

**Topic:** Peer Advocate Advisors Program

**Relevant Administration:** Mary Pat McMahon, Vice Provost/Vice President for Student Affairs; Sue Wasiolek, Dean of Students and Associate Vice President for Student Affairs; Tom Szigethy, Associate Dean of Students and Director of DuWell; Krystal George, Assistant Director for Educational Initiatives of the Women's Center; April-Autumn Jenkins, Gender Violence Intervention Services Coordinator of the Women's Center; Jayne Grandes, Assistant Vice President of the Office for Institutional Equity (Title IX Compliance); Victoria Krebs, Associate Dean of Students, Title IX Outreach & Response.

**Proposal:**

In 2016, the Student Experience Survey of Duke undergraduates found that 40% of female students had been sexually assaulted since beginning their Duke careers. The survey was re-administered in 2018, and the number of undergraduate women reporting sexual assault [rose to nearly 48%](#). Additionally, almost 14% of undergraduate men in 2018 reported experiencing sexual assault while students at Duke. Students and administrators also agree that this data may be underreported.

One of the many barriers to reducing gender violence on Duke's campus is the bureaucratic process of reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment to the Office of Institutional Equity (Title IX) and Student Conduct Offices. Recounting this type of event over and over to individuals unfamiliar with a student's case is often re-traumatizing for victims and discourages students from reporting misconduct to the University. As DSG President, I plan to make the reporting process more accessible and empowering by developing **a peer advocacy program to assist students with the reporting process**. Based on programs such as [SHARE at Princeton](#) and [SAPA at Dartmouth](#), I will ensure that students reporting their assault to the University have a **knowledgeable, confidential peer ally** by their side every step of the way who can facilitate their access to University resources in a non-traumatizing manner. Students will also be able to request to be represented by someone **with similar lived experiences and identity as them**, an important consideration given that LGBTQIA+ students and students of color experience sexual assault and harassment at higher rates than the general student population. I will work to ensure these programs and ones like them have support by advocating for **more funding for the Women's Center and the Title IX office** to better facilitate a more empathetic student experience.

**The peer-advocacy model can be expanded** to serve in other capacities when students in difficult situations can lean on their peers for support and understanding. As students, we are the ones who know best what it is like to attend Duke, and empowering each other through programs such as this one will help not only to **improve the student experience** but also to reduce the number of students that have to deal with traumatic experiences on their own.

**Next Steps:** This semester, I will hold a student roundtable to discuss the shortcomings of Duke's sexual assault reporting process and gain critical student perspectives on the specific necessities of the peer advocacy program. Then, we will present these recommendations to relevant administrators and secure funding for the program through the Office of Student Affairs. Over the summer, we will release applications for peer advocates and determine the inaugural group. In Fall 2020, we will begin training the peer advocates and begin publicizing the initiative. The program will go live in Spring 2021.