

# IS CAMPUS SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION PROGRAMMING WORKING?



## RESEARCHER WILL FIND OUT



*Imagine you are a college student at a house party off campus. You notice a man and a woman in the corner, kissing. Soon you see them head toward the stairs that lead to the second story. The man is supporting the woman, who is having trouble walking. It looks like she is very drunk. You don't know the man's intentions, but you are suddenly concerned for her safety. What should you do?*

The 4,036 incoming University of Kansas students who completed Jayhawks Give a Flock in 2019 should now have the knowledge and skills they need to take action in a situation like this, or any other situation where they think someone is at risk for sexual assault.

But is this mandatory bystander intervention program successfully changing the attitudes and actions of students? Now, a School of Social Welfare researcher is about to find out. Thanks to a \$14,900 grant from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Juliana Carlson, AM, Ph.D., associate professor, will work with the KU Sexual Assault Prevention and Education Center (SAPEC) to evaluate eight sexual assault prevention programs the center offers students, faculty, and staff.



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In addition, she will help create evaluation tools that will allow the SAPEC to measure change in students’ attitudes over their college career as they attend subsequent sexual assault prevention programs.

This work is vitally important to Carlson, who has spent her career working to end gender-based violence. Early on, Carlson worked with survivors of domestic and sexual violence at shelters in Kansas City and Chicago. After she received her master’s in social welfare at the University of Chicago, she decided to work toward preventing such abuse from occurring in the first place.

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Right now, there is increased focus on the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses and how to prevent it, Carlson says. Researchers like her are working to identify and address the behaviors and attitudes that can lead people to become victims or perpetrators of gender-based violence, such as rape myths. Rape myths include false views about sexual assault, such as “Men rape because of uncontrollable passion” or “Women who are raped were asking for it.”

Carlson has been supporting the work of SAPEC since it was founded in 2016. Now, thanks to this grant, she will be able to dedicate more time to developing and implementing evidence-based impact evaluation measures.

“It’s not enough to be implementing an intervention if we are not evaluating its effectiveness. Are we seeing changes in students’ attitudes and behavior?” she queries. “When you are in the mode of doing, evaluation will always take the back seat. This grant helps highlight and bring focus on the longitudinal impact of the SAPEC’s prevention work.”

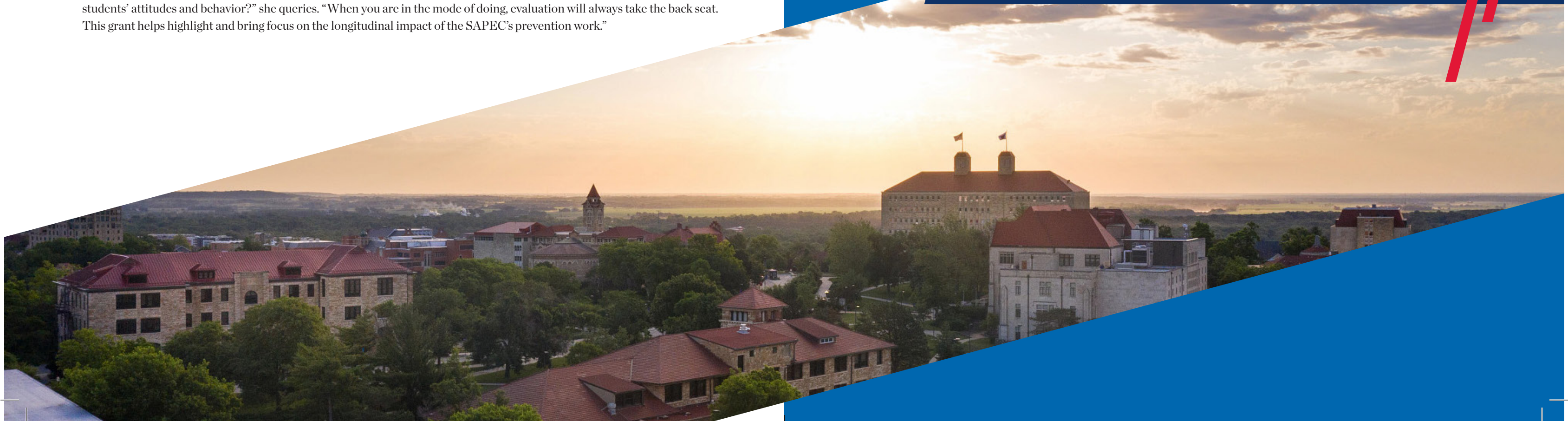
## FOCUS ON PREVENTION

Juliana Carlson has a lot of questions, when it comes to gender-based violence. “What are the sexual gender and social norms that contribute to the perpetration of sexual violence?” she wonders. She tosses out an example, “Men are strong, and women are weak,” and pokes at it. “If we make assumptions that men are strong, what is strength? Is that physically strong? Emotionally strong? How do we understand weakness? Getting at gender norms is really hard to do because norms are like the air we breathe, it is both all around us and it gets inside us.”

Through her research, Carlson is working on:

- Engaging men in the primary prevention of gender-based violence.
- The transition to fatherhood as an entry point to interrupt violence.
- Policy analysis and institutional level change toward gender equity.

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