

March 24, 2017

Statement of Chancellor William McRaven on CLASE Study

As Chancellor of The University of Texas System, there is nothing more important to me than making sure every single student at all 14 of our academic and health institutions is safe and respected. The responsibility for creating and sustaining an environment that brings out the best in every aspiring scholar who shows up at our doors ultimately falls on my shoulders. It's a responsibility I take very seriously, and very personally.

The first step toward meeting that responsibility – and any other responsibility, for that matter – is to take an unflinching look at where you're doing well, and where you're falling short. Unfortunately, higher education has too often fallen short when it comes to addressing the epidemic of sexual assault and misconduct on campus. That includes The University of Texas System.

This is a difficult issue, one I wrestled with during my time in the military. In one of my commands, I was informed that unreported sexual assaults were widespread. I didn't want to believe it, but I knew I couldn't dismiss it, because I was responsible. So I commissioned a survey of my people, and what I learned astonished me. Not only was the problem broader and more entrenched than I realized, but many victims were afraid to come forward, and less than confident in the reporting process.

Armed with a better understanding of the problem, my team and I were able to move aggressively to address it. The positive change that resulted would have been impossible if we hadn't been willing to follow the truth, wherever it led, and to shine a light in some dark corners we hadn't known were there.

That's exactly the approach our researchers adopted with the Cultivating Learning and Safe Environments (CLASE) report, a product of the most comprehensive study on sexual assaults and misconduct ever conducted in higher education.

In 2015 the UT Board of Regents approved \$1.7 million to fund this ground-breaking, multi-year study, and I thank them for their dedication and commitment to this important issue. I would also like to express my profound gratitude to UT presidents, whose institutions already utilize many successful education, prevention and response programs to address sexual assault, harassment and misconduct. Without their support, this study, and all the critically important data we've captured, would not have been possible.

A dedicated team of researchers, administrators and support staff has been working on this study for the past 18 months— and will continue to do so. It was crucially important that we get this right and develop recommendations that will make an impact on our campuses. The UT System is committed to leading the effort to end sexual violence and misconduct on college

campuses and beyond. We will not be a bystander in this fight. And this is just the beginning. We are also following a cohort of 1,200 students throughout their college career to examine their experiences and identify the potential academic, psychological and economic impact of victimization.

I want to thank the more than 28,000 students across UT institutions who stepped up to help make their campuses safer. Their courage and honesty in answering difficult questions is both an inspiration and the foundation of this effort.

Fostering and sustaining safe learning environments is critically important to the state of Texas as a whole. Our mission is to put young people on the path to success. And the research tells us that being the victim of sexual harassment or a sexual assault can be a major stumbling block along that path.

At the same time, just as being the victim of sexual assault or harassment has lasting effect, so, too, does being unjustly accused of such an act. So we must take our responsibility to protect the rights of, and ensure due process for, all parties extremely seriously.

Because of the CLASE report, we know a lot more than we did a year and a half ago. For some people, some of what we learned may fall into the category of “things I would rather not know.” But that attitude is a luxury we cannot afford. In higher education we have an obligation to the truth. We have an even bigger obligation to our students, and to the families and loved ones who entrust them to us through some of the most formative and vulnerable years of their lives. Finally, we have an obligation to Texas, whose future, by definition, rests on the shoulders of its young people.

I want to emphasize that this is not the end of our focus on this issue. At The University of Texas System, we want to lead in every way that matters – and nothing matters more than the safety and well-being of our students.

-- UT System Chancellor William H. McRaven