

Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at Virginia Tech

2020-21 Annual Report

February 2022

Dear Community:

This report aims to share information with the community about sexual harassment and violence at Virginia Tech in a way that is helpful and transparent. In it, you will find aggregate data about the kinds of incidents that were reported to university officials, how the university responded to those reports, and the services provided to students at Virginia Tech. Also in this report, you will find insight into trends observed during the year, and the unique impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic and changing Title IX rules have had on our campus.

I also hope that this report will offer some insight into the experiences of Virginia Tech students. I encourage report readers to be curious about what exists in our university culture that allows sexual harassment and violence to persist and the changes we need to make to root it out.

The [Office for Equity and Accessibility](#) remains committed to ensuring that Virginia Tech is a safe and inclusive environment, and is working toward a campus free from gender-based violence. As always, we do not do this work alone—this report reflects the commitment and dedication of partners across the university. Only in partnership- with faculty, staff, and students—can we begin to fully address this issue.

Take good care,

Katie Polidoro
Title IX Coordinator

Executive Summary

On August 14, 2020, new Title IX regulations went into effect and the university implemented [Policy 1026](#), Policy on Title IX Sexual Harassment and Responsible Employee Reporting (Policy 1026). With these new regulations came several changes, including a new limited definition of the kinds of experiences that fall under Title IX, and the steps the university must follow when responding to reports of sexual harassment and violence. Under these new rules, only experiences of harassment or violence that occur within the United States, on Virginia Tech's campus, or during its programs or activities or at a location controlled by an officially recognized student organization fall into the scope of Title IX and Policy 1026. Entering into this new framework, the university held onto three guiding principles:

- **Sexual harassment and violence cause significant disruption in the lives of those who experience it. Those in our community that experience sexual harassment deserve our support to ensure that they are cared for and that their academic hopes and goals are not derailed, no matter where the sexual harassment or violence occurred.**
- **Accountability matters. The university will continue to address conduct by our students and employees that constitutes sexual harassment and violence, whether it occurs on or off campus.**
- **Fairness and respect are paramount. In all cases, the process used to resolve complaints will be equitable and all parties will be treated with compassion and respect.**

This report includes information about all incidents of sexual harassment and violence reported to the university, both Title IX sexual harassment and violence, and incidents that fall outside of Title IX but are still addressed by Virginia Tech's [Student Code of Conduct](#). It also shares information

about the ways that the university assisted and supported students who experienced harassment and violence, and the effectiveness of that support.

Overall Reports

[Click Here for Fact Sheet](#)

The Office for Equity and Accessibility (OEA) received all official reports of sexual violence and harassment regarding students. Reports are received in two primary ways: students may report directly to the office by phone, email, or via an online form; or responsible employees (most Virginia Tech employees with the exception of confidential resources such as Virginia Tech's Women's Center, Cook Counseling Center, Schiffert Health Center, and the Graduate and University Ombuds offices) are required to share information with the Title IX Coordinator whenever they receive a disclosure from a student regarding sexual harassment and violence. This latter category, third party reports by responsible employees, accounts for most of the reports made. Whenever that occurs, OEA staff actively reach out to the impacted student to offer information, support measures, and reporting options.

During the 2020-21 academic year, OEA received 298 reports regarding students who experienced some form of sexual harassment or violence. This represents a 19 percent increase in overall reports from the 249 reports received in the prior academic year. These reports represented a broad range of incidents, with sexual harassment reports (153 reports) being the most common. Notably, this is the second consecutive year that reports of sexual harassment have been

most frequent. Prior to 2019, reports of sexual assault were the most common reports.

OEA also received 108 reports of sexual assault, 21 reports concerning stalking, and 16 reports of intimate partner violence. Of the reports OEA received, 126 involved conduct that occurred on campus—88 incidents of sexual harassment, 25 incidents of sexual assault, and five incidents of intimate partner violence. Eight incidents of stalking were reported to involve on campus conduct. Most often, those incidents (98 incidents) occurred in residential spaces.

Statistically, the highest risk time for sexual harassment and violence to occur on college campuses is during the "Red Zone," the time period spanning the beginning of the fall semester to Thanksgiving break. Sixty-two of the reported cases this year occurred between September, October, and November of 2020. However, it is important to note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Virginia Tech's Blacksburg campus transitioned to remote learning after the 2020 Thanksgiving break. Another notable rise in occurrences happened mid-spring semester with 22 incidents occurred in March 2021. Still, in many cases, students chose to share limited information about their experiences, resulting in a lack of information about when they were harmed. In 111 cases, no information is available about when the incident happened.

Services and Support Measures

Sexual harassment and violence have deep impacts on those who experience them, and threaten to derail students' academic goals. Offering support measures is an important step in disrupting that negative impact. Title IX staff reached out to all students who were reported to have experienced sexual harassment or violence to offer resources, support measures, and options for filing formal complaints. While some (54) students chose not to respond to outreach, the vast majority (244) had some meaningful contact with office staff. OEA provided support measures to 118 students during the academic year. Those measures are provided whether or not an individual opted to file a formal complaint or participate in a university investigation. Most commonly, those support measures consisted of no contact letters, academic assistance and, housing relocations. While 96 percent of the students who had meaningful contact with office staff either continued on to their next semester or graduated, slightly more students (98 percent) who accepted support measures continued onto the next semester or graduated from Virginia Tech.

Formal Complaints and Investigations

As noted earlier, in August 2020, federal regulations related to Title IX, and therefore Virginia Tech's policies, were changed. One of those changes limited the types of cases that fall under Title IX to include those that:

- Occur within the United States;

- Occur on campus, at Virginia Tech programs and events that occur off campus, or at off campus locations that are controlled by officially recognized student organizations; and
- Meet the following definitions:
 - Demands from university employees for sexual activity in exchange for access to or benefit from academic programs.
 - Sexual harassment so severe, persistent, and objectively offensive that it interferes with access to academic programs.
 - Sexual assault, stalking, and intimate partner violence.

In addressing complaints that fall under the new Title IX definitions, the university uses a grievance procedure outlined in Policy 1026. Perhaps the most differentiating part of that process is the university's obligation to allow direct questioning of each party and witness by a party's chosen advisor.

As an expression of Virginia Tech's commitment to addressing sexual harassment and violence, no matter where it occurs, the university has chosen to pursue complaints that fall outside the Title IX policies through the Student Code of Conduct. In partnership with the Office for Student Conduct, and to ensure that the burden of investigating and navigating these difficult matters does not fall onto students themselves, OEA staff performs investigations on behalf of Student Conduct in these matters.

The decision to file a formal complaint is deeply personal. Whenever possible the university respects students' decisions about whether or not to pursue an investigation. Similar to the previous academic year, during 2020-2021, there was a decline in the number of students pursuing formal complaints and investigations. Of the students who engaged with OEA and Student Conduct, 34 wished to pursue formal complaints. Seventeen fell under the Title IX Grievance Procedures as outlined in Policy 1026 and 17 were resolved through the Student Code of Conduct. Of those investigations, three were closed because the respondent was dismissed from the university related to other conduct matters, one was resolved informally, and 31 were resolved through a formal hearing in student conduct.

Fourteen of the adjudicated cases were Title IX matters. In seven of those cases, the respondent was found responsible and sanctioned. The resulting sanctions included three dismissals, three suspensions, and one probation. These cases represented the full spectrum of Title matters, from verbal sexual harassment to physical sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking. In the remaining seven cases, a not responsible finding was made.

Sixteen of the adjudicated cases fell outside of the Title IX policies and were resolved through the Student Code of Conduct. At the request of the Office for Student Conduct, OEA investigated these matters. In nine cases, the respondent was found responsible

for gender-based harassment or violence policy violations. The most common sanction (eight cases) was suspension for multiple semesters. In one matter, the respondent was dismissed from the university. In the remaining seven cases, the respondent was not found responsible for any policy violation.

Trends in Reporting and Investigations

A clear trend in cases during the 2020-21 academic year was the decline in requests for formal investigations, despite an overall increase in reporting. It is difficult to distinguish the reason for this decline, though it is likely due to a variety of factors. First, as students continued to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, many spoke about struggling with their general well-being and feelings of disengagement. These impacts may have made it less likely for students to engage in a potentially difficult investigation process. Second, as required by federal regulations governing Title IX, Virginia Tech was required to adopt a new grievance process to resolve complaints that met the definition of Title IX sexual harassment. It may be that when faced with an unfamiliar process, more students chose not to pursue formal complaints.

Another identifiable trend during the academic year was a rise in the number of incidents that occurred on campus—107 incidents occurred in residential spaces on campus and another 33 occurred elsewhere on campus. Sixty-nine incidents were reported to have occurred off campus, 31

happened electronically by computer or phone. In 60 reports, the location was not reported. The concentration of incidents occurring in residence halls reflects the social distancing required of students during the pandemic. With the majority of their social interactions occurring at home and within pods, and students venturing off campus less frequently, this year saw more interpersonal conflicts, including sexual harassment and violence occur in those spaces.

Working with the Community

Sexual harassment and violence impact our community on all levels. At the center of this work is transparency, community engagement, and the always ongoing effort to do better.

Conclusion

The information in this report reflects the shared responsibility of many departments and individuals across the university to respond to and address sexual harassment and violence at Virginia Tech. Understanding violence and its impacts on our community is long-term work that requires partnership among all community members, faculty, staff, and students alike. We each play a role in building a culture that is safer, more inclusive, and accessible to all.

More information about the ways the university works to promote a safe and equitable culture can be found in the Office for Equity and Accessibility's Annual Report, which includes information about matters involving employees, and in the Virginia Tech Police Department's [Annual Jeanne Clery Act Security Report](#). To find out about making reports of sexual violence and harassment, or ways to get involved, visit www.stopabuse.vt.edu.

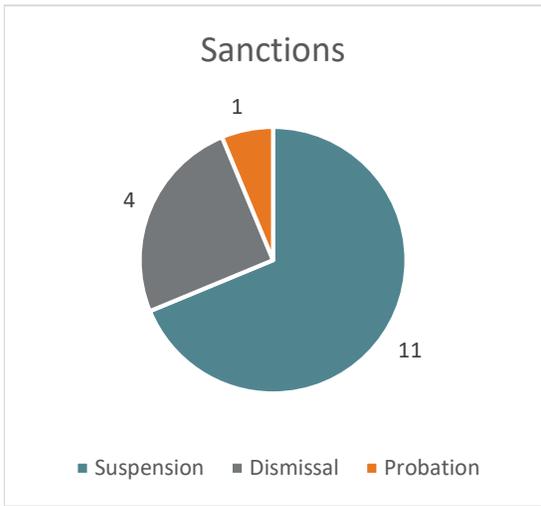
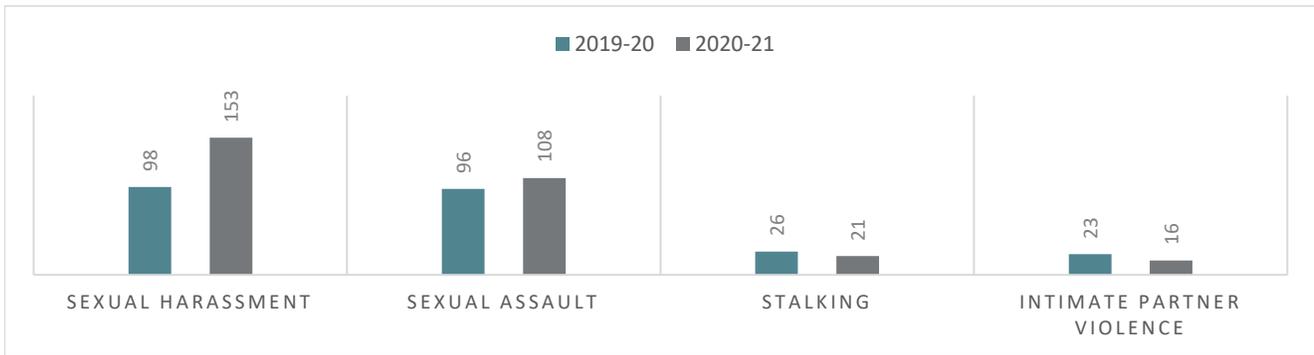
Throughout the year, the university's Student Title IX Advisory Group met to discuss student perspectives and provide feedback on how sexual harassment and violence is addressed at Virginia Tech. Among the work done by that group was:

- Improving communication about how harassment and violence is handled on campus.
- Improving awareness and access to resources, particularly for underserved student populations.
- Providing feedback on prevention education initiatives and campaigns.
- Planning and co-hosting student driven virtual prevention education events.

Sexual Harassment and Violence Fact Sheet

298

The Office for Equity and Accessibility received 298 reports of gender based harassment and violence involving students. We received 153 reports of sexual harassment, 108 reports of sexual assault, 21 reports of stalking, and 16 reports of intimate partner violence.



Title IX at VT

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities by the university. Failing to respond to sexual harassment, which includes acts of sexual violence, meaningfully and with equity, is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX.

For more information on Title IX and Virginia Tech's policies, visit oea.vt.edu or stopabuse.vt.edu. If you want to learn more about your rights, or believe the university is violating Title IX, you may contact the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights at 800-421-3481 or visit www.ed.gov.

Of the reports that resulted in formal complaints and investigations, a student was found responsible for gender-based harassment or violence in 16 cases. In fourteen cases, the respondent was found not responsible, and in three cases the respondent was found in violation of a non-gender-based student conduct policy. Suspension was the most common sanction and four students were dismissed from the university.

To find out more information about filing a report of sexual harassment with the university visit www.stopabuse.vt.edu or contact:

Katie Reardon Polidoro

Title IX Coordinator
Office for Equity and Accessibility
polidoro@vt.edu
540-231-1824

Harrison Blythe

Deputy Title IX Coordinator for Employees
Office for Equity and Accessibility
hblythe@vt.edu
540-231-0448

University Resources

Virginia Tech Police Department

540-382-4343
Emergencies: 911

Dean of Students Office

540-231-3787

Virginia Tech Women's Center*

540-231-7806

Cook Counseling Center*

540-231-6557

Community Resources

*Confidential Resources

Blacksburg Police Department

540-961-1150

Emergencies: 911

Carilion Medical Center (Radford)

540-731-2000

(also provides forensic evidence collection)

Women's Resource Center of the New

River Valley

540-639-1123

LewisGale Hospital at Montgomery

540-953-5133