



new college
students' association

▶ NCSA Community Action Report

New College Students' Association 2017

The President of the New College Students' Association (NCSA) produced this report with contributions by NCSA Executive members.

The NCSA thanks the members of the New College community including FemSoc, BOBSoc, the Residential Advisor team and various other residents for their contribution to the development of these recommendations. Most sincere thanks to all those residents who shared their stories and perspectives on how to create a safer community for all.

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NCSA COMMUNITY ACTION REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Executive of the NCSA have produced this report on sexual harassment procedures and respect in college after holding extensive consultations with a range of residents in the community and identifying numerous cultural issues in the Residence of New College, UNSW. These groups have included FemSoc, BobSoc, various returning residents and first-year residents, and Residential Advisors.

The consultations, discussions and open meetings have been led by members of the NCSA Executive with the express purpose to generate constructive and implementable recommendations. With this key purpose at the centre, the report presents 7 recommendations for New College Administration (namely, the Master, the Dean and the Residential Advisor team).

Recommendations have also been generated for two remaining authoritative stakeholders including the NCSA Executive and finally the Inter-Residential Council of UNSW. These will be formally presented at a later date in Semester 2.

In addressing such problems directly, the recommendations encourage direct and swift action to be taken by each relevant authority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

New College Administration

Appendix 1

1. That the Administration of New College actively seeks to appoint more diverse leaders into college positions, to provide more role models for female residents and to demonstrate New College's commitment to equality.
2. That the Master and/or Dean deliver a serious and personal response to sexual harassment at NCSA Supper to generate important conversation about the gravity of such sensitive issues in college.
3. That a more comprehensive and multi-faceted educational approach regarding drugs, alcohol, mental health, sexual assault, eating disorders and gender-oriented respect in college is introduced for residents. This new program should specifically include; a detailed outline of reporting procedures for residents, a brief of the protocols used in disciplinary proceedings including cautions and the behavioural expectations of residents.
4. That the Administration of New College actively engage in consultation with other colleges to continually improve upon RA training and residential culture, RA training and cultural activities.
5. That the Administration of New College expands Residential Advisor training to better equip those students in a pastoral care role for the complex challenges they face, including formal policy and training in transparency and privacy of a residents' confidential information.
6. That the Administration considers the employment of an external counselor to provide a confidential service further removed from the community than internally employed, student, RAs.

APPENDICES

Support and references for recommendations.

Appendix 1 - New College Administration

Recommendation 1

- 1.1.** It does not go unnoticed by community members that the Master, Dean, Bursar and six of the eight Board Members (including the Chair, Deputy Chair and Secretary) are male. Even amongst the 11 members of the Academic Tutor team for 2017, 10 are male.
- 1.2.** The election of just nine female NCSA presidents in the 48 year history of the NCSA and the number of comments made about the democratic election of three female trustees to the NCSA Executive is further evidence that it is both rare and challenging for women to achieve such leadership positions in college.
- 1.3.** Yet, despite this male domination of positions, the compulsory gender balance on the Residential Advisor team is an indication that College Administration understands the need for diversity to foster strong leadership teams. This diversity must then be extended to other role model positions in college.

Recommendation 2

- 1.1** As per the feedback gathered from an open FemSoc meeting on 24 May 2017, the publishing of the harassment policy and Dean's apology in the Week 11 notices came across as distant and dismissive. It was also stated that not nearly enough people read the notices to generate discussion.
- 1.2** The benefits of a more peer-oriented approach, with a supper address by Exec or RA's, were proposed however, it was concluded, that it was necessary that the message come from the highest figures in the community.
- 1.3** This recommendation was founded in the continuing need for Administration to demonstrate an institutional commitment to prioritizing the wishes of the victim in sexual harassment and assault cases and to convey the seriousness and sensitivity with which allegations are treated.
Ref 2.2. Bagshaw, E., 2017. *Uni's 'Covering Up Sex Asssaults'*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/devastating-report-shows-universities-are-failing-students-20170222-guj84k.html> [Accessed 29 June 2017].
- 1.4** As it stands, multiple cases of sexual assault and harassment have been reported to trusted members of the college community *outside* the Residential Advisor team, preventing administration from taking appropriate action. This presents a serious flaw in the support systems of college.
- 1.5** In an attempt to collect constructive feedback, anonymous interviews were conducted with a number of those that had reported cases of sexual harassment and assault to members of the Executive team throughout Semester 1. Consent was then gained to pass their feedback on to New College Administration however, in the interest of maintaining

the victims wishes as the highest priority, the NCSA will maintain complete their anonymity.

1.6 The following collated findings displays a list of factors that interviewees identified as barriers that complicated the formal reporting process for them including;

- The victims' personal feelings of isolation and fear of backlash from assertiveness
- A hesitation by the victim to surrender control of the situation to an unknown or poorly explained reporting process and disciplinary procedure
- The victims' concern for the consequences or backlash from college peers if disciplinary action was pursued
- A lack of understanding as to what defines 'harassment' and how to recognise it without hindsight
- A absence of evidence that New had sufficient and stringent protocol and training in place for the Master, Dean and RA team to handle the sensitive situation with due respect for the victims wishes, specifically in regard to a lack of understanding and knowledge of rape and consensual sex

Recommendation 3

3.1 As it stands, the O-Week induction attempts to address numerous complex issues that operate on multiple levels in a single time, place and method of presentation. This is not sufficient for numerous reasons including that:

3.1.1 All issues that are addressed in the O-Week induction, and those additional topics recommended above, are not isolated to the O-Week period and often worsen in the post orientation period as the year progresses.

Ref 3.1.1 Funnell, N., 2017. *Sexual Assault: What is your university doing to prevent it?*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-02-25/what-is-your-university-doing-to-prevent-sexual-assault/8295604> [Accessed 3 March 2017]

Ref 3.1.2. Funnell, N., Bagshaw, E., 2017. *The deadly hidden disorder inside our universities*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/the-deadly-hidden-disorder-inside-our-universities-20170707-gx6ujn.html> [Accessed 9 July 2017]

Ref 3.1.3. Student Experience Survey, 2017. *2016 SES National Survey Final*. [Online] Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching Available at: https://www.qilt.edu.au/docs/default-source/gos-reports/2017/2016-ses-national-report-final.pdf?sfvrsn=14e0e33c_5 [Accessed 12 August 2017].

3.1.2 In celebrating the diversity of New College residents, it must also be acknowledged that each individual has an optimum learning style and that a single, one-dimensional presentation does not present an adequate response to the complex and pervasive issues being discussed.

3.2 Suggested content for this revised policy may include a showing of the Tea Consent video by Blue Seat Studios¹, and a display of the Rape Culture triangle² in order to focus upon

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGoWLWS4-kU>

² <http://www.11thprincipleconsent.org/consent-propaganda/rape-culture-pyramid/>

consent-based education, communication skills and respectful attitudes that avoids the culture of male sexual entitlement, recognises young people as sexual beings immersed in complex sexual environments and avoids training built upon victim-blaming.

- 3.3 For some interesting suggestions on other information to include in a revised education policy at New College, see the document titled 'WE SL Guide 2017' from Ms. Leanne Robinson of Weerona College.
- 3.4 Activities organised by NCSA Sub-Committees have great potential for contributing to this positive yearlong education at New and the NCSA extends an invitation to Administration to collaborate with volunteer resident leaders on designing such programs in future years.
- 3.5 The outlining of resident reporting procedures, disciplinary protocols and behavioural expectations of students were received as important feedback areas from the community. Many felt these were not sufficiently addressed in the college handbook.
- 3.6 The Senior Resident Advisor was approached earlier in Semester I regarding the specific outlining of 'Caution' procedures.

Recommendation 4

- 4.1 In researching this report, the NCSA reached out to Ms. Leanne Robinson who has served as Student Residence Manager at Weerona College, Wollongong University for 14 years.
- 4.2 Ms. Robinson provided interesting insight into operating procedures at Weerona College, specifically regarding training for residential advisors and influencing cultural change within the community from both an administrative and student leadership perspective
- 4.3 This consultation included the sharing of documents such as the schedule of training undergone by the team of 11 Residential Advisors for the 204 Weerona residents and the complete induction booklet provided to incoming residents. These provided particular insight into another colleges' unique, complex and largely successful approach to similar issues and will be made available to New College Administration.
- 4.4 Ms. Robinson also extended an invitation for the New College Master, Dean and Student leadership team to have further consultation with the Weerona leadership team if they were interested in pursuing further information or to create a formal partnership through the Asia-Pacific Association for Student Housing.

Recommendation 5

- 5.1 Consistent with the recommendations made in the landmark Australian Human Rights Commission report '*Change the Course*,' the NCSA urges the need for Residential Advisor team to understand the most complex issues to the best of their abilities in order to serve the community.
- 5.2 It is recommended that this training includes completing:
 - 5.2.1 Mental Health First Aid Certificate

- 5.2.2 Sexual Assault Response training (such as those provided by Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia)³
- 5.2.3 Training from AlcoCups (Australia's largest alcohol and drug training, information session, education and resource provider.)
- 5.3** The position of Residential Advisor is internal within the college organisation and held by students who are not removed from their peers in the community yet the information they encounter on a day-to-day basis is often very sensitive, personal information.
- 5.4** Based on interviews conducted by the NCSA Executive, the fear of breach confidentiality has been found to be a significant deterrent to disclosing issues, especially among young adults in colleges.
- 5.5** It is therefore recommended that the Residential Advisor team adopt a confidentiality policy adapted from the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency confidentiality agreement; specifically that personal information may be disclosed to third parties (including to the Dean, the Master and other members of the Residential Advisor team) in only three circumstances:
- 5.5.1 When it is initiated by the individual who has disclosed their own personal information (generally in the form of a written statement signed by the individual)
 - 5.5.2 When there is a legal requirement to provide confidential personal information (i.e. in the case of duty of care). In these cases, the individual should remain informed as to which third parties have become involved.
 - 5.5.3 When there is evidence of a child/children at risk of harm

Ref 5.4 UNSW Counselling and Psychology Services, 2014. *Counselling Privacy and Record Keeping*. [Online] UNSW Sydney Available at: <https://student.unsw.edu.au/counselling-privacy> [Accessed 12 August 2017].

Recommendation 6

- 6.1** To extend the principles of a workplace, confidentiality is the focus of much concern and vulnerability in reference to counseling. This confidentiality forms the most fundamental part of professionalism training and the professionalism of a counselor is the only true basis of confidentiality. Overlapping thus notion is the equally important notion of independence from the authoritative body
- Ref 6.1** Van Oudtshoorn, L. & Summerfield, J., 1995. *Counselling in the Workplace: Developing Practice*. CIPD Publishing.
- 6.2** Given that RA's balance multiple roles and responsibilities and have very limited professional training, it is a matter of professional discretion to separate out the private concerns of disclosers from general organizational concerns. This is especially true in their

³ <http://www.rape-dvservices.org.au/Training/Supporting-People-who-have-Experienced-Trauma/Responding-with-Compassion>

dual responsibility of disciplinary officers and pastoral care officers. Some community members shared that the contradiction of RA roles had prevented them from reporting harassment incidents' because they feared victim blaming and admonishment for disobeying college alcohol bans. While RA's are helpful in many regards, a line must be drawn between feedback and legitimate intervention in the college.

- 6.3** This lack of separation is also problematic when examining the administration's history with employing Residential Advisors who subscribe to a set of values that many community members perceive as judgmental or particularly insensitive to issues of members of the diverse sexuality and gendered community (DSG or LGBTQIA+) and to issues that are generally sexual in nature.
- 6.4** A professional external counselor is therefore needed in college to be freely accessible to all residents.