



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROGRAM EVALUATION 2015

The Mentors in Violence Prevention Leadership Training at
California State University, Long Beach

Submitted by:

Shelley Eriksen, Ph.D.
Lead Evaluator & Professor
Departments of Human Development & Sociology
California State University, Long Beach

with research assistance from Jessica Wiseman
M.A. student in Marriage & Family Therapy Master's Program
California State University, Long Beach

Executive Summary

A year after the renewal of the Violence Against Women Act in February 2013, the White House Council on Women and Girls issued a series of reports on sexual assault in key institutional settings, particularly within the military and on college and university campuses. In “Not Alone: The First Report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault” the Obama administration underscored the reality that one in five women is sexually assaulted in college, most often in her first or second year. In the wake of these policy reports, the Obama Administration and the Department of Education have demanded tighter Title IX compliance on sexual assault reporting and more systematic prevention training on all university campuses. Central to these policy initiatives is the implementation of prevention programs that expressly engage men, and that employ a bystander intervention model aimed at shifting norms within peer cultures that, when left unchecked, often ignore or protect sexual assault perpetration.

In December 2015, Dr. Jeane Caveness, Assistant Dean of Students, received a grant from the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to develop a “coordinated community response” to sexual assault victim services and gender violence prevention at CSULB. As a central component of its prevention strategy, CSULB contracted with MVP Strategies to provide intensive, day-long leadership training to select student leadership groups on campus. The Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) program is a mixed-gender, multi-racial, gender violence, bullying and gay-bashing prevention program that, beginning in the early 1990s, was the first large-scale attempt to apply the bystander approach to issues of sexual assault and relationship abuse. Now at the forefront of the field, MVP frames gender violence prevention as a leadership issue for administrators, faculty and students at all levels of the educational system. In particular, MVP provides a foundation for emerging and established student leaders to examine the social norms in and outside college settings that can contribute to abusive behaviors, and how they might use their personal skills and leadership opportunities to effect change in their spheres of influence.

In January 2015, MVP Strategies, in conjunction with the CSULB Office of Student Services, offered one-day student leadership trainings aimed at introducing participants to the theory and practice of a bystander-focused gender violence and bullying prevention program. Three groups of 113 student leaders underwent training over three consecutive days: student athlete captains (N=24), resident assistants and staff (N=66) and Greek chapter presidents (N=23). Evaluation data reported here occurred both on the day of training (in the form of pre- and post-test paper surveys), and an online survey distributed to all training participants four months after the original training. Both the paper and online surveys included standard bystander readiness measures drawn from the research literature, several leadership measures created specifically for MVP leadership trainings, as well as open-ended questions intended to tap respondent experiences and perspectives. Follow-up focus groups with select training participants (10 Resident Assistants and 6 student athletes) were conducted four months after the training to ascertain levels of retention and application of MVP core concepts. What follows are summative comments drawn from the evaluation data drawn from the January 2015 trainings. (See Exhibit 1 for evaluation procedure template.)

Training participants represent a reasonable approximation of the larger CSULB student body on key dimensions. Forty-four percent of training participants are white, another 21% Latino/Latina and 14% Asian/Pacific Islander. Their average age as a group is 20.6. Like CSULB more generally, 52% of training participants are women, and 48% men. Student leaders represent a range of majors and years in school, though majors skew toward health and human services, the liberal arts and business administration; by comparison, relatively few are in education or in the natural sciences and math. Ten percent of student participants are survivors of some form of gender violence, 69% indicate they know someone who was a victim of sexual assault or relationship abuse, and 42% of student participants say they have known someone who engaged in unwanted sexual contact with someone who didn't want it. Thus, gender violence is not just an abstract or professional matter for training participants; it's also a deeply personal issue for many as well.

Student participants also possess varying levels of leadership "readiness," both in terms of sexual assault prevention education as well as campus and civic leadership more generally. Relatively few (7 out of the 23) of the student athletes had formerly completed a sexual assault/sexual harassment education program prior to attending the MVP training, compared to nearly half (48%) of Greek chapter presidents and 82% of resident assistants. A range of venues—RA training, campus InterACT, sorority/fraternity workshops and job training—provided sexual assault/harassment programming for students, suggesting high variability in the consistency, applicability or depth of knowledge found among student leadership groups. Significantly fewer students have prior educational programming on dating violence/battering. Students also came to the training with considerable leadership experience in other campus, school and community organizations. For example, approximately 70% of students in each of the three student groups report having held a formal leadership position in high school. Nearly three-quarters of Greek chapter presidents and resident assistants had attended a formal leadership training; only 16% of student athletes had, an indication that the MVP training might have served as their first introduction to the concept of themselves as leaders in their peer cultures. Conversely, only 19% of students indicate they had ever attended a leadership training that had a gender focus.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that an effective college gender violence prevention program should possess versatility in program content to best address the variable information background and leadership histories of student constituents. In addition, providing programming that emphasizes gender violence as a continuum of behavior (rather than compartmentalizing topics into separate workshops) helps students understand these interlinkages. Educational programming on dating violence/battering remains a need. Though many student participants come with notable leadership histories, others do not. Relatively few students, by comparison, had taken any leadership training with a gender focus, suggesting that the MVP training may have been their first introduction into gender violence prevention as a leadership issue, for men and for women.

Next, quantitative measures drawn from the empirical bystander literature were matched to MVP program goals and outcomes. Pre- and post-test data were summated for the group as a whole as well as by gender of respondent. To the project aim of whether MVP trainings adequately prepares students to become leaders on gender violence prevention within their respective peer cultures, participants in the training evidenced increases in their positive ratings on all nine items

measuring “leadership readiness” on gender violence from pre- to post-test. Student participants indicate they had thought more about how they could use their leadership skills to reduce the incidence of gender violence, gave greater importance to being up-to-date about best practices on sexual assault prevention, exhibited a greater desire to incorporate the prevention of gender violence in their formal and informal leadership role, and showed positive changes in their understanding of the role of gender violence prevention education in doing what leaders do. Changes in item ratings also indicate that the training was impactful for both women and men participants. Overall, women more positively endorsed nine out of eleven statements at higher frequencies than men, while male respondents evidenced more significant increases in positive endorsements in seven out of nine ratings. To evaluate the effectiveness of MVP as a bystander intervention program, we employed established measures from the existent bystander research literature to establish any significant change from pre- to post-test in such arenas as *bystander efficacy* (felt confidence in performing bystander behaviors), *bystander intervention behaviors* (the likelihood of engaging in 51 bystander behaviors), and *decisional balance scale* (weighing the relative pros and cons of changing key behaviors). For the group overall, and for women and men separately, analyses indicate significant increases in scores on self-efficacy, participants’ willingness to engage in a wide range of bystander behaviors, and a shift toward more positive assessments of engaging in bystander behaviors as a result of the MVP training.

On the last page of the post-training survey, participants were asked six open-ended questions about their experiences with the training. Questions pertained to such things as what they found most helpful or beneficial about the program, areas they would recommend strengthening and any important skills they derived from the training. The most frequently cited elements that participants liked about the MVP training reflect its time-tested, gender-focused pedagogical strategies: separating men and women into separate break-out groups for key discussions; the interactive nature of sessions; the “box exercise” about gender expectations; the quality and care of its facilitators. Of the features that participants wished to change or improve, the redundancy of content, the length of time spent on particular topics, and more concrete solutions or offered strategies were key among them. The confidence to act, the ability to recognize types of abuse and healthy relationships, practical strategies and applications, and awareness and self-knowledge were among the critical skills that training participants indicated they left the training with. A clear majority (88% of respondents) indicated they never felt uncomfortable or unsafe during the training, and another 84% welcomed additional training, especially if it were more advanced or applied. The most significant indicator of the program’s success is the high percentage of participants who would recommend it to a friend—93% answered yes, and nearly all unequivocally so.

Since the application of MVP training to student leadership groups on campus is in an exploratory phase, we conducted two, hour-long focus groups with a select group of participants (one with 10 RAs and the other with 6 student athletes) to further pursue their ideas and experiences with the MVP training. Because focus groups occurred nearly four months after the training, these discussions also provided a qualitative means of assessing knowledge retained over time. When asked how the MVP leadership training impacted their learning in regards to gender violence, the preponderance of answers here focused on the information and awareness that the trainings provided, the unique interactive activities, the open forum for discussion and the focus on leadership. As for key “take aways” from the MVP training, students reported that

the training provided them with useful tools and relevant knowledge to be more effective in their interactions with their peers, look out better for their teammates and friends, articulate a clearer role for men, and better function as a bystander or leader among their peers. The athletes especially offered constructive ideas about how to “to get the message out” to their teammates and to a broader audience, including to their coaches. By all accounts, the trainers were well remembered. Participants found them helpful, nonjudgmental and credible, and appreciated that they came from different walks in life and were both men and women trainers who showed respect when working with each other. For the athletes it made a significant impression that the trainers also had athletic backgrounds and could “understand where they were coming from.” When asked about areas for future improvement, their answers bifurcated based on their different levels of preparation and experience: resident assistants asked for more realistic scenarios relevant to our own particular campus, while athletes asked to have the training days divided up so as to better absorb the information provided. Specific ideas were generated as to what participants felt were the most critical issues for them—as leaders in their respective peer cultures—to address (beginning page 41) as well as some of the barriers they perceived to their effective leadership on gender violence prevention on campus.

Finally, because we were interested in tracking training effects over time, we created and disseminated an online, follow-up survey four months after the January training. We included in the online survey an abbreviated list of leadership and bystander measures drawn directly from the post-training survey. When we examine responses to the leadership items, the bystander efficacy scale and the bystander behavior measures, we find that the boost in scores we saw at the end of the day’s training (via the post-training survey) were dampened with the passage of time. Notably, with one exception, none of the scores return to their original, pre-training levels, but nearly all decline to a mid-zone somewhere between the scores obtained prior to and immediately after the training. This tendency to see dampened training effects two, three or four months follow-up is a perennial finding in evaluation research of this kind, such that how to maintain training effects—and program effectiveness and viability—over time is a central question for nearly all intervention programs. Some programs have addressed this challenge by creating follow-up booster sessions (abbreviated, mini-trainings that reinforce learning and provide practice opportunities obtained from the original trainings). The question of “sufficient dosage”—length and frequency of sessions—is also a central identified principle of effective prevention by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, with the specified preference for longer, multi-session programs over brief, single-session interventions. Overall, to sustain training effects, future MVP trainings might benefit from a combination of delivery modalities, for example several 3-4 hour training sessions over a two-three day period, a brief booster session that foregrounds the actual practice of MVP skills and orientations, or a combination of these modalities.