



July 10, 2020

TO: President Steven C. Currall

FROM: The faculty, affiliates, and friends of the  
Department of Women's and Gender Studies

**WGS stands with #USFsurvivors and calls on the USF administration to fulfill its federally mandated and explicitly stated commitment to our community**

In June 2020 our department became aware of a twitter hashtag, #USFsurvivors, where USF alums and current students were sharing their stories of sexual victimization at USF and various failures of response. In addition to not receiving appropriate and trauma-informed services from USF offices tasked with responding to sexual violence when they chose to report, survivors also reported a widespread culture of discounting, ignoring, and victim blaming when they told others. Many of these survivor narratives speak to violence within USF's Greek system, including fraternity members engaging in multiple assaults, and members of fraternities and sororities failing to support, or even believe, survivors.

These reports are heart-breaking and poignant—and ones that we have heard before. Sexual victimization at USF is all too common and still, after concerted student, staff and faculty effort, inadequately addressed. Recent statements of support from administration, the Panhellenic Council, and individual Greek houses are good to read, but insufficient in terms of a response. Our university must be held accountable to provide the necessary resources—including personnel, training, and ongoing assessment—to appropriately and effectively meet the needs of our current USF students experiencing sexual victimization, and to thoroughly and conscientiously review our past actions to provide necessary redress to our alums. Any less, and we risk losing the trust of our students, even as we fail to meet the expectations of various federal guidances related to the Clery Act, the Violence Against Women Act, and Title IX.

Our department has a long history of working to improve services for survivors of violence at USF, more recently in 2018 when the USF Tampa campus began working toward outsourcing victim advocacy to a local community organization, transitioning our on-campus Center for Victim Advocacy and Violence Prevention (CVAVP) and its staff from advocacy to assistance in the process. This effort followed years of neglect of and poor leadership over the CVAVP office, leading to a small number of staff challenged to provide advocacy services to survivors on a campus with 50,000 students. In response, students, staff and faculty including members of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies mobilized, meeting with USF administration, holding rallies, and publicly sharing our concerns. The outcome was mixed; though advocacy remained on campus in the CVAVP and leadership changed, inadequate staffing was barely addressed. A more decisive outcome was the development of USF's Coordinated Community Response Team (CCRT), co-chaired by CVAVP staff and a USF faculty member and containing experts

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(both academic and professional) on issues of campus response to victimization. However, the CCRT's energy has not yet been fully realized, and its presence and effect at USF at the present time is muted, at best.

This is a powerful moment for USF to show its leadership and commitment on issues of support for its students. The Department of Women's and Gender Studies stands with #USFsurvivors to call for President Currall to fully commit to practices that will lead to the realization of this statement in the Preamble to USF Policy 004 (Sexual Misconduct/Sexual Harassment (Including Sexual Violence)):

The University of South Florida (USF) community is most successful when it is based on respect and fair treatment of all people. USF strives to provide a work and study environment for faculty, staff, guests and visitors that is free of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual violence.

We are also not living up to our Principles of Community. We commit ourselves there to "building a culture of caring that promotes the integrity of our relationships and the sustainable well-being of our entire community" and to "reject the demeaning acts of bullying, violence, prejudice, and discrimination."

The stories told by #USFsurvivors reflect anything but a culture of caring and show our campus to be rife with the kind of violence that is simultaneously bullying and discriminatory.

We must do better.

We ask President Currall to share his action plan on how USF will both respond to the survivors and move USF toward becoming environments free from sexual violence.

Resources:

**Center for Victim Advocacy and Violence Prevention.** <https://www.usf.edu/student-affairs/victim-advocacy/index.aspx>

**USF Policy 004 (Sexual Misconduct/Sexual Harassment (Including Sexual Violence)).**  
<https://usf.app.box.com/v/usfpolicy0-004>

**USF Title IX Office.** <https://www.usf.edu/diversity/title-ix/>. Title IX Coordinator: Araina Muniz,  
[arainamuniz@usf.edu](mailto:arainamuniz@usf.edu)

**Coordinated Community Response Team.** Co-Chairs: Megan Deremiah (Interim Assistant Director of CVAVP), [mmderemiah@usf.edu](mailto:mmderemiah@usf.edu) and Dr. Chris Ponticelli (Associate Professor, Sociology),  
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Signed:

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