

Students express frustration with school policy in emotional video

Middlebury College issues statement



Updated: 6:52 PM EDT Mar 31, 2015

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NewsChannel 5 at 6PM

MIDDLEBURY, Vt. —

In "Middlebury Unmasked" six students expressed their frustration with the administration at Middlebury College.

Sexual assault survivors are behind the video project.

"This project was very much a response to try and contextualize this national discourse with what's going on in our backyard," said Maddie Orcutt, a junior.

Orcutt is an activist who worked on the film. According to the college, there were 17 sex offenses on campus in 2013. She believes there are more.

"I think they need to do a better job in allowing survivors to insert themselves in this process and I think they need to do a better job of saying we're not only going to be compliant with Title IX we're going to demand a higher standard," Orcutt said.

Middlebury College released a statement this week after the video surfaced. The college says they're going beyond mere compliance when it comes sexual misconduct investigation.

WomenSafe in Middlebury said sexual violence is a difficult conversation for any college campus to have and that the college is trying.

"There's a lot of good energy, and effort and heart behind it," said Kerri Duquette-Hoffman.

The center is collaborating with the college to bring sexual violence dialogues to student life. Duquette-Hoffman said campus violence is a longstanding issue and colleges are working to catch up and do the right thing.

"The more we can talk about it and have conversations about what healthy sexuality is, and what is not healthy and really address it, the more we start to end sexual violence and really change that dynamic," said Duquette-Hoffman.

Students behind the video are hopeful their efforts don't go to waste.

"I think that it's highly disrespectful for six individuals to come forward, share their stories, criticisms and experiences and have the administration shut them down and not even allow that conversation to happen," said Orcutt.

Middlebury College released this statement to WPTZ on Tuesday:

At an event on campus on March 10, students played a video that was produced by several individuals who identified themselves as current Middlebury students. The faces of these individuals were masked in the video.

In the video, the individuals stated their dissatisfaction with how their complaints of sexual misconduct were handled by Middlebury. Unfortunately, Federal law (the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or “FERPA”) prohibits colleges from commenting on the details of specific disciplinary cases, so we cannot respond directly to the statements made in the video.

While no institution is perfect, Middlebury College has taken a strong stance in its policies and proscribed responses to complaints of sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and related retaliation. We have moved quickly to adapt our approaches when new policies and practices are recommended or required by the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) or by Congress (although in some cases, we have found that our policies already met or exceeded these requirements). These areas include education, due-process protections for all parties, rules regarding burden-of-proof standards, and much else. We have also gone beyond mere compliance by, for example, adopting a single investigator-based model long before the White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault praised the single investigator approach. We follow the OCR’s guidance regarding confidentiality as well. During the investigation and adjudication, our process calls for confidentiality to protect both students’ privacy and the integrity of the investigation. Once a determination has been made, we encourage respect for privacy in general but we do not require confidentiality regarding the outcome of the disciplinary proceeding, and no one is prohibited from speaking about their experience.

We believe that a commitment to thoroughness and attention to detail throughout these investigations is of paramount importance, and that this is ultimately in the best interest of all involved parties. Nonetheless, we understand the traumatic effects of sexual assault and we acknowledge how difficult it can be for students to participate in these cases. Of course no process can ensure that all parties to these difficult cases, whether complainants or respondents, will be satisfied with the findings. In fact, it is almost never the case that all parties will be. But we will continue to strive to make our campus a safe and respectful environment, and to

ensure that every aspect of our investigation and adjudication processes reflects our dedication to these goals.

To report sexual violence call Vermont's 24 hour Toll Free Hotline at 1-800-489-7273 and in New York call 1-800-942-6906.