

**OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE AUSTRALASIAN ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY HOUSING OFFICERS
SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE
KATE WARNER AC, GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOTEL GRAND CHANCELLOR, TUESDAY 9 MAY 2017**

Good morning and welcome to the Australasian Association of College and University Housing Officers Conference.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land – to pay respect to those that have passed before us and to acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community who are the custodians of this land.

I acknowledge AACUHO President Vincent Wilson; Vice-President Maryanne Pidcock; AACUHO Committee members; AACUHO Life Members Colin Marshall, Edwina Ellicott; ACUHO-I President Beth McCuskey; Platinum Sponsor StarRez representatives Adele Knipe, Con Caccamo, David Thomas, Shane Chandler and Marlita Foster; distinguished guests.

I particularly want to welcome our international and interstate guests to Hobart and do hope that you find time to enjoy all that we have to offer here on the beautiful island.

In preparing for this conference opening I had a close look at your program. What an amazing array of topics you will be treated to during the conference.

Thinking about colleges and university accommodation brought back many memories. Childhood memories of visiting with my father the impressive sandstone St Paul's College at Sydney University where Dad, a Queensland boy from a country town, had spent six years as a student in the 1930s. Stories of his friend's ability to extract extra money from his gullible mother for an amoeba and then for a cage for the amoeba. Of climbing over Sydney Harbour Bridge in response to a dare. He made college life sound idyllic and

exciting. And perhaps it was idyllic in contrast to the next five or six years of his life, serving in World War Two.

My father's idealised accounts merged in my imagination with the college experiences of fictional characters such as Charles Ryder and Harriet Vane. This romantic view of college life was not really diminished by the college experiences of my friends at the University of Tasmania when I was a student. But it was far removed from my daughter's experience. Or probably more accurately, her sometimes anxious mother's experience, when my younger daughter Meg went off to University at aged 17. Meg was unwilling to stay in her residential hall after the first semester. It was followed by a flea-infested private rental, and then others, which were hardly more satisfactory. And there were stories of emptying a bowl of spaghetti bolognese on a flatmate's head and so on.

Fast forward from the 1930s with sandstone colleges, an open fire in your study and a college scout, to the 1990s and to 2017 when university enrolment has increased from about 14 thousand in the 1930s (out of a population of 7 million) to around 1 million students enrolled at any one time. At the end of 2014 Australia had almost 75,000 places in halls of residence, colleges and 100 bed plus commercial student accommodation sites. About 40% of these places are occupied by international students.

So there are a lot of students to care for. Looking at your conference program gives a good indication of the sorts of problems that housing officers need to be aware of and competent in managing in order to keep students healthy and safe and to allow them to flourish and thrive.

There does seem to be a plethora of new conditions and problems to worry about. Not just things like self-harm and eating disorders but seemingly newer conditions such as drunkorexia, which is said to be sweeping across universities.¹ It involves eating virtually nothing before going out drinking both to save calories and stay slim but also to get drunk faster and more cheaply. It has dangerous health consequences.

¹ Olivia Lambert, 'The scary trend sweeping across Australian universities' 1 July 2016.

So there are many issues I could focus on. But I have chosen to talk about sexual assault, because as a Criminologist it is an area in which I have knowledge. Moreover, it is a subject which, in the university context, has attracted a lot of attention in the last year or so.

We do not have reliable figures on victimisation rates for sexual violence at Australian universities. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics report that 1 in 6 women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15 (compared to 1 in 20 men) and ABS and police data reveal that women aged 16 to 24 are most at risk of sexual violence, most commonly at the hands of a man known to the victim.

A 2015 National Union of Students survey has reported that 27% of all survey respondents (1,070 women responded to this question) indicated that they had experienced some form of sexual assault while enrolled at their current institution (although not necessarily on campus). The most frequent on-campus location was university accommodation (24% of incidents).² A University of Sydney survey produced for the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Registrar) reported similar findings.³

While the NUS survey used a small and possibly unrepresentative sample, there is a US study on prevalence of sexual assault among university students with similar findings. The study, involving more than 150,000 students across 27 institutions, found that more than 27% of female college seniors reported that they had experienced some kind of unwanted sexual contact since first entering college.⁴

The dearth of robust data on sexual assault of university students has been addressed by a national prevalence survey commissioned last year from the Australian Human Rights Commission by University Vice-Chancellors. The research was commissioned to guide improvements in how to respond to sexual assault and harassment. The survey was developed by the Australian

² 'Talk about it', NUS Women's Department 2015 Survey, p 20.

³ *Creating a Safer community for All: Sexual Harassment and Assault on Campus*, University of Sydney 2016.

⁴ Nina Funnell, 'No means yes, yes means anal' *Redezview*, The Daily Telegraph, 15 April 2016, <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/no-means-yes-yes-means-anal/news-story/c06c8f0587745e45d9bd70502c62ae0c> accessed 6 May 2017.

Human Rights Commission with input from experts including Roy Morgan Research and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The results will be released in mid 2017.⁵ It has not been without controversy in relation to ethics clearance.

I should also say something about reporting rates. We know that rape survivors are among the least likely of all crime victims to report to the police. The latest ABS victim survey reports that less than one third of persons who experienced sexual assault report their most recent incident to the police.⁶ The NUS 2015 survey found that just 6% of victims reported the incident to their university and less than 5% reported it to the police.⁷

Anecdotally, the beginning of the university year is when female students are most likely to be sexually assaulted. The CEO of the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and Karen Willis, Director of the Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia are reported as saying that there is an increase in calls for rape crisis counselling from university women around O-week events.⁸ Karen Willis added that 'residential colleges give us a stack of work'. She explained that college students who are away from the normal controls and constraints of their communities at home may feel they have the freedom and entitlement to act out their impulses. Others have heard stories from older brothers and dads about 'sowing wild oats' and enter university thinking that it's now their time to enjoy 'sex on tap'.

A recent survey of college halls and residences attached to Australian universities by the community campaigning group Fair Agenda, found that only one in six residences said they would run sexual assault prevention training involving a suitably qualified sexual assault service in 2017. Of the 214 residential facilities contacted, just 35 indicated they would run training as per the best practice national guidelines. These guidelines were established in 2009 by the National Association of Services Against Sexual

⁵ 'Universities confirm release of sexual assault and harassment data', Universities Australia, Media Release, 5 April 2017, <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/Media-and-Events/media-releases/Universities-confirm-release-of-sexual-assault-and-harassment-data#.WQ1gKh2uZmA> accessed 6 May 2017.

⁶ *Crime Victimization Australia, 2015-16*, Cat no 4530.0.

⁷ 'Talk about it', n 2 p 22.

⁸ Nina Funnell, 'Sexual assault: What is your university doing to prevent it? ABC News 25 Feb 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-02-25/what-is-your-university-doing-to-prevent-sexual-assault/8295604> accessed 6 May 2017.

Violence. A further 49 residences indicated that they would run alternative forms of sexual assault prevention training, including 'in-house' training, while the remaining 130 said they did not intend to run any training, or were otherwise unwilling to respond to the survey.

Experts, such as Professor Moira Carmody of the University of Western Sydney, claim that many of the alternative programs that are currently being delivered in colleges fail to meet best practice standards. She argues that once-off programs don't work in changing behaviour and that university or college staff should not be running these sessions unless they have been trained by people who know what they are doing. Carmody observes that a lot of universities are not applying their own standards of academic rigour when it comes to the sexual assault prevention programs they implement and this suggests they do not understand the wide body of international research on how to effectively deliver sexual assault prevention training.⁹

Sharma Bremner from End Rape on Campus claims that many programs still put the onus on the woman to avoid being raped. Nina Funnell's cursory review of the student safety pages on Australian websites reveals many are still teaching 'don't get raped' rather than 'don't rape'. For example, the University of Canberra website warns that 'being drunk or out of it on drugs ... is the most common reason why young people end up having unwanted sex.'

Wollongong University instructs students to 'walk in groups of two or more after dark: stay in well lit areas and keep to well constructed paths; carry a personal alarm and be prepared to scream and shout if attacked.'

Griffith University advises students not to drink too much. 'Keeping a clear head makes it easier to make wise decisions when it comes to personal safety.'

Last year, the Australian Catholic University published 'tips on dating safety' which include: 'Avoid secluded places until you know your date better; do

⁹ Quoted in Funnell, n 9.

not give mixed messages [and] be sure that your words do not conflict with other signals such as eye contact, voice tone, posture or gestures'.¹⁰

Nina Funnell points out that this advice, though well-intentioned, is problematic for a number of reasons. It reinforces victim-blaming attitudes and deters many victims from reporting the assault for fear of being blamed for having done the wrong thing; and because 'avoidance tips' don't address any of the underlying causes of sexual violence (including power and control, sexual entitlement and gender inequality) the advice merely re-orders who gets raped.

When we tell young women to avoid certain behaviours, the message we end up sending young men is that women who do these things are breaching a moral code and are rapeable.

Nicola Henry, a legal studies lecturer from La Trobe University is also critical of the safety advice offered by universities, pointing out that not only may it discourage victims from reporting, because the victim may feel at fault, it may cause them to think that what happened to them was not really rape, particularly if the perpetrator was a person know to them.¹¹

I should note that some of the online advice I have quoted has been omitted or amended; whether in response to these criticisms I cannot say.

Based upon many years experience of talking to university students about these issues, Funnell argues that at least some of the sexual violence that takes place is motivated by a desire to regulate and punish women who are seen to be pushing social boundaries including boundaries about acceptable gendered behaviour. Such girls are perceived as asking for it.

At other times, sexual entitlement, a lack of consent education (such as failing to understand that passivity is not consent), and a lack of concern for the autonomy of women, can contribute to a perpetrator's choice to sexually offend. She argues that sexual assault prevention programs need to focus on attitudinal change rather than on avoidance tips.

¹⁰ Funnell, n 9.

¹¹ Henry n 8.

As well as examining sexual assault prevention programs, the way universities respond to reports of sexual violence has also attracted criticism – and it is said that they have a patchwork of policies and practices which are often ‘overlapping, confusing, inconsistent, incomplete, or in some cases non-existent’.¹²

In a 2017 report to the Australian Human Rights Commission, the advocacy group, End Rape on Campus (EROC) Australia, quoted the experience of one survivor:¹³

The first person I told asked me how much I had been drinking. The second person I told said that I would be ruining his life. The third person I told said it wasn’t a university issue. The fourth person I told asked me why I had waited so long to tell anyone.

There were two media stories last year which highlight the need for a focus on primary prevention campaigns which challenge the underlying causes of sexual violence including violence supportive attitudes and disrespectful attitudes to women.

The first was a video in which students at Baxter College at the University of New South Wales chant extremely sexist lyrics. Disturbingly, according to an EROC advocate, the chant at Baxter College was mild compared with some of the other chants that have been reported by students across Australia. She repeated a report she had received from a student in Queensland who admitted to having done some kinky sexual things during a game of truth and dare. Before she knew it she was surrounded by a group of male students chanting ‘No means yes, yes means anal!’ The female student was terrified, incredibly distressed and has since left the university.¹⁴

The second story was the coverage given to the Facebook group titled, ‘Hotties of Melbourne University’. The group was created so that members

¹² Henry.

¹³ Quoted by Henry.

¹⁴ Nina Funnell, ‘No means yes, yes means anal’ Redezview, The Daily Telegraph, 15 April 2016, <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/no-means-yes-yes-means-anal/news-story/c06c8f0587745e45d9bd70502c62ae0c> accessed 6 May 2017.

could rate students' attractiveness from unauthorised photos and included comments such as 'This girl is a 0/10 I would not bang her even if they PAID me'. The Facebook page also included details about the women's university schedules, classes and places they may be going.¹⁵ It was removed after a Change.org petition went viral but it seems there are similar pages associated with other universities.¹⁶

There is pushback in response to criticism of the students' behaviour such as the Baxter College chants as shown by online comments about Nina Funnell's 'no means yes' article in the *Daily Telegraph*. Men seeing the behaviours as offensive were in the minority. For example, Yo said of the Baxter College chant: ¹⁷ 'I first heard this song on a bus during a footy trip 20 years ago; are boys still allowed to be boys or will that offend someone?'

College and residential facilities have good opportunities to engage students in primary prevention sessions that raise awareness of the nature, scope and prevalence of sexual violence, focus on consent and respectful relationships and proactive bystander intervention to challenge problematic behaviour and attitudes.

And it seems that at least some colleges are taking the issue of primary prevention seriously and are conscious that colleges can't afford to minimise or dismiss such matters and must instead combat misogynist and sexist attitudes rather than tolerating them as a bit of fun or tradition.

St Leo's College at the University of Queensland is attempting to engage young men in conversations around gender, intimacy, respect and consent. I understand at training sessions around ethics and consent, a documentary exploring the widespread cover-up of sexual assault at American universities is being aired.

I see from your conference program that on Thursday, one of the concurrent sessions is about the St Leo's College *Rethink* Program. It will describe the

¹⁵ Funnell, n 9.

¹⁶ 'Hotties of Melbourne Uni page removed from Facebook after viral petition, <http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/hotties-of-melbourne-uni-page-removed-from-facebook/7331218> accessed 6 May 2017.

¹⁷ Funnell, n 4.

O-week program the college ran aimed at opening up the conversation on gender, relationships, consent and sexual assault.

It is pleasing to note that last year universities launched a campaign, *Respect. Now. Always.* It is designed to prevent and address sexual assault and harassment across the sector. The Human Rights Commission Survey I mentioned earlier is an aspect of that campaign. In late 2016 tens of thousands of University students were asked to participate in the survey on university student experience of sexual assault and harassment. When released the report will contain recommendations on areas for action and reform.¹⁸

You have an engaging three days ahead with dynamic key-note speakers and a great choice of concurrent sessions. I now have great pleasure in declaring open your 2017 conference.

Thank you.

¹⁸ Respect. Now. Always. <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/uni-participation-quality/students/Student-safety#.WQ1i9x2uZmA> accessed 6 May 2017.