

gender & sexuality



A PROGRAM OF ASSOCIATED STUDENTS
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Members of the Campus Community:

As we welcome the end of the 2016/2017 Academic Year, we the staff of the Associated Students Gender & Sexuality Equity Center (GSEC) of California State University, Chico wish to address recent concerns brought forth by some Greek-affiliated members regarding our annual Take Back the Night March on April 27, 2017. First and foremost, we wish to educate readers on some widely supported facts about gender-based interpersonal violence (e.g. sexual violence) and how this research informs our guidelines for participation in the Take Back the Night March.

Additionally, we hope that this statement will encourage an open line of communication between Greek life and the GSEC for future collaborative opportunities in combatting sexual violence, and we hope that this improved communication will mitigate any confusion or conflict for those involved. **We acknowledge and commend those Greek members who demonstrated their support at this and previous years' Take Back the Night Marches; it is our hope to continue building bridges between GSEC, Greek life, and other campus organizations while continuing to stay true to our values of diversity, inclusion, and equity.**

Since the 1970's, Take Back the Night (an international movement consisting of marches across the world) has existed for the sole purpose of eliminating sexual violence and empowering survivors of sexual assault (Gibson, 2011). The following facts demonstrate the continued relevance of this initiative:

- 20% of women (one in five) and 6.25% of men (one in 16) will be sexually assaulted while attending college (Krebs, et. al. 2007; Black, et. Al. 2011).
- In 80% of sexual assault cases, the victim/survivor knew the person who assaulted them (Miller, et. al. 1996).
- 91% of the victims/survivors of sexual assault and rape are women (Rennison, 2002).
- In the United States, between 40% and 70% of female murder victims were killed by their intimate partners (UN Women, 2013).

Take Back the Night seeks to dismantle rape culture (a set of beliefs and norms that are incredibly prevalent and pervasive on college campuses [Burnett, et. al. 2009; Klaw, et. al. 2005]), which requires a constant unlearning process to counteract its effects. Rape culture is not one that outwardly promotes rape, but rather one that excuses, trivializes, or otherwise tolerates sexual violence. Rape culture comprises many things, including but not limited to: calling college students who have the courage to report their rapes liars or assuming that false reporting for sexual assault cases are the norm. In reality,

more than 90% of victims/survivors of sexual assault on college campuses do not report the assault (Fisher & Cullen, 2000), and of those cases: only 2-10% of them are false (Lonsway, et. al. 2009; Lisak, et. al. 2010; Heenan, et. al. 2006).

Additionally, not only are cisgender women affected, but the GSEC would like to note that sexual violence and rape culture affects the LGBTQ+ community (as well as cisgender men) at an alarming rate, with the highest rates affecting the transgender community and bisexual women (Walters, et. al. 2013). Rape culture is everyone's issue, regardless of gender.

Another indicator of rape culture is claiming or behaving as if survivors of sexual assault are not legitimate trauma victims who have the need for protection from retraumatization. Up to 75% of college students report having experienced a traumatic event in their life, including but not limited to: traumatic physical and/or emotional events, interpersonal violence, PTSD, and ongoing severe social/socioeconomic stressors. The University of Kentucky (Jordan, et. al 2014) facilitated studies that found that incidents of sexual assault before and during college had an identifiable impact on a woman's academic success. The study explains: "It follows that a woman suffering sequella in the aftermath of a rape may experience cognitive impairment such that she is less able to concentrate, organize a set of facts, or remember details in her academic studies." With this in mind, Take Back the Night exists to fulfill one sole purpose: to provide a safe space for survivors of sexual violence to find empowerment, healing, and communion with other survivors.

In response to the ongoing problems of sexual violence and rape culture, the traditional Thursday Take Back the Night main event and march has been organized on our campus for decades, first by Rape Crisis Intervention and later by the AS Gender & Sexuality Equity Center (previously known as the AS Women's Center from 1971-2011). **We believe that it is important to acknowledge this history of Take Back the Night, appreciate those that have fought long before us, and remember those that have lost their lives due to gender-based violence.** Because of the pervasiveness of sexual assault on college campuses and in general, in the spring of 2015 we expanded Take Back the Night into a weeklong series of events in collaboration with many other campus and community organizations. In addition to Thursday's silent candlelight march led throughout downtown Chico, we also host: a keynote, survivor speak-outs, a consent workshop, and a spoken word titled "Take Back the Mic." Every year, the GSEC invites survivors and advocates to participate in these events.

In an effort to foster a trauma-informed space that prioritizes the emotional, psychological, and physical safety of sexual assault survivors, we have set out certain guidelines for participation. **The GSEC's efforts to avoid retraumatization are a part of a larger movement not only budding on California State University, Chico's campus, but also throughout the nation.** For instance, throughout the entire event, we ask folks to refrain from taking pictures or videos of sensitive content, from speaking over survivors during speak-outs, and from attending spaces that do not pertain to one's experience (i.e. women-only spaces).

Unfortunately, given the pervasiveness of rape culture, toxic masculinity, and substance abuse, the issue of sexual violence affects all groups on campus, including fraternities and sororities. Studies show that members of fraternities who exist within an environment that promotes stereotypical notions of masculinity are three times more likely to perpetuate acts of sexual aggression and assault than other men on college campuses (Loh, et. al., 2005). It is with a heavy heart that we must acknowledge that many survivors have endured their assault while at a fraternity party and, as a result, may experience some form of retraumatization upon seeing Greek-affiliated letters. Furthermore, despite having many members of Greek life stand in solidarity the night of, survivors and their advocates marching

throughout downtown were still met with a heightened level of opposition and catcalling while passing Greek-affiliated houses.

It is with this reality in mind that the GSEC bases its trauma-informed practices. Unless otherwise noted, the GSEC will be making the following requests for future Take Back the Night Marches:

- We ask that any and all campus/community organizations refrain from making it mandatory for members to attend Take Back the Night, but rather encourage those who care and want to be there to attend in solidarity
- We ask that any and all campus/community organizations refrain from wearing clothing with letters or branding, with the exception of those that exist solely to counsel and provide resources for victims/survivors (i.e. CSUC Safe Place, Catalyst, Rape Crisis, etc.)

In addition to aiming to provide a trauma-informed space that protects the safety of survivors, we are also motivated by a philosophy that encourages people to show up to the march as individuals rather than on behalf of or to promote any one organization, with the exception of those previously noted above.

In accordance with Title V of the California Administrative Code as well as the GSEC's Activity Fee-funded status, we would never ask anyone to leave our event (excluding those who pose a very real threat of harm to people in attendance).

At the 2017 Take Back the Night, we never asked anyone who had letters/branded clothing to leave the march. Although we respectfully asked the Greek organizations we were in contact with to honor our previously stated request to remove/replace branded clothing and accessories, we were incredibly disheartened to see some deny our request and instead remove themselves from the event. The GSEC was able to successfully pass along the message to the Multicultural Greek Council, with little luck in successfully contacting Panhellenic and the Interfraternity Council (IFC) despite our attempts via email weeks in advance. In light of this specific incident, we acknowledge that many members of Greek life had either heard our requests secondhand or not at all, and we regret not having had an earlier opportunity to express the reasoning and context for the requests made. We also acknowledge those Greek members who approached us during and after the event to express their support for the request, and we hope to continue fostering those established relationships for the future.

We know that Greek life can be a phenomenal source of friendship, philanthropy, and networking, and we appreciate and acknowledge that relatively few Greek members condone or perpetuate sexual violence on our campus. In fact, there are many members of Greek life working tirelessly in their respective chapters to challenge rape culture and promote healthy interpersonal relationships. We appreciate and applaud those organizations that go out of their way to champion community and national nonprofit organizations in addition to supporting survivors of sexual violence themselves. Immediate examples that come to mind for us are those who have sought out the GSEC to find ways to prevent sexual assault within their own chapter and those who continue to pave the way by engaging in additional sexual violence prevention programming via their philanthropic efforts.

Moreover, we respect and validate concerns regarding one's desire to show support for a cause by representing a particular organization or identity, and it is not our goal to make hasty generalizations when making these requests. With this in mind, the GSEC hopes to provide alternative ways to stand in solidarity with survivors, including but not limited to:

- Post on social media your intent to join the fight to end sexual assault consistently throughout the Academic Year (i.e. post a picture of your organization's members in letters/branded clothing before attending Take Back the Night's main event).
- Commit to enforcing consent-based behaviors and bystander intervention strategies during house parties and other affiliated events.
- Participate in more of Thursday's Take Back the Night events leading up to the march when capable and eligible (i.e. keynote, consent workshop, survivor speak-outs, etc.).
- Represent your letters/branded clothing at other Take Back the Night Week events occurring on the preceding Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, as well as Friday's Debriefing Brunch.
- Invite the GSEC to a chapter or council meeting to explain the week's events and ask if there is anything specific you can do to support survivors and aid in the prevention of interpersonal violence.
- Listen to survivors when they tell their stories, respect their needs when expressed, and understand that it may be uncomfortable in the moment to relinquish one's privilege(s) in order to provide a safe space for survivors.

In closing, we wish to reiterate our understanding that support for the cause exists in all areas of campus, sometimes even in the apparently most unlikely of places. We welcome anyone and everyone who wishes to join the movement to end sexual violence, or oppression of any kind, to come visit and talk with us. We are an ever-evolving, passionate group of students that aims to empower the campus community through educational and awareness-raising events, which means we have an open-door policy for any student in need of resources or a safe place to find community and healing.

We just ask that, in return for our campus partners' overwhelming support, that this special request to not promote any one organization—with the exception of those previously noted—during the Take Back the Night March be honored and respected for the years to come.

Sincerely,

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