Smith: Some cases of sexual harassment go unreported

Hailey Kurth
Staff Writer

DeKalb | Whether it be a pat or pinch of someone's behind or a display of degrading or sexual materials, sexual harassment can happen anywhere.

Andrea Drott, interpersonal violence health educator at health enhancement, said sexual harassment is considered anything that is unwanted or makes a person feel uncomfortable regarding their sex or sexuality.

"What makes one person uncomfortable may be different than what makes another person uncomfortable, so it really is on a case-by-case basis," Drott said.

NIU Police Sgt. Alan Smith said he doesn't have an exact number of sexual harassment reports at NIU, but he thinks many incidents go unreported. Sometimes people don't understand that what is happening to them is not OK, Drott said. Also, Drott said she thinks there's a stigma that goes along with reporting any kind of sexual assault or harassment.

"My guess is there's quite a few college students that have gone through it," said Amanda Schrems, sexual assault legal and medical advocate at Safe Passage in DeKalb. "They're just honestly too afraid to report it.

Schrems said typically, when she and her co-workers receive percentages for things such as sexual harassment reports, they bump it up three to five times to get a more realistic number. At the moment, Schrems said she is working with one person from the community in regard to a sexual harassment situation.

Drott said she believes NIU's sexual harassment policy is pretty average compared to other universities.

"I would say there are some schools that are a little bit above the curve and there are some schools that are way behind," Drott said. "I would say we're pretty average on that list. Our sexual violence policy that just came out is above the curve on a lot of things."

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"I think it's pretty much the same everywhere," Drott said.

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Please see HARASSMENT | Page 03

SMITH'S SAFETY TIPS

• "If someone’s making you feel uncomfortable, let that person know," Smith said. "If you don't feel comfortable with that and you're walking on a street, call the police department and we can come out and investigate it."

• Document every incident, even if it's not reported to anyone, to create a record.

Vigil honors Martin

Hailey Kurth
Staff Writer

DeKalb | Over 75 people gathered at the MLK commons Friday afternoon to remember the life of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old boy who was shot and killed in a gated Florida community last month. Hoodie-filled vigils for Martin like this one have occurred around the country.

"It was just shocking that an innocent kid was killed and nothing happened," said retiree Norden Gilbert, who worked in the NIU legal office. "Once that word got out, people responded."

Senior history major Nina Cunningham stood just steps away from a cross bearing a picture of Steven Agee II, a NIU gun violence victim, as she started the vigil for Martin.

"People keep asking me why I'm doing this," Cunningham said in her speech. "Why have I spent night after night calling people and Facebooking people and crying as if Trayvon Martin were my son? It's because Trayvon Martin, to me, is my son."

Cunningham told the crowd she was careful not to mention race in her opening speech because the situation with Trayvon has been racialized.

"We seem to have lost our way," Cunningham said. "We seem to have lost our way when a murder victim is given a drug test, but the murderer isn't even given a gun powder test or his clothes aren't taken into evidence."

After Cunningham was finished, Pastor Jerry Wright, from Rock Christian Church in DeKalb, took the stand. He said when someone sees injustice, he or she should respond. He said one way to do that is to vote. During the vigil, attendees were given voter registration papers.

"When we talk about combining this with a voter registration drive, we're talking about something that gives you a voice, so that people can hear you. You don't have to yell in front of their faces, they can hear you speak from your vote," Wright said. He recalled something his sister once said: "Evil is allowed to triumph when good folks are silent."

During the vigil, many spoke of the troubles they face today in society.

Wright said it's not easy for him to raise his six black sons because they've been a "threat.

"A threat either to be brilliant, a threat to be a criminal, a threat to come into somebody's home, or a threat to use their brilliance in ways that nobody could even imagine," Wright said.

Harold Raddle Jr., fourth year mechanical engineering major, wears a hoodie at the vigil for Trayvon Martin Friday. Hoodies have become a symbol of support for Martin.

Please see VIGIL | Page 02