

How U Kentucky Is Trying to Stop Campus Sexual Assault

This past fall, sexual assault and rape on campus have been forced to the forefront; high-profile stories from Columbia University NY, the University of Virginia and Vassar University NY prove that we have a long way to go in order to curb sexual assault on campus.

In April 2014, the White House released a report based on the findings of its Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. With one in five female college students assaulted and only 12% of those assaulted reporting the crime, it is becoming increasingly important for colleges to act.

Except, the report goes on to say, many assault-prevention programs don't work. President Obama, however, singled out the University of Kentucky as an example of what can and should be done to prevent violence against women on college campuses.

How did the University of Kentucky become a leader in sexual assault prevention?

Noticing a problem

In 2002, Dr. Carol Jordan was finishing up eight years as executive director of the Kentucky Governor's Office of Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Services. Jordan's experience is in crisis intervention, but, as she puts it, "I spent my career to that point rescuing people from drowning in the river. We needed to start asking, what is going on up-river? Who is throwing them in?" She became very interested in prevention and working on researching the problem of prevention.

The Center for Research on Violence Against Women was created at the University of Kentucky in 2003, with Jordan as the director. With the support of then-UK President Lee Todd, the Center released the Women's Safety Study in 2004, one of the first prevalence and incidence studies of safety issues unique to its own campus.

Most universities still rely on national data and trends and rarely survey their own campuses to understand the climate at their own institution.

The study was repeated in 2007, and it confirmed that there was a problem at the University of Kentucky: 36.5% of UK's female students reported having an experience of victimization while enrolled (physical, sexual and/or stalking).

"I will always credit the university administration for being brave enough, on our own initiative, to do this study, and to release the findings publicly," remarks Jordan. President Todd even matched the funding Jordan was able to raise from the Federal Department of Justice in order to complete the survey.

In response to the report, the campus created a "Women's Place," which later became the VIP (Violence Intervention and Prevention) Center. "We wanted to make sure the Center had a broader focus on victimization and prevention across the campus communities," explained Jordan. But they would need someone to be the director of this new Center.

Frustration in failure

They hired Dr. Dorothy Edwards, a respected researcher and educator in counseling psychology. Edwards had

grown frustrated with the failed strategies for preventing violence against women.

"Conference after conference," she writes in her book *Green Dot Prevention Strategy*, "we sat and listened to each other present one year another clever poster campaign, another creative one-time-only-mandatory program, and another date-rape skit...all the while letting our hope for real change slip into tired resignation."

Edwards saw the research clearly showed that what those who worked in prevention had done wasn't working and decided to "upend everything I thought I knew. Question Everything."

That insight led her to research anything she could find, regardless of discipline, that involved successfully preventing someone from doing something: public health, social psychology, marketing, communication and persuasion. This research informed her new prevention strategy, Green Dot.

Green Dot program

According to the University of Kentucky's Violence Intervention and Prevention Center website on Green Dot, on a map, "A 'red' dot represents every individual act of power-based personal violence—a rape, a threat, an assault, a hit—plus every statement or action that justifies, accepts, minimizes, excuses, or ignores that violence."

The green dots "represent any behavior, choice, word, or an attitude" of intolerance for violence. In other words, they represent actions that promote safety for everyone.

Green Dot seeks to change the culture of violence and tacit acceptance of violence on college campuses by "capitalizing on the power of peer and cultural influence" and is "informed by social theory."

It seeks to create "a force of engaged and proactive bystanders." By creating a social movement led by what are known as Popular Opinion Leaders (or POLs), Green Dot seeks to change the climate on campuses, to make it clear that power-based personal violence is *not* acceptable.

Two-part intervention

The approach is grounded in research, particularly in social diffusion theory, bystander literature, perpetrator data, and marketing and rebranding research. It consists of two phases.

The first phase of the Green Dot approach involves a 50-minute motivational speech, which tries to:

- help students find their connection to dating and sexual violence on college campuses,
- build awareness of the problem of dating and sexual violence on college campuses,
- present a bystander intervention as a manageable and simple activity,
- persuade and motivate students to get involved in prevention, and
- link students to the VIP Center on the UK campus.

VIP Center staff delivers the speech to incoming freshmen in a one-credit course entitled University 101, which is designed to help new students transition to university life.

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The second phase involves an intervention program called Students Educating and Empowering to Develop Safety (SEEDS). The program focuses on preventing perpetrator behavior by providing students with skills to be a proactive bystander.

The program is composed of small-group, intensive sessions. The students who are selected to attend have been deemed POLs and have influence within their particular communities.

“Diffusion of new behaviors is more readily accepted in a community when behaviors are modeled by influential peers,” explains **Dr. Ann L. Coker**, Verizon Wireless Endowed Chair in the Center for Research on Violence Against Women. Coker is the lead researcher on a number of studies seeking to assess the effectiveness of the Green Dot strategy.

The approach shifts the focus away from the victim and crisis intervention and toward the power of collective prevention. “By shifting the focus away from solely helping victims and onto identifying high-risk potential perpetrator behavior, bystanders may be better able to respond to a potentially violent situation earlier in its development,” Coker elaborates.

As put by the program literature: “The Green Dot strategy is predicated on the belief that individual safety is a community responsibility and shifts the lens away from victims/perpetrators and onto bystanders.”

Impact of Green Dot

A preliminary study, “Evaluation of Green Dot: An Active Bystander Intervention to Reduce Sexual Violence on College Campuses,” co-authored with a number of colleagues and appearing in the journal *Violence Against Women*, found that both Phase One and Phase Two had an impact on students, and “significantly increased both observed and actual active bystander behaviors in the general population of UK students” (17).

The studies are ongoing, and with continued research, Coker and her colleagues hope to show that rates of violence are in fact lower at UK than non-Green Dot schools, thus proving the effectiveness of the Green Dot approach.

A growing movement

The success of the Green Dot approach has not gone unnoticed by other campuses. Edwards founded Green Dot, Etc. to bring the approach to college campuses, high schools and military bases across the country.

They also run a Green Dot Institute to train others in order to further spread the Green Dot approach. “I am defiant against a culture that tries to lull my soul into quiet complacency as our daughters and our sons—our partners and our sisters and our brothers—face violence and the threat of violence every single day,” says Edwards.

Coker is now working on bringing the Green Dot strategy into high schools in Kentucky and will research its impact there. Funded by the Center for Disease Control, her study, “Green Dot Across the Bluegrass: Evaluation of Primary Prevention Intervention to Reduce Sexual Violence in High Schools,” is working to curb the violence before the students even reach the college campus.

In September, it was announced that this study found a greater than 50 percent reduction in the self-reported frequency of sexual violence perpetration by students that received the Green Dot training, compared to a slight increase in schools that did not. While this study focused on Kentucky high schools, the results are encouraging for reducing sexual violence on campus.

An issue for retention and completion

Jordan has moved into a new role at the University of Kentucky as the director of the Office for Policy Studies on Violence Against Women, an interdisciplinary research group dedicated to shaping the creation, implementation and evaluation of public policy to improve the lives of women harmed by violence and abuse through policy research and analysis, and empirically driven advocacy and practice.

In her recent article in the journal *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, Jordan shows how sexual violence negatively impacts retention and persistence. Women who have been victimized have lower GPAs, and Jordan advises that student affairs, admissions and academic advising professionals “need to include the risk of victimization among factors included in retention programming.”

What can you do?

“Most people agree that violence is wrong and they want to do the ‘right thing,’” explains current VIP Director **Rhonda Henry**. “Unfortunately, most people don’t see themselves as part of the solution to ending power-based personal violence; they aren’t sure what to do or how they can be effective.”

The VIP Center website at the University of Kentucky has some tips and advice for those who want to work toward becoming a Green Dot campus (you can find the full list at http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/VIPCenter/learn_greendot.php).

- Send an email to your contact list with a simple message: “This issue is important to me and I believe in the goal of reducing violence.”
- Tell a woman in your life that power-based personal violence matters to you.
- Have a conversation with a younger man or boy who looks up to you about how important it is for men to help end violence.
- Talk to a guy friend of yours about the importance of men getting involved in prevention.
- Ask five people in your life how power-based personal violence has impacted them (directly or indirectly) and listen to their response.

But perhaps most importantly, in the Green Dot approach students are encouraged to intervene when faced with a situation that may result in an assault, particularly when alcohol is involved. They remind us all that we need to get educated, get equipped and act. 📌

—LSB

To learn more about the Green Dot strategy and about bringing a workshop or facilitator training to your campus, go to <https://www.livethegreendot.com/>. You can contact Carol Jordan at carol.jordan@uky.edu and Ann Coker at ann.coker@uky.edu.

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