

The importance of trauma-informed training for responsible employees (graduate students working for the university, professors, faculty, and staff)

Using data from the Survivors + Allies' 2021 survey of the UC community

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TW: *The following content contains quotes about experiences of SVSH*



Background & Purpose

“Responsible employees” are professionals employed by a university who are required to report any instances of sexual violence, harassment, assault, and discrimination that occur on campus* [1]. This requirement is enforced and regulated by Title IX federal law, which was expanded to protect students from sexual violence, harassment, and discrimination [1,2]. Similarly, “mandated reporters” are required to report misconduct to protect individuals from harming themselves or others. Mandated reporters are required by the California Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (CANRA) to report suspected child, elder, or dependent abuse or neglect to external authorities (i.e., Child Protective Services or law enforcement).

In the University of California (UC) system, both mandated reporters and responsible employees have distinct roles in reporting misconduct. While both have reporting obligations, they serve different purposes. Responsible employees are designated under Title IX and required to report sexual violence and sexual harassment (SVSH) to the university’s Title IX office. Conversely, mandated reporters report to law enforcement if they suspect someone is being harmed. Mandated reporters expand beyond the UC system, including health staff, mental health clinicians, and confidential employees on- and off-campus.

Most UC employees are responsible employees. As responsible employees, graduate students who work as teaching assistants, research coordinators, and in supervisor roles should be aware of their status as responsible employees, as well as how to support survivors and provide them with an array of resources available on campus. In addition, faculty and staff should be held to the same standard. It is essential that graduate students, research coordinators, faculty, and staff are trained to be trauma-informed, as they support and work closely with various student populations.

Furthermore, graduate students, regardless of the specific work they do for the university, deserve to work in an environment that is safe and supportive. A safe and supportive environment can be fostered by providing trauma-informed training on what it means to be a responsible employee, where someone can go for confidential support, and how to redirect a survivor to resources when they can’t be a support person [3]. Graduate students are still students, and although their role as a responsible employee is required, they still have a responsibility to support themselves. Hence, learning how to support survivors in different ways, including redirecting them to proper resources, is a part of trauma-informed training [4]. Responsible employees can cause more harm and re-traumatization for survivors without the proper language and knowledge of how to support a survivor [5,6]. Therefore, graduate students, faculty, and staff must receive more comprehensive trauma-informed training as representatives of the university.

*Employees designated as confidential (e.g., CAPS, CARE, Office of Ombuds, Student Legal Services) do not fall under the title of Responsible Employee.

Methods

In 2021, UCLA student organization Survivors + Allies (S+A) conducted a research study surveying students across all 10 UC campuses to evaluate students’ awareness, utilization, and evaluation of on-

and off-campus resources for survivors of SVSH, including the Title IX office, Campus Assault Resources & Education (CARE), Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), and UC Police Departments (UCPD). You can read the resulting report and associated academic publications [here](#).

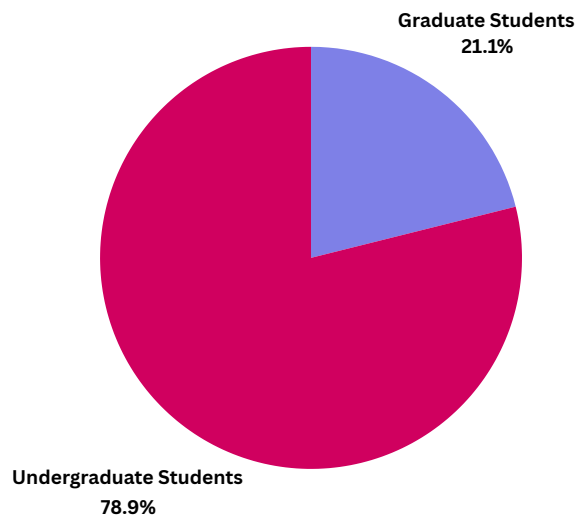
The resulting sample consisted of:

- 1,223 total students (52% undergraduate and 48% graduate)
- 62% cisgender women, 21% cisgender men, 2% transgender people, 18% nonbinary and people of other gender identities
- 42% of students identified as LGBTQA+
- 59% as students of color
- 17% as international students
- 41% identified as survivors of SVSH

Overall Demographics

UC Students

- Undergraduate students make up 78.9% of the UC student population.(1)
- Graduate students make up a varying percentage of the UC student population: Academic Master (2.7%), Academic Doctor (9.3%), Professional Doctor (0.2%), and Graduate Professional (8.8%).

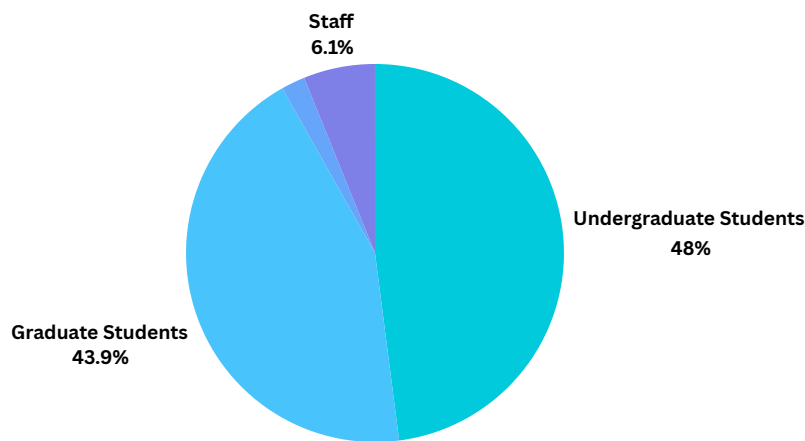


UC Employees

- In 2024, 27,750 people worked as Student Teaching/Research Assistants, 6,389 people worked as Medical Interns/Residents, 5,841 people worked as Postdoctoral Scholars, and 7,589 people worked under the “Other Academic Employees” category.(2)
- In 2024, 25,752 people worked in Faculty positions.(3)

Survivors + Allies’ 2021 Study

- In our study:
 - 47% of participants were undergraduate students
 - 43% of participants were graduate students
 - 2% of participants were faculty
 - 6% of participants were staff



(1) The data presented is based on the [University of California Fall Student Enrollment data](#) for the Fall 2023 term. This data includes a breakdown of UC student enrollment based on degree program type, student level, and enrollment status (new or continuing student).

(2) The data presented is sourced from the [UC Employee Headcount Table](#) which was last updated August 15, 2024.

(3) The number of faculty listed combines multiple faculty positions listed on the [UC Employee Headcount Table](#): (1) Faculty - Ladder-rank and Equivalent, (2) Faculty - Clinical/In-Residence/Adjunct, and (3) Faculty - Lecturers.

Findings

Most students are responsible employees

Students make up a large portion of responsible employees on campus.

- Graduate students working as Teaching Assistants are responsible employees during working hours, which is 24/7, as students can reach out with questions or for support anytime during the quarter.
- Any student working as a Research Assistant is a responsible employee for the time period in which they are employed by the university.
- All other student employees, including students working as resident advisors (RAs) and teaching staff (i.e., readers), are responsible employees while they are working and if they learn about a student experiencing sexual violence or sexual harassment.

Most UC employees are responsible employees

Faculty and staff interact with a large portion of the student population, including undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral students, and professional students.

- Because faculty and staff interact with such a large portion of the student population, they impact the student experience at the university, which includes student support.
- Faculty and staff are responsible employees during working hours. For faculty, specifically principal investigators (PIs), professors, and research coordinators, working hours can be 24/7, as students can reach out with questions or for support anytime.

“Professors have been the least helpful. I was shamed for missing class after being raped. I begged my two male Professors for extensions but they said that being raped isn’t a medical excuse and they couldn’t help accommodate me.” – **cis-woman, LGBQIA+, White, graduate student**

“Professor. I respect and admire my advisor, but his response to my incident of gender based discrimination from another graduate student was met with the response that I should call them in" (instead of call out) and try to educate them on what they did wrong. Why should I have to do that extra labor?" – **White, straight woman, doctoral student**

“My professors are just sarcastically speaking and smirking when I try to get into my concerns and issues. I understand they are trying to keep their space positive but hoped that they could spare just a little of their time for me.” – **Asian, LGBQIA+ woman, undergraduate**

Graduate students should be aware of resources

Many students are unaware of the resources available to support survivors at the UC.

[on reasons they did not try to seek help from Title IX] “I was not aware of [these survivor support resources] until grad school. I also attended a UC during college but was unaware of its resources.” – *cis-woman, straight, Asian, graduate student*

Policy Recommendations

The UCs must include information about confidential and non-confidential resources in the required SVSH response training for graduate students and faculty.

- These resources must be carefully explained and differentiated in a trauma-informed manner, including how to access them, whether they are confidential or not, who can access them (making it clear if these resources are for students, faculty, staff, or both), and whether or not international and undocumented students can access them), when individuals can access them, and where individuals can go to access them.

Graduate students should receive trauma-informed training to better support the students they engage with, and to also create supportive classroom and research spaces for themselves.

- This can also allow graduate students to seek support for any SVSH experiences if they attended a UC as an undergraduate student.
- It’s important that the classroom and research space remain a supportive space for both graduate students, working as teaching assistants, and students.

Faculty and staff should receive specific, trauma-informed training to support the diverse populations they work with and supervise.

- The trauma-informed training they receive should teach them how to support the unique needs of students, including how to support students of color, international students, undocumented students, and LGBTQIA+ students.
- Increasing and improving trauma-informed training among faculty ensures that all students feel supported by the university and its responsible employees and are, therefore, more likely to have a positive experience at the university.

Before requiring trauma-informed training for graduate students, faculty, and staff, the UCs must establish a formal process to elicit feedback from trauma-informed individuals, such as CARE or CAPS, to ensure it meets the requirements of being trauma-informed.

Anyone who is considered a responsible employee should be informed of what that position means and how to support a survivor.

- Responsible employees should be trained on how to inform students that they are a responsible employee and that any information that is shared with them is not confidential (and explain confidentiality).
- Responsible employees should understand and demonstrate how to actively listen to survivors.
- Responsible employees should learn how to address a student if they disclose information that the responsible employee is obligated to report. Specifically, the responsible employee must tell the student that they are required to move forward in reporting the information and why. Then, they should provide additional resources at the student’s request. Providing support and being trauma-informed includes directing people to resources when you can’t be a resource.

Responsible employees must provide students with information on the difference between their role and confidential resources.

- Teaching assistants and professors should include a definition of responsible employees in the syllabus, including their roles as responsible employees. Following this statement, additional confidential resources should be listed.

- This includes providing a list of resources of the confidential resources available on campus and making it clear that individuals working in that role are not responsible employees.

Conclusion

Graduate students, faculty, and staff having a better understanding of their role as responsible employees and how to support survivors will improve their ability to support students and themselves. They do not have to take on the role of professional support persons. However, they need to learn how to teach students about what it means to speak with them (a responsible employee) about an SVSH experience, listen to survivors when they share an experience, provide them with the proper resources for support, and guide them through their education with empathy and understanding. Graduate students, faculty, and staff interact with a large portion of the university's student population and, therefore, impact students' experiences on campus. Thus, it is important that responsible employees are prepared to support students who have experienced SVSH and their unique needs in a trauma-informed manner.

In SVSH response training for responsible employees, the UCs must clearly explain what a responsible employee is and how this role supports students. Specifically, this training must differentiate between confidential and non-confidential resources, and identify who can access these resources. As such, the UCs must educate responsible employees on both non-confidential and confidential resources on campus, and provide responsible employees with recommendations on how to increase awareness about campus resources when interacting with students, such as advising that instructors list these resources in their course syllabus.

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