

First Year Orientation Empowered Consent Prevention Program: Implementation & Assessment



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This report is part of the Gender-Based Violence Research Lab (GBVRL) Whitepaper Series, a collection of reports produced by Professor Dana Cuomo (Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies) and Professor Susan Hannan (Psychology).

The GBVRL is a feminist research lab with interdisciplinary research projects centered on examining and addressing issues of gender-based violence at Lafayette College and across the Lehigh Valley.

The GBVRL also prioritizes training Lafayette students in feminist and community-based research design, methods and analysis.

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Introduction

The Empowered Consent: Preventing Sexual Assault, Relationship Violence and Stalking Program was the result of a year-long, collaborative research project spearheaded by Dana Cuomo, Assistant Professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and conducted with student research assistants Ella Goodwin '21, Libby Mayer '22, Annika Murray '23 and Andrea Rivera Conte '23, who also serve as members of Pards Against Sexual Assault (PASA).

After presenting the Empowered Consent program to Campus Life administrators in May 2021, the Empowered Consent program was endorsed for First-Year Orientation '21. To read more about the research and development of the Empowered Consent program, please refer to Cuomo et al 2021.

In what follows, we document the process of implementing the Empowered Consent program during FYO '21, including recruiting and training peer educators to facilitate the program. We also detail the Empowered Consent program evaluation process, including the administration of two post-program surveys to first-year students, the first occurring immediately following the conclusion of the program during FYO and the second occurring approximately three months after FYO to assess for knowledge retention. We provide a summary of key findings from the surveys, along with recommendations for future iterations of the Empowered Consent prevention program.

Cuomo, D., Goodwin, E., Mayer, L., Murray, A., and Rivera, A. 2021 "Sexual Misconduct Prevention Programming at Lafayette College: Findings and Recommendations." [Gender-Based Violence Research Lab Whitepaper Series](#).

Pre-FYO Preparations

Following confirmation that the Empowered Consent program would serve as the sexual misconduct prevention program during FYO, the research team incorporated feedback and edits from community members (Campus Life administrators and students) who participated in focus groups in May 2021 and finalized the Empowered Consent program materials by the end of the 2020-2021 academic year.



The four student members of the research team took responsibility for the next phase of implementation: recruiting and training volunteer peer educators to facilitate the program during FYO.

Sixteen volunteer peer educators from the two Lafayette student groups focused on gender-based violence prevention - PASA and One Love - committed to serving as peer educators. This commitment required the 16 peer educators to attend multiple training sessions over the summer, return to campus during early arrival for additional training and serve in a full volunteer capacity.

The majority of the 16 Empowered Consent peer educators were also student leaders in other capacities (i.e.: Orientation Leaders, Resident Advisors, Peer Mentors, PARDners, etc.), requiring that they balance the Empowered Consent peer educator training with their other commitments.

The four student members of the research team who worked together over the previous academic year utilized a “train the trainers” framework to prepare the newly recruited peer educators to facilitate the Empowered Consent program. To avoid conflicts related to summer work schedules and other commitments, the Empowered Consent “train the trainers” program consisted of three remote training sessions, each two hours long, that were delivered during the three weeks before early arrival.

The four student members of the research team dedicated hours preparing the “train the trainers” sessions, including the development of a comprehensive “train the trainers” curriculum with background reading and lesson plans.



The four student members of the research team then facilitated the remote training sessions, which included instruction, practice presentations and completing a full run-through of the Empowered Consent program on the final night of training.

The volunteer peer educators also completed “homework” between the “train the trainers” sessions, such as practicing the program independently and watching a recorded presentation of the Empowered Consent program that the four student members of the research team created for training purposes.

Additionally, as peer educators would eventually facilitate the Empowered Consent program in pairs, the peer educators were asked to practice the full 75 minute Empower Consent program with their partner at least twice ahead of FYO.

The ultimate success of the “train the trainers” model and facilitation of the Empowered Consent program during FYO relied upon the commitment of the four student members of the research team and recruiting PASA/One Love peer educators with preexisting knowledge of gender-based violence and experience facilitating prevention programs that could be applied to deliver the Empowered Consent program.

In addition to the “train the trainers” program that prepared the peer educators to facilitate the Empowered Consent program, the four student members of the research team were also responsible for coordinating with FYO and Student Involvement staff to secure early move-in details for the volunteer peer educators, reserve rooms on campus for the Empowered Consent program to take place during FYO, and sort out how the 20+ Empowered Consent programs would fit into the master FYO schedule.

While ultimately successful, the four student members of the research team encountered numerous challenges during the summer of 2021 while preparing the Empowered Consent program for FYO.

The primary challenge being that this was an entirely student-led endeavor following the completion of the 2020-2021 academic year, as the research portion of the project with faculty supervision ended, and the objectives shifted to delivering the prevention program as a peer education program.

Without faculty or staff supervision, the four student members of the research team found it difficult to coordinate with administrators around details and logistics and moreover were unfamiliar with many of the administrative tasks that were necessary in order to successfully execute the Empowered Consent program.

Additionally, the four student members of the research team were already committed to serving as Orientation Leaders and Resident Assistants, making it especially difficult to balance peer educator recruitment and to develop the “train the trainers” curriculum alongside their other summer commitments.

It is important to highlight that the four members of the research team dedicated a **significant** amount of uncompensated time during the summer months to prepare all of the elements necessary to deliver this program during FYO.

First Year Orientation '21

Student leaders assisting with FYO participate in a series of mandatory trainings the week before first-year students arrive on campus. The FYO and Student Involvement staff asked that the student members of the research team present the Empowered Consent program to the over 300-student leaders who arrived to campus early as part of the mandatory training content.

The rationale for presenting the program to student leaders was two-part: that the content of the Empowered Consent program would also be useful to the student leaders assisting with FYO, and that student leaders would benefit from a preview of the Empowered Consent program should first-year students reference the program or have follow up questions throughout FYO. The student members of the research team facilitated the full 75-minute Empowered Consent program in front of their peers in Colton Chapel on August 24.

While we did not administer formal evaluations, the anecdotal feedback immediately following the program and over the ensuing weeks was positive, with numerous junior and senior student leaders sharing that the Empowered Consent program was more informative and helpful than what they had received during their orientation experience. Peer student leaders also indicated that they appreciated that the program was Lafayette-specific and peer-led as it made the discussion feel relevant and grounded.

The 16 volunteer peer educators, within their pairs, facilitated the Empowered Consent program throughout the afternoon on Saturday, August 28.

Pairs of volunteer peer educators facilitated the 75+ minute program three times between 12-5pm, with each program consisting of 25-40 first-year students. With minimal time between each program to recover, the volunteer peer educators managed a phenomenal feat: they delivered an evidence-based, tailored sexual misconduct prevention program to the entire first-year class within an afternoon that utilized a group size structure that allowed for an interactive, discussion-based experience consistent with Lafayette's model for student learning.

The volunteer peer educators gathered to debrief their experiences immediately following the conclusion of the final set of programs. Overall, the volunteer peer educators identified the program as a success and noted that the first-year students were largely engaged throughout the program. Although successful, the volunteer peer educators noted that energy began to wane among the first-year students, particularly in the later afternoon sessions following the morning full of activities. Some volunteer peer educators mentioned that they incentivized participation by giving out candy during the interactive and discussion-based portions of the program. Notably, the volunteer peer educators explained that they were exhausted after facilitating the 75-minute long program three times in a row, with only a short, few-minute break in between.



PASA & One Love
Peer Educators
FYO 2021
Empowered
Consent Program

Empowered Consent Program Assessment

As part of the year-long research project that culminated in the development of the Empowered Consent program, the research team designed two post-program evaluation surveys to assess the effectiveness of the Empowered Consent program: an immediate survey and a 3-month follow up survey.

Immediate Survey

First-year students completed the first of two surveys immediately following the completion of the Empowered Consent program on August 28, 2021.

The volunteer peer educators introduced the survey at the conclusion of the program by utilizing a QR Code on the final slide of the program presentation. First-year students were encouraged to take out their phones and complete the survey, administered through Qualtrics.

Of the over 700 first-year and transfer students who participated in the Empowered Consent Program, 341 participants completed the post-program survey. Of the respondents, 51% identified as women, 47% identified as men.

We believe that the gap in participation and survey completion could be due to a variety of factors. First-year students might not have been familiar with Qualtrics, which could have led to confusion when attempting to complete the survey. It is also possible that students were tired at the end of the program and simply chose not to complete the survey.

For future iterations of the Empowered Consent program, we would recommend introducing Qualtrics to the first-years and providing a more explicit explanation for why the survey data is so valuable, which might help motivate more first-year students to participate.

Immediate Survey Methodology

The survey consisted of quantitative and qualitative questions. To analyze the qualitative questions, we used the qualitative software program Atlas.ti.

The survey incorporated three qualitative questions:

1. What did you find most interesting/helpful about this program?
2. What did you find least interesting/helpful about this program?
3. Any additional feedback?

Of the 341 responses from first-year students, 217 provided a response for most helpful/interesting, 188 for least helpful/interesting, and 38 provided additional feedback. Inductive codes were developed to analyze thematic content from the qualitative responses.

The 38 codes were then grouped into five categories: general knowledge, learning skills, previous knowledge, repetitive information, and workshop design.

To analyze the quantitative survey questions, we used the quantitative software program JASP to compare descriptive statistics for each of the questions. The survey incorporated quantitative questions focused on assessing how helpful specific accepts of the program were (i.e.: bystander intervention skills, how to respond to a disclosure), and comparing participants' knowledge regarding content and resources related to gender-based violence before and after the program.

Means and standard deviations were gathered for each response in addition to the frequencies for the numbers on the Likert scale.

“Going over power dynamics and why we as first years are especially vulnerable was helpful”

Survey Participant

Immediate Survey Analysis

Overall, the data from the immediate post-program survey indicate that the Empowered Consent program was positively received and met its objectives in increasing first-year students' knowledge regarding the dynamics of gender-based violence and available resources on campus, and in providing an opportunity to practice a variety of skills, such as bystander intervention, communicating consent and responding to a disclosure.

The following reflect findings from the qualitative and quantitative survey data analysis:

Finding 1: First-year students identified the skills-based portion of the Empowered Consent program, specifically regarding how to respond to a disclosure and tactics for bystander intervention, as the most helpful/interesting portions of the program in both the qualitative and quantitative responses. Respectively, 97% and 94% of students identified practicing being an active bystander and practicing how to respond to disclosure as helpful parts of the Empowered Consent program. Additionally, responding to a disclosure and bystander intervention strategies were mentioned 54 and 42 times respectively as the most interesting and/or helpful parts of the program.

Finding 2: First-year students considered the framework of grounding the Empowered Consent program in “community values” as comparably less helpful relative to the other topics. Still, in the quantitative analysis, 84% of students found this helpful (4 or 5 on the Likert scale). Related, participants identified “community values” 11 times in the least helpful/interesting response within the qualitative portion of the survey.

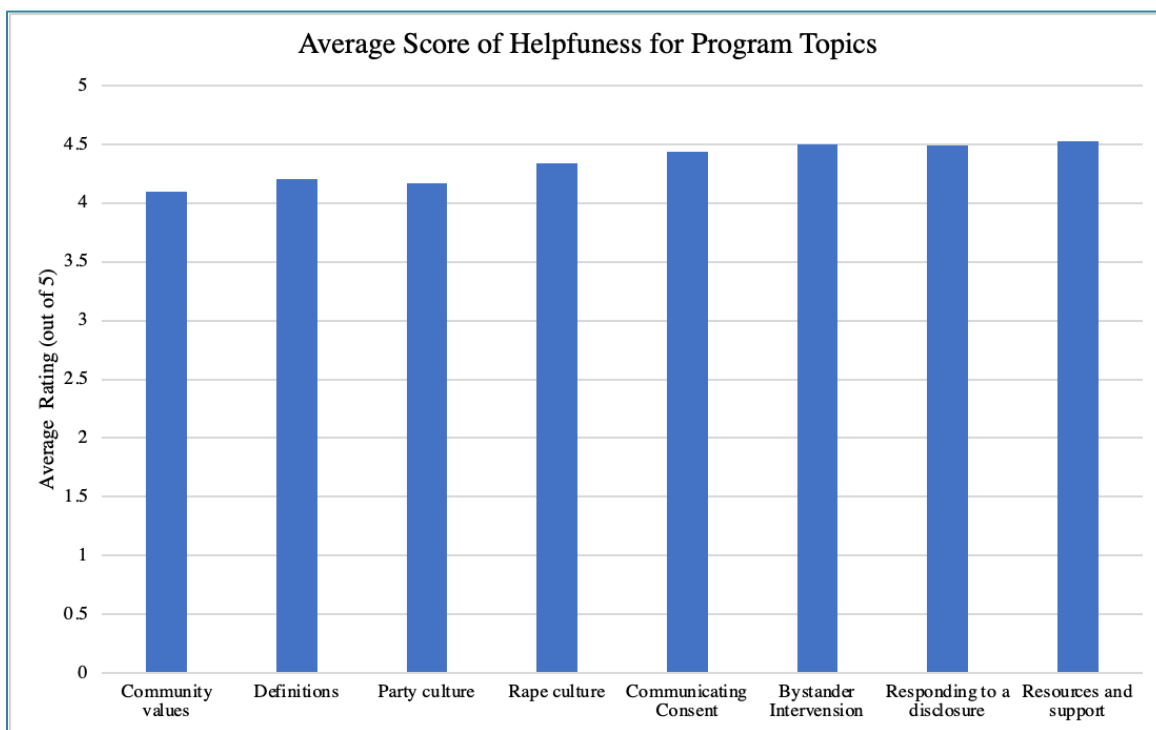


Figure 1: Graph displays the average ratings for eight major topics of the Empowered Consent Program that were rated on a scale of 1 to 5 from least to most helpful.

Finding 3: First-year students identified two sections of the Empowered Consent program as repetitive to either their previous knowledge or with other information provided during FYO: 1) the portion of the program that introduced definitions of stalking, sexual assault, and domestic violence and 2) the portion of the program that focused on “debunking party culture” and drinking statistics. However, despite being repetitive content, students also noted that they still found these portions of the training helpful.

Finding 4: First-year students identified learning about resources on campus and where to seek support as helpful aspects of the program, mentioning these elements 31 times in responses to the qualitative question “What did you find most interesting/helpful?” and 97% of students indicated learning about resources and where to seek help as helpful in the quantitative portion of the survey. Additionally, 25 students mentioned breaking down consent as a helpful part of the program in the qualitative portion of the survey.

Finding 5: Notably, first-year students identified the introduction of the “Red Zone” as a helpful aspect of the program. Many students noted that they were not aware of the Red Zone prior to the Empowered Consent program and it helped make the program feel relevant to them as first-year students; in the qualitative responses, 17 students mentioned learning about the Red Zone as the most helpful/interesting topic. Additionally, 92% of the students identified learning about rape culture and power dynamics as a helpful part of the Empowered Consent program.

Finding 6: While each portion of the program received overwhelmingly positive feedback, the “skit and scenario” portion of the program elicited a mixed response from the first-year students. Within the qualitative responses, participants mentioned the “skit and scenario” portion of the program 7 times as least helpful/interesting and as most helpful/interesting 7 times. It is possible participants were confused regarding whether this question referred to the portion of the training where the volunteer peer educators “acted out” how to respond to a disclosure (i.e.: skits) or the portion of the training where the first-year students practiced responding to a situation utilizing bystander intervention skill (i.e.: scenarios).

“The bystander and response information was very helpful.”

Survey Participant

Overall, the survey analysis indicates that the Empowered Consent program was successful in informing students about sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking. Students were asked to rate their understanding of consent, bystander intervention, and campus resources before and after the program (1 being poor understanding, 5 being strong understanding) and averages across each question increased (see Figure 2 below).

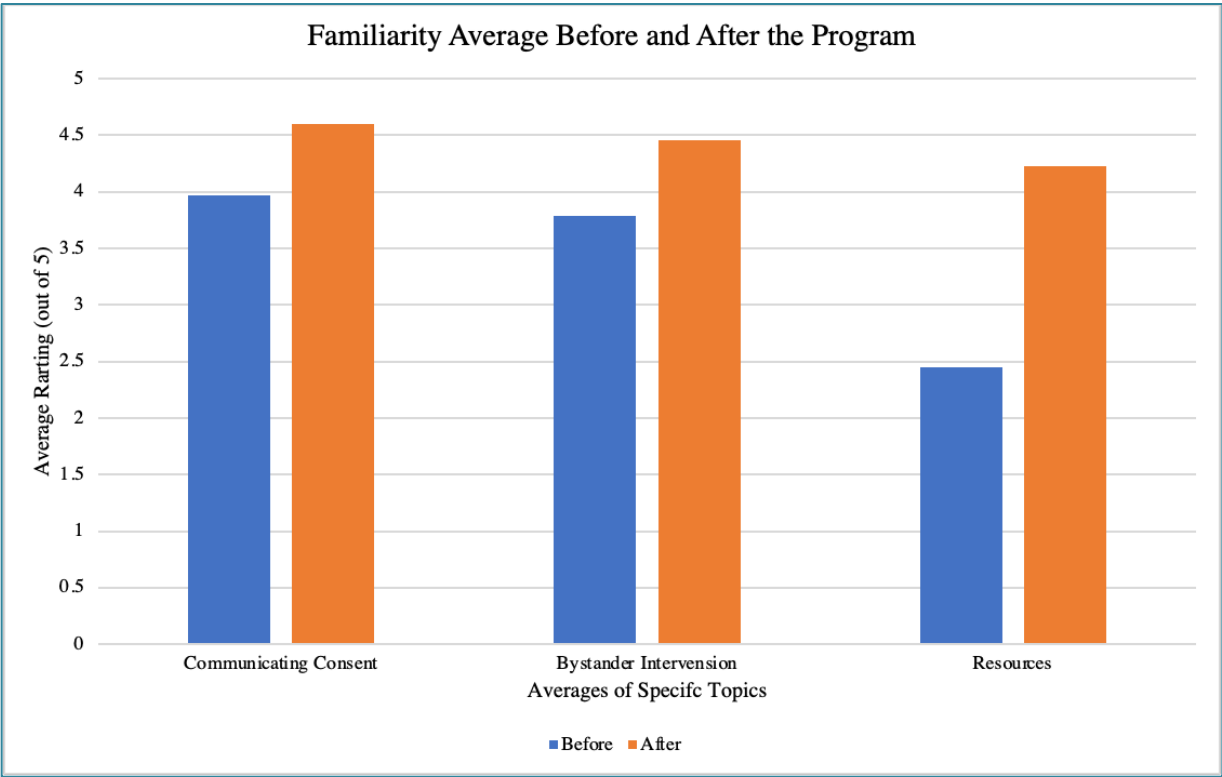


Figure 2: Graph expresses the average ratings regarding students' understanding of three major topics before and after the program rated on a scale of 1 to 5 from very unfamiliar to very confident.

“The scenarios that helped us act how we would react in situations that we may encounter were helpful.”

Survey Participant

3 Month Follow-up Survey

At the conclusion of the fall 2021 semester, first-year students were asked to complete a follow-up survey approximately 3 months after completing the Empowered Consent program. This brief survey focused on assessing what knowledge students retained from the program and whether first-year students had used any of the skills and/or resources introduced in the program during the fall semester.

The survey also included questions to assist in evaluating the campus climate regarding sexual assault and to inquire what additional information or resources would be helpful. The survey was anonymous and students who participated were given the opportunity to enter a raffle to win one of two \$25 Amazon gift cards. The survey was promoted through a class-wide email sent by the first-year class dean and booster messaging was sent via the first-year orientation leaders. Overall, 102 first-year students completed the survey, 69% identified as women and 29% identified as men.

3 Month Follow-up Survey Analysis

Akin to the survey distributed during FYO, we used Atlas.ti to analyze the qualitative data and excel and JASP to analyze the quantitative data. Overall, participant responses in the follow-up survey reinforced the importance of the knowledge and skills introduced in the Empowered Consent program, such as the introduction to the Red Zone, rape culture, how to communicate consent, bystander intervention, how to respond to a disclosure, and campus resources.

When asked about what skills first-year students had used over the course of the fall 2021 semester, 28% of the first-year respondents said they practiced communicating consent, 20% reported supporting a friend who disclosed that they experienced sexual assault, 27% said they tried to change the subject when in a conversation upholding aspects of rape culture (i.e., bystander intervention). The follow-up survey responses reinforce that these topics are integral aspects of the program and are relevant to first-year students.

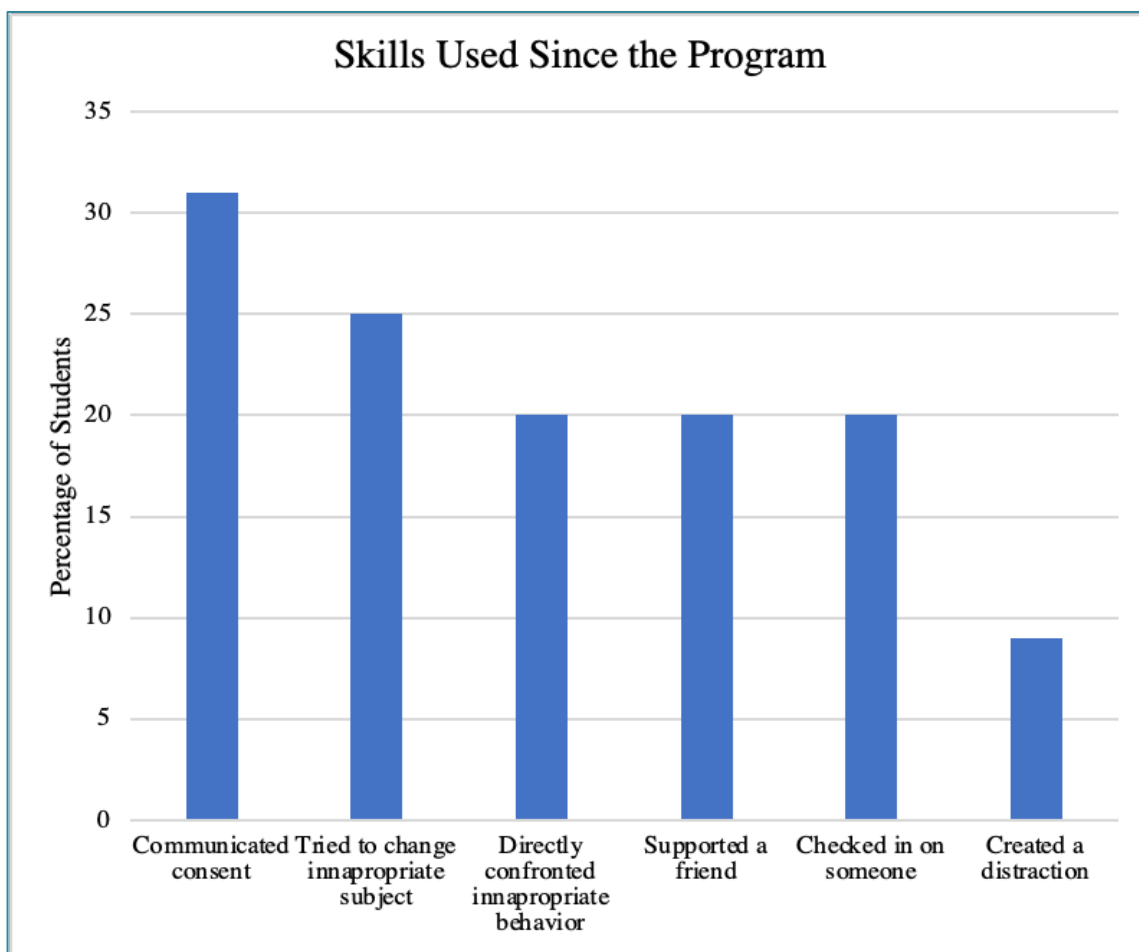


Figure 3: Bar graph depicting the percentage of students who reported using specific skills that are highlighted in the Empowered Consent program.

In the initial survey, “Responding to a disclosure” was seen as a very useful part of the program as it received an average of 4.5/5 on a scale assessing helpfulness.

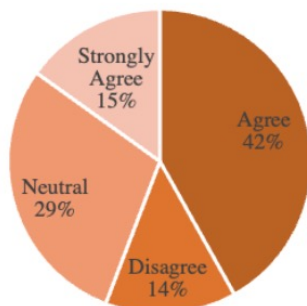
When asked in the 3-month follow up survey what support or reporting resources first-year students used following an incident of sexual assault, relationship violence, or stalking, 53% (n=16) of those who responded said they went to a friend/Lafayette student. This reinforces the importance of including skills surrounding how to respond to disclosure with prevention training, as students are leaning on their peers for support following such incidents.

In addition to using skills introduced during the Empowered Consent program, students were also asked to identify experiences of power-based violence that they experienced during the fall 2021 semester.

Although a smaller portion of survey participants responded to this question (n=19), 3 indicated that they had experienced control or manipulation in a relationship, 5 indicated that they had experienced coercion or pressure to engage in sexual activity, and 12 indicated that they experiences a nonconsensual sexual interaction, 3 of which involved alcohol.

In response to the survey questions related to campus climate, 98% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their peer groups took issues of harassment, equity and inclusion seriously (see figure 4 below). However, first-year students reported less confidence that the broader campus community felt a shared responsibility for cultivating a healthy and safe culture on campus (see figure 4 below).

I feel confident that most people at Lafayette share a sense of responsibility for cultivating a healthy and safe culture:



My peer group takes issues of harassment, equity, and inclusion seriously:

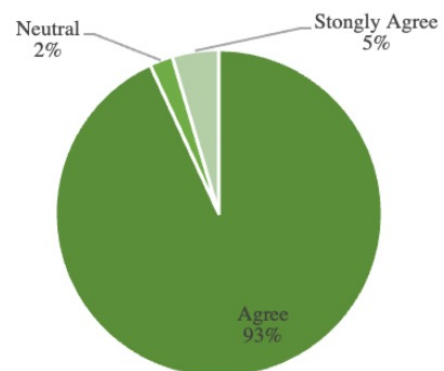


Figure 4: Pie charts show the first-year perceptions of the administration’s ability and attitudes towards issues of creating a safe community (n=85).

Similarly, half of the survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Lafayette, as an institution, can effectively respond to harassment on campus, and 56% of respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that Lafayette administrators take issues of harassment, equity, and inclusion seriously (see figure 5 below).

These findings suggest that first-year students feel confident in their peer groups taking issues of harassment, equity and inclusion seriously, but feel less certain regarding the broader Lafayette community around these issues.

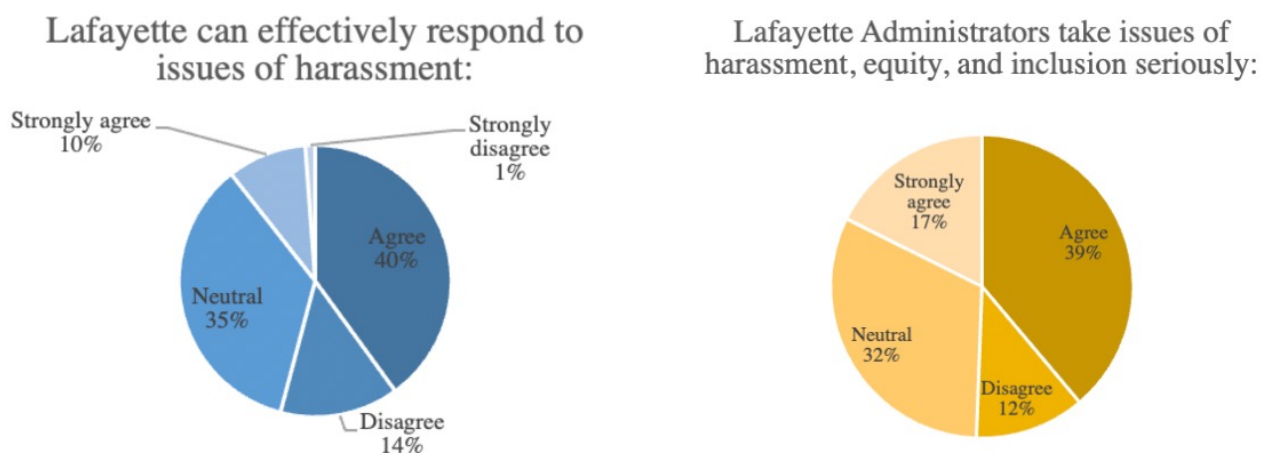


Figure 4: First-year students' perceptions of peer attitudes regarding creating a safe community (n= 86).

Taken together, we highlight three thematic findings that emerged from analyzing the qualitative and quantitative responses from the 3-month follow-up survey data:

Finding 1: First-year students continue to identify learning about “The Red Zone” as a helpful and interesting part of the program. Discussing “The Red Zone” in the Empowered Consent Program was not intended to be fear-based, but rather to make the students aware of the increased risk of this period of time to encourage them to be aware and give them the tools to navigate this period of time.

Finding 2: First-year students found the emphasis on available resources as well as skills on how to respond to a disclosure very helpful as 20% of respondents reported providing support to a friend who experiences sexual assault.

Finding 3: First-year students requested that there be additional follow-up training to build upon the information they learned as well as to remind them of the importance of discussing difficult topics such as sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking. Eleven students provided qualitative feedback that such information would be helpful.



“The Red Zone of sexual assault through Thanksgiving Break. That was shocking and I definitely have thought about it multiple times in the last 3 months.”



“The sheer amount of resources available to students in case of any event that takes place”

“Knowing how to respond to someone who comes to you as support if they have had any sexual harassment or assault against them”



“I believe more sessions like that help the students around campus get a better understanding of the importance and seriousness of this topic.”

“It’s something that shouldn’t be taught once but rather reminded throughout the year. I think talking about academic consequences but also the consequence of hurting the victim.”

Recommendations

Based on the feedback gathered from the immediate and 3-month follow up surveys, we offer the following recommendations, with appreciation that these recommendations may be more or less relevant depending on how FYO and sexual misconduct prevention programming are restructured in 2022:

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the Empowered Consent program remain a peer-led program with peer educators. As peer educators with specific training focused on gender-based violence, PASA and One Love members have a refined skill set that supports creating a safe space for learning and facilitating conversations surrounding sexual assault and relationship violence. Additionally, first-year students got exposure to these groups as yet another resource and provided an avenue for these students should they want to be involved with either of these organizations.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that the Student Advocate and Prevention Coordinator, Katy Bednarsky, oversee the Empowered Consent program. As a prevention expert, Katy is positioned to further refine the “train the trainers” materials, supervise the peer educators, ensure consistency across program delivery, and coordinate with FYO and Student Involvement staff.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that the group size remain between 25-40 students per program. This size fosters an environment conducive to discussion and engagement.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that the following topics remain a part of the program as the immediate and follow-up surveys suggest they were helpful for first-year students: The Red Zone, Power Dynamics and The Iceberg Model; Communicating Consent; Bystander intervention skills; How to respond to a disclosure; Campus resources.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that the program continues to be annually evaluated to examine its effectiveness in addition to ensuring that the topics in the program are helpful and relevant for first-year students over time.

Recommendation 6: We recommend creating supplemental materials to complement the Empowered Consent program, including take-home materials and follow-up training so that the content delivered during the program is revisited through 2.0 trainings and booster messaging throughout the year.

Conclusions

Analysis of the immediate post-program survey data indicates that the Empowered Consent program received an overwhelmingly positive response from first-year students.

Twenty-three students shared sentiments of gratitude for having access to this kind of program and its content in the additional feedback portion of the survey. When asked to identify the least helpful aspects of the survey, of those who responded, 45% said there was nothing they found unhelpful about the program. First-year students also provided positive reviews of their facilitators, with 23 first-year students responding with sentiments of appreciation for the program and compliments of their facilitators. Such comments included:

In addition to being well received by first-year students, as noted above, the student leaders who participated in the Empowered Consent Program during pre-arrival training also endorsed the program. The three-month follow-up survey analysis suggests that the information covered in the program was relevant and remained useful as students navigated their first semester at Lafayette.

As Lafayette College continues to enhance its sexual misconduct prevention programming and refine the *Empowered Consent: Preventing Sexual Assault, Relationship Violence, and Stalking* program, we hope that these positive findings and constructive recommendations are useful to stakeholders and to future iterations of the program.

“It was a really informative and engaging training!”

“Very informative, useful strategies!”

“I like how both of them made the room feel nice and welcomed all forms of opinions or statements.”

“It was very good and thank you for educating students about important information about consent and sexual assault.”