

May 19, 2022

Western's commitments to education, prevention, safety, and culture change to combat gender-based and sexual violence

I'm sharing an important update today regarding Western's ongoing efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based and sexual violence.

Recently, I received two reports developed in response to disturbing allegations that began circulating on social media the weekend of September 10-11, 2021, in the midst of Orientation Week for our incoming first-year class, that women students at Western had been drugged and sexually assaulted.

Before commenting on the reports, I want to provide some background and also acknowledge what a difficult year this has been for our students and our campus community. Last September has rightly led us to look inward as an institution—to re-examine our culture, our values, our policies, and our approach to orienting students to campus life. And we are redoubling our efforts as a community to use this moment to generate lasting change.

As soon as the allegations came to our attention, the university immediately began looking into the allegations and contacted London Police Service, which opened an investigation into the information circulating on social media. After interviewing more than 600 students living in residence, London Police advised us that no formal complaints have been received, and that, to date, no charges have been laid.

Among other actions taken in response to these allegations, I established an internal [Action Committee on Gender Based & Sexual Violence](#) to make recommendations aimed at changing the campus culture at Western. This committee was led by Professor Nadine Wathen, who is the Canada Research Chair in Mobilizing Knowledge on Gender-Based Violence, and Dr. Terry McQuaid, who is a psychologist and director of wellness & well-being here at Western. The committee consulted approximately 900 campus members and 60 members of the [London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse](#). Their report includes a number of important recommendations.

In parallel to the Action Committee, I also commissioned an independent review to identify policy gaps and/or procedural failures related to the weekend of September 10-11 and make recommendations to address them. This review was led by Prof. Nathalie Des Rosiers—who is a lawyer, legal scholar, and Principal of the University of Toronto's Massey College—and Sonya Nigam, who is the Executive Coordinator for the [Canadian Association for the Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment in Higher Education](#). They conducted an independent review through interviews with Western student leaders, faculty, staff, and university administrators,

as well as with London emergency response personnel. Their report also contains a number of important recommendations.

The two reports complement one another and offer several new ideas for advancing efforts to combat gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV). There are also many instances where the reports identify work that is already underway, in part stemming from interim recommendations submitted by the Action Committee in February.

Western welcomes the valuable insights and suggestions in both reports, which merit careful review and consideration. I am grateful to the hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and London community members whose insight and expertise informed these reports and guided us throughout this process.

And I want to thank everyone for their ideas and commitment to cultivating a safe, secure, and respectful campus environment for all members of the Western community.

In response to the reports, Western is taking the following actions:

- a) Re-evaluating Orientation Week and the transition to residence life.** We have taken several steps that include:
 - Working with the University Students' Council and other important campus stakeholders to rethink and plan a welcoming, inclusive Orientation Week program that discourages the over-consumption of alcohol and other recreational drugs, and instead contributes to a culture of safety, community, respect, and academic success.
 - Appointing Lisa Highgate as a senior leader to collaborate with student leaders and other campus community partners (including key staff members from the Student Experience portfolio, and Western Special Constable Service) to promote a positive culture change to Orientation Week and the transition to residence life.
- b) Establishing a new Gender-Based & Sexual Violence Advisory Committee.** To help guide and prioritize our next steps, a new Advisory Committee will be established including student, staff, and faculty representatives, with input from internal and external community partners as needed. Chaired by a Special Advisor named by the Provost & Vice-President (Academic), the Committee's mandate will include further consideration of the reports' recommendations, and support for education, communication, and training initiatives aimed at prevention, safety, and culture change. The committee will engage other campus groups focused on this issue, such as the **President's Committee on the Safety of Women** and the **Caucus on Women's Issues**.

- c) **Continuing to develop, deliver, evaluate, and refine mandatory GBSV education and training.** Recognizing culture change requires ongoing engagement of all campus members, Western’s GBSV education and training programs will continue to focus on:
- ***Incoming students:*** As of September 2022, as a condition of their admission to Western, all incoming students will be required to complete a GBSV education module *before* arriving on campus. Additional GBSV education will be provided in August during [Community Connections](#), a one-day intensive on-campus experience designed to orient new students to Western. Content includes discussion of Western’s values and community expectations, GBSV prevention and education, and information related to alcohol and safe consumption.
 - ***First-year students living in residence:*** Mandatory GBSV training was provided to 5,300 students living in Western’s 10 residences during the Winter 2022 term. Content was developed in consultation with students and survivors in residence, and across campus, as well as violence-prevention teams in Student Experience, the [Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children](#), and [Anova](#), a London-based agency devoted to supporting survivors and changing the root causes of gender-based violence. Going forward, this training will be delivered each fall to new incoming students.
 - ***Orientation for student leaders:*** Western is enhancing customized training for upper-year student leaders on GBSV prevention and response. For example, those who help plan Orientation Week will participate in a new two-week intensive training program focusing on their roles in supporting students.
 - ***All faculty and staff:*** As of May 17, seventy percent of all Western employees have completed an online [mandatory training](#) module on supporting disclosures of GBSV, and we are following up to ensure all faculty and staff have completed the training by September 1. This training will continue to be mandatory for all new hires. Additional customized GBSV training for special constables and other security personnel will also be provided.
 - ***Fraternities and sororities:*** We will provide support to members of these autonomous student organizations in their effort to address the issue of GBSV within the Greek system.
- d) **Increasing resources for education, prevention, and response.** Western is also taking steps to increase our capacity to support GBSV-related activities, including:

- Partnering with the [Regional Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Program](#) of St. Joseph's Health Care London to offer 24/7 support to students who have experienced GBSV, in addition to the [on-campus supports offered by Western](#).
 - Hiring an additional GBSV Support Case Manager.
 - Hiring an additional GBSV Prevention and Education Coordinator.
 - Hiring non-student adult staff as Residence Health & Safety Advisors to work overnight shifts, provide educational support and guidance.
 - Applying to the Canada Research Chair program and Canada First Research Excellence Fund to support new academic positions focused on GBSV-related research.
- e) **Increasing physical safety measures on campus.** Ensuring the safety and security of our physical surroundings is an important GBSV prevention strategy. Accordingly, Western will monitor the impact of extra safety measures put in place **since fall 2021**, which include:
- Hiring six additional special constables.
 - Hiring 15 new security guards.
 - Enhancing the number and frequency of security patrols.
 - Re-activating the Foot Patrol program, which had been paused during the pandemic.
 - Upgrading/adding emergency phones, building alarms, lighting, security card access system.
 - Implementing new/enhanced communication protocols, particularly regarding the use of social media, to notify the campus community of emerging safety concerns.

Thank you again to the Western community and to our partners for your incredible dedication and commitment to making our campus a more vibrant, respectful, caring, inclusive, and safe place to learn, live, and work.

Changing our culture will not be fast or easy. It will take time, persistence, and the active engagement of all campus members to achieve our goals. Together, we remain committed to working to end gender-based and sexual violence on campus and in our community.

Sincerely,

Alan Shepard
President & Vice-Chancellor
Western University