



NEW JERSEY

# Association of State Colleges and Universities

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**QuickTakes!**

## **Stockton President Makes Compelling Statement on Campus Sexual Assault**

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### ***Campus sexual assault: a reality that can't be tolerated***

In just a few weeks Stockton University will open a new campus in Atlantic City and welcome almost 1600 new freshmen to our campus in Galloway Township. They will arrive with the hopes and enthusiasm of those embarking on a great new adventure. Welcoming them and watching them grow to become civic-minded, responsible adults is the highlight of my job as president.

But in recent weeks several civil suits have been filed in federal court claiming that for some young women those hopes and enthusiasm have been shattered by sexual assault.

That any student on our campus should have to fear for their safety is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Yet sexual assault on campus is a reality. According to a 2017 report by the American Association of Universities, 23.1 percent of females and 5.4 percent of male undergraduate students surveyed at their member institutions reported experiencing "nonconsensual penetration or sexual touching involving physical force or incapacitation" since entering college. These are shocking statistics. We know Stockton is not immune, and we continue to work diligently to educate and protect our students.

Nearly 9500 students attend Stockton, more than half of them women. We care for our students as they are cherished members of our community. But, as we all know, no matter how hard we try we cannot always shelter those we care about from heartbreak and tragedy.

With recent reporting and heightened awareness of sexual misconduct in our society, it's only natural we ask ourselves "*Are we doing enough?*" In response, we could produce a long list of all the warnings, programs, policies and procedures we initiate and support to protect our students. But this would suggest that somehow there is a line, an end to what can be done. As long as sexual assault occurs in our society, there is no "*enough.*"

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We can feel no pride in having done all the right things if a victimized student sits with a counselor and says she is too distraught to attend class. We are extremely proud and supportive of the work our staff does every day, educating, counseling and supporting victims, often at a moment's notice, at any time of the day or night. They exemplify our motto of "Students First."

We are also proud of the students who have actively stood up and spoken out about sexual assault including our fraternities and sororities who have taken a leadership role in supporting sexual assault awareness initiatives such as the Teal Ribbon Program.

As a university we will continue, from orientation to graduation, to build a culture where we respect and care for each other. We will continue to work with law enforcement to hold predators accountable.

For any student who has been victimized, or knows of someone who has, please do not remain silent. No student should fear coming forward. We will stand with you.

As I look at the new buildings we have built, the new campus we are opening, I am excited at the opportunities they offer New Jersey students. But it is our students, not the buildings, who create the Stockton community. It is a welcoming, generous and caring community, one that cherishes each member and stands up to those who would do them harm.

Stockton University represents many things to different people: Education. Opportunity. Friendships. But to me and many others, Stockton means family.

As we prepare to open in September, I ask our South Jersey community to stand with us and support us as we welcome a new campus and a new class of Ospreys. We will take care of each other. Our students deserve nothing less.

*\_ Harvey Kesselman, president, Stockton University*