The Impact of the Dear Colleague Letter on Sexual Assault Reporting on College Campuses
Michael Sayre, Master of Public Policy Program, Michigan State University

BACKGROUND
In April 2011 the Department of Education sent a letter to every institution of higher education detailing new requirements when responding to cases of campus sexual misconduct. Among other goals, the Dear Colleague Letter sought to address the chronic underreporting of sexual assault by reducing potential barriers to reporting setting investigatory standards:

- Sexual misconduct is to be considered gender discrimination and is therefore part of an institution’s Title IX requirements
- Lowering the standard of evidence required when adjudicating cases
- Requiring an investigation by the institution regardless of any criminal justice investigation
- Requiring interim measures during an investigation
- Requiring an institution’s grievance procedures allow for due process rights of both parties
- Athletic Departments may no longer have oversight into any investigation
- Institutions that fail to comply risk losing federal funding

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
- As a result of the reforms made by higher education institutions in response to the Dear Colleague Letter, have the reported number of sexual assaults increased?
- How have the reforms impacted the reported number of sexual assault in the four location categories?
- Have institutions that have been placed under investigation by the Department of Education for potential violations of these requirements reported differently from those that have not?

REPORTING TRENDS

DATA AND METHODS
This data are campus crime and safety data reported by institutions to the Department of Education as required by the 1990 Clery Act.

- 190 public, four-year institutions with enrollment greater than 15,000
- Reporting numbers for 10 different crimes over four distinct reporting locations for each institution from 2009 to 2013
- Indicators for Department of Education investigation
- Indicators for Department of Justice Grants to Reduce Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking on Campus Program

RESULTS

DISCUSSION
- There was a significant increase in reported sexual assaults over this time period
- Increases in campus crime and alcohol violations predicted increases in reported sexual assaults
- On Campus and Student Housing are the primary locations for Clery Act reported sexual assaults
- Reported numbers for other crimes decrease during this period
- The year variables likely capture the variation due to policy changes at each institution. A survey of 440 higher education institutions conducted in 2014 by Senator Claire McCaskill reported that 95% of those surveyed have updated their sexual assault response policies in the last 5 years
- Department of Education investigations were not strong predictors of reported sexual assault in either direction
  - Of the 94 currently open investigations, only 11 are captured in this dataset

UNIVERSITIES IN MICHIGAN
There are eight universities in Michigan in this data set. Of these, Michigan State University (2011, 2014), University of Michigan (2014), and Grand Valley State University (2014) are currently under investigation by the Department of Education.

REPORTED SEXUAL ASSAULTS FOR 190 INSTITUTIONS 2009-2013

REPORTED NUMBER OF SEXUAL ASSAULTS BY YEAR

UNIVERSITIES IN MICHIGAN

REPORTED NUMBER OF SEXUAL ASSAULTS BY UNIVERSITY

ADMINISTRATORS’ BELIEF IN THE PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
Leslie Papke, Ph.D., Saundra K. Schneider, Ph.D., Valentina Bali, Ph.D.