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# SPEAKING NOTES ON BILL 132

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Speakers in attendance on behalf of the Society of Graduate Students (SOGS):

Tamara Hinan, President

Kirstyn Seanor, VP External Affairs & Communications

Taniya Nagpal, Women's Concerns Commissioner

## Overview of the Society

The Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) is a student union comprised of full- and part-time graduate students at Western University. We are a democratic body representing about 5000 graduate students spanning 65 departments. Concerns regarding sexual violence and campus safety were part of the motivation in creating a Women's Concerns Commissioner role as recently as 2015. Our purpose, broadly speaking, is to advocate and represent graduate student issues, and it is this purpose that motivates our attendance here today.

## Background

As of November 2014, only nine out of 102 Canadian colleges had sexual assault policies in place.

We'd firstly like to share the work being done currently at Western. As a result of this policy SOGS has had student representation on the Sexual Violence and Prevention Education Committee, for the first time at



graduate student orientation which welcomes over 800 students every year a student and the vice-provost of graduate studies presented Western's commitment to campus safety including prevention of sexual violence. Educational events, such as a campus wide Consent and Compassion forum was hosted at Western focused on establishing a consent culture on our campus, it was powered and implemented by students and staff working together. The conversation and work to improve our campus to assure that sexual violence is prevented and students reporting or in need of support is a conversation that is ongoing and is highly prioritized. We now would like to share three recommendations.

## Recommendations

### *That the language be expanded to be more inclusive*

The language of the act, specifically as outlined in schedule 3 section 3, focuses on protecting students who are currently enrolled. We argue that this language needs to be expanded to include anyone working at, or reporting to, the campus more generally. Campus communities include a wide variety of people who are integral to the community, yet not enrolled students; from contract workers, to visiting lecturers, to students on leave of absence. Our concern is that focusing this act explicitly on enrolled students will unnecessarily complicate reporting procedures. The fact that calling 911 while on campus will connect you to Campus Police suggests to us that the current infrastructure supports a campus-specific reporting strategy that supports anyone reporting sexual violence while on campus, regardless of the specifics of their student status.

Notably, graduate students often find it particularly challenging to navigating the campus environment as we are often employees as well as students. We are not unique in this, but this does disproportionately affect graduate students in light of how often our funding is usually tied to teaching or research assistant contracts. This presents challenges in handling graduate student experiences which ought to be considered when developing sexual violence policy. If a graduate student is harassed by one of their



students while performing their teaching assistant duties, will the university respond according to the student policy or employment standards?

A similar but distinct concern is when students access university services while not enrolled. We often hear from graduate students who are on parental leave, medical leave, or who have temporarily withdrawn from studies due to financial or mental health concerns, but will still visit the library or with their supervisor. These students might be overlooked in policy development, despite how they are accessing student services.

We are concerned that limiting the act to “enrolled students” is too ambiguous to adequately address the graduate student experience. When colleges and universities are developing their sexual violence policies, we consider it imperative that they bear in mind the wider campus environment.

### *Developing and requiring a climate survey*

Regarding schedule 3 section 7 requiring provision of information for the Minister, we encourage a specific requirement that colleges and universities be required to complete a broader climate survey, which would survey students about their experiences and perceptions around sexual violence through their college or university experience.

Statistics will only ever reflect part of the picture. This is particularly true for sexual violence, which is frequently underreported; some estimates suggest that as few as 1 out of 10 sexual assaults are reported to police. We are further concerned that the schools with the best policies might be painted the worst through reported statistics, specifically as incidents handled by both counselling services and police might get double counted, and schools effective policies may lead to an increase in reporting. A climate survey requirement would ensure that the details and lived experience of sexual violence are adequately described so that campuses can better develop and refine their policies accordingly.



### *Requiring that student input be included rather than considered*

Currently the bill under schedule 4 states “A college or university described in subsection (2) shall ensure that student input is considered”. We recommend changing the term *considered* to *included*. Considered implies option, whereas it is of extreme importance to assure that student input is certainly included in the development and dissemination of this policy. As mentioned by my colleagues, student input is necessary to assure that students are given the supports they need in any instance of sexual violence on campus. By having students included, the university will be better informed of what areas on campus are lacking in regards to supporting students who have experienced sexual violence regardless of whether they would like crisis support or in reporting an incident and how the campus community can improve to prevent sexual violence and develop a consent culture. Students can best suggest how the campus environment can improve to increase accessibility to support services and students are the ones that can assure that this policy is being upheld and put into action. Because Western has included students, we have student representation on the Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Committee by both undergraduate and graduate students, students are at the forefront of planning and executing prevention events such as the mentioned Consent and Compassion Forum, and students are empowered to express what changes they would like to see and are involved in making those changes happen. The term included will assure that this is maintained and is across all campuses.

### In closing

We believe that this policy has strengthened Western University and with the added recommendations, safety of all members of our campus community will be improved. As graduate students we are proud to attend an institution that puts our safety at the highest priority.