Prevention Starts with Staff and Faculty

Full citation:

Research Review:
As campuses ramp up their efforts to prevent sexual violence, dating and domestic violence and stalking intercollegiate athletes have often been the focus of discussion. In part this comes from their high profile on campuses, with cases of sexual misconduct often picked up quickly by the media. While research is mixed about athletes being at higher risk for sexual misconduct, they are also potential leaders in reshaping community norms to increase positive bystander actions to reduce violence. College athletes are also the students on campus who are most likely to be reached by prevention strategies of all sorts, given NCAA requirements for training and education. Thus they are a good sub-community for helping us understand what is working or what needs to be improved for campus power-based violence prevention. A new study just published by Kroshus and colleagues raises a point that is too often neglected in campus prevention work – training staff and faculty. Their study used data from a recent NCAA survey of student athletes. They analyzed data from over 3,000 intercollegiate football players. They found that players who reported that their coaches talked to the players about expectations for treating women, discussed relationship abuse, and communicated expectations about being an active bystander off the field were not only more positive about taking action but also reported greater intent to help in situations that could escalate to inappropriate sexual behavior. Further, athletes who felt that their coaches would discipline the team for negative off field behavior were also more willing to take action.

Putting it in Practice:
We hear the term “comprehensive prevention” used a great deal these days. But what does it really mean? The Kroshus et al study reminds us that prevention is not just about students. Comprehensive efforts to reduce the high rates of sexual assault and other power-based violence on campus needs to start with staff and faculty who regularly interact with students. Campuses should look at evidence based approaches to teaching coaches, trainers, faculty, and other staff how to talk to students about these issues, how to convey expectations for community behavior, and how to communicate consequences for negative behavior. For example, for high school students the Coaching Boys to Men program shows promise at changing attitudes about being an active bystander by training coaches to implement prevention training. GreenDot, etc.’s prevention strategies involve faculty and staff on campuses in training sessions. Staff and faculty are community members who are on campuses for the longest amount of time so it makes sense to include them more intentionally in efforts to change community norms.