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Dear Editor,

Although University of Cape Town staff and students have been quoted in the article "The Reality Of Rape On South African Campuses" (6 February 2017), UCT was not invited to provide an institutional response, as were other universities. It's important for your readers to know we commend the efforts of various support groups and NGOs to raise awareness globally about sexual harassment and the subtle forms it can take. With more than 28,000 students and more than 5,000 staff members in the UCT community, raising awareness is an important step in educating people and changing attitudes and behaviour. Indeed, this discussion needs to take place in all communities around the world. As international news reports show, sexual harassment is a universal problem. It enters into university life because people come with attitudes that need to be identified, discussed and challenged.

UCT works to inform and educate staff and students on gender issues, beginning with Orientation Week and continuing throughout the academic year. Faculties and the Student Representative Council play an important role in this process. The university provides a range of facilities to help manage the needs of students and staff who experience sexual harassment or assault, including the [Sexual Assault Response Team](#) (SART): a multidisciplinary team of professionals who work together to address the culture of rape, sexual assault and gender discrimination that is so prevalent in South African society. SART seeks to provide survivor-centred, compassionate and comprehensive services on campus. It provides a 24-hour Hotline: 072 393 7824.

Supportive measures provided by UCT may include crisis counselling, assistance with accessing emergency medical services, para-legal advice and other relevant services, as well as measures to shield the complainant from any potential consequence of making a complaint.

We are conscious that we have to consistently and continuously work to improve on these services. We are particularly interested in improving the way we prosecute cases internally through our disciplinary processes. We have listened to the feedback of some survivors about how we can improve the support offered by some units at UCT, and we have, for instance, restructured our DISCHO, Disability and HAICU offices under the leadership of a

single deputy vice-chancellor who oversees the overall transformation portfolio, in an attempt to make a positive difference.

Rape is unacceptable and criminal no matter where it happens or whom it harms. But it is particularly shocking when it occurs on campus, in what should be a place of safety. The university is committed to maintaining an environment across campus where students and staff members can feel safe from threats of personal harm.

Like many NGOs and lobbying groups, UCT helps to raise awareness, lobby and advocate against all forms of harassment on campus. We also speak out against peer-group behaviours, such as victim-shaming and victim-blaming, joking about rape, objectifying the other gender, and gender classification. We encourage all who experience any form of discrimination, harassment or assault to register a complaint so that action can be taken against those crimes. We ensure confidentiality, and every effort is made to avoid victimisation, stigmatisation and or marginalisation.

Following all that is said above UCT recognizes that fighting sexual violence is an enormous challenge in our society and the world and that there is a long and difficult road ahead, particularly when it comes to structural and subtle forms of this pandemic.

Sincerely,

Ms Gerda Kruger  
Executive Director: Communications & Marketing Department  
University of Cape Town