

# KNOW YOUR IX

Empowering students to stop sexual violence

## Campus Activism Case Studies: City University of New York



*CUNY activist Nusrat "Jerin" Arifa*

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I was one of two students to propose and help create the City University of New York (CUNY) sexual assault policy for half a million students. It was a two-year process from the time CUNY administration agreed to our proposal to when the policy was finally written. Although we did the bulk of the work, it was in no way a solo project. Many different individuals and organizations helped, from Students Active for Ending Rape (SAFER) to the National Organization for Women (NOW) to Representative Gerard Nadler. Allies like Rep. Nadler and NY State Senator Liz Krueger helped by writing letters of support. Others, like Feminist Majority, helped us strategize. SAFER's help was invaluable; staffers mentored me from Day One and stayed with me throughout the process.

We proposed the creation of a sexual violence and harassment policy to CUNY's administration through CUNY's University Student Senate (USS), which is comprised of student government members from each of CUNY's colleges. I had access to the USS as the Hunter College representative, having been elected to the executive board of Hunter's undergraduate student government as the External Affairs/Public Relations Commissioner. (This is another example of why I believe women should run for office – whether it's in schools or elsewhere.) CUNY's administration responded to our request to create the policy – which did not exist beforehand – by forming a task force to advise on the process. I was one of five students in the taskforce of 14 charged with creating the policy, which included CUNY's community and senior colleges, General Counsel Staff, the Council of Presidents, Student Development personnel, faculty and staff researchers, and Public Safety officials. We ensured there was LGBTQ representation on the task force to make sure it was a truly inclusive process.

**We wanted to ensure the policy would represent the voices of everyone within CUNY.**

- One tactic we used was creating a free Survey Monkey survey to collect responses from everyone from staff to students to alumni on what they wanted to see in the policy. We had limited time to gather the research, but were able to get over 600 responses within two weeks. We disseminated the survey via CUNY listservs and asked faculty to send out on their listservs and mention the survey during their classes.
- In addition, I utilized Hunter College's various events and tabling hours for college clubs to elicit feedback.
- I also posted flyers on the survey all over Hunter's campus, emailed all of the 130-plus student organizations on campus, and contacted every media outlet at CUNY.
- Professor Morris of the Hunter publication the Word was also helpful in publishing a link to the survey and consistently mentioning our work in articles. We presented the survey results during the task force meetings.

Our efforts in getting feedback did not end with the survey. We helped organize town hall meetings at Hunter College, where I was a politically active student as the president of the Women's Rights Coalition. We gathered additional feedback on the first draft from students and presented it to the taskforce. Even after I graduated college, I remained active with the process as long as possible. I utilized the NOW New York State Young Feminist Task Force, which I chaired, to organize students and activists to attend the CUNY Board of Trustees meeting in Staten Island, NY. We urged the Trustees to include anonymous reporting and mandatory prevention education in the policy.

To make things as easy as possible for administration, I helped organize anti-violence programming on campus, including a “Take Back the Night” event, self defense classes, and trainings with Men Can Stop Rape and the Bringing in the Bystander program. I utilized all resources to fundraise for these trainings, doubling the club budget the first year and tripling it the second year I was president of the Women’s Rights Coalition.

The Bringing in the Bystander program I organized especially resonated with participants, since it does not use traditional tactics of telling men not to rape and women to watch their drinks. Instead, it uses a pro-social bystander model, which teaches that everyone has a responsibility in ending gender-based violence. After organizing the first training in 2008, I brought back the trainer to conduct a train-the-trainer training in 2009. The attendees included a member of the General Counsel Staff, who was in charge of drafting the policy. She liked the training so much that she incorporated lessons from it in the final draft of the policy. The public safety officials who attended the training also found it valuable and began incorporating lessons from it into CUNY’s training academy for all public-safety officials.

Although I am proud of the policy being passed, there are two things I wanted that were not included: anonymous reporting and mandatory prevention education (despite letters of support from people like Gloria Steinem and politicians like Representative Nadler to organizations like NOW and Feminist Majority). The Village Voice wrote an article about it. In addition, as I was afraid, after my graduation, enforcement of the policy has been less than ideal. I tried to mentor current students, but there has not been much involvement from the current student body. Currently, there is no mandatory prevention education for the college community, which is what I wanted most of all.

–Nusrat “Jerin” Arifa

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