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UNH Faculty to Discuss Violence Against Women with White House Officials
DURHAM, N.H. – Three University of New Hampshire faculty members who research violence against women and develop effective programs to address it on college campuses have been invited to brief the White House on their work.

UNH professors Sharyn Potter, Victoria Banyard, and Robert Eckstein will meet with Lynn Rosenthal, the White House advisor on violence against women, and former New Hampshire judge Susan Carbon, director of the Office on Violence Against Women, Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2010, in Washington, D.C., to discuss their work. Following the meeting, the professors will attend a reception at the residence of Vice President Joe Biden to celebrate the 16th anniversary of the passage of the Violence Against Women Act.

“We are honored to have the opportunity to speak with government representatives who are working on this issue and to celebrate the passage of this important legislation with the vice president and Dr. Biden later in the evening,” Potter said.

As a senator from Delaware, Biden was widely recognized for his work on criminal justice issues, including the landmark 1994 Violence Against Women Act. The Violence Against Women Act provides funds to improve investigation procedures and prosecution rates of violent crimes committed against women. The Office of Violence Against Women was established in 2000 in the Department of Justice and administers grants and develops federal policy that focuses on domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

During the briefing Potter, Banyard, and Eckstein will discuss the problem of sexual and relationship violence and stalking on college campuses.

“Sexual assault of women is the most common violent crime committed on college campuses today. Approximately 20 percent of undergraduate women have been a victim of sexual assault that occurred when they were attending college, and these incidence rates are not in decline. Moreover, the rates are higher for women on campus than for their non-college peers,” Potter said.

“The majority of attempted and completed sexual assaults on college campus are perpetrated by acquaintances, such as classmates, residence hall neighbors, dates, or intimate partners of the victim rather than strangers. Despite the fact that college campus communities are at-risk environments for sexual and relationship violence, there is variability in the extent to which campuses are working to prevent this problem. Further, although the majority of these assaults involve alcohol or alcohol with another drug, few of the existing programs address the role of alcohol and other drugs in these assaults,” she said.

According to Banyard, exposure to sexual and relationship violence is a key public health issue associated with a multiplicity of negative outcomes, including increased substance use, depressive symptoms, health risk behaviors, and symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder for women and men. Therefore, there is an urgency to find new prevention tools that engage communities as a whole.

Funds from the Office of the Violence Against Women have helped to fund different components of UNH’s nationally and internationally recognized Bringing in the BystanderTM program.

The Bringing in the BystanderTM Program has two components: A Prevention Workshop for Establishing a Community of ResponsibilityTM in-person program and the Know-Your-PowerTM social marketing campaign. It is being used at a number of institutions of higher education and other organizations throughout the United States.
“The program applies a community of responsibility model to teach bystanders how to intervene safely and effectively in cases where sexual and relationship violence and stalking may be occurring, have occurred or are at risk for occurring. Its main message is that everyone in the community has a role to play in ending violence,” said Jane Stapleton, coordinator of the UNH-based Prevention Innovations, which administers the program.

According to Mary Moynihan, coordinator of Prevention Innovations, the Bringing in the BystanderTM Program is one of the few programs of its kind that has been scientifically evaluated and found to be effective. The program and the social marketing campaign do not have unintended, significant “backlash” effects leading some participants to worsen their attitudes or behaviors following participation in the program or exposure to the social marketing materials.

Both components of the Bringing in the Bystander Program are being evaluated with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on two campuses to determine the synergy between the prevention program and social marketing campaign and their combined effect on perpetration and victimization rates.

UNH has long been regarded as a leader in addressing violence against women on campus. In 1988, the university began funding the Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention Program, one of the country’s first on-campus crisis centers to provide comprehensive confidential direct services and prevention programming to UNH students, faculty and staff. The program continually seeks out new and innovative ways to educate the UNH community about ending violence against women. Recently, these efforts have included the introduction of an online advocate service, the creation of a new position specifically focusing on education through the use of new media, and a soon to be released educational campaign on supporting survivors.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state’s flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

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