

## **An Open Letter on the *Final Report of the Presidential and Provostial Committee on Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence***

In November 2014, following a series of high-profile incidents of sexual violence across college and university campuses and students demanding institutional change, the *Presidential and Provostial Committee on the Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence* (“the Committee”) was formed, with the task of creating recommendations on preventing and responding to sexual violence at the University of Toronto. The Committee released its Final Report (“the Report”) on February 2, 2016. On April 5, 2016 the President and Provost released their Administrative Response (“the Response”) to the Committee’s Report, endorsing the Report’s principles and accepting the Committee’s recommendations in full.

While we, the undersigned campus groups and organizations, recognize the efforts of the University of Toronto Administration to begin addressing sexual violence on campus, we remain concerned about the Committee process and Report. In particular, we remain concerned about:

- The Committee’s failure to meaningfully engage with marginalized communities;
- The absence of a broad-based approach to the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence at the University;
- The limited scope and analysis of the Report; and
- The lack of institutional resources dedicated to implement holistic recommendations to support students, as well as staff and faculty at the University.

### ***Failure to Meaningfully Engage Marginalized Students***

Sexual and gender-based violence exists and has gone unaddressed on our campuses and in our communities. In order to ensure that all students are supported, we centre the experiences of communities within the University that are disproportionately impacted by sexual and gender-based violence, including indigenous, Black, racialized, Muslim, queer, trans, disabled, and low-income communities. Members of these communities face particular social and institutional barriers of access and experience disproportionate levels of sexual violence.

The Committee’s failure to meaningfully engage and therefore address the needs of marginalized students is demonstrated in the voices and experiences that were included and those that were tokenized or excluded throughout the Committee process. Initially, only two students were granted space to serve on the Committee - one undergraduate, one graduate - both of whom were not specifically involved with anti-sexual violence organizing on campus. At the same time, the Committee rejected applications of interest to sit on the Committee from students who were actively working on the issue of sexual violence.

In its report, the Committee has listed a series of campus groups that were invited to the focus groups that were organized and conducted by the Committee, or to respond to the online survey it had created. However, a majority of these groups did not participate in the process. Many groups listed as having been consulted had submitted meaningful recommendations to the Committee but their contributions were omitted from the Report.

The demographics of the focus groups also exemplify this critical underrepresentation for students who identify as First Nations, Metis and Inuit, trans, and/or as disabled. The majority of participants in focus groups identified as white. While the Report identifies the need to define sexual violence and to root programs and services in the “principles of equity and inclusion”, nowhere does it address the intersectional experiences of students who also face the violence of racism, queerphobia, classism, sexism, transphobia, ableism, ageism and settler colonialism. Naming and addressing these forms of discrimination in relation to sexual violence is key to supporting all students.

### ***Absence of Broad-based Approach to the Elimination of Sexual Violence***

Along with the failure to take an intersectional approach to sexual violence, the Committee fails to contemplate rape culture and gender-based violence in its Report, demonstrating a lack of comprehensive analysis of the issue of sexual violence. Without meaningfully addressing rape culture, we cannot address the underlying attitudes and beliefs that underpin sexual violence, allow for its normalization and the myriad of ways in which sexual violence manifests.

Throughout its Report, the Committee places the onus and responsibility onto students who experience sexual violence to seek supports and resources, erasing the power dynamics and institutional barriers faced by survivors. The Report focuses on mechanisms for reporting rather than addressing the need for institutional supports and resources for survivors. The Committee fails to articulate the need for the University of Toronto Administration to dedicate funding towards anti-sexual violence initiatives. Most importantly, the Report fails to acknowledge the University's complicity in upholding and reproducing the barriers that survivors face. Instead, the Committee suggests conducting a campus climate survey to understand the needs of the University community but does not explain what such a survey may look like or how and by whom the climate survey will be evaluated. The Committee also recommends University-wide education and training on consent, but there is no mention of this training being mandatory for all students, staff, faculty and administrators. Any training and education offered must address rape culture, gender-based violence, and anti-oppression. Sexual violence is a systemic issue and the University must institute survivor-informed processes that do not individualize experiences.

### ***Limited Scope and Analysis***

The Report does not consider the academic and non-academic impacts of sexual violence on students and the wide range of supports that they may need. Students may require academic accommodations, changes to their housing, emergency funds, access to anti-oppressive and trauma-based counselling and/or mental health resources that fit their specific needs, crisis support, and more. We must also address and respect the choices made by students as to whether or not they wish to pursue formal reporting (including to the police), or to file any type of formal complaint within the University. A holistic approach for survivors centres their experiences.

The Report also seems to have considered only instances where sexual violence occurs between students or violence that takes place on the university campus. It is critical to recognize that violence takes place in many ways in campus communities, including between faculty, staff, administration and students. Students may also experience sexual violence off-campus or prior to their time at the University, and this can have a significant impact on their academic and campus lives. University policy must account for these forms of violence and ensure students have access to support regardless of the context in which they experienced sexual violence.

While the Report references current protocols and policies in place, there is no clarity around centralized mechanisms for survivors. There continues to be an absence of clear communication to students as to the resources and mechanisms available to support them in coming forward to share their experiences and access support. The Report neither clarifies how existing protocols and policies will be impacted by a new policy on sexual violence, nor the jurisdiction and role of existing resources and offices (including, but not limited to current policies, the Code of Student Conduct, Community Safety Office, Status of Women Office, Counselling and Psychological Services, Campus Police). Addressing sexual violence on campus requires a systematic review of existing resources. In order to assess the value of current resources and to identify gaps, the Committee must regularly consult with campus communities that are disproportionately impacted by sexual and gender-based violence to inform what is needed and how to improve supports.

### ***Implementation of Recommendations***

Another significant gap in the work of the Committee is identifying a plan of action to implement the recommendations highlighted in the Report. First and foremost, no new resources or funding are identified in the Report or the work of the Committee to assist with improving outreach to and supports for survivors and general members of the University community. The President and Provost's Response to the Report only designates individuals to spearhead the implementation of the Committee's recommendations. There remains uncertainty about what a campus climate survey will look like and how results from such a survey will be assessed. The Report and the President and Provost's Response both highlight the creation of a tri-campus anti-sexual violence centre but do not provide any information about how one centre will be able to address the unique needs of all three campuses. Existing resources and offices with a tri-campus mandate including the Anti-racism and Cultural Diversity Office, Sexual and Gender Diversity Office, and Status of Women Office are under-resourced and underfunded by the central administration. This leaves students at the Mississauga and Scarborough campuses underserved.

In addition to allocating dedicated funding for an anti-sexual violence centre, a concrete action plan is also needed for training and educating students, staff, faculty, and administrators on consent, anti-sexual violence strategies and initiatives, and anti-oppression. This will help address the distinct and diverse realities of sexual violence as experienced by racialized, indigenous, queer, trans, disabled, low-income, mature, part-time, and women students.

Students, staff and faculty need support on the issue of sexual violence on an ongoing basis. The Committee needs to engage in an assessment of immediate short-term, as well as long-term measures that can be implemented to support members of the University community. It also must focus on improving the consultation process to address the needs of marginalized students, eradicate tokenization, and to allow meaningful participation from all members of the University community.

### ***Moving Forward with a Community-based Approach***

Students have a right to be safe on campus and the University Administration has a responsibility to provide a safe environment for teaching and learning. In order to have a truly representative and community-based approach to responding to sexual violence, we the undersigned campus groups, call on the University Administration to create a working group that includes representatives from a variety of student-led organizations, including student unions, clubs, and equity service groups, to consult on the creation, implementation, and ongoing review of the University of Toronto's sexual violence policy, and institutional resources for survivors of sexual violence.

The undersigned,

Aboriginal Studies' Students Union (ABSSU)  
Afghan Students' Association (ASA)  
Association of Part-time Undergraduate Students of the University of Toronto (APUS)  
Black Students' Association (BSA)  
Centre for Women and Trans People at the University of Toronto (CWTP)  
Filipino Canadian Youth Alliance / Ugnayan ng Kabataang Pilipino sa Canada (FCYA/UKPC-ON)  
Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Trans People of the University of Toronto (LGBTOUT)  
Scarborough Campus Students' Union (SCSU)  
Students for Barrier-free Access (SBA)  
Social Justice Education Student Caucus  
University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union (UTMSU)  
University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union (UTGSU)  
Woodsworth Inclusive (WINC)