**Students Seek More On-Campus Precautions**

By Simone Burnett, Shelby Farrell and Maika McKenzie

She couldn’t wait to come to Oklahoma State University but she wasn’t ready for the night she was raped in her bed.

Chelsea, an OSU student whose identity is concealed, said she has forgiven her attacker but she will never forget the impact he had in her life. Ignoring warning signs and OSU’s lack of support didn’t make the event any easier to handle.

“I vividly remember saying ‘no’,” Chelsea said.

At OSU, there has been an increase in sexual crimes. The number of sex crimes reported at OSU more than tripled from 2010 to 2011, according to the University’s 2012 Clery Act reports. With the number of sex crimes on OSU’s campus rising, students, like Chelsea, often start wondering what’s being done to reduce them. The 2012 Clery Act statistics haven’t been updated. Gary Shutt, director of OSU communications, said the university has until October 1 to update these reports.

“The 2012 statistics are currently being tabulated,” Shutt said.  “The university uses this time to resolve any discrepancies in the statistics and ensure an accurate accounting of all forcible and non-forcible sex crimes. The report includes incidents reported to the OSU Police Department, as well as Student Conduct. Incidents in areas adjacent to OSU and reported to the Stillwater Police Department also are included in the statistics. The 2013 statistics are being gathered.”

Sexual assault cases, such as those of Darrell Williams and Nathan Cochran, are examples of sexual crimes on campus.

The Williams case was high profiled, dominating newspapers in 2012. He was an OSU basketball player who was convicted and charged with rape by instrumentation in July. Cochran was charged with four counts of sexual battery and has pleaded not guilty to at least one of those charges, according to the Oklahoma State Courts Network.

OSU’s sexual offense policies started being discussed more because of the Cochran case. When five students filed complaints against Cochran, OSU took action by suspending the junior for three years, though the University didn’t take the complaints to the Stillwater Police Department, according to court records.

Grace Aguilera, a psychology freshman, said she was shocked by the Cochran case and the way university officials handled it.

“They might have been following the [Family Education Rights and Privacy Act],but they should have made sure something was done,” Aguilera said.

FERPA requires permission from either the student, if he or she is 18, or the student’s parents to give out a student’s education records unless there is a health or safety emergency. A sexual crime falls under a health or sexual emergency, so students who are involved in a sexual assault lose their FERPA rights.

Enforcement of the Clery Act prevents sexual crimes on campuses from being unheard.  Schools are required to report statistics for specific crimes and issue timely warnings about Clery Act crimes, which includes “sexual offenses”, that “pose a serious or ongoing threat to students or employees,” according to the Clery Center website.

One organization that tries to aid OSU in sexual assault awareness and prevention is the Wings of Hope Family Crisis Services. Desiree Ingram, a sexual assault counselor at Wings of Hope, sees victims, such as Chelsea, every day.

“You can get in more trouble for injuring an animal than a person,” Ingram said. “There needs to be a centralized location or an entry point with someone to talk to. Eighty-eight percent of sexual assaults are by a non-stranger nationwide. In Stillwater, that number is increased to 95 percent.”

Julia Aikman, Wings of Hope prevention program coordinator, said things are slowly being done to raise rape awareness on OSU’s campus, but not enough. She said rape victims miss their college experiences and the sooner something is done to help reduce rapes among students the better.

“Being raped you lose focus on your studies. Sometimes there’s no one to support you,” Aikman said.

“You can’t even enjoy yourself at a party because you’re dealing with the aftermath,” she said. “You’re dealing with mental health issues, the physical issues, the hospital bills and the therapy.

“If we can prevent it before it gets to that point, what a better university experience the students at OSU would have.”

Taylor Crew, a biology freshman, said she is worried about her safety because of the recent stories of sexual assault on campus and believes there’s a need for more awareness.

“It’s scary because it’s my first year here, and I’ve never even heard of anything like this happening,” Crew said. “I never know of a new case of sexual assault until it’s in the O’Colly or a friend tells me. I feel like for the most part OSU keeps sexual assault under the radar when really we need to broadcast these things more.”

De-stigmatizing the situation and increasing its education is becoming more vital on university campuses as more sexual assaults arise.

“Get the students talking about it,” Aikman said. “Make them aware of the issues that could happen at a party or at the bars in town. Mention the words ‘sexual assault.’ There’s a lot of meaning, a lot of power behind those words. Too many students are shoving it underneath the rug and putting it in the closet when they hear about these stories.”

One way OSU tries to prevent sexual crimes on campus is by having an escort system through the OSU Police Department. Officer Kayle Queen of OSU police department covers community policing, traffic safety and education.

“We don’t have the numbers to provide the service of a ride,” Queen said. “Although the student may not see the officer, we can have someone there to secure the area.”

Although Josh Swan, an OSU junior, said he feels safe on campus, he doesn’t think he would walk alone at night if he was a woman. Swan said he thinks the police escort system isn’t enough.

“If they are going to have an escort system, they should actually do the escort part,” Swan said.

OSU is the only Big 12 university without a Women’s Resource Center, according to each university’s site. The WRC of every other university features a safe place for victims of sexual crimes to get information on what to do and where to turn.

Melanie Page, chair of the OSU Women’s Faculty Council, seeks to further care and accessibility for students and staff on OSU’s campus.

“When you don’t dedicate those resources, it sends a message,” Page said. “Whether you intend that message or not, the message is that you aren’t important enough.

“We do a good job of lip service. We do less of a good job implementing things that are tangible.”

OSU is also one of two Big 12 universities that doesn’t have a safe walk or safe ride program, according to each Big 12 university’s website.

Catherine Molleno, the community development residence coordinator, is an OSU graduate student who is pursuing a safe walk program.   
 “We need to be proactive, not reactive,” Molleno said. “What other universities do shouldn’t matter to what we do here.”  
 The other Big 12 universities have a safe ride program, according to their sites, which students can use to avoid tickets, drunken driving and attacks by adding the extra step of security to get students to their homes after dark.

Kirstin Shea, a therapeutic recreation junior, agrees with the benefits of a safe ride program at OSU.

“Students need to have a way to get home safely,” Shea said. “It would be nice if OSU could go the extra step to ensure our safety. If it could save just one life, it would be worth it.”

OSU is working on increasing safety on campus and implementing programs to make students feel safe, and their efforts are appreciated.

“I know changes can’t happen overnight, but I’m glad that I’m starting to see some progress,” Chelsea said. “One of the reasons I haven’t spoken about what happened to me is because I felt like no one at OSU, both faculty and students, cared. A year later, I’m finally starting to feel like sexual assault awareness is a subject that is being talked about and that’s what’s important.”