

# Is an anti-sexual assault office's location preventing victims from reporting?

12/05/2016

By Hannah McDonald  
Dec. 4, 2016

It's a five-minute bus ride from the center of campus to Utah State University's office for Sexual Assault and Anti-Violence Information. On foot, it might take 15 minutes.

But for victims of sexual assault — who are often torn over what to do — those minutes can be the difference between reporting a crime and staying silent.

That's one of the main reasons why the office, known as SAAVI, is planning to relocate to the center of Utah State's campus next semester. In January, SAAVI will take over a third-floor office in the Taggart Student Center currently occupied by the student newspaper, which is moving to a first-floor space vacated by Zion's Bank.

The move will put SAAVI right next to the department for Counseling and Psychological Services and the Center for Women and Gender.

Felicia Gallegos, a student intern in Utah State University's office for Sexual Assault and Anti-Violence Information, or SAAVI, said she hopes the move will help students feel more comfortable in reporting.

It takes "very little to deter students from seeking services," Gallegos said.

"It's such a big step for people," Gallegos said. "We found that location is one of those big deterrents because we're not just right there. You have to be motivated to walk down there, whereas a lot of times it's a split second decision to come into our office. It takes a lot of courage to come in."

Sophomore Gorety Ramirez, a resident assistant in the university's Living Learning Community, visited SAAVI last year and said she was pleased with her experience. Since then, she has recommended the office to some of her friends and residents.

But Ramirez said she has seen several friends lose interest in seeking help because of SAAVI's current location.

"I've seen so many people who don't go and report something just because it's far away," she said.

Another obstacle: the current location, in the university's Health and Wellness Center, is right behind the football stadium.

A study published in May by the journal *Violence Against Women* concluded that greater than half of male collegiate athletes have engaged in sexually coercive behavior, including rape. If correct, that may indicate little has changed for the better on college campuses over the past few decades; an extensively cited study from the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* in 1995 suggested that male college athletes comprise about 3 percent of the college population but represent 19 percent of sexual assaults. Former Aggie football player Torrey Green is among several Utah State students who have been accused of serial sexual assault in recent years.

"I didn't even have any experience with any of the athletes," Ramirez said, "but when I went to SAAVI, I was like, 'Oh my gosh, there's a bunch of guys here and I'm walking out and this is awkward.' It's just really inconvenient."

Gallegos said the university hoped to move SAAVI to the student center this fall, but SAAVI coordinator Jenny Erazo decided to hold off until the university could make the new office soundproof.

That request, along with stalled renovations in the old Zion's Bank location, have delayed progress in moving. When a fall move didn't work out, university officials hoped to complete the switch by December. Now, they're hoping to finish the move by the start of the spring semester.

Nevertheless, Gallegos is confident the move will be beneficial to students.

"It just takes one thing to dissuade students from seeking services, and location can be just that," she said. "But hopefully with us located in the student center, we'll be more accessible to students."