

VCU Combats Sexual Assault Mishandlings

By Maya Blacken

RICHMOND, Va.— After being under federal investigation for sexual assault handling policies in 2014, Virginia Commonwealth University now enforces Title IX training for all students and employees. The U.S. Office for Civil Rights put the university under investigation after two students came forward about sexual assault and discrimination complaints being mishandled.

“VCU is too conservative to actually acknowledge that we have real sexual assault problems,” said Sophie Smith, VCU senior and transfer student from Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). Smith said “At MICA, we literally had a seminar on responsible sex toys. They gave us the correct information and resources to be safe instead of pretending like it doesn’t happen.” “The best example is the Stall Street Journal [news source in VCU bathrooms]. The information is unrealistic and not helpful whatsoever.” Smith also recalled that when she transferred to VCU from MICA, there was no Title IX training required. Her sophomore year, she received the email that she had to complete the online Title IX course.

“My goal is to create relationships with the students I see regularly so that I can detect when something is abnormal since I know their normal,” said VCU Security Officer Tykeytah Burford. Burford has been doing security with the university since December of last year. “Every security officer is DCJS (Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services) certified. We are instructed to immediately report any form of sexual assault to the VCU police,” said Burford. She described how she doesn’t handle the case herself but she could be the first one to respond or report the incident. Burford said “If a student walked into the building to report an

incident to me, I have to then call the VCU police who are able to actually watch me on the phone with them through the cameras in the lobby and check out the situation for themselves.”

The U.S. Department of Education released VCU’s Resolution Agreement which reviews the implementations VCU must enforce after this incident. The list includes ten implementations such as revising its current Sexual Misconduct Policy, periodically providing Title IX training to university administrators/faculty, and reviewing all complaints between Aug. 12, 2012 and Jan. 1, 2014. VCU is no longer under investigation for sexual assault handlings. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Campus Security and Safety data, the number of reported cases of rape has nearly tripled since 2014.

“I would feel perfectly comfortable to report any type of sexual assault to the VCU police,” said VCU Freshman Cara Wortham. “I’ve never had a bad experience with any type of VCU security and I do have a friend that talked to a security officer about a problem and she said they handled it appropriately.” Wortham also said “I actually watched most of the Title IX videos and found them really sad and helpful but I think most people just skipped through and didn’t really listen so I don’t know how helpful that is.”