

Media Relations

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UNH Researchers to Create Video Game to Help Students End Sexual Violence

DURHAM, N.H. – Prevention Innovations, a University of New Hampshire research and training unit that develops and evaluates programs to reduce sexual violence on college campuses, will create a video game to extend the reach of its acclaimed bystander intervention strategies. The project, which will create an interactive simulation video game (ISVG) for use on the Web and mobile devices, is funded by a two-year, \$579,301 grant from the National Institute of Justice.

“We wanted to take our two programs we know are effective – Bringing in the Bystander® In-Person Prevention Program and the Know Your Power® Bystander Social Marketing Campaign– and translate them into a video game,” says [Prevention Innovations](#) co-director Sharyn Potter, the principal investigator on the grant.

“The video game is another way to engage students through something that is very common to them,” adds Prevention Innovations co-director Jane Stapleton. “Our students’ lives are so much online.” Further, the video game format will help them reach more male college students, who research shows spend significantly more time engaged with video games than females.

Both [Bringing in the Bystander®](#) and [Know Your Power®](#) focus on bystander intervention, a community approach to prevention where everyone has a role to play in ending sexual and relationship violence and stalking. Bringing in the Bystander® is an in-person prevention program and Know Your Power® is a social marketing campaign.

Working with Dartmouth College’s [Tiltfactor](#) laboratory, a leader in designing games for social change, the researchers will develop a game in which players will be presented with situations that let them learn and practice active bystander skills. Research has shown that practicing bystander intervention strategies transfers to real-world behaviors. “Practicing is the key to prevention,” says Potter, who is also an associate professor of sociology at UNH.

The team anticipates having a prototype game by early 2016, with the development process heavily influenced by input from college students. As with all Prevention Innovations projects, the game will undergo rigorous evaluation for its effectiveness.

“We need to go to our target audience and make sure we’re doing this right,” Potter says. “We’ve found that if the scenario doesn’t look like a party they would go to on a Saturday night, the intervention is not effective. It really has to resonate with college students, or there’s no sense in doing this.”

The researchers stress that the video game in no way makes light of the subject of sexual violence on campus.

“It’s not a game of sexual assault. We’re making a game of prevention,” says Stapleton. Collaborator Mary Flanagan, founding director of Tiltfactor and the Sherman Fairchild Distinguished Professor in Digital Humanities at Dartmouth College, is a leader in the field of using games for public health and social change.

Established in October 2006, Prevention Innovations is a research and training unit at UNH that develops, implements and evaluates programs, policies, and practices to help end violence against women. A

multidisciplinary center, it includes faculty from the sociology, psychology, social work, and justice studies departments as well as from the women's studies program and UNH Law School.

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 12,300 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

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