

Department of Education Grant to UCSD Underwrites Innovative Campaign for Preventing Sexual Violence

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An innovative new campaign for preventing sexual violence among university students has been launched at the University of California, San Diego through the UCSD Student Safety and Sexual Assault Resource Center.

The program is based on findings that students have an exaggerated idea of sexual activities among their fellow students, and correcting these exaggerated assumptions is an effective approach toward rape prevention.

Through a U.S. Department of Education grant, the *Perceptions of Rape: Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Social Norms Approach to Rape Prevention Targeting First Year Students* study is aimed at giving students a better idea of actual social and sexual behavior. It will focus on decreasing misperceptions of sexual behavior beliefs and attitudes among UCSD students through a campus wide marketing campaign and both single-sex and mixed gender workshops.

The new prevention program is based on information gathered through a campus wide survey distributed to UCSD male and female students in Fall Quarter '05-'06. The online survey, termed *Healthy Relationships*, was sent to 6,000 randomly selected students, with a response rate of 30 percent. The ethnic and demographic breakdown of survey respondents mirrored the UCSD student population.

The survey asked students for their own knowledge about rape and sexual behavior, beliefs and attitudes, then in conjunction, asked about the same subject matter to what the respondent felt was the "typical UCSD female/male." The data found high misperceptions between what the respondents do and think, and what they believe the "typical UCSD student" does and thinks about sexual beliefs and attitudes.

"This new campaign will attempt to correct these misperceptions and share the healthy, positive behavior that is actually typical on this campus," said Nancy Wahlig, director of Student Safety Awareness and Sexual Assault Resource center. The media campaign will begin with distribution of a poster highlighting one finding gathered from the survey: that 95 percent of UCSD students believe that it is wrong to pressure a date into drinking to improve chances of having sex.

"*Perceptions of Rape* is very different from other approaches to sexual violence because the whole idea is to proactively target the development of healthy relationships," Wahlig said. "Other efforts to stop sexual violence have been directed at the victim and how he or she can protect themselves, with the underlying message that it is their fault if a sexual assault occurred." "Our new program aims to step sexual violence before it even peeks on the horizon by promoting healthy relationships," said Wahlig. "We are pleased to be on the cutting edge by using this program to prevent violence."

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