

EDITORIAL

by Allan Carter

As the first term quickly comes to a close, students are preoccupied with mid-terms, essays and the thoughts of a nice long Christmas break. But while we are rushing around trying to complete our academic commitments, it would be wise not to overlook the recent survey of unwanted sexual experiences which was conducted last fall by counseling services at UNB and STU.

There has been a large amount of statistical information collected in the United States about unwanted sexual experiences, but there has been very little in Canada. I can remember reading an article about a year ago which dealt with this subject. While the article was written for the Canadian public, most of the statistics contained information which was collected through university surveys completed in the United States. Lack of concrete information about unwanted sexual experiences on Canadian universities makes it difficult to raise awareness about the problem and it also stifles any discussion on the subject.

Nevertheless, such an obstacle has not prevented various organizations from holding awareness campaigns in order to expose the problem and make people think about it. But because UNB and STU took the initiative to survey their own communities, the UNB Student Union was able to make this year's Date Rape Awareness Campaign more effective than in previous years. Instead of only publishing general statistics about sexual assault, the Union was able to bring the issue closer to home with the help of results of the survey which were just released last Thursday. And some of the results are disturbing.

With a return of 447 questionnaires out of the 1,454 which were sent out last fall, it was discovered that 28.6% of these students reported having at least one unwanted sexual experience during the past year and 17.1% of female students reported experiencing rape or attempted rape in the previous year. Further, 92.8% of surveyors knew the aggressor, and 68.8% of the aggressors and 48.4% of the survivors involved had been drinking or taking drugs.

Of course, these statistics only make up a small fraction of what was discovered. But in just only a few statistics, it is obvious that the university community needs to immediately reevaluate how it deals with unwanted sexual experiences. In other words, the university must take an honest in-depth look at what services it is offering or supporting in helping the victims of such experiences. In addition, counseling services for the aggressors should be provided and a charge or penalty for such behavior must be established.

The survey points out that while the Student Disciplinary Code for UNB deals with offenses such as theft, assault and damage to property, there is no mention of sexual assault or aggression. The survey recommends that policies and programs should be reviewed and established so sexual aggression is clearly defined. Indeed, this is a valid point given that the university made it very clear only about a year ago that sexual harassment would not be taken lightly and would be dealt with accordingly by implementing a sexual harassment policy. Such a policy ensures the university that everybody is made aware that such conduct will not be tolerated. In the same manner, a policy dealing with sexual assault and aggression needs to be implemented to ensure that it is officially clear that the university will also not tolerate sexual assault or aggression.

The report further recommends better co-ordination of programs to deal with unwanted sexual experiences. The report recognizes that such programs have "been carried out by differing groups, largely independently of each other." It could be argued that one concern which could be raised with such various groups performing similar programs, is that services may be unnecessarily overlapped. The report believes that if an administrative position or body was created to be responsible for such matters then co-ordination and accountability would be ensured.

The university administration's response to the survey has been very positive. UNB president Robin Armstrong claims that the university will move quickly on the report. He expresses just how important it is to

have concrete information when he says: "now that we have reliable data on UNB, we intend to take action promptly to improve the situation." It is unfortunate, however, that such data has been so long in coming.

But the report's recommendations are only one aspect of the report. Considering the above mentioned statistics, students in general, the Student Union and other concerned individuals and organizations need to discuss the findings. While the university plans to form a task force to look into the report's recommendations, the community in general must consider the findings and come to their own separate conclusions.

For instance, the figure stating that 63.6% of the aggressors and 48.4% of the survivors involved in unwanted sexual experiences had been drinking or taking drugs challenges the effectiveness of the alcohol awareness programs. Are these programs promoting enough awareness in this specific area? Moreover, the figures indicate that while various groups lobby for more lighting on campus and tighter security, it is obvious that in a good number of cases the victims of sexual assault know their aggressors. Perhaps these lobbying groups also need to stress a greater awareness among students through various venues, such as public lectures, residence tours and open forums.

Thus, one hopes that this report will encourage the university to act promptly on dealing with sexual assault and aggression on campus. However, while the administration is taking steps to begin this process, the Student Union, students and other members of the university community should analyze what can be done with already existing programs and where new measures can be taken to tackle this problem effectively.

In last week's issue, Nick Oliver made a few comments in his entertainment column about Tibbits Hall which should never have been printed. *The Brunswickan* sincerely apologizes for this error and we regret any offense which those comments caused.



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The Brunswickan
Student Union Building
University of New Brunswick
P.O. Box 4400
E3B 5A3
Phone: (506) 453-4983
Fax: (506) 453-4958

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