



Westmoreland County efforts to change the culture to prevent sexual violence

Blackburn Center provides services to victims of domestic and sexual violence and other types of violence and crime in Westmoreland County. Services are free and confidential.

In 2007, Blackburn Center and Seton Hill University initiated an institutional partnership to address and prevent sexual assault and domestic violence on campus. They sought to discover: *What does it take to change the attitudes and behaviors of a diverse cohort of college students to prevent sexual assault and domestic violence from happening?*

A project team was formed to lead the university-wide initiative. Dubbed STAR (Social Transformation through Awareness and Resolve), it is comprised of administration, student life professionals, faculty across departments and Blackburn Center staff. Over a decade of work, the project now encompasses all facets of the Seton Hill campus and culture, including:

- providing support to faculty across disciplines in integrating gender violence into curricula;
- developing strategies to engage men (including athletes) in meaningful ways;
- training all students, faculty, staff and administration in bystander intervention;
- educating students about their rights and the services available to them – taking great care to ensure that appropriate responses to victims are in place and that perpetrators are held accountable;
- updating university policies and enhanced university training for residence life staff and other key players in this area;
- reviewing university HR policies (e.g., those related to family leave and equal pay) to address more global issues of equity.

STAR's Assessment Team focuses on developing tools to gather and analyze data and quantify their success, and it has developed quantitative and qualitative tools to assess the impact of campus programming. The primary method of quantitative evaluation is a survey that tests the effectiveness of class-based and campus-wide strategies intended to change attitudes and beliefs about gender-based violence.

Seton Hill faculty have presented on this project at several national conferences, leading the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg to join the STAR effort in 2014. Pitt Greensburg is following Seton Hill's example, and researchers are working together to measure the impact of prevention activities.

Blackburn Center has established a goal of full participation by all college campuses in Westmoreland County. Initial efforts are underway at Saint Vincent College and Westmoreland County Community College.