



GSO & SA Response to the Advocacy Center Shutdown

Dear Colleagues:

What happened:

Over the past several weeks, the Graduate Student Organization and Student Association have carefully watched the reaction to the centralization of resources for survivors of sexual violence, first briefly mentioned in [the Chancellor's Changes \(Part 2\)](#) and later expanded upon in a released [fact sheet](#). *We've reached out to folks on both sides of the aisle - the administrators who made the decision and the students who strongly opposed it.* It's clear to us that the presentation of these sensitive and critical changes was poorly managed. The decision to close the Advocacy Center, which was executed in the span of one business day, was made without any student input, data collection, or involvement of the broader community. The lack of transparency and hastily executed change attracted [national news attention](#) and led to outrage, confusion, and distrust from members within the student body.

Although we can understand our administration's desire to consolidate resources and give students the ability to disclose privileged information through the Counseling Center, closing the Advocacy Center deprives many survivors of sexual abuse an important sense of safety and empowerment. In response to the unexplained loss of this vital community resource, students took to social media to protest, starting [a Change.org petition](#), which currently has over 8,000 signatures and the tagline [#BringBacktheAC](#) made the rounds on [Twitter](#). An even more detrimental effect of the untimely closing of the Advocacy Center was the instilled sense of fear that other beloved identity centers on campus, like The Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) and the LGBTQA Resource Center are vulnerable to detrimental centralization and eradication.

What we've done:

To ensure that we had a comprehensive understanding of this complex issue, we've engaged the key players in this situation, including:

- Chancellor Kent Syverud
- Dean Rebecca Reed Kantrowitz
- Counseling Center Director Cory Wallack
- Former Advocacy Center Director Janet Epstien
- Alumna Erin Carheart, the creator of the change.org petition
- Title 9 Coordinator Cynthia Maxwell Curtin

GSO and SA representatives have also attended Bring Back the Advocacy Center student group meetings held weekly. We also represented the many students who aren't on campus through our active participation in the [first listening session](#) during which the administration provided an open forum for students to share their feedback.

What our stance is:

GSO and SA are strongly opposed to the exclusive process in which this decision was made and executed. We are tasked with representing the many student voices at Syracuse and we believe that when decisions are planned and executed without student input, everyone involved suffers from a grave disservice. While we acknowledge the administration's efforts to engage students through [listening sessions](#), these efforts are too little and too late. We hope to ensure that future decisions will not be made in this manner.

Call to Action:

As we continue to work with the administration to better understand and reverse the impact of this unfortunate loss, we solicit your voice. In the upcoming weeks, we will nominate students to serve on the Chancellor's Workgroup on Sexual Violence Prevention, Education and Advocacy. According to Chancellor Syverud, this workgroup will be tasked with producing "suggestions and proposals for how aspects of the Advocacy Center's programs and services can be better integrated within the new structure." If you are interested, please email gso@syr.edu.

The Graduate Student Organization will be working with the administration to ensure proper student representation and input in future decisions which substantively impact student services. The GSO will also be partnering with concerned student groups and the #BringBacktheAC campaign to find the solution which best serves the student body.

During the Fall of 2014, Student Association is planning to find ways to end sexual assault on college campuses through initiatives focused on dismantling rape culture and a consent campaign. Any interested students should reach out to bmoore02@syr.edu for more information.

Please know that we recognize how deeply this decision has impacted the Syracuse community and we are committed to doing everything within our power to right this tremendous wrong. We ask for your help and patience as we continue to work with our administration to ensure that everyone at Syracuse feels empowered and safe on our campus.

Sincerely,
GSO and SA