

*An Interview with...*

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### **Q: Are there unique challenges that colleges and universities face in addressing stalking?**

A: Yes, given that a person is more likely to experience stalking between the ages of 18 and 26 years old—and that is the primary group that a college/university is serving—we definitely have unique challenges just because of the risk factor. There are also unique challenges because of the developmental stage that many of our college students are in. There is perhaps a focus developmentally on establishing more independence and separating from your family of origin, and that may make it difficult for a college student to reach out, ask for help, or even tell somebody what is happening. International students may come from a part of the world where there are not similar laws or conversations about the problem of stalking. It can be a challenge for students to identify or even know how to describe the problem of stalking or even come forward and ask for help. I think it puts an international student at a higher risk of being a victim/survivor.

### **Q. What are some of the most pressing needs of stalking victims on campuses and how do you try to address them?**

A: I think the most pressing needs are victim/survivors' desire to get control and some normalcy back. We use things like interim sanctions to be clear about expectations during an investigation. Expectations

about what the accused can or cannot do—access to buildings, access to contact with the victim/survivor—and also sharing that information with a victim/survivor so that they can predict who will or won't be in their classroom or living on their residence hall floor. Just trying as much as possible to give them some sense of control; making sure that they know their options for reporting to both law enforcement and to the university.

Often times a student might choose to work with our campus police to issue a harassment warning in addition to filing a complaint with our Dean of Students Office, so using both resources within the criminal justice system as well as administratively. Law enforcement agencies in our county will issue harassment warnings without requiring a victim/survivor to press charges or go forward with a criminal investigation since many times a survivor is not ready to take that initial step or just concerned that it is going to escalate the problem.

Of course, linkage with a victim advocate is a critical first step. We educate about confidential resources, including the advocate's role, from our very first contact with a survivor. We believe working with an advocate can assist a person with reclaiming sense of control over their life and provide ongoing support throughout a criminal or administrative complaint process. Providing information about online safety planning resources, by connecting them either with a local victim services program or through our university website; our site here

links directly to the National Stalking Resource Center, ensures a victim/survivor has resources to review when they are alone with a worry or fear. We also keep a survivor's long-term goals in mind when connecting the student or employee with resources, ensuring that the help that we are providing isn't just focused on crisis intervention but also on long term healing.

**Q. Were there any challenges you faced in developing and implementing an Anti-Stalking Policy at University of Iowa?**

A: I would say a challenge was a belief of "we don't really have a problem with that here." That maybe came from a perspective of not understanding the difference between harassment and stalking. I think another challenge was resistance to creating another policy to manage, so we chose to update existing policies and to include or add stalking language in the existing policies. One [set of policies] related stalking to interpersonal violence—domestic violence, sexual assault cases, either real or perceived romantic or sexual relationships—and that meant we updated our sexual harassment policy (which deals with employee conduct) and our sexual misconduct policy (which deals with student conduct).

Then the other type of stalking that we were concerned about was stalking that didn't target gender necessarily or didn't involve sexual or romantic partners, for example a student stalking an instructor about a grade. We updated the code of student life to address student conduct and then our anti-harassment policy, adding stalking language there to cover nonsexual and nonromantic stalking.

It made sense to us at the time but from an implementation point of view what I see as a challenge or weakness is that investigators aren't always using the right policy to do the analysis of the behavior. Alternatively, the victim/survivor or responsible employee who is reporting the problem may not be aware that stalking is in the sexual misconduct or sexual harassment policy.

If they don't hear that it is something of a sexual nature or they aren't thinking about how the survivor is being targeted based on gender then that policy doesn't get invoked and that means they aren't following the right reporting protocol. It is a challenge and I'm not sure where we will go with it. It is something that we are paying attention to and I think it is a training issue both for responsible employees and for those who are investigating or deciding sanctions.

**Q. What advice would you give to other colleges and universities seeking to develop or enhance a stalking policy?**

A: Ensuring that they have a broad base of support from central administrators and their shared governance leaders, and to include somebody from the general counsel's office, local victim advocates, and the local prosecutor's office. I think you need to ensure that your review team gets training at the beginning of the process. Everyone is going to bring a different frame based on their professional training and it is important that everyone kind of has shared language and shared understanding even though everybody is bringing their own specific expertise. You want to do that at the beginning of your process and then ensure that the review team continues to have access to content experts whether that is through the National Stalking Resource Center or your local victim advocacy organization.

It is really critical for a team to address both student conduct policies and employee conduct policies at the same time. The team should be able to include people who could address both types of policies.

But at the same time having a consulting relationship with somebody who is not on the review team that an individual or the entire group could go to and say, "we're really struggling with this question," "we don't have agreement," or just "we don't get it." Someone that you can ask for either that one on one or for the entire group. For instance, our group used content experts and advocates on the review team but we were also

able to have some meetings with someone from the National Stalking Resource Center and that was really helpful when we had questions or were struggling with understanding something as we were going through the process.

**Q. With the amended Clery regulations, there are a multitude of changes campuses are facing. How are the new regulations affecting the way your campus addresses stalking?**

A: I would say that it is an ongoing process, but right away I can say that some incidents that were tracked as harassment are being tracked now as stalking. This means that they are more likely to be referred to my office for follow up and they are more likely to be linked to victim advocates. The other thing that we are doing differently is tracking whether an incident is labeled as stalking, why we labeled it as stalking or something different. That helps people to know, it increases understanding and education for people who are in the trenches dealing with it daily to kind of understand the difference between harassment and stalking and to be reminded about that difference. We are also working again at reviewing what the written information is that we are providing to victims/survivors.

**Q. What was the genesis of the campaign the University created last year for National Stalking Awareness Month? What were the objectives of your campaign? What effect do you think the campaign had?**

A: The campaign [top right] was built into our project plan and it was intended to follow our policy review; we didn't want to raise awareness without making sure that our policies were in place. We used images



*To view the entire campaign, [click here](#)*

that were specific to our campus and we worked with the marketing team that is part of our student life area. The people who worked within that marketing team to develop materials are students and we think that was helpful in creating images and messages that resonated with students.

It is hard to know about the impact because we made a mistake, we didn't build an assessment plan into the implementation plan. That's a conversation we are having right now; what do we do about assessment? How can we tell that the campaigns we are doing have an impact? That's what our team is doing right now.

**Q. Any additional comments or thoughts?**

A: It was so helpful to have an external organization that provided assistance with our policy review and our campaign messages. I am hoping to find a similar resource as we shift our focus to dating and domestic violence. It makes me appreciate so much more the work that [the Stalking Resource Center] is doing.