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# A Prevention Puzzle

*USAFA continues search for effective sexual assault education programs*

*By Jeff Holmquist / Photos by Ryan Hall*

**F**or more than a decade, the United States Air Force Academy has ramped up its effort to reduce the number of sexual assaults within the Cadet Wing.

So far, there's been no definitive program or curriculum that has proven effective on its own. But that doesn't mean senior leaders have given up the search.

In fact, the Academy has developed quite a reputation for its outside-the-box thinking and support for innovative violence prevention efforts.

Unfortunately, despite the Academy's commitment to finding solutions, the prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment at USAFA remains largely unchanged. The reality is that new programs may take years to produce lasting changes to the culture and prove effective.

"At times it is discouraging to see immense effort put forward by our staff and prevention stakeholders to address this program, but then prevalence numbers go in the wrong direction," admits Dr. Trevin Campbell, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response/Violence Prevention Program manager. "I think there are a lot of really well-intentioned, prevention-minded people who are doing a lot of good work. We just haven't found the perfect solution yet."

According to the Service Academy Gender Relations (SAGR) survey, which is conducted with cadets every two years, 15.1% of female cadets indicated that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact in 2017-18. About 1.8% of male cadets experienced unwanted sexual contact during that same school year. While those figures were both increases from the 2015-16 survey, the increase for female cadets was shown to be statistically significant.

Only 29 cadets officially reported the assault they endured in 2017-18, according to the Department of Defense's annual

report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at Military Service Academies. While that's down from 33 reports the year before, Campbell indicates that the total number of reports of sexual assault for the 2018-19 year have substantially increased.

The DoD report suggests that 87% of sexual assault victims at USAFA never report the crime for various reasons. Campbell says his office hopes to increase the number of cadets who feel comfortable reporting the crime, while also decreasing the actual number of assaults in the cadet ranks.

"There is an expectation that these are the best and brightest our nation has to offer and they should be above such things," Campbell says of the cadets. "But we are a reflection of society, and this is a pervasive problem throughout society. We're trying to teach cadets how to create and maintain healthy relationships, how to respect one another, and how to show dignity for one another."

## **SAPR OFFICE**

At the direction of the Department of Defense, USAFA first stood up its Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program in 2005-06.

"Before that, there were only fragmented response initiatives," Campbell says. "But as the DoD expands and evolves the existing sexual assault and prevention response program, we continue to adapt to new and changing initiatives. Many DoD initiatives have been in response to the general prevalence of sexual assault and the idea that commanders weren't doing enough to support victims and prevent assaults." ►



Today, the USAFA prevention program is much more robust. The office in Arnold Hall touts nine full-time prevention/response personnel and victim advocates, as well as two violence prevention integrators.

In addition, the SAPR office has 15 specially trained volunteer victim advocates who work with trauma survivors to get them the help they require. The office serves USAFA, Prep School and 10th Air Base Wing personnel, cadets and cadet candidates.

Most of the current SAPR staff members are relatively new to their USAFA roles, hired following a 2017 investigation and shake-up in that office.

Thanks to the new blood, a number of new initiatives have been launched at USAFA in the past couple years in hopes of curbing sexual assaults and incidents of sexual harassment. Some of the programs are showing great promise.

The big difference these days, Campbell suggests, is that the Academy is seeking out evidence-based programs that have been proven to work.

"We're trying to measure all of our programming, which will hopefully give us the next generation of best practices," Campbell notes. "It's a bit of a puzzle."

Future SAPR prevention programming will be a multi-pronged approach, Campbell notes. And what works in one university or service academy, he adds, won't necessarily work here at USAFA.

"To be honest, partners within the Department of Defense had aimed for a one-size-fits-all solution for violence prevention. That's the type of programming we had been delivering for the past decade or so," he says. "What we know today is that we need to find a tailored and comprehensive approach."

## **FOLLOWING THE EVIDENCE**

All of the initiatives at USAFA have sprung from evidence-based programs attempted at other institutions.

"Somewhere around the country, somebody has done this — either at universities or high schools or somewhere — and have gotten good results, and we think the programs may be adapted well here at USAFA," Campbell explains. "That's the reason why we are pursuing those particular programs."

New programs are evaluated to make

sure they are delivering results for the Cadet Wing, he adds.

USAFA has a four-year plan to drive down sexual assault and harassment numbers. The list of ongoing programs is quite extensive.

## **CADET HEALTHY PERSONAL SKILLS (CHIPS)**

Just the second year being taught to Doolies, CHiPS is based on a program that's proven effective among middle and high school students.

The seven hours of instruction focus on life skills and healthy relationships, as well as tools to prevent victimization.

CHiPS, administered and taught by an outside contractor, is currently being evaluated by USAFA to determine its effectiveness. The SAPR office is extending the program another year to better measure its impact on cadet behavior and sexual assault numbers.

"We can't simply proclaim that it's a best practice without evaluating it ourselves," Campbell says.

## **HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP TRAINING (HRT)**

Taught to intercollegiate athletes annually, HRT attempts to build a culture that prevents sexual assault. The training has been around for five years and is being evaluated for possible expansion to the entire Cadet Wing.

"HRT allows cadets to have discussions that aren't typically had about relationships, dating and sex," says Dr. Kimberly Dickman, HRT director. "Yet research shows that young adults want and need to have these discussions. It details what healthy relationships look like and how to develop them as a leader, friend and intimate partner."

## **CADET WING INTERVENTION TRAINING (CWIT)**

CWIT focuses on the topics of empowerment, cadet responsibility and bystander awareness related to prevention of sexual assault and suicide. Three-degree cadets receive initial training in CWIT, and an enhanced "CWIT for Leaders" will soon be offered to firsties.

## **ALCOHOL SKILLS**

A secretary of defense directive from 2017, responsible alcohol skills are taught to three-degree cadets. Reports indicate that

irresponsible alcohol use often leads to poor choices. In fact, most of the sexual assaults that occur at USAFA are attributed, in part, to excessive drinking on the part of the perpetrator and/or the victim.

## **ENHANCED ASSESS, ACKNOWLEDGE, ACT (EAAA)**

Academy leaders call this new initiative "E Triple A." The only evidence-based program on the market that appears to help reduce sexual assaults, EAAA training was developed for female college freshmen.

Patterned after a program developed by Dr. Charlene Senn at the University of Windsor in Canada, EAAA provides female cadets with the tools they need to avoid or resist violence. The program, also known as Sexual Assault Resistance Education (SARE), has been implemented in a handful of universities in Canada and New Zealand, as well as a few in the United States.

EAAA at the Academy is being spearheaded by Dr. Kimberly Dickman and Maj. El-Len Serra '03. Dickman and Serra both previously worked in the SAPR office, but now are planning and implementing the program under the auspices of the Center for Character and Leadership Development.

A pilot EAAA program was launched last April to test the 12-hour training. The initial data is very positive, Dickman reports.

The Academy approved a larger, controlled trial for this past fall, requiring half of the incoming female freshman cadets to take the class. At least six of the female cadets who took the course have already indicated that the tools they learned helped them recognize and stop a potential sexual assault situation.

According to Serra, the deputy director for Culture and Climate, EAAA is split into four different blocks.

During block one, freshman cadets are taught the environmental and behavioral risk cues that can put them in a potentially dangerous situation.

"You'd think it's easy to avoid them," Serra says, "but there are a lot of social and emotional obstacles and barriers involved with why women are not avoiding them. We go over those barriers and emphasize what their personal rights are in block two."



The third block involves self-defense training.

"It's not the typical self-defense course that you would think of," Serra says. "This is more about how you defend yourself verbally and physically in the most statistically evident circumstances, which unfortunately includes defending against someone you know."

The final EAAA block focuses on sex education and healthy relationships.

"How do you communicate what you want and don't want in your everyday relationships, whether they're platonic or intimate?" she explains. "We help young women identify what a healthy relationship is and how to communicate their boundaries in realistic scenarios."

At the conclusion of the fall trial, cadet participants were surveyed to gather their feedback on EAAA. Most of the responses were very positive.

Dickman, new assistant professor in healthy relationships education with the Center for Character and Leadership Development, says she is extremely optimistic about the new initiative. The program has a decade of proven effectiveness behind it, and early USAFA research has followed suit.

"The data looks very promising, so we're excited about that," Dickman says. "And I'm really optimistic that we're doing a program that is based on evidence. A lot of times we throw everything that we can at something, without knowing the impact and the outcome. I'm encouraged that we're doing such a scientifically rigorous program to see what the impact is."

If the positive results are verified, Dickman says the remainder of the female cadets from the Class of 2023 will receive EAAA training this year. Then the entire Class of 2024 will be enrolled in the training beginning in the fall of next year.

Serra says it takes the cooperation and buy-in of everybody — the Cadet Wing,

*"It's not the typical self-defense course that you would think of... this is more about how you defend yourself verbally and physically in the most statistically evident circumstances, which unfortunately includes defending against someone you know." — Maj. El-Len Serra*





faculty, 10th Air Base Wing, athletics and leadership — to free up 12 hours of training for cadets. But everyone is working closely together to make it happen.

To fully implement the program, Serra says the Academy will need up to 15 trained facilitators to conduct the classes. Ideal class sizes range from 18 to 24.

An Air Force and airline pilot by trade, Serra took a leave of absence for a year from Delta Air Lines to help ramp up EAAA. She says it's important that she help her alma mater reduce the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment.

"I don't normally work in this field, but I really think it is worthwhile," she says. "I want to see this through."

USAFA continues to search for an evidence-based program similar to EAAA that can be provided to male cadets. Though people are working to find an effective program, nothing has been identified yet.

"We definitely recognize that there are male victims out there, as well as female perpetrators," Serra says. "However, there's just nothing out there right now that shows any promise in preventing male victimization or perpetration in general."

## TEAL ROPES

Scattered throughout the Cadet Wing are 50 cadets who wear a teal-colored rope on their left shoulders. The rope indicates that each of these cadets has been specially trained in sexual violence prevention and response.

In their role, Teal Ropes are dual-purposed: First, they are immediately available within the cadet population to provide survivor-centric, resource-informed conversation to their peers (a very limited, but important, liaison capacity), and second, they are also functioning as change agents within the Cadet Wing, proactively working to facilitate culture change around the topic of sexual violence.

## SAGR (survey every two years) Unwanted Sexual Contact

### Women

2018 - 15.1%  
2016 - 11.2%  
2014 - 9.7%  
2012 - 11.2%  
2010 - 11.9%  
2008 - 9.7%  
2006 - 9.5%

### Men

2018 - 1.8%  
2016 - 1.6%  
2014 - 1.4%  
2012 - 1.7%  
2010 - 1.1%  
2008 - 1.4%  
2006 - 1.2%

## Sexual Harassment and Violence at Military Service Academies (annual) Reported sexual assaults at USAFA that occurred during the year

2017-18 — 21  
2016-17 — 22  
2015-16 — 17  
2014-15 — 36  
2012-13 — 34

2011-12 — 33  
2010-11 — 26  
2009-10 — 14  
2008-09 — 2  
2007-08 — 20

The program, which was launched at the Prep School in fall 2018 and within CW in spring 2019, is patterned after its predecessor at Air Force tech schools, recognizing the benefit of peer-to-peer influence.

"People like to go to their equals," explains Sonja Strickland, SAPR deputy program manager. "It's that cadet-to-cadet piece."

According to Genevieve Brock, SAPR victim advocate and Teal Rope project manager, the Teal Ropes act as a liaison between cadet survivors and the SAPR office for access to reporting and support services. They are also advocates and staunch allies for survivors of sexual trauma, dedicated to addressing negative and harmful behaviors in the Cadet Wing that may make it easier for sexual violence to occur or survivors to be ostracized.

The Academy trained an additional 18 cadets in November for the Teal Rope program, with the ultimate goal of having at least one volunteer liaison in each squadron.

C2C Kiana Brantley, commander of the Teal Ropes, says the cadet volunteers are

gearing up to help reduce the number of sexual assaults at USAFA.

"We're working to change the entire image of sexual assault and healthy relationships within the Cadet Wing," she says. "I think it's going really well."

C1C Britian Rogers, Teal Rope director of operations, says she decided to get involved with the group after learning that some of her friends had been affected by unwanted sexual contact.

"It led me to want to take a strong stand against it," she says.

Rogers says the foundation of the program is starting to take shape.

"The program is steadily growing. We're building a solid structure for the program to last for years to come," she notes. "If we set it up right, we set it up for success in the future."

Brock notes that the program is SAPR-guided but cadet-led. The program has been structured to include cadet

leadership positions such as the wing Top 3 (commander, director of operations, executive officer) and group commanders for overall program accountability and growth; activities and academic committees that will develop, facilitate and manage proactive initiatives that promote sexual violence protective factors and mitigate risk factors; and permanent party partners for mentorship.

The Teal Ropes meet regularly for training and are responsible for completing continuing education each month that focuses on victimology, support and prevention. They planned and facilitated their inaugural Teal Rope-hosted event — in honor of National Singles' Day — in September. The evening event emphasized healthy relationships and provided an opportunity for cadets to come together, make new connections, engage in established friendships, and enjoy games and karaoke in a safe environment.

Planning is underway for additional events throughout the academic year in order to engage the Cadet Wing in healthy



USAFA cadets participated in a first-ever Denim Day on April 24 to show support for sexual assault victims and to promote prevention. (Photo by Ryan Hall)

behaviors and thoughtful discussions about being supportive of survivors and actively resisting sexual harassment and assault.

### SAFE TO REPORT

Instituted in 2018, the Safe to Report policy seeks to reduce the barriers for cadets to report a sexual assault.

According to Campbell, victims can file a report without having to face significant discipline due to collateral misconduct on their part in the areas of alcohol use or possession (e.g., underage drinking, possession of alcohol in the dorms); consensual intimate behavior in the dorms; unprofessional relationships/fraternization among cadets; or cadet area limits restrictions (a.k.a. “over the fence” violations).

“Our top priority is to be able to address sexual assaults, and our secondary concern is the co-mingled honor code violations or some of the other misconduct issues addressed in the Safe-To-Report policy,” he says. “Young adults are not immune from challenging, unfamiliar or difficult situations at times, but that shouldn’t be the overarching reason why somebody doesn’t come in to make the report and to get help.”

### DENIM DAY

Visitors to the Academy last April 24 likely had to do a double take. The majority of the Cadet Wing, assembled on the Terrazzo, was decked out in jeans and black t-shirts.

The specially designated Denim Day encouraged cadets and USAFA staff members to show their support for victims of sexual assault by wearing the unusual uniform of the day.

“It was a large-scale awareness activity,” Campbell says. “It helped show victims around us that we want to be supportive. We were all

out in front of the public making a statement in support of victims and against the crime of sexual assault.”

An internationally recognized event, Denim Day grew out of a 1998 court ruling in Italy in which a judge partially blamed an assault victim because she wore tight jeans. The rape and sexual assault awareness campaign has spread ever since.

Denim Day is likely to become an annual event at USAFA, Campbell says.

### PATHWAYS SUMMIT

For the past two years, USAFA has hosted the Pathways Summit. The first event, “Pathways to Thriving,” was in support of victims of sexual assault, while a “Pathways to Prevention” summit this past September focused on various prevention research and application efforts. The gathering will continue annually and is open to cadets, Academy staff, civilian college and university personnel, and leadership from nearby military bases.

Campbell says the summit allows prevention experts and victim advocates to discuss recent research and advance evidence-based initiatives.

### LEADING THE WAY

Some in the graduate community may believe there isn’t a problem with sexual assault or harassment at USAFA, Campbell notes. Others may think the institution isn’t doing enough to address the problem.

Campbell assures that neither perception is accurate.

“We’ve directed a lot of effort toward prevention,” Campbell says. “But we have to be patient and we have to follow the data, and that’s not a short process.

“The problem in the past has been that you can have a good idea — and the DOD

SAPR partners were willing to throw a lot of resources at good ideas— but it just has not materialized in directly impacting the prevalence of sexual assault. So, we are becoming more strategic ... we can’t really shortcut this process.”

As the Academy inches closer to the right mix of training and programs, Campbell says the SAPR office is leading the charge for other service academies and universities to follow.

“We’re willing to do the heavy lifting in terms of pursuing evidence-based programming and share what successes we find,” he says. “Year after year, we’re dealing with the ongoing dilemma of not having the exact science of reducing prevalence in sexual assault. But we’re getting closer and we remain determined.”

Lt. Gen. Jay Silveria ’85, USAFA superintendent, remains a staunch advocate for the expanding prevention and risk reduction programs. Despite a limited budget for the efforts, Silveria and his leadership team have consistently allocated discretionary funds to help launch and maintain the slate of initiatives.

“The folks at the top levels of our institution are continuing to express that there is no tolerance for these types of criminal behaviors,” Campbell says. “It really does make a difference when you have somebody in those positions making those declarations and setting appropriate expectations.”

In addition, Campbell notes, faculty and staff throughout the Academy are stepping up to do what they can to advance the conversation about sexual assault prevention and curbing inappropriate behavior within the Cadet Wing.

“It is not just one program that’s going to stop this,” Dickman adds. “So, the efforts of every airman at USAFA are part of the whole solution.”



# A Mission of Support

AOG affinity group joins sexual assault prevention conversation

By Jeff Holmquist

*(Many names in the following story were changed to protect the privacy of the crime victims.)*

**I**n the late 1970s, as a freshman from one of the early classes with women at USAFA, Rachel woke to find a man standing by her bed. Rachel's roommate had snuck out for the night, so she was alone in the room. The man attempted to rape the cadet but didn't succeed.

She claims she received advice during Basic Cadet Training suggesting that, in case of an assault, female cadets shouldn't fight back so as to not invite serious injury.

Had she screamed, Rachel now realizes, help would have arrived. Instead, the inter-collegiate athlete tightened her muscles, kept quiet and hoped the assault would stop.

"He came up and kissed me, and at that point I bit the hell out of his tongue," she says. Bleeding profusely, the man fled, never to be found or disciplined.

"Part of the Academy is to break you down and then build you up in the model they want," Rachel says. "I got broken down and never got built back up. I think a lot of it had to do with the sexual assault."

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A few years later, then-cadet Mary had to fight off an unwanted sexual advance from a drunken Air Force officer. She suddenly found herself pinned against a door and panicked when she realized she wasn't strong enough to overpower her attacker.

"I reminded him that he had a wife and

child and that this was wrong," she recalls. "Eventually, he let go."

Mary reports she never reported the attack, and partially blamed herself for drinking with a group of cadets and officers that evening.

"The episode did open my eyes to the fog that alcohol can introduce to situations," she says. "People can act differently under the influence than they normally would. Not that this is an excuse."

Mary admits she's "one of the lucky ones" because nothing more terrible happened to her. But to this day, she hopes her silence didn't put other women in jeopardy at a later date.

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In the early 1990s, Margaret woke to find a stranger next to her bed rubbing her lower extremities. The attacker was brazen, Margaret says, as her roommate was asleep just five feet away.

"I wasn't even safe with my roommate in the room," she remembers. "There was just groping, but that's still assault. It was awful, especially for a young, naïve cadet who had led a pretty sheltered life."

The male cadet eventually ran from the room, with Margaret in close pursuit. She soon discovered there was a power outage, which made the crime easier to commit and the perpetrator's escape possible. She enlisted the help of some nearby football players, but they couldn't find the male cadet. Fortunately, the cadet was later identified and kicked out of the Academy.

A few years later, while serving on active



Col. (Ret.) Kelly Timmons '81

duty in Germany, Margaret was again sexually assaulted, adding to the list of traumatic experiences that have haunted her throughout her life.

Years later, during her exit medical examination from the Air Force, Margaret was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. She could never sleep restfully since the assaults, always dreaming that she needed to be ready to fight at any moment.

"And I've had constant chronic headaches for my whole life," she says. "That's the long-term result of these sexual assaults."

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Two decades later, USAFA cadet Megan traveled to a nearby city to visit a friend. She woke up that night to discover she was being raped.

"I never told the story or came forward or made a big deal out of it," she admits. "At the Academy, you're the best of the best. The

*"I never told the story or came forward or made a big deal out of it. At the Academy, you're the best of the best. The best don't show weakness, so we didn't talk about it."*

*— Anonymous*

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Years later, Megan recognizes the lasting toll the assault had on her life. She now is open to sharing her story in order to help others avoid such trauma.

"I don't know a woman who hasn't been violated in some way physically over the course of her life," she says. "I think that says something about how pervasive this problem is."

Megan is not about to fix blame for the issue on any one segment of society. She says it will take effort on the part of everyone to help prevent the ever-present crime.

"I don't think this is a men's problem or a women's problem," Megan suggests. "I think it's a societal problem. It's amplified by our hyper-masculine culture, specifically at places like service academies."

## YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Though these are just four stories of former cadets who were sexually assaulted during their time at the Academy, hundreds of alums and current cadets have been victims of the crime through the decades. And each victim learned a hard lesson he or she didn't count on during their time as a cadet — the road to justice and healing never comes easy in the wake of such traumatic experiences.

But now an affinity group of USAFA alumni is banding together to support current cadets and fellow alums who have often suffered alone and in silence.

Zoomies Against Sexual Assault (ZASA) is made up of assault survivors and many victims supporters. Approximately 240 Academy grads and alums, representing every

decade, currently count themselves as members of the group. The ZASA board of directors is composed of 12 volunteers. There are no dues or fees charged for membership.

Col. (Ret.) Kelly Timmons '81, executive director of ZASA, says sexual assaults and sexual harassment have been an issue at the Academy for decades — as evidenced by national media coverage on the crisis in 1993, 2003 and 2013-14.

Then, a national news report in 2017 recounting the alleged lack of support at USAFA for assault victims was the last straw, Timmons says.

"Forty years ago, this was happening ... but it's still occurring. This has to stop," she reports. "It is not reflective of the core values of the Air Force or the United States Air Force Academy."

The group — initially known as the USAFA Women — drafted a letter outlining its disgust over the ongoing prevalence of sexual assaults at the Academy and emailed it to then-Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson '82 and Chief of Staff of the Air Force Gen. David Goldfein '83. A few days later, Timmons says she was on the phone with them discussing the issue.

Since then, ZASA has honed its mission and roles.

"Our mission is to unite cadets past and present to combat sexual assault, sexual harassment and victim/survivor abuse at USAFA," Timmons notes.

To fulfill that mission, ZASA identified four key roles:

**1) Prevention** — Members support current USAFA prevention programs by attending the courses and providing feedback

to the program developers. ZASA continues to research potential screening techniques that could help identify sexual predators before they enter USAFA as cadets.

**2) Continuity** — ZASA provides an uninterrupted focus on reducing sexual assault/sexual harassment despite frequent change-over in USAFA senior leadership.

**3) Outreach** — ZASA manages an active webpage to provide facts, documentation and resources. The group participates in the AOG as an affinity group that is open to all cadets, former cadets (alumni and graduates), and families and friends of USAFA.

**4) Survivor support** — ZASA provides information on where help is available to ensure every USAFA victim of sexual assault/sexual harassment is able to receive appropriate care and support.

Along these lines, ZASA members have been researching data and separating fact from fiction about sexual assaults, prevention programs and more.

Members of the affinity group regularly attend USAFA Board of Visitors meetings, making sure the topic remains a priority for the oversight organization. ZASA representatives also attend court-martial hearings at the Academy when a sexual assault is alleged.

"We're there to support the victim," she explains. "We want to make sure they know they're not alone."

Through their engagement with senior leadership, board members also played a role in the development of the promising "Safe to Report" policy USAFA implemented in May 2018.

The ultimate goal of ZASA, Timmons concludes, is to reduce sexual assaults and harassment through culture change and effective prevention programs.

"We would love to eliminate sexual assault at the Academy, but the reality is that there are predators in the world," she says. "We want to help communicate acceptable behavior that creates a culture truly reflective of our core values and tell the real story of what's happening at the Academy."

ZASA's new website has just recently gone live. Visit [ZASA.USAFAGroups.org](http://ZASA.USAFAGroups.org) for more information about the group or to join the effort. The website also lists helpful resources for sexual assault survivors. 