



POLICY 9.29

POSITION POLICY

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

POLICY INTENT

To outline the position of AUSU regarding its commitment to advocating for and supporting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence as it pertains to the post-secondary learning environment, while acknowledging and supporting survivors in their personal and professional lives.

POLICY RESEARCH

As a result of the economic downturn and further exacerbated by the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, there have been increasing incidents of sexual and gender-based violence on a local, provincial, national, and global level.

In particular, sexual and gender-based violence has been escalating¹ in what the UN has deemed a “shadow pandemic.”² In many countries, resources have been diverted from domestic violence support to the COVID-19 effort, despite increased calls to domestic violence hotlines and shelters worldwide, including Canada.

For the purpose of this policy, gender-based violence and sexual-based violence are defined as follows:

Gender-Based Violence includes sexual, physical, mental, and economic harm, as well as threats of violence, coercion, and manipulation, in the public or private sphere. It can include domestic or intimate-partner violence, family violence, sexual violence and harassment, and human trafficking.³

Sexual-Based Violence is a type of gender-based violence in multiple forms, encompassing sexual acts or coerced sexual acts.⁴

Often, when we speak of sexual and gender-based violence awareness as it pertains to post-secondary institutions, we refer to incidents on campus. A 2019 study by Statistics Canada revealed that 71% of Canadian students have witnessed or experienced unwanted sexualized behaviours in a post-secondary on-campus or off-campus setting, while 11% have experienced sexual assault.⁵ In addition, a 2014 Statistics Canada survey revealed that 83% of sexual assault incidents are not reported to authorities.⁶

In Alberta, there are currently no standardized policies to prevent sexual and gender-based violence at universities or colleges.⁷

According to Sadiya Nazir, the former chair of the Council of Alberta Students (CAUS), “[a]cts of sexual violence are unfortunately present on every campus in Alberta.”⁸ A 2020 CAUS Whitepaper on Sexual Violence revealed that “[c]ampus sexual violence (CSV) robs students of an environment to safely and

confidently pursue educational endeavours and enriching experiences,”⁹ with “adverse impact on their academic performance and physical and mental well-being.”¹⁰ As a result, it has called “on the Government of Alberta to better track instances of campus sexual violence, ensure institutions have robust policies and work with institutions to fund campus sexual violence services as well as programs addressing preventative measures.”¹¹

With its online framework, AU differs from traditional brick and mortar post-secondary institutions; many AU students do not attend classes at a physical campus location. Despite this, AU students are not exempt from sexual and gender-based violence in their daily lives—personally and professionally. Students can often face instances of sexual and gender-based violence during practicum placements, co-ops, and undergraduate research opportunities. Increased attention to these conditions have revealed a system of rape culture,¹² underscored by countless individuals coming forward as a result of the #MeToo movement, initially begun by activist Tarana Burke.¹³

When discussing solutions, it is important to take an intersectional approach, first developed by activist and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw.¹⁴ As a framework, intersectionality can be defined as “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.”¹⁵ This means that while students of all backgrounds and socioeconomic levels may be affected, many communities face disproportionate rates of violence, as well as systemic barriers to resources, including the often overlapping BIPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+, immigrant, newcomer, and disabled communities.

In Canada, in particular, the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls¹⁶ has underscored the disproportionate rates of violence faced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, as a result of historical, as well as continued, systemic barriers to housing, education, employment, healthcare, and cultural support.

As a response to rising statistics, the Government of Canada has launched “Courage to Act: Addressing and Preventing Gender-Based Violence on Post-Secondary Campuses,” a two-year project “to address and prevent gender-based violence on post-secondary campuses in Canada.”¹⁷

However, this is not enough. As a start, AUSU supports the 2020 CAUS Whitepaper recommendations, adapted and viewed through the lens of our unique online institution.

- We support that the Government of Alberta assess and measure the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence in Alberta by developing and administering a yearly, institution-specific student survey.¹⁸
- We support that the Government of Alberta “should ensure that all institutions have robust sexual violence policies and procedures by creating a provincial framework in collaboration with campus sexual violence specialists, student representatives, [post-secondary institutions] PSIs, and other key stakeholders.”
- We support that the Government of Alberta “should allocate consistent and adequate funding towards efforts focused specifically on training and prevention of sexual violence” within Alberta’s post-secondary sphere.

- We support that the Government of Alberta “should work with individual PSIs and commit to consistent and sufficient funding for the most appropriate support services dedicated to anyone affected by . . . sexual [and gender-based] violence.”
- We support that the Government of Alberta “should fund the development of online-based training that institutions can use as a baseline to educate their campus staff and faculty on effective and supportive responses to sexual violence disclosures.”

Be it resolved that the Athabasca University Students’ Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) to continue to acknowledge that despite AU’s online framework, students face sexual and gender-based violence in their personal and professional lives.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University to continue to work toward eradicating sexual and gender-based violence on an institutional level by supporting Athabasca University’s Harassment, Violence, and Sexual Violence Policy.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students’ Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) to continue to improve upon and expand their sexual and gender-based violence policies.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students’ Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University (AU) to develop policies for students in practicums, work-integrated learning, undergraduate research, and co-ops to educate students about their rights and foster a safe space for the reporting of incidents.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students’ Union (AUSU) will continue to develop and update its Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Resource List.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will advocate to Athabasca University that AU staff implement culturally-sensitive trauma-informed sexual violence policies, programming, and student supports.

Be it further resolved that the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will continue to work to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence on a provincial level through its work with the Council of Alberta Students (CAUS), calling on the Government of Canada, the Government of Alberta, and other provincial governments to collect more public data on sexual violence and provide more funding to combat sexual violence at post-secondary institutions.

¹ Owen, Brenna. (2020.) Calls to Canadian domestic violence helplines jump during pandemic. CTV News. Retrieved February 24, 2021, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/calls-to-canadian-domestic-violence-helplines-jump-during-pandemic-1.5145983>.

² UN Women. The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>.

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- ³ UNCHR: The UN Refugee Agency. (2021). Gender-based violence. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://www.unhcr.org/gender-based-violence.html>.
- ⁴ United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commission. (2014). Sexual and gender-based violence in the context of transitional justice. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from https://www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/women/wrgs/onepaggers/sexual_and_gender-based_violence.pdf
- ⁵ Statistics Canada. (2019). Students' experiences of unwanted sexualized behaviours and sexual assault at postsecondary schools in the Canadian provinces, 2019. Retrieved January 12, 2021, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00005-eng.htm>.
- ⁶ Council of Alberta University Students. (2020.) CAUS Releases campus sexual violence white paper. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://www.caus.net/news/2020/2/10/caus-releases-campus-sexual-violence-white-paper>.
- ⁷ Kost, Hannah. (2020). Alberta student associations push for standardized sexual violence policies. CBC News. Retrieved March 3, 2021, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/campus-sex-assault-consent-statistics-policy-standardized-alberta-post-secondary-1.5493970>.
- ⁸ Council of Alberta University Students. (2020.) CAUS Releases campus sexual violence white paper. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://www.caus.net/news/2020/2/10/caus-releases-campus-sexual-violence-white-paper>.
- ⁹ Council of Alberta University Students. (2020). Sexual violence on campus. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b95cd14697a9812941dd36f/t/5e3dac89475a525571d360db/1581100176267/CAUS-Sexual+Violence+on+Campus-2020-v3-PRINT-no+crops.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ CAUS. (2020.) CAUS Releases campus sexual violence white paper. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://www.caus.net/news/2020/2/10/caus-releases-campus-sexual-violence-white-paper>.
- ¹² UN Women. (2019.) 16 ways you can stand against rape culture. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/11/compilation-ways-you-can-stand-against-rape-culture>.
- ¹³ Garcia, Sandra. E. (2017). The woman who created #MeToo long before hashtags. The New York Times. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/me-too-movement-tarana-burke.html>.
- ¹⁴ Columbia Journalism Review. (2018). The origin of the term 'intersectionality.' Retrieved February 24, 2021, from https://www.cjr.org/language_corner/intersectionality.php.
- ¹⁵ Merriam-Webster. Intersectionality. Retrieved February 24, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality>.
- ¹⁶ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>.
- ¹⁷ Possibility Seeds. (2021). Courage to Act. Retrieved March 1, 2021, from <https://www.possibilityseeds.ca/couragetoact>.
- ¹⁸ Council of Alberta University Students. (2020). Sexual violence on campus. Retrieved March 1,, 2021, from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b95cd14697a9812941dd36f/t/5e3dac89475a525571d360db/1581100176267/CAUS-Sexual+Violence+on+Campus-2020-v3-PRINT-no+crops.pdf>.