

## **Team Solutions Story Cover Sheet**

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Sexual Assault on College Campuses

Students Struggle to Feel Safe on College Campuses as Sexual Assault Remains a Crisis

11/10/22

### **Budget Line:**

Sexual assault remains a major concern for students on college campuses across the country, especially with recent stories from schools like The University of Pittsburgh and Cornell University.

### **Interviewed Sources:**

- Kara Eisenstat - Past peer educator and president elect of the Not On My Campus Movement.
  - Phone: (469) 644-5188
  - Email: [kara.eisenstat@gmail.com](mailto:kara.eisenstat@gmail.com)
  - Date(s) contacted: via text on 10/18/22 and phone on 11/3/22
  - We discussed the Not On My Campus movement and her previous and current involvement.
- Erika Bellingham, MA, MEd - Title IX Director of Education and Prevention
  - Email: [erika.bellingham@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:erika.bellingham@austin.utexas.edu)
  - Date(s) contacted: via email 10/28/22 and zoom interview 11/10/22
  - We discussed the accommodations she received and if they either benefitted her or put her at a disadvantage. We also touched on solutions for her situation and what could've been improved regarding the way it was handled.
- Katie Gallo- University of Pittsburgh student who attended protest and founded Underdog, a startup focused on providing resources to make her campus safer.
  - Phone: 908-442-9117
  - Email: [katiegallo@gmail.com](mailto:katiegallo@gmail.com)
  - Date(s) contacted: via Instagram DM on 11/01/22 and via phone on 11/6/22
  - We discussed her experience with safety and sexual assault on her campus and what she has done to improve it.
- Brittany Sodic, MEd - Title IX Assistant Director of Support and Resources
  - Email: [brittany.sodic@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:brittany.sodic@austin.utexas.edu)
  - Date(s) contacted: via email on 10/28/22 and zoom interview on 11/10/22
  - We discussed her perspective as a member of the faculty and in her department which handles these cases and establishes the university policies on such topics.

She pointed me to specific resources available for these types of situations and brought up solutions that she felt were applicable.

- Detective Scott Stanfield, Investigations and Mitigations Division member from the UTPD
  - Phone: (512) 720-8378
  - Dates contacted: via email to UTPD on 11/07/22 and 11/08/22 and via phone on 11/07/22
  - We discussed the goal of the UTPD's rape aggression defense program (RAD) and how they are trying to change it to better accommodate all victims of sexual assault.

#### **Background sources/ websites used:**

- Not On My Campus Facebook Page  
[https://www.facebook.com/NOMCTexas/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/NOMCTexas/about/?ref=page_internal)
- Title IX Executive Summary: Chief Executive Report 2022  
<https://titleix.utexas.edu/sites/default/files/documents/executive-summary-to-the-2022-ceo-report.pdf>
- Title IX Executive Summary: Chief Executive Report 2021  
<https://live-utexas-title-ix.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/documents/executive-summary-2021-ceo-report.pdf>
- Title IX website  
<https://titleix.utexas.edu/>
- Husch-Blackwell  
[https://www.huschblackwell.com/industries\\_services/title-ix](https://www.huschblackwell.com/industries_services/title-ix)
- OIE Report  
<https://www.scribd.com/document/442327237/OIE-Report>
- The University of Texas at Austin Police Department: Self-Defense Classes  
<https://police.utexas.edu/services/rad>
- Research by UT  
<https://ugs.utexas.edu/researchweek/poster-session/archive/healthcare/sexual-violence>
- UTPD Crimefeed Category: Sexual Assault  
<https://police.utexas.edu/crimefeed/tag/sexual-assault>
- UTPD Sexual Assault & Sexual Violence  
<https://police.utexas.edu/services/victims-resources/sexual-violence-assault>
- RAINN Campus Sexual Violence Statistics  
<https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence#:~:text=13%25%20of%20all%20students%20experience,all%20graduate%20and%20undergraduate%20students>

#### **Here are the attempts I made and criteria I used to diversify my sources:**

We tried our best to make sure that all of our sources came from different levels of expertise on the topic of sexual assault and were speaking from different experiences with the topic. For example, we spoke to official sources like Title 9 and the UTPD as well as students who are working toward a solution like the President Elect of not on my campus. We even took it a step further and wanted to examine the experiences of students at other institutions, so we spoke to Katie Gallo from the University of Pittsburgh who is working toward a solution in her own manner. We diversified our sources by making sure that they would have varying perspectives on the topic and that they would suggest solutions from all facets of the issue.

**While reporting this story, this is how I worked to enhance my credibility.**

We made sure to try and remove as much personal bias as possible when reporting on this topic, especially because even though it is extremely sensitive and personal, we do not have any expertise. We attempted to make sure our opinions remained out of the piece throughout the editing process. I made sure to remember that I am an individual with personal ethics when it comes to my work as a journalist and that my personal opinions or the opinions of others should not be lumped with my work.

Sexual assault has remained a major problem on college campuses and has proven increasingly hard to prevent. But universities and student groups across the country are striving to address it.

Thirteen percent of all students experience rape or sexual assault throughout their college experience, according to a report from the Association of American Universities. Another report from the US Department of Justice statistics, shows that only 20% of students who experience sexual assault will report the incident to law enforcement. Of those who don't report, one fifth of the victims say they fear retaliation from their peers and the university, while nine percent said they worry that reporting won't lead to further prosecution or any change whatsoever. The trauma caused by sexual assault can derail a college career and rob students of the promise of their future said a 2020 report from the Association of American Universities on sexual assault.

At the University of Texas, 15% of undergraduate female students and 5% of undergraduate male students experienced rape since enrollment according to the Cultivating Learning and Safe Environments, survey released in 2017.

To combat sexual assault, the University of Texas at Austin resources for its students, faculty and staff. Programs like the university's Title IX office, the UT Police Department and Not On My Campus each use different strategies to reduce the number of sexual assaults.

- Title IX is a federal law that prohibits discrimination based on sex in federally funded education programs and activities. The office works to protect students, faculty and staff from sex discrimination, assault, interpersonal violence and harassment.
- UTPD is the general law enforcement on campus that assists people by maintaining safety and order, while also working to prevent sexual assault through self-defense training.
- Not On My Campus is a student-led movement that works to combat sexual assault and bystander intervention on the UT campus.

Students are taking initiative at other universities as well. Following a series of three sexual assaults in the last two months, a student at the University of Pittsburgh has taken matters into her own hands with a startup called Underdog that is focused on educating women on safety and self-defense tactics.

### **Erika Bellingham and Brittany Sodic - UT Title IX**

When a sexual assault occurs, students, faculty and staff can file a report with the Title IX office. Erika Bellingham, the office's director of education and prevention, said their purpose is to ensure people do not experience sex or gender-based discrimination or interpersonal violence in educational settings.

“Our job is to make sure that you can get an education and that you can continue to grow and be the best that you can be,” Bellingham said. “We want to help put things in place so that way you can continue to be successful.”

For the 2021 - 2022 academic year, UT’s Title IX office reported a 16% decrease in incident reports from the year before, totaling 1,193 reports. Different mandatory reporters like resident assistants, professors and coaches may report the same incident to the office, which causes duplication. Bellingham attributed the decrease to people filing their own complaint.

When someone files a report, their intake team reaches out to the victims to discuss a plan of action, but do not require an investigation. If they wish to follow through, the investigation moves to the Department of Investigation and Adjudication. Bellingham said it allows the office to remain as a “neutral third-party” and “provide support” without conflict of interests.

“It can be hard sometimes to ask for help and I certainly don’t want anybody to ever be scared to report an incident,” said Brittany Sodic, assistant director of support and resources. “The (victim) really is in the driver's seat on whether or not they do want to pursue a matter.”

When people report a sexual assault to the Title IX office, the office can refer the victim to University Health Services. There, the victim can get in touch with a sexual assault nurse examiner, receive STI testing, mental health resources and even academic accommodations.

“So there's a lot of things that we kind of work through and again, it just kind of depends upon what the individual needs,” Sodic said.

In 2019, 17 UT employees violated the school’s sexual misconduct policy, resulting in student protests and even discussions with former UT president George Fenves. The university hired law firm Husch-Blackwell to reevaluate Title IX’s sexual misconduct policies.

Since then, the office holds required training and education sessions for university employees every two years to bring awareness and prevent sex-based discrimination and violence. The 90-minute sessions focus on Title IX purposes, mandatory reporting requirements, support and resources.

Bellingham said the office has created a new five-year plan to focus on training first responders. She said the office wants to use the training to improve their partnership with UTPD and build trust between the office and the police department.

“The more that we work together, the better we can serve our students and serve the community as well,” Bellingham said.

To prevent ongoing or developing situations that may be dangerous and harmful, Title IX can conduct a threat assessment. Sodic said UT police can help get people out of their harmful environments. Sodic said there have been multiple instances this year where they have prevented someone from “experiencing additional or initial harm.”

“We are a team of very caring individuals,” Sodic said. “We really do care a lot about the students on this campus and we want them to be successful.”

### **Detective Scott Stanfield - UTPD**

Sexual assault reports don’t always start with Title IX.

Students can also report an assault through the University of Texas Police Department. After a report is filed, the UT police department works alongside the Title IX office to provide victims with proper physical safety resources. When victims choose to file a report with the UTPD, officers and detectives come to the scene to investigate. They sometimes bring suspects who match descriptions into custody. If a report has been filed long after an assault occurs, UTPD’s investigators will analyze it to prevent further danger from happening.

The UTPD has also provided free rape aggression defense (RAD) classes for decades. This program teaches people self-defense skills. However, Detective Scott Stanfield of the Investigations and Mitigation Division at UT said this seems to prevent only the rare surprise attack cases. Most cases on UT’s campus, he said, involve a victim’s acquaintance.

UTPD is reevaluating the ways their rape awareness and self-defense classes are taught to better prevent these cases.

“We’re trying to match the awareness and the self-defense to the vast majority of people that find themselves in a situation where they don’t want to consent to something,” Stanfield said.

These more common cases often include influences like alcohol or drug abuse. Under them, Victims can become more vulnerable and reluctantly submit to an aggressor.

Some instances have caused a high level of stress for victims, putting them in a state of tonic immobility. This is a type of paralysis where a person is frozen in place by a traumatic situation, Stanfield said.

“It’s the same kind of impulse that many animals have, where they’ll literally play dead as a defense mechanism. That’s how most people respond,” Stanfield said.

Stanfield said UTPD aims to make their self-defense program as simple as possible, so that people will know a way to navigate these more common sexual assault situations instead of freezing in place.

“It’s important people know how to defend themselves,” Stanfield said. Stanfield said the RAD program tries to eliminate this fear so victims can avoid harmful situations. Even with these resources, he said that sometimes the hardest thing a person can do is say, “No.”

“It’s almost counter-intuitive when we do have to say, ‘No,’ to somebody,” Stanfield said. “We almost aren’t capable of it.”

### **Kara Eisenstat - Not On My Campus**

While the university provides preventative resources and legal assistance, Not On My Campus UT is a local chapter of a national movement that combats the culture of sexual assault on the UT campus. The group focuses on public education by presenting to different campus organizations.

Kara Eisenstat, past peer educator and president elect of the UT group, explained her role as “constant contact with campus organizations” like Interfraternity Council and University Panhellenic Council to “ensure Not On My Campus is in their bylaws.”

The group members have majority control over what information is presented. Eisenstat said other sexual assault preventative organizations rarely discuss drugs or alcohol, but Not On My Campus focuses on them and their effects on sexual assault cases. Research by UT states that 246 out of 379 women who responded to a survey said they worry about their friends if they leave with a date.

During her time as peer educator, Eisenstat represented Not On My Campus by attending a number of sorority and fraternity chapter meetings. UT’s research found that 52% of UT sorority members felt at risk to sexual assault on campus.

Eisenstat said that these organizations tend to have a larger party culture than others that often leads to sexual assault cases.

The group encourages bystanders to intervene in risky situations. Eisenstat teaches techniques to help potential bystanders address any tricky situation.

The group offers an eight-hour training session once a semester that allows students to become peer leaders. The training sessions are run by police officers, Title IX workers and other staff who have experience with rape kits.

Eisenstat said these sessions also teach people how to respond to victims who have confided in them about an assault.

### **Katie Gallo - The Underdog**

Other schools are also innovating new ways to combat sexual assault.

When University of Pittsburgh Sophomore Katie Gallo heard the news that yet another woman at her school had experienced sexual assault, she said she was frightened and infuriated. She said this incident was especially horrifying because it happened right in a stairwell of the Cathedral of Learning, the most prominent building on the university's campus. The Cathedral is a skyscraper that holds many classrooms and administrative offices.

"I don't really feel safe anywhere that I go on campus after that," Gallo said.

Gallo explained that living on a city campus has forced her to be more aware of her surroundings. This was the third assault reported to Pitt police since the semester began. The incident occurred on a Monday afternoon around 4 p.m., which Gallo said is even more unnerving because students are still in class and suspecting nothing.

This left students like Katie questioning the safety of her campus and the strength of its leaders. She, along with many others, decided to take matters into her own hands. They held a protest with more than 200 people where Gallo said they sat in a circle and listened to women share their experiences with sexual assault.

Although it was very emotional, Gallo said she was grateful to "have solidarity with other women who are experiencing the same thing." She said the protest was not meant to be disruptive; it was more focused on making a statement.

Gallo said the protest sparked a drive to do more. So, she started Underdog, an organization "by women, for women" to teach proactive and reactive self-defense and advocate for increased safety on college campuses.



“That constant fear and having to be aware of my surroundings made me passionate about wanting to find a solution for it, because I don't think that it has to keep going on this way.”

She said that while the University has implemented some preventative measures like increased campus police presence and newly installed security cameras, these measures are reactive. Gallo believes the root of the solution comes from being proactive.

So, Underdog offers free self defense classes on her college campus.

Gallo said that teaching women corrective body language, how to effectively scream for help or even use pepper spray can have an impact on the number of sexual assault cases.

Underdog worked with professional self-defense trainers at their first event on Nov. 6 and Gallo said there was a great turnout. The class was so successful that Underdog is now offering a 10-week self-defense course in the spring.

“We all walked away feeling more confident and empowered. And that was my goal,” she said.

But she won't stop there.

She hopes to expand these classes to every college campus in the U.S. and even push for legislation that can toughen the punishments for assault. Gallo believes that with the right combination of actions, the “numbers of sexual assaults on college campuses can actually be drastically reduced.”