

The Association of American Universities (AAU) 2015 Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct for Dartmouth

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the purpose of the survey?

The survey is a scientific initiative to help universities better understand the attitudes and experiences of their undergraduate, graduate, and professional students with respect to sexual assault and sexual misconduct.

The data resulting from these surveys will help university administrators formulate policies and practices intended to make students safer and to help them feel safer. In addition to the survey's value to participating universities and their students, the aggregate data and analysis will provide useful information to policy makers as they work on possible legislative and administrative initiatives. Researchers will also benefit from the important contribution this survey will make to the body of research on this critical and complex issue.

Who developed the survey?

AAU established a multi-disciplinary survey design team to work with Westat, a leading social science research firm, to develop the survey.

Dr. Bonnie Fisher, a nationally recognized expert on sexual assault, was hired by Westat to work closely with the AAU-Westat team to shape the content and analysis of the sexual assault climate survey. Dr. Fisher's article published in 2000 is one of the most widely cited publications on the sensitivity of sexual assault data to the type of measurement employed.

The AAU team was led by Dr. Sandra Martin, Professor and Associate Chair for Research, Department of Maternal and Child Health, Associate Dean for Research, Gillings School of Global Public Health, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Dr. Martin's research, teaching, and public health service focus on the public health problems of sexual and domestic violence, including sexual violence on campuses. She was involved as a co-investigator on the Campus Sexual Assault Study (led by Chris Krebs of RTI International). She has authored more than 100 peer-reviewed manuscripts, as well as book chapters and reports, on a wide range of violence-related concerns, including sexual violence.

Overall, the survey team included a number of recognized experts on survey design and methodology, as well as campus leaders directly responsible for dealing with sexual assault, issues of gender, health, and student affairs. The multidisciplinary team had significant and specific expertise on these issues.

How was the survey developed?

AAU informed the AAU presidents and chancellors (and other constituents) in June 2014 – and the public in November – that the starting point for the survey design team was the survey instrument developed by the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, which was included in the notalone.gov April 2014 report. Dr. Victoria Banyard was the primary author, and the survey had been viewable in the public domain for nearly a year. That survey instrument was recently piloted by Rutgers University. The AAU design team deliberated for months on the survey instrument. Most members of the survey design team consulted extensively with their university colleagues in reviewing the draft survey instrument. Items and topics were submitted by researchers and considered by the team in developing the final instrument. In addition, students provided feedback on questions in a number of ways, including cognitive testing and pilot administration to groups. Questions were adjusted as appropriate.

What was the content of the survey?

The survey structure was comprised of 10 sections (A-J) and concluded with a final debriefing question about the survey experience. A core set of 53 questions was asked of every respondent, including Background (A), Perceptions of Risk (B), Resources (C), Harassment (D), Stalking (E), Sexual Violence (G), Sexual Misconduct Prevention Training (H), Perceptions of Responses to Reporting (I), and Bystander Behavior (J). Respondents in a partnered relationship or who had been in a partnered relationship since enrolling at the university were asked questions about Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence (F). Additional questions were administered if respondents reported being victimized. For Harassment, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence (sections D, E and F), follow-up questions were asked for each type of misconduct. Questions regarding Sexual Misconduct Prevention Training (H) were asked of students who had enrolled in the university in 2014 or 2015.

How was Sexual Assault defined?

The AAU survey focused on nonconsensual sexual contact involving both sexual penetration and sexual touching or kissing. Respondents were asked whether one or more of these contacts occurred as a result of four tactics: 1) physical force or threat of physical force, 2) being incapacitated because of drugs, alcohol or being unconscious, asleep or passed out, 3) coercive threats of non-physical harm or promised rewards, and 4) failure to obtain affirmative consent. The first two tactics generally meet legal definitions of rape (penetration) and sexual battery (sexual touching or kissing). The other two tactics generally are violations of student codes of conduct.

Is the survey proprietary?

No. The survey instrument is now in the public domain. It is posted on the AAU website along with the aggregate report on the survey. It contains background information on the questions asked. Westat is preparing more in-depth documentation of the methodology to aid researchers in their use of the survey.

Who administered the survey?

Westat, a private research organization, administered the survey, analyzed the data, and provided a summary report of findings. The survey was sponsored by Dartmouth in collaboration with the Association of American Universities (AAU).

Did other colleges or universities participate in the AAU survey?

Yes, a total of 27 institutions of higher education (IHE's) participated, including Dartmouth. The list includes: *Brown University, California Institute of Technology, Case Western Reserve University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Harvard University, Iowa State University, Michigan State University, The Ohio State University, Purdue University, Texas A&M University, The University of Arizona, University of Colorado Boulder, University of Florida, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, University of Missouri-Columbia, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Oregon, University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, University of Southern California, The University of Texas at Austin, University of Virginia, The University of Wisconsin-Madison, Washington University in St. Louis, Yale University.*

Our response rate was only 42%, are the results valid?

Survey research does not typically have 100% response rates. Since this was a census survey in which all students enrolled at Dartmouth were invited to participate, instead of a sample survey which is open only to students in the selected sample group, 100% is not expected. Overall, Dartmouth had one of the highest response rates among participating institutions.

Why are survey responses “weighted” in the reports, and what does “weighting” mean?

Westat employed a common survey research technique known as weighting to address non-response.

Specifically, the initial step was to create a base-weight for each respondent. A census was conducted at Dartmouth and a base weight of one was assigned to each respondent. The base weight was adjusted to reflect non-response. This adjustment consisted of a raking procedure that adjusted the base weight to the demographic data available on the frame (Deming and Stephen, 1940; Deville, Särndal, and Sautory, 1993; Cervantes and Brick, 2008).

The variables used in the raking procedure included:

- 1) *Gender* (Male/Female);
- 2) *Age Group* (18-20, 21-23, 24-26, and 27+);
- 3) *Year in School* (Undergraduate freshman, Undergraduate sophomore, Undergraduate junior, Undergraduate senior, and Graduate/Professional year); and
- 4) *Race/Ethnicity* (Hispanic, White, Black, Other race, Nonresident alien).

Missing values in the demographic variables in the survey data were imputed using a hot-deck procedure that randomly allocated responses in the same proportion as those answered within each imputation class. On average, 0.80 percent of survey respondents had to be imputed in this way.

Survey researchers commonly debate the pros and cons of using weighted estimates. According to the AAU Aggregate Report, additional statistical analyses of the weighting procedures suggest that the weighted estimates reported are significantly higher than actual rates based only on the survey responses, (see pages 163-189, and specifically pages 167-168 in the AAU Aggregate Report).

How was the survey advertised?

Numerous avenues were used to promote the survey at Dartmouth, including but not limited to posters, table tents, Twitter, radio, a web banner on the D for one month, and emails from campus leaders.

When was the survey administered?

The AAU Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct was launched at Dartmouth on April 2, 2015 and closed three weeks later on April 23, 2015.

How was the survey administered?

The survey was administered as a web survey. At Dartmouth, email invitations to participate in the “AAU Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct” were sent to all enrolled Dartmouth students’ school email addresses through a Westat email account on the first day of data collection, April 2, 2015. Each email included a unique link to the student’s online survey. Westat sent reminder emails on April 9 and April 20 to prompt completion of the survey before the deadline.

What happened if students lost their unique link to the survey?

Students were directed to the Westat Help Desk at 1-855-497-4787 or via email CampusClimateHelp@westat.com.

Who was invited to participate in the survey?

At Dartmouth, all enrolled students (undergraduate, graduate, and professional) were offered the opportunity to participate in the survey.

Was participation mandatory?

No.

What about IRB approval?

At Dartmouth, students were fully covered by Westat’s IRB protections during the survey administration process.

What was the process for informed consent?

Functioning as a gateway to the survey, the consent form provided details about the survey, set expectations for the types of questions to be asked, and allowed students to make an informed decision whether participation was right for them. Students who felt they would become distressed taking such a survey could choose not to participate (and not enter the survey), and students who consented to participate were prepared for the sensitive topics. The consent form emphasized that respondents could skip any question they did not want to answer, and that they could stop the interview at any time they felt uncomfortable or simply wished to stop. In addition, all consent forms concluded with contact information for a responsible IRB and research representative.

Did the survey include a trigger warning?

Yes. The survey included a consent statement and a trigger warning about the explicit nature of some of the questions.

What happened if students became upset while answering the questions?

Each page of the online survey had links to on- and off-campus resources the student could contact if they became upset. In addition, information for several national services providing information and counselors 24 hours a day, 7 days a week were available.

How long did it take to complete the survey?

On average, the survey took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

Were incentives offered for participation in the survey?

Yes. At Dartmouth, to encourage participation, students were offered a \$5 incentive to complete the survey. Students were notified of their eligibility for the \$5 Amazon gift card in the invitation and reminder emails.

How many students participated in the survey?

At Dartmouth, a total of 2,796 students participated, translating to an overall response rate of 42%. Across the 27 participating IHE's, a total of 150,072 students participated translating to an overall response rate of 19%.

The report tables have letters and strange symbols, what do they mean?

An "s" indicates the cell was suppressed for confidentiality reasons while any non-numeric symbol "-" indicates there was no data for that cell.

Did Dartmouth receive a dataset?

Yes. The individual dataset was reviewed by Westat for potential disclosure risks. Where appropriate, variables were altered (e.g., categories collapsed) to limit potential risks before delivering the final files.

Why aren't other race categories reported?

As noted above, to reduce disclosure risks, certain variable categories were collapsed and race was one of them. While Dartmouth's Office of Institutional Research (OIR) normally reports additional race categories in the Fact Book and elsewhere, it is impossible given the dataset provided by Westat.

Who do I contact if I still have questions?

For questions related specifically to the AAU survey, please contact [Barry Toiv](#), Vice President for Public Affairs. For Dartmouth specific information, please contact [Justin Anderson](#), Vice President for Communications.