

Full comments from Kirsten Skillrud, Director of Survey and Institutional Research at the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium, on the sexual assault surveys:

Schools administered our survey for any 2- to 6-week window between January 1, 2015 and April 30, 2015.

We did not contract with any research firm to conduct our survey. We developed the survey ourselves and administered it through our survey engine, Qualtrics.

We used the federal government's proposed sexual assault climate survey (<https://www.notalone.gov/assets/ovw-climate-survey.pdf>) as a foundation for our survey. Next, our staff formed a working group with people from four HEDS institutions to revise the survey so that it was better suited to the kinds of smaller private institutions that are in HEDS. After revising the survey a number of times with the working group, we sent it out to representatives of 30 or 35 HEDS institutions for feedback. The people at these institutions covered a wide range of positions, including institutional researchers, student affairs professionals, administrators, and title IX representatives. After reviewing their feedback, we finalized the survey and began administering it last fall.

Our goal in creating the survey was to get useful information into hands of people on campus. Part of what makes data useful is when people at institutions can see data from other similar institutions to help them make sense of their own data. HEDS distributed data from this survey to HEDS institutions unmasked. All participating HEDS institutions can see and identify one another's data. To facilitate this open sharing of data among HEDS institutions, we promised that we would not publicize the results nor identify the participating institutions. We have and will continue to sponsor workshops and send reports to participating institutions. But we won't release any data publicly. HEDS institutions are free to release their own data, but they cannot release data from other institutions. This stance brings less publicity, but we feel that it brings more action.

HEDS is not a public advocacy, lobbying, or research organization. HEDS operates by creating an environment in which member institutions can openly share sensitive institutional information outside of the normal competitive and ranking-focused environment in which many institutions normally operate. HEDS institutions share all kinds of survey and other institutional data with the agreement that a) they will use that data to improve their educational quality and impact, and b) that they will not publicly release identifiable data from other institutions. Institutions are free to release their own data though. Likewise, HEDS collects, analyzes, and distributes data to its member institutions, but never publicly releases any of that data.

We have written internal summary reports on the data for HEDS institutions, suggested ways that HEDS institutions could analyze data from the survey so that they could develop helpful institutional responses, hosted a workshop for institutions that have participated in the survey, and reviewed reports that some of the participating institutions have developed for their campuses. Our role is to

help our institutions gather and collect useful information so that they can act on the data.

The final reason that we cannot release the data has to do with the ethical review process. As you know, before we can conduct a survey, we have to have it reviewed by an ethical review board. In our review, we indicated that we were not conducting a research project that was aimed at creating generalizable knowledge, but we were creating the survey to help member institutions gather critical information to help them improve their campus climates. If we release our findings as a study, we would be violating the agreement that we made with our institutional review board.

We understand and agree with the public concern about sexual assaults on college campuses. Indeed that concern led us to develop the survey and work closely with our member institutions to make sense of and use data from the survey. Regardless of the data from the HEDS survey, it is already abundantly clear to us that sexual assault occurs too often on college campuses and that we need to find ways to dramatically reduce it. We are trying to help institutions do this, while we operate within the principles of our organization and our institutional review board agreement.