

Sexual Harassment and Violence Advisory Council

Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

The Sexual Harassment and Violence Advisory Council (SHVAC) was created at the behest of the President of the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) to consider and articulate campus values and practices relating to Title IX legislation, in accordance with regulations and community needs, and to develop recommendations for improving policies and practices, for delivery to the President, Title IX Coordinator, and Vice President for Student Affairs. Charged with these important tasks, the faculty, staff, and student representatives of SHVAC convened weekly to conduct a thorough self-study of MICA and research external best practices in order to make informed recommendations that reflect the culture and needs of the MICA community.

Although MICA is often regarded as a safe and supportive environment for students, faculty and staff, incidents of harassment, discrimination, and violence have occurred—and persist. For a variety of reasons, however, incidents frequently go unreported or are insufficiently addressed. Current policies, resources, and practices are unclear and/or inadequate, and there is concern that this lack of clarity has contributed to a climate of mistrust, confusion, and inaction. As a result, victims and survivors are not always receiving the support and resources needed to thrive at MICA, while those in a position to help often find themselves ill-equipped to intervene effectively.

METHODOLOGY

To familiarize itself with regulatory and cultural dynamics, SHVAC reviewed materials and resources produced inside and outside the institution and engaged in activities intended to gauge campus perspectives/expertise on the topics of sexual harassment and violence. It also conceptualized an approach to explicating the myriad concerns embedded in its work, settling on four central areas of inquiry: **policies and protocols; education and training; counseling and support; and academic or artistic freedom**. In response to its charge and key questions, SHVAC initiated the following: *review of documentation produced by legislative/governmental bodies pertaining to Title IX policy/practice; review of internal resources that cite/describe institutional policies pertaining to the themes of sexual harassment and discrimination; presentations by campus officers and other stakeholders who have a direct role in the application/enforcement of institutional policy related to sexual conduct, or who provide support to community members on such matters; listening sessions conducted with key constituency groups within the MICA community; targeted interviews with other campus community members who serve in a support or advocacy role; informal discussion with members of the campus community; survey of peer and aspirant institutions; networking with external community organizations; and establishing pathways for access and communication*. Through these efforts SHVAC collected a tremendous amount of both anecdotal and empirical information, which was then distilled in the latter portions of the academic year into a set of recommendations that have been woven into the Areas of Inquiry sections of its full report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Create a culture in which training is supported and valued.* Develop programs for all community members that can be delivered in multiple modalities throughout the year. Provide specialized sexual harassment and violence training for Campus Safety personnel and other primary responders. Design specialized workshops about issues pertaining to academic freedom for faculty.

2. *Conduct a climate survey, as suggested in the Not Alone report published by the White House.* MICA is a large and complex institution, and SHVAC found that a widespread method of collecting feedback is necessary to represent the diverse views and experiences of community members more fully.

3. *Increase visibility of Title IX officers, and of relevant discussions on campus, with a dedicated website and passive programming.* A web page should be created, and printed materials should be distributed to all new students and employees early in the fall. SHVAC also recommends that the sexual violence and harassment policy be reviewed and updated in these resources annually.

4. *Improve reporting policies and structures & increase response time to sexual violence complaints.* MICA is delinquent in this area, extending mistrust and the perception that this issue is not prioritized on our campus. In conjunction, SHVAC recommends a reexamination and overhaul of MICA's adjudication system.

5. *Reconsider MICA's counseling services, and the provision of safe discussion spaces, to match the scope and tenor of demand.* Consider building relationships with external partners—students require multiple spaces in which they can talk about their experiences without judgment or fear.

CONCLUSION

In the final stages of its inquiry SHVAC contemplated the ways in which it might contribute to the implementation of recommendations, or facilitate the campus-wide dialogue for which it is advocating. While the membership of this group has a vested interest in advancing a coherent agenda/strategy for creating a safer and more enlightened community, and hence would welcome continued participation in these activities, it also recognizes that the responsibility for ensuring implementation of the measures suggested herein rests ultimately with the institution's Title IX officers, and more generally with the school's leadership. As a bookend to its process, and as a final exhortation, SHVAC would like to propose two additional things: 1) that its original membership reconvene toward the end of the Fall Semester of 2015 to review feedback offered through the campus climate survey recommended above; and 2) that a more permanent committee be established to provide guidance and oversight on the measures that MICA must take to ensure compliance with federal regulations and the maintenance of a safe, supportive environment for all community members. Because of MICA's unique composition it has an opportunity to become a leader in these areas, and SHVAC would very much like to see that potential realized.