

## Response to sexual violence on UConn's campus

On Thursday, Feb. 3, 2022, University of Connecticut student Alexandra Docken stood in the rain with signs that read "I was raped, and UConn silenced me." She wanted her story heard, regardless of any backlash she may have received.

While Docken respectfully declined commenting for this article, she previously told The Daily Campus that she wanted this act to create chaos and bring attention to her cause.

"In the most crude way, I hope it lights a fire under their ass," Docken said in a [Daily Campus](#) article from February, 2022.

Docken's bravery in sharing her story prompted a campus wide response, with protests and demonstrations in the weeks that followed. However, what has changed since?

The history of sexual assault cases on UConn's campus is alarming, with the university being tied with Brown University for first in most reported rape cases in 2016. According to a [Fox61 article](#) published in the same year, UConn's sexual assault statistics were at an all time high. In April of 2016, UConn released a survey to students and approximately 1,500 students responded. Out of those students, 5.5% had reported being a victim of sexual assault.

In more recent days, former student Leonardo Villanes-Medina, pleaded guilty to sexually assaulting a 14-year-old girl in 2018. In an article by [CTInsider](#), it is stated that at the time of publication, Dec. 7, 2022, the student was still enrolled in the university. He was charged again with an incident of sexual assault in a UConn dorm hall in October 2021, according to his arrest records.

Connecticut [criminal records](#) state that Villanes-Medina was sentenced to 10 years in jail for the 2018 incident, which involved sending sexually explicit messages to a 14-year-old. In the same records, it states that Villanes-Medina was arrested in November of 2019. This means that he was allowed to attend UConn until 2022 with a sexual assault arrest under his belt.

Stephanie Reitz, University Spokesperson and Manager of Media Relations, commented on this case in an interview. She stated that he has not been enrolled in the university since the 2022 fall semester.

"Leonardo Villanes-Medina has not been enrolled at UConn since the fall 2022 semester," she said. "Beyond enrollment status, UConn is prohibited by federal law from providing specific information about former or current students. However, we can provide general information about the University's processes."

This confirms that the offender was enrolled in the university for three years before eventually being expelled.

In this interview, she provided resources for students who wish to report their cases. Reitz said, “UConn offers a wide range of options for reporting so students can work through whichever process feels right for them.” She provided a link to filing a report through [Title IX UConn](#).

In the following questions, Reitz said that she spoke with Letissa Reid, UConn’s Associate Vice President for Institutional Equity, as well as Sarah Chipman, Deputy Title IX Coordinator, before answering.

When asked about Docken’s case and whether any progress has been made since this incident, Reid responded by saying, “UConn is prohibited by federal student privacy laws from discussing specifics of individual students.” Even though Docken chose to make her case public and reveal her name, Reitz said she could not comment any further.

One thing that Reitz specifically highlighted is the new [LiveSafe app](#) that UConn has implemented. “University Safety recently launched the LifeSafe app, which provides direct reporting and emergency and non-emergency communications to UConn Police,” Reitz said.

When asked about an increase in cases in the last few years, Reitz responded by saying “Comparisons against recent years can be complicated due to the significant decrease in on-campus population in spring and fall 2020 during the pandemic. The years before that, and the 2021 figures, are more representative of UConn’s usual trends.”

Some of the recent statistics from 2021 show that there was an increase in cases from 2020. According to an article by [UConn Today](#), there were 16 reported cases, up from seven in the previous year.

The article explains this with the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic decreased campus population. “The COVID-19 pandemic significantly decreased the on-campus population at Storrs and the regional campuses for much of the 2020 calendar year, and the number of incidents reported during that period decreased as a result,” (UConn Today).

UConn police department captain Justin Gilbert also responded to similar questions regarding student safety and sexual assault cases on campus. This interview was aimed towards finding out the process of how a student would report a case effectively.

When asked about the police department's efforts to combat this issue, Gilbert stated "The UConn Police Department is always seeking to do its best to help victims of sexual assault. I think it's important to always strive to do our best, but we understand we must continue to strive to be better and continue to train our department in the best ways to respond to these reports."

In addition to providing the same link that Reitz did, Gilbert said "obviously these incidents can be reported directly to the police department, 911 while on campus or 860-486-4801 in a non-emergency situation. We have officers who received specialized training in these areas to best handle these incidents."

In terms of statistics of cases in the past few years, Gilbert reported that the number of cases fluctuates per year and that the university is aware of these patterns.

He stated that "working to protect students safety from sexual violence is a community wide effort, much like safety in general."

"There are many teams of people from on/off campus including the Dean of Students, Community Standards, Office of Institutional Equity, SHAW, the Police and Fire Department, and the Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut who work together in response to incidents to provide support," Gilbert said.

The UConn Women's Center also works with students on issues related to sexual violence on campus. Elise Delacruz, the Assistant Violence Against Women Prevention Program Director, stated in an interview that "we offer several primary prevention programs to try and shift the culture at UConn so that there are no more sexual assaults."

Delacruz went on to discuss different programs that have been initiated at UConn, but did not go into detail with specifics. "Our programs, like the Violence Against Women Prevention Program, Greeks Against Sexual Assault, and Men's Project, all work to shift the culture," she said. "Our group, In-Power, is another avenue we offer to support students."

Delacruz included the fact that the Women's Center does not work directly with the Office of Institutional Equity when investigating cases. Additionally, she mentioned that the staff members at the Women's Center are exempt employees and do not have to share confidential information.

"In addition, this exemption allows us to support people for survivors going through a crisis," Delacruz said. "We tell survivors about their options, support them as they figure out what is best for them, and help them develop coping skills for this crisis period in their life."

The issue of sexual assault is not unique to UConn, although the university ranks highly in number of sexual assault incidents on campus. For more information, please visit the [Title IX website](#). If you or someone you know is struggling, call the national hotline 1-800-656-4673.