SexPositive app aims to help build cultures of consent on campus

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Much of the public debate about sexual assaults on campuses across the U.S. has (rightfully) focused on creating/strengthening university policies about assault investigations and prosecutions.

In addition to these important policy overhauls, universities have a responsibility to step up efforts to prevent assaults. When we launched the University of Oregon (UO) SexPositive app in October, we felt it was vital to provide students information not only about sexually transmitted infections and safer sex practices, but also to highlight effective communication and partner consent.

Beneath our innovative and engaging user interface, we’ve included a section of ways for users to increase communication about sex. It’s not enough to tell people not to rape. We made an effort to model what we expect users to do.

First, we want folks to examine their motivations for having sex and consider whether they’re ready for sex. Second, for users who are ready for sex, we want them to understand that a “yes” to one sexual act is not a “yes” to every sexual act. Third, we want users to consider a variety of personal boundaries before finding themselves in a high-pressure situation. Finally, we want to model the many ways to express and obtain explicit consent.

Members of the UO Counseling and Testing Center (UCTC) wrote and starred in a YouTube video in which they ask basic questions about a viewer’s readiness for sex. UCTC staff provide contact information for those who want to talk things over with a professional.

Scarleteen.com gave us permission to share their “yes/no/maybe so” survey and help people think about boundaries that range from holding hands to anal sex. We partnered with the UO Sexual Wellness Advocacy Team (a student troupe that utilizes theater and facilitation to educate peers about sexual assault, dating violence, and sex-positivity) to write and star in YouTube videos that model how to start difficult conversations, and offer a list of sexy suggestions for obtaining explicit consent (without ruining the mood or sounding like a lawyer).

Students come to campus with a range of beliefs and experiences. By modeling how we expect students to communicate, we will join other programs and organizations at UO whose goals are to create a culture of consent on campus.

DETAILS

SexPositive is a free app for iPhone and Android that has been downloaded more than 10,000 times. For more information, visit sexpositive.uoregon.edu.