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Groups work to prevent sex assault

ASNMSU encourages Board of Regents to adopt victims' bill of rights

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A group of New Mexico State University personnel are working together to increase the awareness of sexual assault and make resources that are available to victims more organized and accessible. Jessica Adkisson, project coordinator for the prevention of sexual violence on the NMSU campus, brought the issue to the attention of the Associated Students of NMSU Senate in February. Adkisson recommended that the Senate encourage the NMSU Board of Regents to adopt a sexual assault victims' bill of rights. The Senate passed the resolution, and as a result, several NMSU faculty and staff members began to examine methods to improve and coordinate the services available to sexual assault victims. Adkisson said while NMSU has many services available for sexual assault victims, much of the information is not readily accessible and has not been compiled. "Probably the biggest problem is coordination," Adkisson said, explaining that the variety of programs and services available are scattered throughout campus. The members of the group working on this collaboration process are Scott Moore, associate dean of students; Lou Cabot, NMSU chief of police; Bruce Kite, general legal counsel for NMSU; Lori McKee, director of the student health center; and John Irvine, director of counseling and student development. "We were doing these things all along, but there were things we could be doing better," Moore said. "It made a lot of sense to put it all in one place and make it visible and accessible to the students." Adkisson said the university has been exceptionally cooperative with her program this year, and campus-wide support for it has grown. "Our presence is definitely becoming more stable," Adkisson said. Rape is the most unreported crime in the nation, according to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization. According to the latest statistics on the RAINN Web site, 61 percent of rapes/sexual assaults were not reported to the police in 2001. The sexual assault prevention program is funded by a federal grant through La Piñon Sexual Assault Prevention and Recovery Services. However, the grant will expire by the end of this semester. The student fee review board recently approved funding for the program, and the university will officially take over the program in July. The counseling center will direct the coordination of sexual assault education on campus and consolidation of information. "I can easily say we have exceptionally good services for students, and La Piñon has exceptionally good

services," Irvine said. "We're just bringing them together and getting them out to students," Irvine said. McKee said among other plans, the group will create a Web site that will include all the resources available to sexual assault victims.

"We want to reduce the number of sexual assaults," McKee said. "If we get this message out there, maybe students will be proactive in using the resources."

McKee said rape victims often do not seek out help because they are ashamed. In cases where date rape drugs were used, the victim often does not know he or she was assaulted.

"We want to try to get the educational information out there in advance so that if something happens to them, they know where to go," McKee said.

In July, the counseling center will hire a campus coordinator for sexual assault education.

"We're all very enthused; we really want to do everything we can to reduce the risk," Irvine said.

Moore said the goal of the group is to go beyond what is already being done, in order to become more active in giving information to students.

"We all want to do the best job we can, and it's important that we always be open to input from our students," Moore said.

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