

# Title IX Annual Report

2019-20 Annual Report and Campus Climate Survey

March 2021

Dear Virginia Tech Community:

The 2019-2020 academic year presented numerous and unexpected changes. From a global pandemic, to new federal rules governing Title IX, to student activism demanding improvements to the ways the university responds to gender-based violence, Virginia Tech was challenged to continuously adapt and be increasingly transparent. What has remained unchanged is the university's commitment to take gender-based harassment and violence seriously, to provide service and care to those impacted by it, and to resolve reports in a way that is equitable and recognizes the dignity of all involved.

Included in this report is Title IX reporting for the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years, as well as data from the university's most recent campus climate survey, conducted during the Fall 2019 semester. The academic year data provides information about those who chose to come forward and tell someone of their experience and the steps the university took to respond to those reports, including providing information and support and fair and rigorous investigations. The climate survey data gives deeper insight into what does not get formally reported: what prevents students from seeking help, how helpful are our campus resources, and importantly, what is it in our campus landscape that makes violence and harassment persist.

This report primarily represents the work of the Office for Equity and Accessibility. In addition and because this work is truly a community effort, this report also reflects the work of university partners and campus colleagues with whom responsibility and commitment to caring for Virginia Tech students and employees is shared. Gender-based violence leaves a mark on the place that we call "home" and each member of us plays a role in creating a safer, more inclusive community.

Take Good Care,

Katie Polidoro  
Title IX Coordinator

## Executive summary

Virginia Tech does not tolerate harassment and violence based on an individual's sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation. Conduct that is harassing or violent not only violates university policies ([Title IX Policy 1026](#) and [Policy 1025 on non-discrimination](#)) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#), it undermines Virginia Tech's [Principles of Community](#) and disrupts each students' ability to learn, grow, and thrive. Virginia Tech take reports of sexual harassment and violence seriously and strives to handle those reports in a way that is fair, equitable, and recognizes the dignity of all students. Virginia Tech should be a safe and inclusive place for each member of our community.

From weathering the COVID-19 pandemic to adjusting to new federal Title IX regulations, the 2019-20 academic year was one of unpredictable changes. While this report focuses on gender-based harassment and violence, it also outlines the impacts of this unique year.

### Student Reports of Harassment and Violence

[Click Here for Reporting Fact Sheet](#)

For the past several years, the rate at which the Office for Equity and Accessibility (OEA) receives reports of sexual harassment and violence has been increasing. During the 2018-2019 academic year, the office received 230 reports.

Reports increased again in the 2019-2020 academic year, despite the university moving to fully remote learning in March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The total number of reports during 2019-2020 was 249.

In past years, sexual assault reports outnumbered reports of other types of harassment and violence. In 2018-19, sexual assaults accounted for 87 reports. Notably,

that changed in 2019-20, with gender-based harassment being the most common type of incident reported. Ninety-eight reports of gender-based harassment were received, which was a significant increase from the 68 harassment reports received in 2018-19.

Though there was an increase in overall reports, one clear impact of the pandemic was a decline in the number of students wishing to pursue formal complaints and investigations. Thirty complaints were fully investigated in 2019-20, compared to 44 the prior year. This decrease was more pronounced during the spring 2020 semester with just six students requesting investigations that semester. The decision to make a formal complaint and participate in an investigation is an individual choice and the university respects whatever choice a reporting party makes.

In 90 percent (197) of the reported cases, the primary reason for not pursuing an investigation was that the reporting party declined to move forward or share additional information. Other reasons for not moving forward with investigations included: 1) The accused individual was not affiliated with Virginia Tech and therefore not subject to our policies; 2) The report was made anonymously; and 3) The incident reported was not gender-based, and the reporting party was provided resources and referred to the appropriate university office.

Of those reports that were investigated, 22 students were found responsible and three were found not responsible after a hearing. Sanctions for those found responsible ranged from probation (1) to dismissal from the university (6), with the most common sanction being suspension (12). Four cases were resolved informally after a full investigation.

While 2019-20 saw fewer students pursue formal complaints, much of the important work of the OEA was done through informal resolutions and by providing support services. Informal resolutions, including “No Contact Orders” and educational conversations, were provided in 21 cases. Support services, including referrals to resources, academic assistance, and other supportive measures, were provided to 105 students.

## Culture and Climate

[Click Here for a Climate Survey Fact Sheet](#)

A campus climate survey was disseminated to students between November 18-December 11, 2019. The survey was sent to a sample of 5,000 students and was also shared with listening session participants, partner organizations, in the Virginia Tech Weekly Newsletter, and via social media.

660 students responded to the survey responses, representing a 9.44 percent response rate from the sample. The majority of respondents to the survey were between the ages of 18-21 (70 percent) and were undergraduate students (75 percent). Female identified students made up 60 percent of the respondents; male identified students accounted for 39 percent.

Respondents were asked general questions about campus climate. They were also asked about their specific experiences with harassment and violence at Virginia Tech between the Fall 2017 semester and Fall 2019 semester.

Several respondents indicated that they identified as trans, genderqueer or non-conforming, or declined to state their gender identity. Because there were not enough responses in those groups to protect anonymity, specific data about their experiences are not reported here. However, the experiences of sexual harassment and violence by trans and gender non-conforming individuals in our community cannot be

minimized. In nearly all areas, trans and gender non-conforming respondents reported significantly higher rates of sexual harassment and violence than their cisgendered peers.

The most notable themes that arose in the survey include:

- A significant portion of respondents (41 percent) reported experiencing some form of gender-based harassment. When identifying who they had been harassed by, 78 percent reported that other Virginia Tech students subjected them to harassment. Of those who reported harassment, most said that it occurred multiple times with 38 percent reporting they experienced three to five incidents of harassment.
- Approximately 7 percent of respondents reported experiencing stalking during their time at Virginia Tech. These respondents also reported that the individuals who stalked them were primarily other students.
- Six percent reported some experience of intimate partner violence.
- Slightly more than 16 percent of respondents reported experiencing some type of non-consensual sexual contact during their time at Virginia Tech. Seventy-seven percent reported that the person who harmed them was another student.
  - 5.6 percent of women and 1.7 percent of men reported that someone had

sexual intercourse with them through use of threats and physical force.

- 7.6 percent of women and .4 percent of men reported that someone had sexual intercourse with them when they were too intoxicated to consent.

The climate survey indicated that sexual harassment and violence are underreported. While nearly 90 percent of respondents reported confiding in a friend. Far fewer reported to law enforcement or to a university official. Of note, 60 percent of individuals who experienced intimate partner violence and 50 percent who experienced sexual assault chose not to report what happened. The most common reason for not reporting an experience was that respondents did not feel that what happened was “serious enough” to report. These responses were provided even when the underlying behavior that respondents reported would be objectively viewed as serious incidents.

Underrepresented communities reflected disproportionately higher rates of concern about sexual violence on campus. Specifically, women of color reported that sexual violence was a problem on campus more often than any other group. While respondents generally agreed that the university would respond appropriately to individual reports of gender-based violence and harassment, they expressed less confidence that Virginia Tech would take steps to address the underlying circumstances and culture.

## Changes to Title IX Policies

On May 6, 2020, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) issued new regulations that govern how educational institutions handle reports of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct. Among the required changes were:

- A new definition of what constitutes sexual harassment, as well as a new limit on the geographic jurisdiction of the Title IX process, to include conduct that occurs within the U.S. and on-campus, with limited jurisdiction over off-campus conduct that occurs where the university or a recognized student organization has substantial control.
- Supportive measures must be made available to reporting parties whether or not the underlying conduct meets the definition or jurisdictional scope defined in the regulations, and regardless of a reporting party's decision to make a formal complaint.
- The regulations map out a specific, prescribed grievance procedure for resolving complaints that includes live hearings for both students and employees, the opportunity for the parties' advisors to perform direct cross-examination of the other party and witnesses, and the opportunity to appeal the outcome. The university is obligated to provide advisors to perform cross-examination for parties who do not have one.

To effectively address these wide-ranging regulatory changes, Virginia Tech President Tim Sands appointed a Title IX Policy Work Group to review the changes and propose recommendations. The work group developed a comprehensive set of recommendations over the summer months. To ensure that community voices were heard, representatives from student and employee leadership organizations were identified to serve on the work group.

At the August 13 special session of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, the Executive Committee adopted the following changes:

- A Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy, [Policy 1026](#), which is now separate from the university's existing non-discrimination policy, [Policy 1025](#).
- Procedures for investigating and resolving Title IX sexual harassment complaints that comply with the federal requirements (see [Policy 1026](#)).
- Reaffirmation of our institutional commitment to address, via [Policy 1025](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#), all categories of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including those that occur off campus, that are not included in the Department of Education's new definition of [Title IX sexual harassment](#).
- To facilitate reporting, most employees who regularly interact with students or supervise others will continue to be

required to report incidents they are aware of to the Title IX coordinator.

## Conclusion

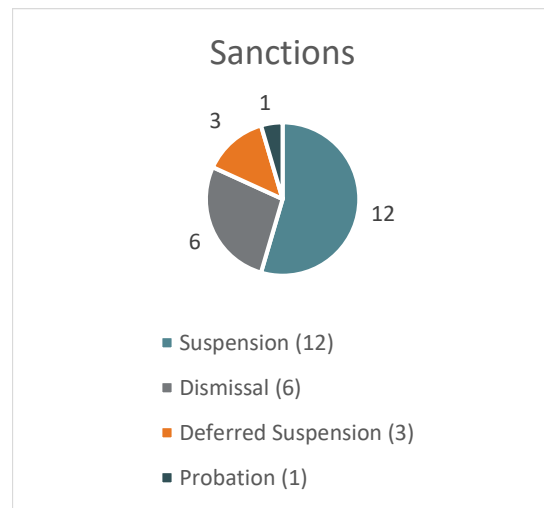
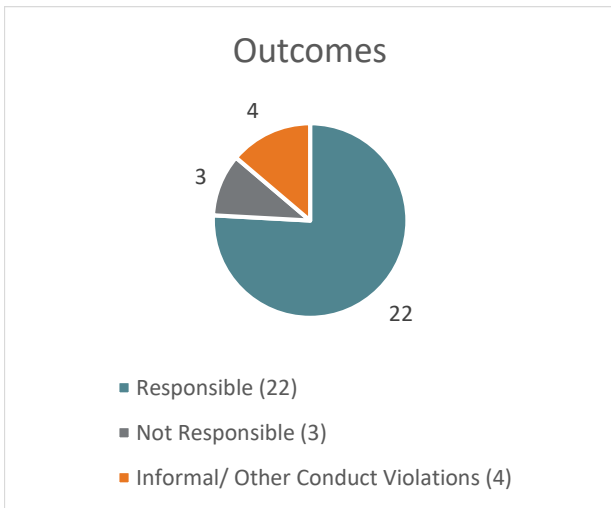
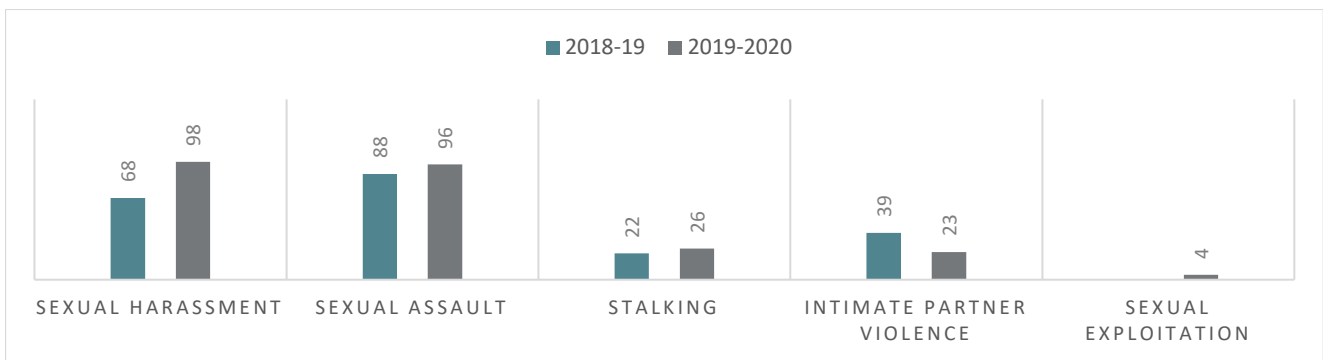
OEA strives to be transparent about our work, whether that is sharing the kind of information included in this report or listening to our community and partners for advice and input. We are confronted with difficult and humbling questions about how to best address sexual harassment and violence at Virginia Tech. Each of us has a role in creating a campus community free of sexual violence. We must look carefully at the behaviors and actions in our culture that lay the groundwork for violence, including harassment, and find ways to improve.

For more information about how the university addresses these issues, and for ways to become involved, visit [stopabuse.vt.edu](http://stopabuse.vt.edu).

## Title IX Reporting Fact Sheet

# 249

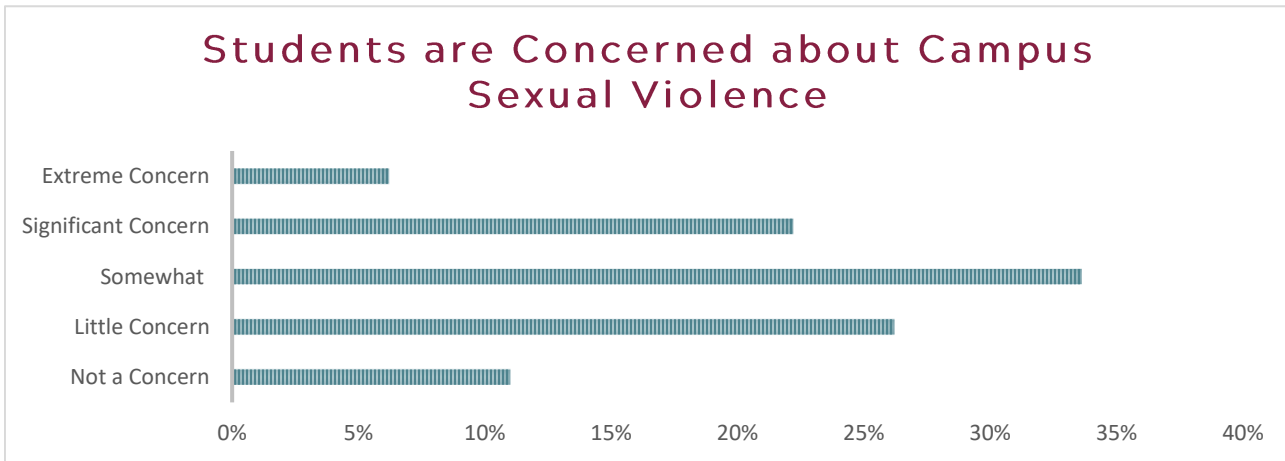
The Office for Equity and Accessibility received 249 reports of gender-based harassment and violence involving students. Of that total 98 reports were of sexual harassment, 96 reports were of sexual assault, 26 reports were of stalking, and four reports were of sexual exploitation.





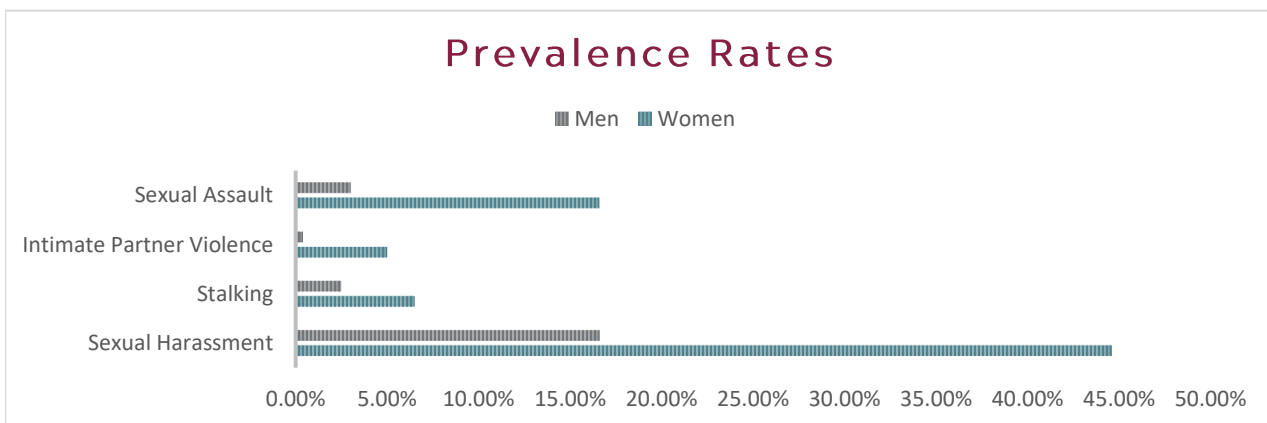
## Climate Survey Fact Sheet

A significant portion of students responded that sexual violence was an issue that they were at least somewhat and often very concerned about on campus.



sanction and six students were dismissed from the university as a result of a Title IX complaint.

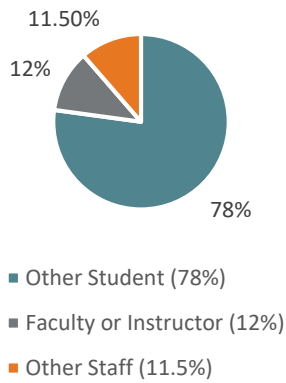
More than 40 percent of students reported that they experienced some level of sexual harassment, most often by other Virginia Tech Students. When asked about experiences of sexual violence, 16 percent responded that they experienced some form of sexual assault.



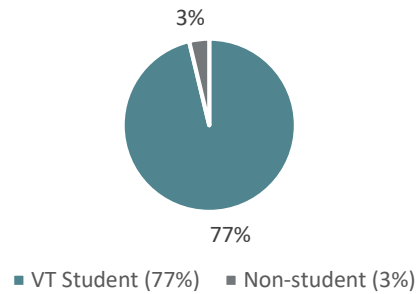
## Climate Survey Fact Sheet (Continued)

Of those who reported experiencing sexual harassment or sexual assault, the vast majority indicated that it was another student who harmed them.

### Sexual Harassment by:



### Sexual Assault by:



Half of respondents who reported experiencing a sexual assault never reported it to law enforcement or to the university.

### Sexual Assault Reporting



## Title IX at Virginia Tech

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities by the university. Failing to respond to sexual harassment, which includes acts of sexual violence, meaningfully and with equity, is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX. For more information on Title IX and Virginia Tech's policies, visit: [oea.vt.edu](http://oea.vt.edu) or [stopabuse.vt.edu](http://stopabuse.vt.edu). If you want to learn more about your rights, or believe the university is violating Title IX, you may contact the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights at 800-421-3481 or visit [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov).

To find out more information about filing a report with the university contact:

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## Campus Resources

### **Virginia Tech Police Department**

540-382-4343  
Emergencies: 911

## Community Resources

### **Blacksburg Police Department**

540-961-1150  
Emergencies: 911

### **Virginia Tech Women's Center\***

540-231-7806

### **Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley**

540-639-1123

### **Dean of Students Office**

540-231-3787

### **Carilion Medical Center (Radford)**

540-731-2000  
(also provides forensic evidence collection)

### **Cook Counseling Center\***

540-231-6557

### **LewisGale Hospital at Montgomery**

540-953-5133

**\*Confidential Resources**