Yet to be Resolved**

In the six years since two brutal sexual assaults placed sexual violence on the University of Saskatchewan's radar, a number of positive changes

efforts at increased public education on sexual violence, represent important first steps in addressing the issue of sexual violence at a deeper level. However, there is still a great deal more work to be done. Support services are under attack, the core beliefs that contribute to a culture of violence have not been shifted significantly, and more public education is still very much needed. Further, because of the constant turnover of staff and students and the fact that there have not been any high profile sexual assault cases on this campus for several years, it is difficult to keep these issues at the forefront of the public's awareness.

The university administration is taking advantage of this waning public engagement by aggressively trying to undo the gains previously made in support services and resources devoted to these issues, as they appear to see the decrease in public complaints as "proof" that sexual violence is no longer a problem among their students and staff. As a result, anti-violence activists are forced to spend their time and energy "fire-fighting" in an effort to protect the gains that have been made. This makes it difficult to envision and fight for expanded, enhanced services or to work on an agenda of long-term

women or all assaulted women. In addition, although we believe that our university is not so different from other Canadian post-secondary institutions, we are aware that the strategies we found successful may not work in other contexts and that there are likely other strategies that may be just as, if not more, effective. That said, we offer the following final reflections on our experiences in the hopes that they might provide a starting point for those looking to take similar action within their own communities.

We believe that our grassroots activism was successful for a number of reasons. First, we recognized and named the structural dimensions of sexualized violence. We knew that these two assaults were not just one-off occurrences and we were not placated by the University's claim that "our university is a very safe place." Our commitment to making change was motivated by the overarching ethical principle of feminist social justice, and our actions were initiated and sustained by our sense of "having right on our side." In contrast, the actions of the senior university staff, aimed at protecting the institution's reputation, reflected the norms and values of the institution, not their own personal ethical frameworks.

Second, we brought humour into our campaigns to raise awareness about the intransigence of the university administration. For instance, in preparation for a meeting with senior administrators approximately one year after the two public assaults, CASA prepared a First Year Report Card. Using the format of an elementary school report card, the Card evaluated the University's progress towards becoming a "mature" university and recognizing its important social responsibility as a fully functioning public education institution. Campaigns such as this were able to engage the public while still communicating the serious messages and changes that we sought.

Third, although not always successful, there were a number of times when we were able to take advantage of the media's appetite for provocative stories as a way of putting pressure on the university. We suspect that this strategy may be even more effective today. The growing number of unofficial media sources (e.g., facebook, blogs, zines, and YouTube) makes it even easier to take social justice battles to the court of public opinion.

Another reason for our success was that the Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CASA) had a flexible structure that made it possible to carry out effective actions simultaneously inside and outside the institution. Within this ad hoc group of parents, faculty, staff, and students, some CASA members had strong affiliations with the university while others had little or no affiliation. We were able to capitalize on these differing positions and roles by having our overt advocacy actions, such as demonstrations and petitions, led by our members who were less affiliated with the institution and could afford the risk. At the same time, covert advocacy activities, within the structures of the university, were led by our members who had the "insider" knowledge of how the system works as well as access to some institutional funding. This two-pronged approach was instrumental in our ability to push for lasting changes.

Finally, we were not afraid to reach out to others, locally and nationally, who shared a similar view of sexual assault as a social justice issue. As part of this effort, CASA and the Victim Advocate position were influential in organizing a network of campus sexual assault service providers and LGBT/queer and women's centres staff from the western provinces. In the three roundtable-meetings held thus far, there has been a healthy space created for dialogue, sharing of strategies and best practices, and voicing of concerns. Networks such as these permit another level of advocacy work to be done, as they allow us to address sexualized violence on campus from a broader lens and as a unified body. Our sincere hope is that the Western network will continue and be extended to a national network, with campuses representing all regions across the country. With a national profile it would be possible for the network to take up many important initiatives such as the development of comprehensive education programs on sexual violence issues and lobbying *MacLean's* magazine to include holistic campus safety indicators in their annual university ratings.

Another platform of future work for a national network will be to advocate for improvements to Statistics Canada data on gender-based violence. As it stands, the data are woefully inadequate: the Victimization Surveys do not collect information on the sexual assaults occurring on Canadian university campuses, and the specific variables necessary for a comparative analysis of incidence rates of sexual assault between racialized groups of women are not included in the Surveys. Future advocacy efforts require these most basic of descriptive data.

The public assaults that occurred on the University of Saskatchewan campus in 2003 forever changed us. We honour the women who experienced these—and all other—horrific acts of violence, as well as the many women who have been brought together by a shared sense of outrage

and desire for social action. In the years since these events, we have experienced a number of struggles and successes in our efforts to counter the institutional response to sexual violence. Although the journey is not yet over, we have learned through our combined experiences that coalition work makes it possible to transcend the boundaries that usually isolate people who share similar ideals and to allow them to work collectively for change. It is the collectivity of effort that continues to nourish our most deeply felt hope that one day our post-secondary institutions will become safe and positive spaces for all who study, work, and otherwise contribute to them.

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There has considerable debate within feminist scholarship regarding the most appropriate terminology for referring to individuals who have experienced sexual assault (Spry; Lamb; Young and Maguire). The term "victim" can mistakenly suggest weakness, as some scholars have contended, and "survivor" tends to imply a recovered state, which may or may not be the woman's reality. Therefore, we use neither of these terms.

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JOANNA M. WESTON

### The Danger of Joan

it's said the saint wore armour at night  
to keep soldiers at bay

they wouldn't dare assail  
a saint wearing iron  
even with gossamer beneath  
being afraid they'd get rusted  
from loving in the rain  
or get turned to angel feathers  
when Joan went up in flame  
in Rouen on a Sunday  
with bishops by the score  
flirting for her handshake  
genuflecting for a smile

she wouldn't let them burn her  
until she'd taken steel from her eyes  
and pierced one cleric with a nail

*Joanna M. Weston has had poetry, reviews, and short stories published in anthologies and journals for twenty years. She has published two middle-readers The Willow-Tree Girl and Those Blue Shoes. Frontenac House of Calgary published her poetry collection, A Summer Father.*



## Canadian Studies Network-Réseau d'études canadiennes

May 2010. A Steering Committee made up of scholars from across Canada has been in the process of creating a new non-profit Canadian Studies organization to facilitate connections and strengthen partnerships between faculty, students, and independent researchers involved in the study of Canada at the post-secondary level.

We are pleased to announce the **Canadian Studies Network-Réseau d'études canadiennes** and to welcome all individuals or institutions involved in Canadian Studies to participate and join with us in our goal to facilitate linkages between Canadianists working in Canada.

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