

# Advocate against sexual assault joins college

## CLACKAMAS WOMEN'S SERVICES PARTNERS WITH CCC TO BRING NEW RESOURCE TO CAMPUS

STORY AND PHOTO BY JEANETTE WRIGHT  
THE CLACKAMAS PRINT

Sexual violence is the least-reported crime, and often victims have no idea how to respond, who to talk to or where to go. Helping victims figure out what to do is the most important part of the Clackamas Community College's Sexual Assault Advocate position.

Appointed as the advocate in June 2017, Mary Vest has worked at Clackamas Women's Services for more than two years. Vest's position at CCC is part of a partnership between CWS and CCC to provide support and help for students who have experienced any form of sexual assault. Vest has traveled to middle and high schools across Clackamas County teaching violence prevention. The classes instructed students in consent, bystander intervention, and domestic- and sexual-violence prevention.

Vest's position is funded by a grant through the Oregon Department of Justice and will last through at least 2019. CWS hopes the position will be permanent. The position is the first of its kind in Oregon, and one of the very few across the nation. Vest is very enthusiastic about the program and the changes it will bring to CCC.

"Having a really good on-campus response, even if the incidents are happening off-campus or happened, like, a long time ago, I think still is a part of creating a really supportive community, where people feel safe coming forward," said Vest.

The largest difference between the Sexual Assault Advocate and the Title IX services is confidentiality. While Title IX is focused on the legal aspects, and the staff are mandatory reporters, Vest's position allows her to be discreet and personal. Vest is not required to report, and is instead focused on providing support to whoever comes to her. Vest's office in Barlow is a safe space, and is comfortable, but Vest is mobile and willing to meet anywhere, if the victim doesn't feel safe on campus.

"We want to make it as easy and comfortable as possible for people to be able to get support," said Vest.

Information about the Sexual Assault Advocate services available to students is located on the CCC website, and faculty and staff can direct students to the Title IX and Sexual Assault Advocate offices. Support at CCC can entail seeking actual legal help and reporting, or just finding someone to talk to.

Title IX Coordinator Patricia Anderson



Mary Vest, who has worked with Clackamas Women's Services for two years, was assigned as CCC's Sexual Assault Advocate in June.

Wieck is happy to have Vest on campus.

"I really wanted someone like that on campus, because that helps [students] navigate on campus," said Wieck.

Seeking help after sexual assault can be confusing and scary, and Vest is there to make sure that the experience is as easy and comfortable as possible. Title IX procedures and reporting systems are complicated, and part of Vest's job is to explain them in a way that's easy to understand.

Vest provides explanations of what Title IX entails, how to make a report, what to expect, and support through the whole process. CWS' Community Education Program Manager Kristin Schlotterbeck explained that Vest's whole job is to provide a more personable approach to seeking help after sexual assault.

"It's just basically for somebody fearful of talking to anybody else in their lives because they don't know what would happen if a report got made, or were nervous about that prospect, that they can get some information just about what the reporting process might look like from somebody like Mary first, and

then choose or not choose to go through that process," said Schlotterbeck.

But providing services to help victims respond to incidents isn't the only thing Vest is interested in. Vest is committed to teaching students about sexual assault, and believes that learning about it in college, even in high school, is too late. Vest added that the old teaching curriculum was about risk reduction, rather than teaching to avoid committing sexual violence. Things like "don't go out without a buddy," or "don't walk alone at night" are focused on someone preventing sexual violence towards themselves, rather than teaching about how to get consent, how to give consent, or even how to communicate well with each other.

"Most folks don't wanna say, 'yeah, it's possible I could assault someone,'" said Vest.

Most sexual assaults don't even happen in unfamiliar places, or even by strangers. Most often, sexual assaults happen in people's own homes, by people they're comfortable with.

Several professors on campus have asked Vest to visit them in class, or even taken their classes to Vest's office, to explain her job

and the services her position offers. Vest said she'd love for that information to be part of the orientation process, to help students be aware of the support CCC offers.

"Allowing people who have experienced trauma to see faces and to know what they're walking into, and to know who they're going to meet, it's really helpful for folks to be able to see Mary, or to hear her speak," said Schlotterbeck.

The Sexual Assault Advocate office is located in Barlow, a few doors down from the Title IX coordinator's office.

### Clackamas Women's Services (CWS)

24-Hour Crisis Line:  
503-654-2288

Support Line:  
888-654-2288

Mary Vest:  
503-349-4249  
Maryv@cwsor.org