

Let's do better- sexual assault on campus

Sexual assault is defined by womenshealth.org as “any kind of unwanted sexual activity, from touching to rape.”

It's a topic that is often talked about but never reported. According to [RAINN sexual assault](#), when it comes to sexual assault on and around college campuses, only 20% are reported. In 2018, DU only reported 6 on campus rapes.

On top of this, the [Denver Post](#) reported other surprising statistics. 52% of DU undergraduates said they or someone they knew experienced sexual assault, domestic/dating violence or stalking since enrolling at DU, according to a 2018 campus climate survey.

Of those students, the survey showed 43% — up from 19.6% in 2017 — did not seek on-campus help or resources. The survey said some who didn't get help wanted to move on and forget what happened to them, were unaware what resources existed or felt reporting would be useless because DU had a “history of doing nothing.”

University of Denver students Madeline Membrino, Grace Wankelman and Shannon Saul decided to show the world just how unreported sexual assault really goes.

Being survivors themselves, the women were tired of the way DU and campus safety go about sexual assault. In early January, they created the [@wecandubetter](#) Instagram account. Using the same layout on every post, including a trigger warning, each tells a different, anonymous story from around campus. Today, the account has gained almost 4,000 followers.

After speaking to the creators via email, Saul tells me, “we knew people personally who wanted to share their stories anonymously and decided to provide a platform for anyone who wanted to do the same.”

Sexual assault is a prevalent, serious problem around college campuses. Yet an issue so serious somehow goes so unreported.

“Sometimes, when people are uncertain about sexuality and consent it can lead to misunderstandings which may manifest in violent ways,” Saul says, “we have known the problem of gender-based violence has been a pressing issue at DU for a long time, but it was not being discussed nearly enough.”

In a New York Times article titled, [Campus Sexual Assault: A Timeline of Major Events](#), they state that “although the outcry over sexual assault on college campuses has intensified recently, the issue has a long history.”

Naturally, as more women began to attend universities in the 1900’s, sexual assault became more prevalent. A few major events have happened, bringing light to the severity of the situation.

In February 1957, one of the first studies about campus sexual assault, “Male Sex Aggression on a University Campus” from the American Sociological Review was published.

Over time, different people brought awareness to the issue, especially in the 2016 Brock Turner court case, after the college student sexually assaulted an unconscious woman at Stanford University. Though not given a serious punishment, it brought a lot of awareness to the media and public. The district attorney, Jeff Rosen, said, “The

punishment does not fit the crime. Campus rape is no different than off-campus rape. Rape is rape.”

By adding a Linktree to the Instagram profile, the three women provide a safe platform for anonymous submissions, along with donations, resources for survivors, the campaign website, ways to get involved, and a petition.

With the liberty of anonymous submission, the possibility of false stories occurs. The women told [Westword](#) that they can tell if a story is fake by the wording. Saul says, “When actual survivors of assault share their stories, they tend to not use ‘eloquent’ terminology, they don’t have every single detail listed, and may not remember everything that happened. Differentiating between stories that are true and false are just based on how these stories are told.”

With the increasing popularity of this account, more initiatives have been taken to expand the campaign.

A national Instagram account was created, called [@thedobettercampaign](#). In only a short few months, the campaign has had story submissions from schools all over the United States.

In regard to change on campus, the chancellor of DU has sent a school-wide email and [letter](#) to the We Can DU Better Campaign in response to demands.

The chancellor, Jeremy Haefner was very receptive to this. He tells the Denver Post, “When you read these kinds of stories coming from our students, there’s a deep, emotional reaction that you have,” Haefner said. “Just thinking about it right now, the emotions are being called up. They’re gut-wrenching. They run so contrary to what I envision the University of Denver experience should be like for our students.”

A few of the demands sent to DU administration included:

- Requesting DU's Campus Safety receive trauma-informed training and hire more officers of color and female officers who have worked with survivors of trauma
- Calling for more lighting on campus along with fixed blue light phones that allow students to call for help if their phones die
- Asking that those who have been found responsible for gender-based violence offenses such as rape be removed from campus

"This should be a group project where everyone works together for change," DU sophomore Grace Wankelman tells Westword. "The biggest thing the community wants is to push for change and solve this problem, but I've noticed there are some students who don't feel supported by the administration or student body."

The overall goal of this campaign is to eliminate the stigma of sexual health and assault talk on campuses. They began with their own campus, DU, but after receiving helpful feedback from administration, hope to help other campuses achieve the same goals. Campuses all over the country are now taking part as the wecandobetter Instagram gains over 2,000 followers and more stories are shared.

"We have definitely seen an increase in the time people spend discussing the issue of gender-based violence and the DU administration's commitments were a great first step." Says Saul. "We hope to keep this momentum going to create change on a national level."