

Campus Archives in the Shadow of Campus Sexual Assault (A Work in Progress)



Ana Roeschley¹ and Jessica Holden²

¹University of North Texas, College of Information

²University of Massachusetts Boston, Joseph P. Healey Library



Introduction

Campus sexual assault is a wide-spread problem in institutions of higher learning across the world. In the United States, the civil rights law, Title IX, demands that students are not denied the benefits of federally funded educational programs on the basis of their sex. Though prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment fall into Title IX protections for students, the rates of sexual assault have not decreased on federally funded campuses in the United States since the implementation of the law in 1972. This has led to a number of Title IX lawsuits against colleges and universities where students have been raped and sexually assaulted.

This situation provides campus archivists with a quandary regarding what records they should collect regarding campus sexual assault. Additionally, campus archivists are faced with questions on how to best describe records that contain information on sexual assault. These decisions can be especially difficult in a campus environment where the administration, either tacitly or explicitly, downplays the problem of sexual assault on campus. However, as many campus archives' mission statements unequivocally state, the college and university archive acts as a repository of campus history. If campus archives are to document campus history, what happens when that history is part of an enduring difficult reality?

Through a systematic investigation of US campus archival finding aids, collection policies, and mission statements, this ongoing study interrogates the role of campus archives and campus archivists. Many questions have arisen through this process: What responsibility do campus archivists have in collecting materials about aspects of campus life that the administration does not wish to highlight? Can campus archives center survivors of sexual assault while protecting survivors' privacy? Should the descriptive language in online finding aids explicitly reveal when records include information on difficult topics like sexual assault? How can we apply archival theory to not only the appraisal of such records, but to their description as well? The purpose of this paper is to explore these questions in order to reach an understanding of how campus archives are responding to the problem of campus sexual assault in the United States.

Title IX

Title IX, the United States federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, passed in 1972. Though sexual assault and sexual harassment are not explicitly named as violations of Title IX in the initial passage of the law, subsequent legal rulings have deemed that Title IX does indeed protect college students from sexual violence and harassment.

However, despite the establishment of Title IX protections, sexual assault continues to be a serious problem on US campuses of higher learning. Estimates indicate that as many as 29% of college women are sexually assaulted in the United States (Rennison and Addington, 2014). Additionally, according to RAINN, 21% of transgender, genderqueer, or gender nonconforming college students have been sexually assaulted, while 4% of cis-male students have been sexually assaulted. The overwhelming rates of women, transgender, genderqueer, or gender nonconforming college students who experience sexual violence make it clear that Title IX protections against sexual violence are necessary. However, there is a lack of appropriate action by campus administration to prevent and punish campus sexual assault which has been described as institutional betrayal by Stader and Williams-Cunningham (2017).

This institutional betrayal and historical lack of adequate action in response to sexual violence by campus administration adds to low percentages of reporting of sexual assaults by survivors. In fact, as Schaaf et al. (2018, p. 1). Sexual assault is difficult to document. The processes of documentation ask that survivors of sexual assault re-live deeply traumatic experiences. Survivors have little incentive to report their assaults as they bear the burden of proof and can be further re-traumatized through the documentation process. Especially because even when survivors are believed, their assailants go unpunished by either the criminal justice system or the campus institution. Rather, survivors are the ones who suffer the negative consequences of disclosing the sexual assault (Brubaker, 2019).

“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance...”
-TITLE IX OF THE EDUCATION AMENDMENTS OF 1972

What is the role of campus archives?

In describing the memory function of campus archives, Thelin (2009) states, “It is key for archivists in light of changing media and the burden of increased record keeping to keep a keen insight in finding materials that preserve institution identity and culture” (p. 4). However, it is important to ask, are campus archivists responsible for more than taking care of records which preserve campus identity and culture? What about records that document the facets of institution identity and culture that reveal painful truths regarding campus life? What is the responsibility of the campus archivist regarding those records? Thelin (2009) argues that “open consideration of all records and sources is the sign of a healthy, vital institution” (p. 13). How does this translate to collection policies and descriptive practices? Should campus archivists go out of their way to collect and make visible the records that document violence and injustice on campus?

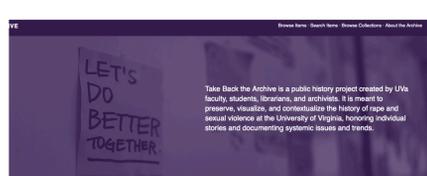
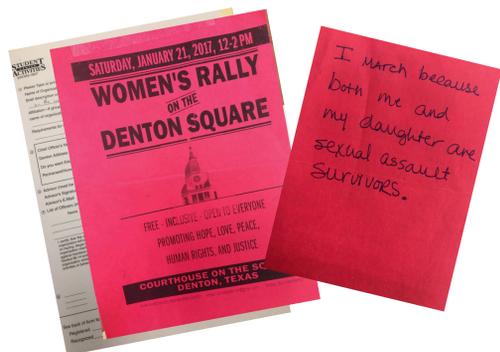
Questions also arise regarding what types of records regarding campus sexual assault would be appropriate for campus archives to collect and make accessible. Records regarding individual cases should be processed to ensure that survivors' privacy is protected. This may mean that these records are not accessible by the public. However, these records are not the only documentation of the burden of campus sexual assault. Marine and Trebisacci (2018) explain, “In response to both institutions' handling of sexual violence incidents and larger issues around rape culture on campus, student activism has increased in recent years, taking a variety of forms” (p. 649). These variety of forms leave traces and records. From flyers for Take Back the Night events to student activist organization meeting minutes, to student activist editorials, the evidence is there. The main questions of this project are, what are campus archives doing with this evidence? Are they collecting these records? If so, how are they describing or under-describing the records? Are these records prioritized?

To help answer these questions, this study is an ongoing systematic investigation of the campus archive finding aids, mission statements, and collection policies of the 50 college campuses with the highest rates of reports of rape according to 2014 U.S. Education Department campus safety and security data, reported under the Clery Act (Anderson, 2016). Finding aids are searched using the same set of search terms for each archive. Additionally, we are also searching for news stories regarding each campus and include search terms that are related to that campus.

Initial Findings

We are still in the data collection stage so these are very early findings that may change as we collect more data and conduct more in-depth data analysis. I did want to make a note of a few things. First, there seems to be little evidence of active collecting on campus sexual violence. Positive results will often belong in special collections and will be about sexual violence but not about campus sexual violence. In campus related results, we tend to see administrative files much more often than active collecting on the topic. This suggests that materials about campus sexual assault are found in campus archives due to other factors instead of active collecting initiatives.

Results include materials from special collections and fewer administrative records in the campus archives. We are coding positive results as Campus Related (CR) and Not Campus Related (NCR).



Administrative Timeline
Exposures: Vigil, Task Force, Police, Presenters, Exhibits. This timeline charts administrative responses to reports of sexual violence from 1974. The work after the #POSTERS: Events and Campaigns Relating to Sexual Violence at the University of Virginia
Created by Take Back the Archive. #POSTERS exhibit showcases event and campaign posters related to sexual violence at the

Our findings also include archival initiatives that are not directly connected to the campus archives. These include UVA's Take Back the Archive (takeback.scholarslab.org) which is actually hosted by their scholars lab rather than the archives. While librarians and archivists are involved with the project, we found it only mentioned once in the library and archives website, in a library newsletter about a panel presentation.

Search terms

Rape
Assault
Sexual assault
Harassment
Sexual harassment
Sexual violence
Survivor
Take back the night
Sex crime
Rapist
Victim
Rape victim
Date rape
Sexual abuse
Dating violence
Domestic violence
Sexual predator
Assailant
Campus violence
Campus rape
Campus assault

Conclusion

Archives have a long history of being tied to trauma. How the records that embody trauma are described, collected, and made available is a question that remains focal to our field. Wallace states, “[E]fforts should be directed to harnessing archival content to engage controversial contemporary social issues with an eye toward illuminating the politics of the present” (Wallace, 2010, p. 175). Our initial findings show that campus archives may not be actively engaging with the issues of campus sexual violence, making room for an archival silence.

It is important to ask why it matters if campus archives do or do not collect materials that deal with campus sexual violence. Does the campus archive matter in the larger discussion regarding sexual violence on campus? In 1995, Trouillot stated:

Archives assemble. Their assembly work is not limited to a more or less passive act of collecting. Rather, it is an active act of production that prepares facts for historical intelligibility. Archives set up both the substantive and formal elements of the narrative. They are the institutionalized sites of mediation between the sociohistorical process and the narrative about that process. They enforce the constraints on “debatibility”... they convey authority and set the rules for credibility and interdependence; they help select the stories that matter (p.52).

If we as archivists indeed do help to select the stories that matter and through doing so enforce the constraints on debatibility, are we participating in the re-traumatization of campus sexual violence survivors or are we combating it?

References

- Anderson, N. (2016, June 7). These colleges have the most reports of rape. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved July 1, 2019, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2016/06/07/these-colleges-have-the-most-reports-of-rape/?utm_term=.9ad212cfe2db
- Brubaker, S. J. (2019). Campus-based sexual assault victim advocacy and title IX: Revisiting tensions between grassroots activism and the criminal justice system. *Feminist Criminology*, 14(3), 307-329. doi:10.1177/1557085118772087
- Deming, M. E., Covan, E. K., Swan, S. C., & Billings, D. L. (2013). Exploring rape myths, gendered norms, group processing, and the social context of rape among college women: A qualitative analysis. *Violence Against Women*, 19(4), 465-485. doi:10.1177/1077801213487044
- Guberek, T., & Hedstrom, M. (2017). On or off the record? detecting patterns of silence about death in Guatemala's national police archive. *Archival Science*, 17(1), 27-54. doi:10.1007/s10502-017-9274-3
- Marine, S., & Trebisacci, A. (2018). Constructing identity: Campus sexual violence activists' perspectives on race, gender, and social justice. *Journal of College Student Development*, 59(6), 649-665. doi:10.1353/csd.2018.0063
- Rennison, C. M., & Addington, L. A. (2014). Violence against college women: A review to identify limitations in defining the problem and inform future research. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 15(3), 159-169.
- Schaaf, M., Sarah, Lamade, P., Raina V, Burgess, D.N.Sc., APRN, FAAN, Ann W, Koss, P., Mary, Lopez, D., Elise, & Prentky, P., Robert. (2018). Student views on campus sexual assault. *Journal of American College Health : J of ACH*, 1-8. doi:10.1080/07448481.2018.1500476
- Stader, D. L., & Williams-Cunningham, J. L. (2017). Campus sexual assault, institutional betrayal, and title IX. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 90(5-6), 198-202. doi:10.1080/00098655.2017.1361287
- Thelin, J. R. (2009). Archives and the cure for institutional amnesia: College and university saga as part of the campus memory. *Journal of Archival Organization*, 7(1-2), 4-15. doi:10.1080/15332740902897485
- Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. A§ 1681 Et. Seq.
- Trouillot, M. R. (1995). Silencing the past: Power and the production of history. *Beacon Press*.
- Wallace, D. A. (2010). Locating agency: interdisciplinary perspectives on professional ethics and archival morality. *Journal of Information Ethics*, 19(1), 172.