# International Pathways Project: Identifying and reducing barriers that newcomer students have in accessing sexual violence support and education services at FIC

# Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that SFU, the SVSPO and its partners in the International Pathways Project conducted the work of this project on unceded Coast Salish Territory - the traditional territories of the xwmoth kwoyem (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səlilwəta? (Tsleil-Waututh), kwikwoxem (Kwikwetlem), Semiahmoo, Kwantlen, Qaywayt, Tsawwassen, and Katzie Nations. Sexual violence has been part of the core of the settler-colonial agenda that displaces and disenfranchises Indigenous peoples. Though we have much to learn, doing anti-violence work, we strive to centre anti-colonialism on the path to end gender-based violence.

#### Introduction

Post-secondary institutions are intended to be safe spaces for learning, personal growth and community building. While college and university campuses are places where students are heavily engaged with academic and social activities, students may experience sexual violence and other forms of harm. Despite the fact that many post-secondary institutions have developed and implemented educational programs and support services to respond to sexual violence in university communities (Reid and Dunlop, 2017), this approach tends to miss a vulnerable population on campuses: those Students from International Pathways (SIPs) (definition offered below).

The purpose of the International Pathways Project (IP Project), initiated by the Sexual Violence Support & Prevention Office (SVSPO) and in partnership with Fraser International College (FIC) and International Services for Students (ISS), seeks to identify barriers that SIPs face when accessing sexual violence support and engaging in sexual violence educational initiatives. We also seek to survey SIPs' knowledge of sexual health issues. As well, we would like to identify the sexual health base knowledge of SIPs at Simon Fraser University (SFU) and Fraser International College (FIC). The hope is that by sharing project findings, SFU and other postsecondary institutions may be able to implement change to better support SIPs.

Consultations with key campus community partners about the project were conducted in Fall, 2018. The consultants consisted of the Women's Centre, International Student Services (ISS), Student Engagement & Retention Services, the Interfaith Centre, Campus Public Safety, Residence & Housing, Health & Counselling. In partnership with ISS and FIC, the SVSPO conducted a survey to gauge SIPs perspectives and needs in relation to sexual violence support services that are offered at SFU and FIC. We created and distributed digital and paper questionnaires targeted towards undergraduate SIPs studying at SFU and FIC (separate report). We received 427 responses (166 SFU responses, 261 FIC responses) and offer a summary of our findings in this report and offer some insight into SIPs' perspectives about accessing sexual violence support services and prevention education on campus.

# **Background**

The Sexual Violence Support & Prevention Office (SVSPO) at Simon Fraser University (SFU) offers ongoing, confidential and free support for University Community members including students, staff, and faculty, who are impacted by sexual violence. The Office also offers

educational materials and workshops about sexual violence prevention, supporting disclosures of sexual violence, and other educational topics for students, staff, and faculty. Committed to fostering a culture of care, consent and respect at SFU, the SVSPO supports student-led initiatives with the Active Bystander Network who promotes support and education services.

Partnered with SFU, Fraser International College (FIC) is an educational institute for students from outside of Canada who wish to pursue undergraduate studies at SFU. It houses the FIC Wellness Office which supports students' mental health and wellbeing. It offers culturally-responsive counselling, psychoeducation and resiliency skill-building, and other resources and information to FIC students (Reid, personal communication, 2019). In this document, we report the responses of the IP Project questionnaire from FIC SIPs. We thank the members of the IP Project working group from the SVSPO, FIC, and ISS for their ongoing support on this project.

#### **Definitions**

## **Students on International Pathways (SIPs)**

Those students who have arrived in Canada within the last eight years and could include permanent residents, refugees and international students. SIPs could also include Canadians who may have been previously living outside of Canada, and have now arrived in Canada within the last eight years.

## **Sexual violence**

An umbrella term that encompasses a broad range of behaviour...a sexual act or an act targeting a person's sexuality, gender identity or gender expression that is committed, threatened or attempted against a person without the person's Consent. Such behaviour may or may not involve physical contact...includes but is not limited to: sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, and the distribution of sexually explicit photographs or videos of a person without their Consent. (SFU, 2017)

# **Community Engagement**

The community engagement process mentioned above was done in two stages. The first included conversations with key campus community partners and helped develop the survey questions. The second stage included the development of a survey with questions tailored for SFU and FIC SIPs and asked about their experiences accessing sexual violence support services and their engagement with sexual violence education. The survey was hosted on an online platform and distributed in paper form to three major locations on the SFU Burnaby campus frequented by SIPs: International Services for Students (ISS), Fraser International College (FIC), and Residence & Housing. Two separate surveys were developed: one for SFU students and one for FIC students. Surveys were live from late February, 2019 to mid-March, 2019. A total of 464 responses were collected; 267 of which were from FIC students. After the data was compiled and reviewed, 261 FIC responses were analyzed.

#### **Literature Review**

While there is little research in this area, studies show that international students often face many barriers to disclosing or reporting sexual violence. Often, this is because they lack an

understanding of what constitutes as sexual violence. These students may also be afraid that they will lose their student visas as a result of disclosing an incident (Crace, 2017).

Some studies have shown that there is an underutilization of counselling services by international students, and researchers are trying to understand the barriers that deter students from accessing these services. Kambouropoulos (2015) conducted a study in two universities to identify some of these barriers through counsellor interviews and also sought to understand students' help-seeking behaviour and the path by which they eventually sought out counselling. The barriers identified from the feedback provided by the counsellors during the interviews include; lack of familiarity with the concept of counselling & personal experience with it, stigma & saving face, inability of students to talk about their problems and confide in strangers, lack of awareness of the availability of counselling services, confidentiality issues as well as gender roles & age.

Likewise, some reports have shown that international students do not engage well with sexual violence education because the content is not in a language easily understood and the method of delivery of the educative course is different from what the students are used to. The course contents are also not culturally sensitive to the needs of these students (Reid and Dunlap, 2017).

There are not many studies to show how SIPs access sexual violence support services; of the ones that do, even fewer focus on students' standpoints in their access of these services. Acknowledging this gap in literature, we reviewed research about sexual violence experiences of newcomer immigrant and refugee women in Canada instead. Given that the sample of this investigation is fairly broad and includes immigrant students and refugee students, utilizing studies about immigrant and refugee women's experiences of sexual violence offers relevant knowledge to our understanding of how SIPs navigate sexual violence. We suspect also that the shared experience of being racialized, newly-arrived, and non-Canadian likely suggests that immigrant and refugee women experience similar barriers as SIPs when accessing sexual violence support and educational services. It is important to highlight this part of the IP Project's assessment process as it will bring relevance to our research and findings and also brings attention to the lack of academic literature highlighting SIPs' voices in how they navigate helpseeking. But crucially, it brings attention to the fact that postsecondary institutions have failed to address racism as being a part of students' lives and, importantly for this project, as intersecting with sexual violence. This latter note will be further addressed in the discussion section of the report.

Immigrant and refugee women experience sexual violence in their communities, yet there are challenges in terms of accurately reporting the prevalence and the unique dimensions of sexual violence in these communities. This is due to the limited scope of research that specifically examines the issue of sexual violence within these communities as research on this population in Canada focuses more on the subject of intimate partner violence rather than sexual violence (Status of Women Canada, Communications and Public Affairs Directorate, 2016)

Much academic research highlights that immigrant and refugee women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence because they may be isolated from family and community (Status of Women Canada, Communications and Public Affairs Directorate, 2016). This notion is supported by Forbes-Mewett and McCulloch (2016) in their interviews with postsecondary

administration and their experiences of supporting Survivor SIPs note that international students are often seen as "attractive targets" because they tend to be isolated from their more intimate networks of support while they are in the host country. Wright, Dhunna, Riddle, Degannes, and Berzins (2019) suggest that Survivors who are international students may find themselves having a more difficult time when dealing with sexual violence as they are away from their support networks.

Given what we know about differing cultural norms regarding talking about sexual (and other forms of) violence, as well as language barriers, it is likely that additional evidence is required that can consider the complexity of immigrant experiences and identities. Status of Women Canada, Communications and Public Affairs Directorate (2016) reported that immigrant and refugee women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence because of a lack of host-country language skills, lack of access to dignified jobs (e.g., those that reflect their skill-set and level of experience), uncertain legal status, as well as their experience with authorities in their country of origin. Individual and group experiences of sexual violence will differ based on such variables as country of origin (e.g., regional/cultural expression of patriarchal ideologies that shape the treatment of women) and the context of arrival (e.g., forced versus voluntary migration; settlement in a rural versus urban location).

In addition, echoed in Crace, immigrant and refugee women lack awareness of their rights and the resources of support available to them which creates further obstacles to accessing services. This may be especially true for new immigrants, women with precarious citizenship status, or those who are undocumented; furthermore, those in Canada as refugees, on temporary work visas, or whose citizenship is pending, may not want to draw attention to themselves out of fear of deportation. Under these circumstances, women may not feel safe to report sexual violence if they feel it will jeopardize their status in Canada. (Status of Women Canada, Communications and Public Affairs Directorate, 2016). Given that immigrant and refugee women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence when living in the host country, and given that international students are more likely to be targeted for gender-based violence, it is clear that postsecondary institutions are challenged with focusing on how to best support Survivors from international pathways. From the literature review, we have found that there is a gap in research in relation to best practices for reducing barriers for students on international pathways from accessing sexual violence support services, further reinforcing the need for this project.

## **Results**

Below are the results of the surveys. We roughly estimate that about 65% of FIC students who enrolled in Integrated Learning Skills (ILS) classes during February and March completed the questionnaires.

#### **Personal Information Section.**

Question: Age range

16 - 18 years-old: 47.3%
19 - 21 years-old: 51.9%
22 - 24 years-old: 0.8%

Question: Gender that you identify with

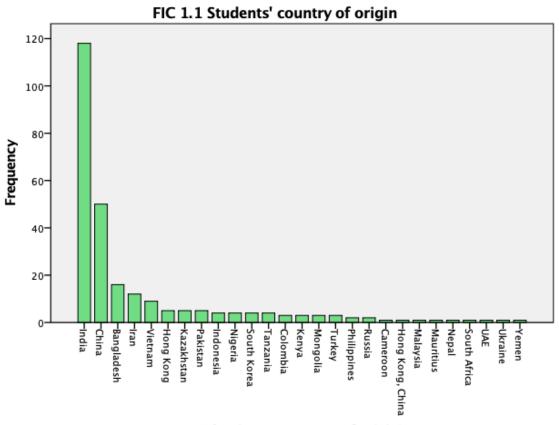
Male: 52.9%Female: 47.1%

Question: What year of study are you in?

- 1<sup>st</sup>: 88.1%
- 2<sup>nd</sup>: 5.7%
- 3<sup>rd</sup>: 1.9%
- 4<sup>th</sup>: 1.5%
- $-5^{th} +: 2.7\%$

Question: What is your country of origin?

- Please see image FIC 1.1

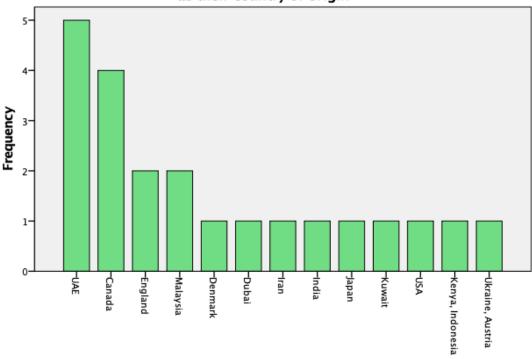


What is your country of origin?

Question: What country have you spent the majority of time in, if different from the above question?

- Please see image FIC 1.2

FIC 1.2 Country wherein students have spent the most time if not the same as their country of origin

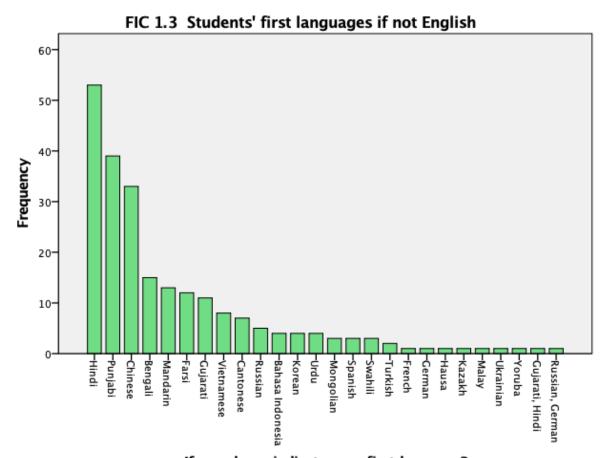


What country have you spent the majority of time in different from the above?

Question: Is English your first language?

- Yes: 9.2% - No: 90.8% Question: If your first language is not English, please indicate your first language

- Please see image SFU 1.3



If no, please indicate your first language?

Question: How long have you been living in Canada?

0 - 1 year: 89.7%
1 - 2 years: 6.5%
2 - 5 years: 3.1%
5 + years: 0.4%

Question: What is your status in Canada?

- International Student: 99.6%

- Canadian Citizen: 0.4%

# **Sexual Violence Support Services.**

Question: Are you familiar with the definition of sexual violence?

- Yes: 82.6% - No: 17.4%

Question: If yes, please describe sexual violence as you understand the term.

Here are some of the responses that we would like to highlight:

- "Any form of sexual interaction without consent [sic]"
- "Sexual Harrassment [sic]"
- "Sexual violence is the act of abusing someone sexually."
- "Any sort and form of violence related to sex/gender [sic] and a person's sexual orientation/self [sic]."
- "A harm to people in action or behaviour [sic]"
- "Acts that attempt your integrity [sic]"
- "The behaviour and words that make you feel offended (about bodies?) [sic]"

Question: Are you aware of the existence of the FIC Wellness Office?

- Yes: 90.8% - No: 9.2%

Question: If yes to the question above, please indicate how you heard about the FIC Wellness Office?

- FIC website: 4.4%

- Friend: 2.2%

- Workshop: 6.6%

Class: 68.7%Residence: 0.5%

- Orientation: 15.4%

- Other: 2.2%: "Just [sic] walked by and read what the office is specializing in."

Question: Are you aware that the FIC Wellness Office provides sexual violence support to all students at FIC?

- Yes: 82.1% - No: 17.9%

Question: What are some of the reasons why you may choose **not** to use FIC Wellness Office support services?

Here are some of the highlights from the responses we received from the question:

- "Shame [sic]"
- "being [sic] too shy to take that initial first step to actually go to the office [sic]"
- "The person may be uncomfortable or shy talking about their personal problems [sic]"
- "Scared to raise my voice [sic]"
- "I preffer [sic] my friend's and family [sic] help over it [sic]"
- "I'm afraid my information may be [sic] not well protected. [sic] Especially in an institution where other people know me and information can reach my family."
- "The fact that majority [sic] of my friends are there and i [sic] do not want to stumble across them when i [sic] use the services (they will most likely ask questions about it) [sic]"
- "Privacy [sic]"
- "Their office hours are just on weekdays not [sic] on weekends [sic]"
- "[b]ecause I don't know how to describe questions and language [sic] is different."

"Because I don't know how to describe questions and language is different."

Question: What are some of the ways in which you would like to receive information on the FIC Wellness Office's support services?

Email: 78.5%Newsletter: 10.7%Social media: 51.0%In class: 51.7%

- From a friend: 12.6%

- I do not want wish to receive information from FIC: 12.6%

- Other: 0.8%

- o Here are some ways in which students would like to receive information about the Wellness Office's support service:
  - "Some posters [sic],"
  - "Banners, brochures and something like this in FIC building [sic]"

# Recommendations for sexual violence support.

- Create campaigns and classroom initiatives that promote the ways in which students can access the Wellness Office for support.
  - o Highlight what "client-centred" support means and what it can look like.
  - o Highlight the Offices' integrity to protect confidentiality and privacy.
- Create long-term, safety-centred campaigns that draw attention to what sexual violence means.
- Create posters about support services that can be posted around FIC.
- Give students the option to access support in the top 3 non-English languages that they speak.
- Offer flexible hours for student support (after hours, weekends, etc.).
- Maintain engagement about Wellness Office support services through social media, email, and in class.
- Create Wellness Office social media accounts and centralize information about the Wellness Office's support services.

#### **Sexual Violence Education Initiatives.**

Question: Were you aware that the SVSPO provides educational workshops and materials to all students at SFU?

- Yes: 88.1% - No: 11.2%

Question: What are some of the ways in which you would like to receive information on SVSPO educational workshops:

Email: 81.5%Newsletter: 10.0%Social media: 51.2%In class: 52.3%

- From a friend: 13.1%

- I do not wish to receive information from the SVSPO: 2.3%

- Other: 1.2%
  - Some other ways in which students would like to receive information about FIC educational workshops:
    - "By posters [sic],"
    - "Moodle [sic],"
    - "Banners, brochures."

Question: What are some reasons why you may choose **not** to engage in an FIC educational workshop?

*Here are some of the responses that we want to highlight:* 

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"Shy [sic]"
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"Not comfortable with crowd, not comfortable with topic [sic]"

"Don't [sic] need it [sic]"

"I am educated about sexual violence [sic]"

"because [sic] it might be awkward in some cases, given my own culture [sic]"

"distance [sic] (takes an hour to reach campus) [sic]"

"when [sic] it does not relate to my major or interest [sic]"

"If I don't feel the knowledge I learnt in these workshops will be applicable in my life." "inst [sic] lazy [sic]"

"just [sic] lazy [sic]"

"As an international student [sic] it is very hard to make friends especially [sic] on your first semester. I prefer to join workshops with a group of friends to make it more enjoyable rather than going in alone."

"I would always try to engage in workships [sic] as it would help in my holistic develop. The only thing that would stop me would be availablility [sic] from courses or examination."

"Because of my busy work and study schedule. [sic] So, I may miss the workshop."

"I would definitely want to engage in the workshops, but probably again due o [sic] timing problem it might be hindered. Otherwise, I'll my best o [sic] attend them."

Question: Would you prefer to engage in an online training module or an in-person training about these topics?

- Online module: 28.2%

- In-person training: 36.5%

- I do not wish to engage in training about these topics: 11.4%

- Both online and in-person: 23.9%

## Recommendations for this section.

- Create diversity-informed, culturally-sensitive, safety-centred educational workshops and materials about sexual violence that can be engaged with in-person and online.
  - o The design of these materials and workshops should be student-centred as SIPs are busy people.
- Communicate information about educational workshops through student email blasts, social media, and in-class discussions.
- Create informational posters and brochures about educational workshops to be advertised around FIC; create Moodle posts to promote educational workshops.

# Sexual Health Knowledge.

Question: How knowledgeable are you about sexual health issues?

Extremely: 5.0%Very: 34.9%

Moderately: 53.3%Slightly: 6.1%Not at all: 0.8%

Question: How comfortable are you discussing sexual health issues?

Extremely: 20.7%Very: 29.9%

Moderately: 40.2%Slightly: 7.3%Not at all: 1.9%

Question: Would you be interested in attending a sexual health workshop if this was offered on campus?

- Extremely: 16.2%

- Very: 26.2%

Moderately: 35.4%Slightly: 13.1%Not at all: 9.2%

Question: If you indicated you would be interested in attending a sexual health workshop, please indicate the reason(s) why you would like to attend.

*Here are some highlights from those responses:* 

"It is always beneficial to have more knowledge about such topics [sic]"

"It's necessary [sic] to live a happy and healthy life [sic]"

"To maintain healthy sexual relationship [sic]. Aware of diseases such as STD, AIDS, HIV etc. [sic] happy sexual life [sic]"

"Learning more about consent is always good and healthy [sic]"

"to [sic] meet new people [sic]"

"Sexual health is very important and as for my background in a country where sexual health discussion is slightly forbidden, I would love to engage myself in something that I haven't experience before. I learnt every from internet or friends. So, I might have some lack of knowledge regarding this, [sic] this workship [sic] will help me."

"To help others to know more about sexual health [sic]"

Question: What topics would you be interested in learning more about related to sexual health?

- Consent: 35.6%

- Healthy relationships: 62.1%

- Assertiveness and boundaries: 27.2%

- Safer partying: 34.2%

- Dating culture in Canada: 49.4%

- Other: 5.4%

- Here are some highlights from our students' responses:
  - "Contraceptives [sic]"
  - "having [sic] safer sex"
  - "All the things that come under sexual health"
  - "Who should we make partners?"
  - "Persuation [sic], understanding male and female physicology [sic]"
  - "How to support LGBTQ+ folks, promote LGBTQ+ rights and create a safer and more inclusive atmosphere at campus [sic]"

# Recommendations for this section.

- Create diversity-informed, culturally-sensitive, safety-centred educational workshops and materials about sexual health and healthy sexuality.
  - Students are keen on learning about topics such as healthy relationships and dating culture in Canada. They would also be pleased to learn more about safe sex.
  - The design of these materials and workshops should be student-centred as SIPs are busy people.

# **Key Recommendations**

## Recommendations for FIC and the Wellness Office.

- Create campaigns and classroom initiatives that promote the ways in which students can access the Wellness Office for support.
  - o Highlight what "client-centred" support means and what it can look like.
  - o Highlight the Offices' integrity to confidentiality and privacy.
- Create long-term, safety-centred campaigns that draw attention to what sexual violence means.
  - O Students' responses strongly suggest that they are engaged with a basic understanding of sexual violence but lack a nuanced understanding that covers the scope of sexual violence. This may hinder students from accessing support because they do not believe that their experiences of sexual violence "count" as sexual violence.
- Create posters about support services that can be posted around FIC.
- Offer students the option to access support in the top 3 non-English languages that they speak; also offer other identified vulnerable groups who may be less resourced the option to access support in their language of origin.
- Offer flexible hours for student support (after hours, weekends, etc.).
- Maintain engagement about Wellness Office support services through social media, email, and in class.
- Create Wellness Office social media accounts and centralize information about the Wellness Office's support services.
- Create diversity-informed, culturally-sensitive, safety-centred educational workshops and
  materials about sexual violence, sexual health, healthy sexuality, and dating and
  relationships that can be engaged with in-person and online.
  - o Students are keen on learning about topics such as healthy relationship and dating culture in Canada. They would also be pleased to learn more about safe sex.

- The design of these materials and workshops should be student-centred as SIPs are busy people.
- Communicate information about educational workshops through student email blasts, social media, and in-class discussions.
- Create informational posters and brochures about educational workshops to be advertised around FIC; create Moodle posts to promote educational workshops.

## **Next steps**

- SFU and FIC must commit to anti-racist, decolonial, anti-oppressive feminist (intersectional) principles and act to support their students who face multiple structural and interpersonal barriers.
  - o Short-term goals around collaboration:
    - Share findings of the IP Project with SFU and FIC Human Resources, EDI, and Senior Directors within SFU Student Services
  - o Long-terms goals around collaboration:
    - HR to embed anti-racist, decolonial and anti-oppressive feminist principles into job descriptions, hiring practices and professional development opportunities.
    - Directors within Student Services to explore what may be implemented at a departmental level
    - Diversify support staff and encourage staff to engage with multicultural, anti-racist, decolonial professional development.
- SVSPO to share the literature review and findings of the IP Project with internal consultation stakeholders and other Canadian postsecondary institutions.
- SFU to further explore capacity with Monreau Shepell, MySSP provider, to offer traumainformed counselling.
- SVSPO and FIC Wellness Office should strategize around how they can provide resources and support services to SIPs, and the larger campus community, in the language that clients are most comfortable speaking/engaging in. (i.e. promote the use of translation services, translate key promotional materials, hiring staff who are fluent in non-English language, etc).
- For on-campus support services to foster relationships with off-campus multicultural, immigrant serving organizations and develop a nuanced understanding of their support services so that they may strategically raise students' awareness of these services and for the latter to be able to access these in ways that are meaningful.
- Create in-person and online educational initiatives that are mindful of students' schedules. SIPs demonstrate a keenness to engage with educational materials and workshops about sexual violence and sexual health but do not have the time to do so due to busy schedules and academic demands.
  - o Short-term educational goals:

- To further develop workshop and educational materials around dating and relationships in Canada that explore transitions from high school to university and dating culture in Canada.
- Expand on sexual violence and sexual health educational materials, specifically dating and relationships, into co-curricular programs such as SFU 101.
- o Long-term educational goals:
  - Collaborate with specialized program offerings for vulnerable groups
     (Back on Track as an example) to provide educational opportunities.
  - Explore creating a Living-Learning community around sexual violence educational and prevention.
- In a few years, engage with another iteration of the IP Project to assess the potential barriers that SIPs face when trying to access sexual violence support services and educational initiatives. This will also help the SVSPO and campus partners be able to assess whether there is a change in perception amongst SIPs.
  - o In the next iteration of a survey, to track where students learned about the opportunity to engage in the survey.

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