

2026 Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM)

A resource of historical milestones for the Southern Oregon University community

15 Events that shaped the Sexual Assault Awareness Month movement, legal landscape, colleges and universities, survivor support and more.

Tip: hover over the hyperlinked text to learn more.

2001: First National Sexual Assault Awareness Month Campaign

NSVRC coordinated the first national Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM), building on the years of advocacy and awareness-building that had come before. Through this campaign, teal was solidified as the color associated with sexual assault awareness, and teal ribbons become the symbol of sexual assault awareness and prevention.



2002: Launch of The World Report on Violence and Health

The World Report on Violence and Health from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) was the first extensive review of violence as a global public health issue. The report provided an overview of the issue of sexual violence, analyzed risk factors and the impact on victims, and described how a public health approach could be used to prevent it. Since its publication, over 30 governments around the world have used the report as a framework to assess the issue of violence and determine how best to prevent it.



2003: Prison Rape Elimination Act

People who are incarcerated are at higher risk for sexual violence. The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) was the first civil law created to stop sexual assault against incarcerated people. PREA called upon the Department of Justice to develop national standards to prevent prisoner rape and for nationwide data collection on the issue. It also provided federal grants to help states prevent and respond to it.



2004: PreventConnect Is Launched

The California Coalition Against Sexual Assault launched PreventConnect as the first-ever online hub for web conferences and podcasts about preventing domestic and sexual violence. PreventConnect transformed the way sexual assault advocates from communities across the country could connect and facilitated a community of prevention practices among them. The Coalition is still active today.



2005: Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorized

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), passed by Congress in 1994, was the first comprehensive federal legislative package designed to end violence against women. VAWA remains the primary federal law that provides legal protections and services to prevent and respond to crimes like domestic and sexual violence and stalking. VAWA's reauthorization in 2000 and again in 2005 expanded the initial law to address sexual assault and stalking in addition to domestic violence.



2006: Me Too Movement Founded by Tarana Burke

Activist, community organizer, and advocate Tarana Burke began using the phrase "Me Too" in 2006 to raise awareness about the prevalence of sexual abuse and assault, particularly for Black women and girls while working at a nonprofit she founded focused on the well-being of young women of color. She coined the phrase, "me too" after a young girl disclosed that she was experiencing sexual abuse and Burke was left searching for the right words to let her know she wasn't alone.

- A decade later, the phrase would go viral as #MeToo and develop into an international social movement against sexual violence.



2009: First Presidential Proclamation to Declare April is SAAM

President Barack Obama, makes history. The President of the United States launches first ever, Presidential Proclamation officially declared April to be Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Through the proclamation, President Barack Obama encouraged citizens to develop policies at their workplaces and schools, have conversations about sexual assault with friends and family, and prioritize preventing sexual assault in their communities.

- Since 2009, every April SAAM has continued to be recognized with a presidential proclamation.



2009: Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act Signed Into Law

Named in honor of Matthew Shepard, a gay college student who was beaten to death in 1998, and James Byrd Jr., a Black man who was murdered by three white supremacists the same year, this act expanded hate crimes to include crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. The Act provided increased funding to state and local authorities to prosecute hate crimes and was a key step forward in protecting our most vulnerable populations from bias-motivated violence.



2011: Department of Education Guidance Released

The Department of Education's (DOE) Office for Civil Rights "Dear Colleague" letter provided guidance to all federally funded institution of higher education to take steps to end sexual harassment and sexual violence on their campuses. The letter makes it clear that student-on-student sexual harassment, including all acts of sexual violence, is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX.

- The new guidance sparked a widespread focus on sexual violence prevention programming on topics like consent, bystander intervention, and more on college campuses throughout the country.



2012: Jerry Sandusky Found Guilty

The sexual abuse conviction of former Penn State University football coach Jerry Sandusky showed that people who are well-respected in their communities can still commit abuse. Sandusky sexually groomed children participating in his youth charity foundation through gifts, money, and access to football games — introducing the term "grooming" into the public lexicon.

- University officials were charged with covering up and failing to report the abuse to protect the image of the prominent college-sport team over the welfare of children. This high-profile case led to public conversation on the role that institutions need to play in stopping abuse.



2013: Violence Against Women Act Reauthorized

The reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act in 2013 included expansions to address gaps in services for victims of sexual assault on Native American reservations. The new law, which took effect in 2015, allows tribes to criminally prosecute both Indians and non-Indians who assault Indian spouses or dating partners in Indian country.

- The renewal also included updated protections for immigrant women and anti-discrimination provisions to protect LGBT victims from being denied access to services.



2014: Formation of the White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault

Under President Obama, the White House formed a task force to create trainings and share guidance around preventing sexual assault on college campuses. This national focus on campus sexual assault is reflected in a few other notable events during this time period, including the founding of the national organization End Rape on Campus in 2013.

- The release of The Hunting Ground in 2015, a documentary about the prevalence of campus sexual assault.
- The national SAAM campaign also reflected a focus on campus sexual assault during this time period.



2016: Emily Doe's Statement in Brock Turner Case

When Brock Turner was convicted of sexually assaulting a young woman known then only as Emily Doe, Doe shared a victim impact statement in court, explaining how the assault had impacted virtually every aspect of her life. Later, the statement was posted on BuzzFeed and went viral, since it spoke to the shared experience of many survivors of sexual assault.

- It was shared across the internet, discussed on national news outlets, and even read aloud by members of the House of Representatives.



2018: 200 Larry Nassar Survivors Share Victim Impact Statements

In 2017, former USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar was convicted on seven counts of criminal sexual conduct for sexually abusing over 150 girls he was supposed to be treating. On more than half a dozen occasions over the course of Nassar's career, victims reported abuse, only to have their stories brushed aside in favor of protecting Nassar and the institution.

- More than 200 women who had survived his abuse read their victim impact statements aloud at his sentencing hearing.
- This story demonstrated the importance of listening to and supporting survivors and the role institutions must play in taking abuse seriously.



2018: Dr. Ford Testifies

When it was announced that Justice Brett Kavanaugh would be nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court, a college professor from California named Dr. Christine Blasey Ford spoke out about an attempted sexual assault by Kavanaugh when they were in high school.

- Dr. Ford followed in the footsteps of Anita Hill, a lawyer who, in 1991, brought claims of sexual harassment against Justice Clarence Thomas before his confirmation to the Supreme Court.
- Dr. Ford's called to testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee during Kavanaugh's confirmation hearing/ Her testimony, led to widespread conversations about the impact of trauma on the memory.



2020: Other notable sexual harassment and sexual assault changes specific to colleges and universities. 2020, first time DOE issued Title IX regulations approved through Congress rather than Executive Order guidance documents and regulatory requirements. This changed the landscape for the resolution and other areas of Title IX.

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