



Students elevate voices in recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness Month



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Reina Britt, founder of Elevate, leads the protestors back to the fountain in front of the student center after walking past the Claremont Ave. intersection.

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White shirts covered in red and black ink were hung on a clothesline in the Student Center on April 1, through the collaborative effort of Elevate and Safe Haven. Each shirt depicted a story of sexual assault through the eyes of a survivor or an advocate.

Clothesline Project, the organization that started the trend, aims to bring awareness to the issue of sexual abuse or sexual assault through the use of a visual display. Safe Haven, a domestic violence shelter and rape crisis center in Ashland County, has held this event in years past, holding their last event on April 15 at Corner Park in Ashland.

Hannah Shaw, the campus advocate from Safe Haven, shared what the event entailed.

“The survivor speak-out was originally just an idea that came from our sexual assault support group,” Shaw said. “They are very outspoken and want to shout from the rooftops why what happened to them is not okay. We’ve never done a speak out like this before for sexual assault.”

Survivors told their stories and shared words of support for other survivors.

The white shirts featured at AU’s campus, were also hung up at the speak-out event, after being returned to Safe Haven. Reina Britt, founder of Elevate, said that this is not the first time these shirts have been on display around the campus or community.

“These shirts are written by not only students on this campus, but community members as well, and they [Safe Haven] have had this project going on for a while,” Britt said.

Students were able to freely express themselves through this

display, while representing the millions of Americans who are sexually assaulted each year. According to Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), an American is affected by this kind of violence every 73 seconds.

AU student Juliet Touma participated in the Clothesline Project and found herself at the forefront of media attention after posting photos of the shirts and gaining unexpected feedback on Twitter.

“My role came about suddenly,” Touma said. “On April 1, I tweeted some pictures of the Clothesline Project—I just thought that those shirts spoke to me and they pulled my heartstrings, so I tweeted them.”

She only expected to receive a couple of likes, but was quickly greeted with over 3,500 likes and more than one-thousand retweets. This sudden influx resulted in movements happening on campus discussing Title IX procedures.



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Schuyler Berger speaks to the crowd gathered around the fountain.

“I’m using my platform on social media and as a senior student here to promote other stories and give them a platform,” Touma said. “I hope that the university takes this seriously and sees that the Title IX policy has to change. Whether [that change is] providing more counselors, or having advocates in the Title IX process from the get-go, there’s a lot that can be changed and a lot that we can do to make survivors feel more comfortable on this campus.”

Not long after the shirts went up, a few came down.

Dr. Robert Pool, vice president for student affairs and Title IX coordinator, commented on the reasoning for several shirts being taken down and the cause for the university’s statement on the Clothesline Project.

“Three shirts that were authorized to come down included either names, first name/last name, first name/initial, or a title that is only ascribed to one person at this university,” Pool said. “They were personal, identifiable information. The majority of the 50 plus shirts all stayed.”

A fourth shirt, however, came down without being authorized.

The shirt, which read, “Me: Reports RAPE to University, Faculty Member: Did you LIKE IT?,” came down unnecessarily after an unnamed staff person “took it upon themselves to take it down.”

The administration was made aware and told the organizers that it can go back up.

Several students came forward at the Student Senate meeting on April 6, calling out the university for silencing survivors and taking the side of assaulters through unjust hearings and the removal of certain shirts.

Britt used the platform of the Senate meeting to call out for changes to be made to Title IX and

“I started feeling unsafe on campus and I was starting to feel very conscious of my surroundings and thinking, ‘is this guy next to me the person that raped me?’ ‘Was the group of three guys at the eating hall staring at me the ones who raped me?’”

- Makenna Fisher

the treatment of survivors.

The process of Title IX begins when the university is made aware of an assault on campus. Any student who is affected is given the option to be referred to the university’s policy, or to approach the police with a formal investigation.

“Students are not required to speak with the Title IX coordinator once a report is known,” Pool said. “In my initial invitation to meet, I make it clear that meeting with the Title IX coordinator is not required, but strongly encouraged. I also include information about all available supports (confidential, Dept. Coordinators, counselors, etc.). It is up to them if and when to meet, or not, and in what manner (with a support person, via Zoom, in person, or telephone).”

As deputy coordinators and Title IX coordinators, Pool said that they remain neutral to allow the due process to fetter out facts and present them so the board can determine if there was a violation or not.

“For Title IX, our culture on our campus must be that we will not tolerate sexual assault and sexual misconduct of anyone,” Pool said. “In order for people to know how to respond and that they can respond with confidence that their cases are going to be held in trust is to build this process that students are

trained on who to go to, how to go and what they will expect on both sides. We train our staff to know that when cases come forward, you believe them—what I mean by that is that you don’t automatically question the content that’s coming in reports.”

A Survivor’s Story

Former AU student Makenna Fisher’s story took place on Labor Day weekend, just off-campus at the football house (a house in town where many football players stay).

She was called by a drunk friend who needed someone to escort her back to her dorm. Fisher, a student dispatcher for Safety Services at the time, had a shift coming up, but set off to help her friend.

“I was searching through the house and that’s where I was pulled into a dark room and I was sexually assaulted by three men,” Fisher said. “I was in shock. I wanted to guard myself from the feelings I was feeling, and I still think to this day that I’m in shock because I still have yet to process those feelings.”

Fisher admitted that she felt scared at the Title IX meeting because of all the attention that could be drawn to her if she requested there be a formal investigation.

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