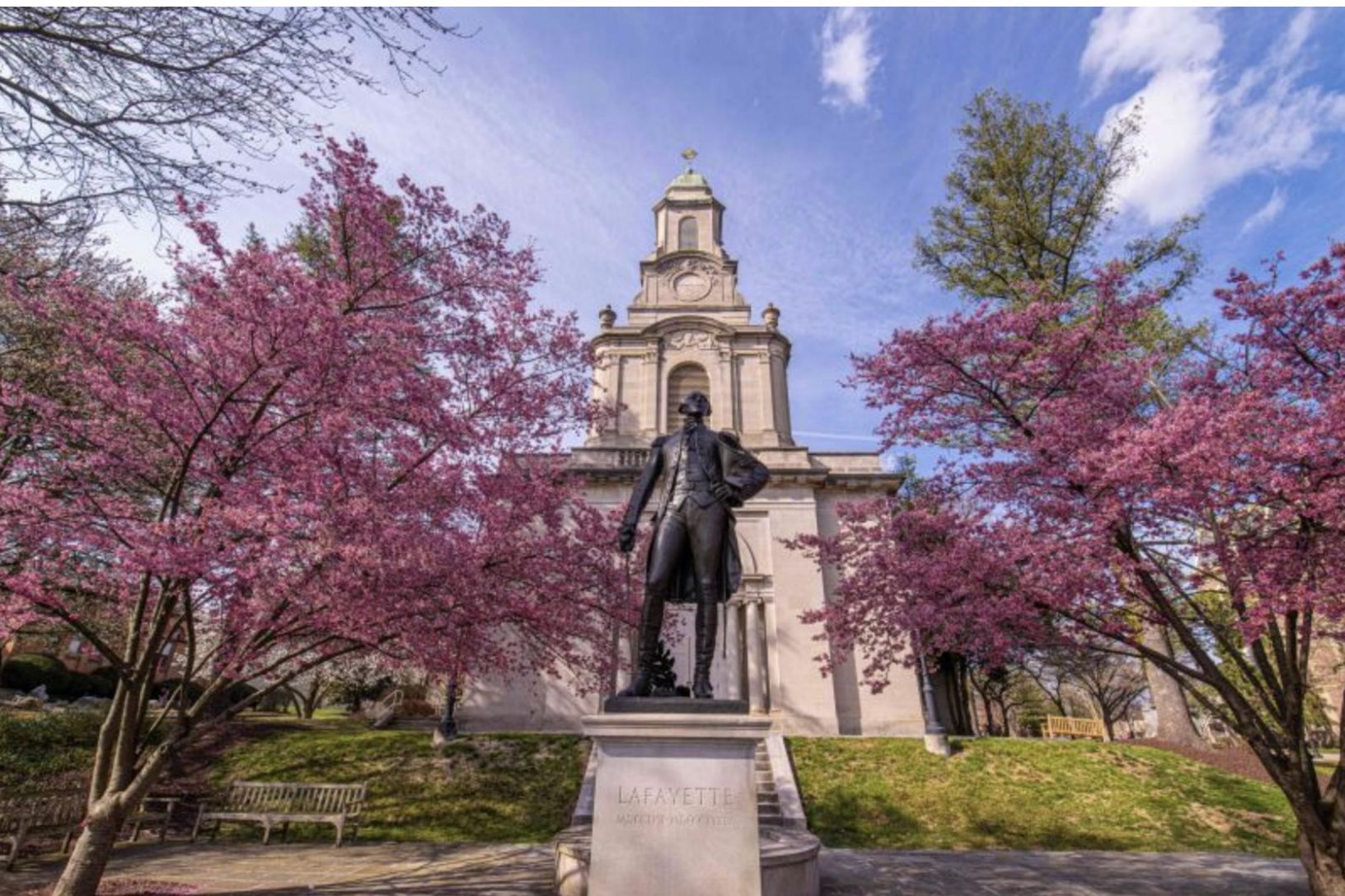


Gender-Based Violence Research Lab 2025-2026 Whitepaper Report



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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.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our ongoing appreciation to the Division of Student Life for providing funding assistance to the lab.

We would like to thank Sarah Ye, Administrative Coordinator for Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies for providing administrative support to the lab.

We would also like to acknowledge Vicky Cao '26 and Lex Tejada '27 who worked in the lab as research assistants during fall 2025, and Summer Troxell who worked in the lab for the 2025-2026 academic year. The lab and its projects would not be possible without the support of our research assistants.

Introduction

The Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Research Lab advanced two projects during the 2025-2026 academic year. With both projects focused on data collection, we use this whitepaper report to provide brief overviews and updates on the status of the projects, rather than a comprehensive reporting on findings and recommendations.

Three students worked as research assistants for the GBV Research Lab during the 2025-2026 academic year, collaborating together on the lab's projects and providing essential assistance in research design and data collection.

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The Impact of Institutional Responses on Unwanted Sexual Experiences on Campus: A Longitudinal Study

Project Objectives

The aim of this project is to assess potential changes in students' perceptions of institutional betrayal (or support) following unwanted sexual experiences on campus. Institutional betrayal has been defined as wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings (e.g., sexual assault) committed within the context of the institution (Freyd, 2018).

We are also assessing psychological reactions (e.g., posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, depression symptoms) following unwanted sexual experiences that occur on campus, and examining the possible interactions among perceived institutional betrayal (or support), unwanted sexual experiences, and subsequent psychological reactions.

Background

While previous research has shown that perceived institutional betrayal exacerbates psychological suffering following unwanted sexual experiences, no study to date has measured baseline perceptions of institutional trust (i.e., perceptions about an institution before or immediately upon establishing a relationship with said institution).

Assessing students' baseline perceptions of institutional trust will help to establish potential changes in perceptions of said institution following exposure to unwanted sexual experiences on campus.

Research Methodology

This is a survey-based, longitudinal project that is being administered through Qualtrics. The project is following a sample of Lafayette students from the class of 2027 over the course of their 4 years at Lafayette College. All first-year, non-transfer Lafayette students (who were over the age of 17) received an email invitation to participate in the first wave of the study (“Time 1”) during the first week of August 2023 (prior to students physically arriving on campus). The purpose of surveying first-year students before they arrived on campus was to capture students’ baseline perceptions of institutional trust. Approximately 150 first-year students participated in Time 1.

Students who participated in Time 1 were invited to complete the Time 2 survey, which was administered during the last week of classes in the Spring 2024 semester. Approximately 90 students participated in Time 2. The Time 3 survey was administered during the last week of classes in the Spring 2025 semester, with approximately 60 students participating. The Time 4 survey was administered during the last week of classes in the Spring 2026 semester, with approximately 50 students participating.

The final survey timepoint (Time 5) will be administered at the beginning of the Spring 2027 semester. We have also received IRB approval to conduct a follow-up qualitative study later that semester, in which we plan to interview 20–30 students who participated in all five survey timepoints. These interviews are intended to provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding of participants' experiences in the study, as well as their perceptions of institutional support and betrayal in relation to unwanted sexual experiences.

The Harm Mapping Project

Project Objectives

The Harm Mapping Project examines the geography of gender-based violence on campus with the two-part goal of 1) better understanding the spaces and places that students have experienced gender-based harms and/or feel vulnerable to experiencing such harms, and 2) providing recommendations to campus leadership regarding ways to modify the built environment to help prevent future harms from occurring.

Background

The Harm Mapping Project contributes to an emerging area of prevention research focused on understanding how elements of the built environment contribute to gender-based violence (see Mahoney et al., 2022; Meredith et al., 2020). On a college campus, the built environment includes elements like lighting or lack thereof, accessible exits, clear lines of sight within buildings, the availability of on-campus social spaces, and the layout of residential halls, including dorm rooms, where the primary furniture is a bed (Hirsch & Khan 2020).

This new area of prevention work is complementary to an established body of research in the field of feminist geography focused on understanding geographies of violence, or why gender-based violence happens where it does (Cuomo & Dolci, 2021; Little, 2020; Pain, 2014). Feminist geographers have also examined the spatiality of fear or where people worry about experiencing violence (Shirlow & Pain, 2003; Pain, 2009). As the geographies of violence and the geographies of fear do not always align, this project seeks to understand student experiences of both gender-based violence and fear of experiencing such harms.

Research Methodology - Phase 1

Phase 1 data collection occurred in fall 2022 and entailed a participatory mapping study and a brief survey; over 500 students participated. Participants were provided with instructions and stickers to mark where on the campus map they had experienced or felt vulnerable to experiencing sexual and/or gender-based harm with different color stickers indicating different types of harm. Participants who had not experienced harm or who did not feel vulnerable to experiencing harm left the map blank. Participants then completed the brief survey and short answer questions on the back of the paper.

Following data analysis, we worked with a cartographer to create a series of proportional symbol maps that represented the frequencies of different forms of harm across campus, what we call “Harm Spots”. We displayed these maps in an exhibit in Farinon in spring 2025. A detailed description of the methodology for creating the maps can found in the following publication:

Houtman, L., Cuomo, D., *Dennehy, M., *Forman, M., *Zea, A., and Hannan, S. (2025) The Harm Mapping Project: Navigating Ethics and Collaboration in Map Design. *Cartographic Perspectives* 105: 27-33.

* denotes Lafayette student

A journal article highlighting the findings from this phase of the project is currently under review.

Research Methodology - Phase 2

Phase 2 data collection occurred in spring 2024 and focused on examining how the built environment contributes to gender-based violence. There were two data collection procedures for this study: 1) walking focus groups and 2) photovoice.

Walking Focus groups: We conducted four walking focus groups. Thirteen participants joined the research team on a guided walk through campus. Harm Spot locations identified in Phase 1 of this study guided the walking route for Phase 2. During the walking focus group, the research team asked participants to describe how the built environment on campus impacted their feelings of safety.

Photovoice: Nine participants participated in the photovoice component of the study, a participatory data collection method that involves using participant-produced photography as a tool for facilitating discussion. Participants were provided with the following prompt to guide the content of the images: *Please take photos of spaces and places on campus that make you feel safe and/or unsafe.* We conducted two focus groups with the photovoice participants. Discussion focused on creating a collective understanding of what elements of the built environment on campus contributed to spaces feeling safe and unsafe.

We displayed a selection of participant-generated photos in an exhibit in Farinon in fall 2025. We also co-sponsored a petition calling on President Hurd and her administration to develop a lighting plan to improve lighting at key locations on campus. Over 200 students and campus community members who engaged with the photo exhibit signed the petition, and a lighting plan was distributed to the campus community in January 2026.

Research Methodology – Phase 3

Data collection for phase 3 of the Harm Mapping Project occurred in fall 2025. The aim of this phase of the Harm Mapping Project was to better understand the experiences of undergraduate student research assistants who work in research labs and contribute to multi-phase studies on gender-based violence.

Specifically, we were interested in contributing to knowledge regarding how faculty supervisors can better mentor and support undergraduate student research assistants who work on projects that examine gender-based violence in the college communities in which they are students, and related, how faculty supervisors can best onboard and train undergraduate student research assistants who work on research projects that are conducted over multiple phases with different cohorts of research assistants.

We conducted two focus groups with 8 former research assistants who worked on earlier phases of the Harm Mapping Project.

With data collection and analysis complete for all three phases of the Harm Mapping Project, the faculty PIs are now working on drafting academic publications that detail findings from the project, with former student research assistants as co-authors.