

Syracuse University Senate Committee on Student Life
2016-2017 Academic Year: Report 1
October 19th, 2016

“There shall be a Committee on Student Life. The committee shall concern itself with the aspects of student life. It shall consider such matters as campus activities and organizations, health and recreation, advising and counseling, and university environment and living conditions. The Committee shall also serve as a liaison between students and the Senate, Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, and other administrative offices of the University. It shall advise and consult regularly with the Vice President for Student Affairs”.

(From the Bylaws of the Senate of Syracuse University, Article V. Standing Committees, Section 6, as amended during the 2011-2012 session of the University Senate)

The Student Life Committee met at the beginning of the Fall 2015 semester with Rebecca Kantrowitz, Senior Vice President and Dean of the Division of Student Affairs; Aysha Seedat, President of the Student Association; Can Aslan, President of the Graduate Student Organization; and Nedda Sarshar, President of the Residence Hall Association. This meeting provided the committee with a general idea of the issues that relate to student life, and after some discussion, three issues were selected to be the committee’s main focus throughout the academic year. These 3 topics are: student safety with a focus on off-campus life, graduate student support & career services, and alcohol consumption & sexual assault.

In this report, the committee will be presenting its findings on alcohol consumption among students and sexual assault.

On March 2016, the committee met with Pamela Peter; Assistant Dean of the Division of Student Affairs and Director of the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities; Justina DeMott, Associate Director of the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs; Cory Wallack, Director of the Counseling Center; and Samantha Skaller, an SU junior and member of the national “It’s on Us” campaign. Discussion on the meeting were on the topic of this report.

Alcohol consumption among Syracuse University students is on the rise, and with it, the number of alcohol intoxications. Indeed, as of early March, the number of students that were transported to the hospital because of alcohol intoxication ranged somewhere in the high 200s, with an average of 10-12 transports weekly. To put in on perspective, with over 2 months left of classes, this number approached the total number of transports that were reported in the full 2014-2015 academic year.

This behavior among students is a dangerous one and it must be dealt with promptly, as the health and safety of the students is being compromised. For example, on Fall 2015, among the

individuals that were transported because of alcohol intoxication there was a student that had an alcohol blood level of .37% and others with alcohol blood level well above .30%. As reported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (2015), alcohol blood levels above .30% are life threatening due to poisoning or the suppression of vital organs function.

It has been noted that when student go out to party, they leave their residence already with mild alcohol intoxication symptoms.

This issue of alcohol consumption may be explained by the strong alcohol centered culture the university possesses. Students that do not identify with this culture do not find others likeminded and are sucked into the alcohol culture. Moreover, that same alcohol centered culture as well as the social centered culture is what promotes high school students with the same mentality regarding alcohol to apply to the university. This information has been gathered in questionnaires like the "Think About It", and indeed, there are students that have reported that they had alcohol abuse problems before coming to campus.

Syracuse University must commit to the students and their health and safety. Previously, the university has opposed to the creation of a city ordinances that would hold landlord responsible for the behavior of their tenants. This initiative has seen a significant reduction on parties and alcohol abuse in the college cities it has been implemented, as landlords would have to prohibit their tenants to host parties on their properties and they would reserve their rights to terminate the lease contract if the tenants do not follow the lease agreement. This initiative was expected to be very successful in Syracuse, as unlike the common misconception, most parties occur on off-campus properties and not in Fraternity houses, as these have to follow strict rules set by the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs. Moreover, Syracuse City passed an ordinance where it prohibits the consumption of alcohol in public parking lots, and Syracuse University did not join the effort and still allows alcohol consumption in university events and properties.

It is also worth noting that alcohol is involved in the majority of the cases of sexual assault that are reported in Syracuse University. However, a major problem regarding sexual assault, is that not many of the assaults are actually reported. In our campus, sexual assault, which can be anything from an unwanted hug to rape, is well above the 3 digit mark, even though just a fraction of these are reported. A major problem that induces the avoidance of reporting assaults is the lack of knowledge from the victim's part. If the victim of sexual assault doesn't know how their privacy will be handled when they come forward, victims are more likely to not report in order to avoid any further dissemination of their assault.

Thus, awareness of the victim's rights and the handling protocol for sexual assault cases by the general campus community is the first step in increasing the number of assaults that will be reported. This will increase the likelihood of assaulters being held responsible for their actions. On the number of assaults that happen in our community, awareness of the repercussions as well as knowledge of the university's strong commitment to held assaulters accountable by the

general campus community is expected to decrease the number of assaults that occur. The university as an institution must make a strong stand against this kind of behavior, making clear that assaulters will indeed be held accountable.

The pressing importance of this issue led to the committee to submit the information gathered without concrete recommendations. These will follow.

For more information regarding drinking in SU, see the Daily Orange and SU's Department of Newspaper and Online Journalism special report: <http://dailyorange.com/2016/04/see-the-results-of-a-survey-on-alcohol-use-taken-by-syracuse-university-students/>. Collaboration's full project "A Sobering Reality" can be found at: <http://dailyorange.com/tags/a-sobering-reality>.

Submitted by the University Senate Committee on Student Life on October 19th 2016.