

Boston University Student Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Survey

Executive Summary

Boston University is committed to ensuring **all** students can engage in a learning, living, and working environment that fosters mutual respect. Recognizing the need to collect comprehensive information on the experiences and perceptions of its student body regarding sexual and gender-based harassment and misconduct, Boston University contracted with Rankin Climate, LLC to conduct an anonymous survey of students focused on sexual harassment and gender-based misconduct in the spring of 2024. This information will serve as a foundation to build on the University's strengths and focus on growth opportunities. A random sample of 10% of the undergraduate and graduate student populations was selected and recruited to complete the survey. Approximately **50% of the Boston University student sample responded to the survey** invitation, including 48% of undergraduate students and 51% of graduate students in the sample. The undergraduate and graduate student samples each closely match the Boston University student populations regarding race, ethnicity, international status, program, year at the University, and age.¹

National Context

Sexual misconduct experienced by students, faculty, and staff at U.S. institutions of higher education has been the subject of intense attention in recent years. In January 2014, responding to calls for state and federal action, former U.S. President Barack Obama established the White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault. This Task Force released its first report, *Not Alone*, in April 2014. In their report, the Task Force recommended actions that should be taken by college and university communities, specifically campus administrations, regarding campus sexual assault. These recommendations included campus climate surveys to identify prevalence and perceptions related to campus sexual assault (White House Task Force, 2014). Specifically, "The first step in solving a problem is to name it and know the extent of it – and a campus climate survey is the best way to do that" (White House Task Force, 2014, p. 2).

The national discourse has broadened since the White House Task Force was established and released their 2014 report. Research on student experiences with sexual misconduct reveals a high prevalence of various forms of harassment and violence on college campuses. Rankin Climate has conducted past campus sexual misconduct climate

¹ See the Endnote: Figure Two, Page 6 for demographic information.

assessments² using a similar survey instrument and measured the average sexual and gender-based misconduct incidence rates at research-intensive U.S. universities included in the following table. Rankin Climate worked with the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education to develop this survey, which complies with the Commonwealth mandate for institutions of higher education to assess their campus sexual misconduct climate. Rates for image-based exploitation are not available for comparison.

Key Definitions

Campus Climate - The current attitudes and behaviors of faculty, staff, administrators, and students, as well as institutional policies and procedures, which influence the level of respect for individual needs, abilities, and potential.

Gender Identity - A person's inner sense of being man, woman, both, or neither. Gender identity may or may not be expressed outwardly and may or may not correspond to one's physical characteristics.

Image-Based Exploitation - The creation, threatened, or actual distribution, or any use of sexualized or sexually explicit materials without the consent of the person depicted.

Incidence Rate - The estimated percentage of a given campus population who experienced a form of sexual or gender-based misconduct between the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year and the time of survey response.

Intimate Partner Violence - Violence that occurs between any hook-up, boyfriend, girlfriend, intimate partner, spouse, husband, or wife, including exes, that excludes playing or joking.

Rape - Any act of vaginal or anal penetration, however slight, with any body part or object, or oral-genital contact of another person, without consent. Sexual assault encompasses rape, attempted rape, and unwanted sexual contact.

Sexist Hostility - Demeaning jokes or comments about sex or gender, comments that people of a given sex or gender do not belong in leadership positions or are not smart enough to succeed in a scientific career, and sabotaging people of a given sex or gender.

Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment - Verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature when this conduct affects an individual's education or employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's educational or work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational or work environment.

Sexual Violence - Nonconsensual sexual contact committed through verbal pressure, threats, physical force, or incapacitation.

² Rankin Climate worked with the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education in modifying the ARC3 survey instrument in accordance with the MA 2021 Campus Sexual Assault Law (M.G.L. c. 6 § 168E (q)) requiring institutions to report annually on campus sexual misconduct incidents.

Stalking - A course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to fear for their safety or the safety of others or suffer substantial emotional distress.

Results

Figure One: National Benchmarks for Campus Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct Incidence with Boston University Incidence						
	Undergraduate Students			Graduate Students		
	Men	Women	Non-Binary/Transgender	Men	Women	Non-Binary/Transgender
Sexual or Gender-Based Harassment						
National Benchmarks	15%	23%	33%	9%	18%	25%
<i>Boston University</i>	10%	18%	44%	9%	14%	29%
Stalking						
National Benchmarks	15%	22%	26%	3%	11%	8%
<i>Boston University</i>	13%	25%	40%	8%	14%	33%
Intimate Partner Violence						
National Benchmarks	16%	25%	32%	8%	16%	13%
<i>Boston University</i>	6%	12%	24%	7%	8%	21%
Sexual Violence						
National Benchmarks	16%	33%	42%	7%	14%	4%
<i>Boston University</i>	4%	20%	12%	1%	6%	17%

Key Findings by Population

Undergraduate Students

- Women and non-binary/transgender³ undergraduate students who responded to the survey were more likely to indicate experiencing sexual or gender-based harassment, stalking, and intimate partner violence compared with men who responded.
- Non-binary/transgender undergraduate students who responded to the survey were more likely to report sexual or gender-based harassment compared with

³ Gender non-binary, non-conforming, and transgender student participants are combined in this report to protect student confidentiality while ensuring their voices are included in these results.

women.

- Women undergraduate students who responded to the survey were more likely to report sexual violence compared to men who responded.
- Undergraduate students generally agreed that they knew about the confidential offices/resources at BU they could speak with about an incident (74%),⁴ that they could initiate a formal complaint process (71%), and where to go to get information, support, and help for sexual or gender-based misconduct on BU's campus (65%).

Graduate Students

- Women and non-binary graduate students who responded to the survey were significantly⁵ more likely to experience sexual or gender-based harassment, stalking, and sexual violence compared with men who responded.
- Non-binary/transgender students who responded to the survey were more likely to report sexual or gender-based harassment, stalking, and sexual violence than women who responded.
- Non-binary/transgender graduate students who responded to the survey were more likely to report that they had experienced intimate partner violence than women and men who responded.
- Graduate students generally agreed that they knew they could initiate a formal complaint process at BU (79%) and that they were aware of confidential offices and resources (77%) where they could speak with someone about experiences of sexual and gender-based misconduct.

All Students

- Of the students who indicated they had experienced sexual or gender-based harassment by a BU employee since they enrolled:
 - 81% of undergraduate students and 71% of graduate students indicated that the misconduct was perpetrated by a faculty member.
 - Most indicated the experience included sexist harassment, which includes displays of sexist or gender-biased language or imagery.
 - 72% perceived that their gender identity played a role in the experience.

⁴ Selected either "agree" or "strongly agree".

⁵ Interpretations of significance in this report specifically indicate statistical significance, where the estimated probability of no difference between values is compared to an acceptable level of uncertainty regarding the true value of that difference.

- Between 10% and 20% of undergraduate and graduate students who experienced sexual or gender-based misconduct indicated that they disclosed their experience to a Boston University representative.
- Student responses demonstrated a strong understanding of consent in sexual situations, with >90% of students endorsing consent across situations.
- Most students understand which BU offices they can go to for sexual and gender-based misconduct resources and reporting. Students had the greatest awareness of:
 - Student Health Services (98% overall awareness).
 - Sexual Assault Response and Prevention Center (93% overall awareness).
 - Equal Opportunity/Title IX Office (83% overall awareness).

Endnotes

Figure Two: Number of Boston University Students in the Survey Sample						
	Undergraduate Students			Graduate Students		
	Men	Women	Non-Binary/ Transgender	Men	Women	Non-Binary/ Transgender
Student Participants (Percentage of Students)	294 (40%)	415 (56%)	27 (4%)	289 (38%)	454 (58%)	24 (3%)