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## VOICES

# Students Lead The Charge For Comprehensive Sexual Assault Policies At CUNY

BY VIVIAN NUNEZ | JUNE 10, 2016 AT 10:00 AM

As a student at the City University of New York's Hunter College, Jerin Arifa found herself at the intersection of change. The City University of New York (CUNY) system as a whole, which is comprised of various colleges, did not yet have an overarching policy on sexual assault, but with Arifa's leadership as well as various student activists on campus, this was set to change.



*Hunter College Brookdale Campus in New York, NY.*

CREDIT: Flickr user Jessie Daniels.

Together with another student, [Arifa proposed and developed a more inclusive](#) domestic violence and sexual assault policy for more than half a million students within the City University of New York system.

“I was already really involved in campus organizing,” said Arifa to Generation Progress. “And because of my position in Hunter College’s Student Government, I was the representative for Hunter College... in the CUNY-wide student government and that allowed me access to CUNY administration, which helped us start the whole process.”

The new CUNY policy was an improvement because it created safer spaces for both survivors of sexual assault and those who chose to outwardly support them.

“The policy includes new and comprehensive guidelines for students and counselors, establishes disciplinary procedures, creates on-campus advocates for victims, provides education and training for faculty and staff, and ensures assistance for students in obtaining medical care and counseling,” explains [the official statement from CUNY](#).

In many ways, CUNY’s 2010 move to approve such an exhaustive policy was ahead of the curve; most colleges are just now, under the pressure of increased Title IX investigations, choosing to revisit their campus sexual assault policies.

- Brigham Young University, for instance, a Mormon, private university, **announced at the beginning of May that it would be invoking a task force** and launching a website that allows anyone to offer feedback to the university on its handling of sexual assaults. But Brigham Young University impetus for change came after various survivors came forth with allegations that the university treated survivors unfairly.

BYU is not the only example of how students, activists and survivors have sparked change. Much of the change that has happened across college campuses is due to grassroots movements. Students across the nation have taken on the role of activists and openly embraced the role of active bystander.

“I absolutely think that students should get involved and organize,” explains Arifa. “I think grassroots organization is probably the best kind, I think it’s so important, not just for the causes they’re fighting for, but also for the skills [they gain] and the way it changes society.”

At a federal government level, the White House has also acknowledged the power behind grassroots movements on campus. Vice President Joe Biden has persistently pushed forth the idea that the more students who become active bystanders, the less likely it is for sexual assaults to occur on campuses.

Currently, statistics show that 1 in 5 women will be sexually assaulted during their time in college. Historically, of the individuals who are sexually assaulted, less than 5 percent of them report their assaults.

The lack of reporting can be traced back to various different reasons, from not trusting college’s investigative process to fearing that they will not be believed.

Vice President Joe Biden has taken the lead in the White House in the national efforts to stamp out sexual assault. “Until we make a pariah of all those who believe they have a right to say, ‘She asked for it,’ we won’t make the progress we have to make,” **he remarked to students at a campus event** for the White House’s It’s On Us campaign.

Jerin Arifa shares the Vice President’s beliefs as evidenced by her work to the cause as a student and her continued work on the overall conversation around campus sexual assault as a post-grad activist.

Her work, she explains, “really helped [her] grow as a professional and as an individual.” She currently is the President and Founder of the First Virtual Chapter of the National Organization for Women.

She has also seen the impact of how becoming active bystanders and student activists have impacted the lives of those she served with.

“A lot of the people that personally worked with me have jobs now that are directly related to the campus organizing that they did,” she tells Generation Progress.