

**Raising Awareness and Lowering Rates of Sexual Assault on East Carolina University's
Campus and Surrounding Areas:**

*An Inside Look at the Signature Honors Project Completed by Members of the East Carolina
University Honors College*

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Abstract

Our group project, in fulfillment of the Signature Honors Project graduation component, was an attempt to lessen the prevalence of sexual assault on East Carolina University's campus, as well as in the greater Greenville area. Throughout this process, we explored different avenues, including implementations of more blue lights on ECU's campus, self-defense classes, and a Greenville-specific version of the viral "Angel Shot." Though the COVID-19 Pandemic limited our overall progress, we became more aware of the resources that exist on ECU's campus to prevent sexual violence and support survivors.

Section 1: Group Portion – A Reflection of the Efforts Made as a Group, Including the Breakdown of Tasks, Successes and Failures, and a Chronological Order of Events

In the beginning of Honors 2000, the original group members were tasked with examining the wicked problem of sexual assault. We spent the first quarter mind mapping the issue and the numerous scenarios and departments that are impacted by the issue. We realized that this singular problem touched a multitude of people and departments across our own campus. We narrowed down our project to focus primarily on sexual assault as it pertained to college students, specifically at our home university, East Carolina.

We began to narrow the problem down to the safety aspects available on campus and had meetings with those leaders. We began with the blue light systems available across campus where ECU has installed these safety measures to provide students with a direct connection to the campus police department. We asked if there was a way to increase the number of blue lights to better serve the growing student population but were told that was not an option. These blue lights cost the university a significant portion of their yearly budget and they would not be able to increase the number of stations on campus without disrupting the budget.

We switched to diving deeper into the resources already available on campus starting with Lanika Wright at the ECU Student Health Services (SHS). Dr. Wright took us through what a survivor of sexual assault or rape on campus would go through if they chose to involve the university. If they were to inform the student health center first, this would be their first point of contact, the goal of the SHS is to minimize the number of times that the survivor must relive their attack and minimize the number of people that the survivor must interact with following the event. Once they arrive at the SHS they will be escorted into a back room where they will not be disturbed by other patients, and they will remain being seen by their first point of contact.

If they choose to complete a sexual assault evidence kit (rape kit) it will be administered by a sexual assault nurse examiner. This will allow for evidence to be collected from the survivor's mouth, torso, vagina, and anal canal. The evidence may be collected even if the survivor does not wish to report or wishes to store under a Jane Doe identity, in case they decide to come forward in the future. In addition to the evidence kit being administered, the survivor will be given an STD screening, an emergency contraceptive, and antibiotics to kill any bacteria that was exchanged during the attack.

There are also victim advocates and counseling available to the survivor if they choose to accept that from the university. We also met with a victim advocate on campus and learned that they will be there to support the survivor in any way, through counseling, attending any legal meetings or litigation, or just as a familiar face. If the student chooses to report the attack to the Dean of Students or through the police department, they will be helped with finding counsel through the university.

In addition to these meetings, we were also involved with Pledge Purple on ECU's campus speaking to Ashley Cleland of the Women and Gender Office and Dr. Erik Kneubel of the Dean of Students Office. We participated in the week of activities and spoke to the group's leaders to become more informed and involved in the future. These student leaders and faculty members allowed us to gain a better understanding of how the issue was being addressed by administrators and presented to the student population.

In the fall of 2019, at the beginning on HNRS3000, our group set out to collaborate with Brian Cavanaugh. Cavanaugh is a professor in the Health Science department at East Carolina University. He teaches Sexual Health and Health 1000 classes. Because taking Health 1000 is a requirement for graduation at ECU, its curriculum reaches a wide audience. Our group was

interested in how we could integrate what we have learned about on-campus sexual assault through our project into the school's official Health 1000 curriculum. We met with Cavanaugh on October 9, 2019. At this point, we had already begun our initial conversations about a collaboration between our group and the Health Science department. The first item on our agenda in speaking with him was to ask how we, as an honors group, could be useful to him in revamping the curriculum regarding its treatment of sexual assault. Mr. Cavanaugh informed me that the changes and additions we would potentially make to the curriculum would be fully implemented in three years' time.

One of our main focuses at this point in our project was organizing and promoting self-defense classes, for both female and male students. To further promote these self-defense classes, I asked Mr. Cavanaugh if he would consider making the classes an extra credit opportunity for his students, which he eagerly agreed to do.

Mr. Cavanaugh advised our group members that we get involved with programs such as Pledge Purple. He suggested that we become Pledge Purple ambassadors to take on leadership roles in an existing, official campus organization concerned with sexual assault on our campus. After our meeting, I spoke to our group, and we decided that we would take action to become involved with Pledge Purple in the spring. However, this plan was never realized due to the pandemic shutting everything down and bringing our project to a halt. All plans we had to work with Brian Cavanaugh and the Health Science department at ECU were unexpectedly ended.

Throughout honors 3000, we continued to pursue the avenue of changing the Health 1000 curriculum but opted to diversify our workload in order to create more of an impact. One way we did this was pursuing a partnership with the mobile device application and organization by the name of LiveSafe. LiveSafe is an application intended to increase safety measures for its users.

The app contains multiple resources: campus maps, the ability to report tips for crimes, and the portion we were most interested in - the Safe Walk option. When in use, users can share their location with a peer as they travel between their current location and their destination; the trusted person can watch as the user makes it safely to their destination, or report to the proper authorities if something goes wrong. When exploring facets of campus safety, we found that students walking by themselves on campus at night — specifically with female-presenting students — was a major concern we wanted to address. As a result, when we discovered this application, it seemed like a natural avenue to pursue. We formed a partnership with the organization — albeit one that was short lived — and worked with them to try to improve some of the shortcomings of the application. We also represented the organization at Barefoot on the Mall, which had a two-fold mission in mind. First and foremost, we wanted to increase student awareness about the existence of the application. Second, we wanted to partner with these new users to find flaws in the app we could propose to be fixed.

In addition to our LiveSafe partnership, we investigated increasing discussion of sexual assault awareness on campus, in addition to other general safety information. The way we wished to do this was by hosting our own session at freshman orientation; we went through multiple iterations of this idea. At one point, we considered the possibility of hosting an entire safety session. We found there were many problems with this idea. For one, this would be costly and time-consuming. The manpower we would need would be extensive, and we needed to ensure consistent volunteers for our session. Next, there was the issue of time. There are many sessions offered during students' time at orientation — everything from major-specific events to extracurricular fairs — that we would likely struggle with attendance. This idea then evolved into sharing information in a written format. We thought we could distribute information on

safety and resources – such as about the Women and Gender Office, the Victim Advocate on campus, what to do in the event of an assault, etc. – but found some shortcomings with the idea. First, this would've been costly, as well. We wanted to have two different sets of information, one for parents and one for students. Printing packets of this caliber would've been far outside of our budget. Next, there's the fact that parents and students are bombarded with information during orientation; it's unlikely they'd even give our packet the time of day. We eventually retired from this idea as other possibilities came to light, but the many ideas that crossed our path provided us with the inspiration and connections to make further progress.

As we moved on from working directly with LiveSafe, at the beginning of Honors 4500, we began to work with the Student Safety Committee (SSC). At the time we began working with them, the two main projects they had on their plate were the Pirate Pathways and the annual LiveSafe Night Walk. Two of our group members, Logan and Liz stepped into leadership roles on the SSC executive board as co-vice chairs in the fall of 2019. At the beginning of the 2020 spring semester, Liz stepped up to be interim-chair and held the position through to the fall 2020 semester. Both the Pirate Pathways and LiveSafe Night Walk projects were in motion before our group began working with the SSC, but we were able to help organize the events and see them through to success.

The Pirate Pathways project aimed to mark safe pathways for students and Greenville residents to follow through and around ECU's campus with a symbol on the ground. These pathways would lead its followers through corridors that were deemed safe, well-lit, and were near Emergency Blue Lights that have hard lines to law enforcement. Our group members helped decide on the final design of the symbol that would mark the pathways. Our group finished our project and stopped working with the SSC before any symbols were painted on the ground, and

we have yet to see them. It is unknown to us whether the project was halted due to cost, or because of the covid pandemic, or if it was scrapped all together. The LiveSafe Night Walks put on by the SSC were a joint effort between LiveSafe employees, ECU students, ECU Police Department and Greenville Police Department to identify possible areas in and around ECU's campus where lighting or visibility could be improved. The Night Walk we helped plan and execute occurred in February of 2020.

We felt as though both projects, the Pirate Pathways, and the Night Walks, were relevant to our group's initiative of reducing sexual assaults on campus. Both initiatives had a common goal of increasing and improving safe corridors for ECU students and Greenville residents to move through and around the university's campus later at night, which in turn could reduce the number of physical and sexual assaults that might occur in these areas at that time.

Another approach taken during the Honors 4500 course was making R.A.D. classes better known and more accessible on campus. The acronym stands for Rape Aggression Defense and the classes are instructed by members of the East Carolina University Police Department. The courses are different for men and women, so for that reason, Attie Giles and Abigail Yourkavitch took charge of this part of our project, so we had both a male and female present. Additionally, both group members are also members of an athletic team for East Carolina, making the athletic department the goal audience for a trial run of the courses. Attie and Abigail teamed up with Danielle Morrin, the Life Skills Coordinator for the athletic department; Captain Beth Watkins of the ECU Police Department, who oversees the R.A.D. courses; and Sergeant Ike Hill of the ECU Police Department, who coordinates and is one of the instructors for the classes. The five met at the ECU Police Department to talk more about what the courses entailed, options for the location of the courses, and ways to test student-athlete interest in the courses. This meeting occurred on

February 20th, 2020. At the end of the meeting, Attie and Abigail were given brochures, which had information pertaining to the courses, and planned to present at the following month's Student-Athlete Advisory Committee meeting to explain the courses to leaders from each athletic team and to ask them about their team's interest in taking the courses. Unfortunately, this meeting was scheduled to take place on March 23rd, 2020, just after students were sent home and campus was put on lockdown for the COVID-19 pandemic. At this point, the entire project came to a standstill.

During the HNRS4500 course, Logan introduced another avenue for the group to try out when it came to student's safety while enjoying the many nightlife opportunities in Uptown or Downtown Greenville. The Black Pearl Shot was created by taking inspiration from a more commonly known term "The Angel Shot" that is being utilized at bars across the country. The Black Pearl Shot is not a drink as the name misleads you to believe. Instead, it is a code that was implemented to keep, specifically, women safe while being in Uptown or Downtown Greenville. The renaming of The Angel Shot to the Black Pearl Shot, so that we could keep some anonymity and originality, was only the beginning. We decided to design our own flyers which included being able to order it "neat," so a bartender will discreetly escort you to your car; "with ice," so a bartender will call you an uber ride home; or "with a lime," so a bartender will call the police. These various safety precautions allowed for women to have three different avenues that would allow for them to choose how they wished the harmful, weird, or uncomfortable situation to be adverted with assistance from the bartenders. We initially launched this program in the Fifth Street Distillery & Annex in Uptown Greenville. This bar was chosen for the trial run because Logan had a connection with the owner and manager who were more than willing to assist in launching the program.

The bartenders at Fifth Street held a laminated copy of the flyer behind the bar, and multiple copies were placed in the women's restrooms. The group decided to do no promotional work for the Black Pearl Shot due to the anonymous nature of the safety precaution. We decided to allow until the end of the semester for the testing period to see how effective – measured by how many times it was utilized – the system would be at the Fifth Street Distillery & Annex before trying to implement it in any other locations. Once we were heading into the winter break, Logan checked in with the owner and manager at Fifth Street to see how many times the Black Pearl Shot was utilized over the testing period and determine if it would be beneficial for the group to pursue in the coming HNRS4550 semester. The manager informed the group that 12 women had utilized the system over only a few short weeks, which to us, meant it was becoming a successful avenue for prevention of sexual assaults in Greenville. The owner also informed us that the bar had received many compliments for implementing the program which showed us that women, even if they did not utilize it, were aware that the option existed. This was important to us because it showed us that this was producing active results when it came to the prevention of sexual assaults. We collectively decided to reach out to other restaurants and bars in the Uptown Greenville and Downtown Greenville areas once we began HNRS4550.

At the beginning of HNRS4550, the Black Pearl Shot was forefront in the group's mind. We saw that it was producing results at Fifth Street Distillery & Annex, which lead us to compiling a list of other places we could explore implementing it at. We compiled a list of nine other restaurants and bars we believed were hotspots for drinking, and thus more susceptible to sexual assault situations, amongst the East Carolina University student population. We then each chose the locations we wanted to target to gain their interest in our safety program. While we did get to inquire with a few of the locations to obtain managers' information - or, in some cases, get

turned away at the door as solicitors - the COVID-19 pandemic quickly took a toll on this project. Over the initial extended spring break, we discussed how we could better approach the businesses we were trying to target for the Black Pearl Shot program. One avenue we explore was possibly creating a brother program that could be implemented for men to also have a safety precaution in place. This was just a brainstorm, and never ended up being implemented in any way due to the global pandemic putting all our work to a halt.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 posed many challenges for us in our relationships among the group, but it also threw a few wrenches in our relationships with other groups. As stated before, our group did not see the Pirate Pathways Project through to completion, and it is unknown if the pandemic created any barriers for the project. We had set dates for R.A.D. self-defense classes, as well as a meeting with a representative from ECU's SGA to possibly plan other R.A.D. sessions. These events did not occur due to the pandemic. Our pursuit of bringing the Black Pearl Shot Program into businesses was greatly affected by the pandemic. We had a key meeting with Chief Barnwell of ECU PD, Chief Holtzman of Greenville PD, and a representative from Pitt County ABC to discuss the possibility of benefits that establishments may receive for using our Black Pearl Program. One benefit could have been a discount on liquor supply from ABC for businesses. Of course, the pandemic caused this meeting to be postponed. Liz tried to keep in contact with Chiefs Barnwell and Holtzman, but ultimately our contact fizzled as both chiefs, understandably, had much more important things on their plate. Ultimately, the pandemic could not have arrived at a worse time for our group. Admittedly, it took our group a while to decide on a set pathway to achieve our envisioned goal of reducing sexual assault on ECU's community, even before the shutdown. We had finally decided on three avenues: work with the SSC, facilitating R.A.D. classes, and developing the

Black Pearl Program, and we had events and meetings to launch all three of these avenues into motion. Ultimately, all the momentum we had built with other groups and organizations was brought to a grinding halt. As the pandemic was prolonged, our hope of resuming these efforts was replaced with the goal of evaluating our project as a whole and completing our thesis paper.

Section 2: Individual Portion – A Reflection on Individual Efforts, The Process of Learning Through the Honors College Process, and The Effect on Future Plans

My earliest recollection of this project process was filling out the HNRS2000 survey during the summer prior to my freshman year at East Carolina University. As I combed through the list of “wicked problems,” I found myself overwhelmed by the sheer volume of issues facing our world. For me, it was hard to prioritize these issues; when faced with a list of social justice issues, environmental issues, and problems facing our own community, I found myself feeling self-conscious. I found it difficult to fathom how a group of college students could truly effect change among all the issues in society. Nonetheless, as I ventured through the list, my eyes befell the issue of sexual assault, my chest tightened; the realization that it was likely that I would become a statistic during my time in college - due to the volume of sexual violence acts committed against and by college students - drew me in. I ranked the wicked problem of sexual assault as my first choice.

Once we were officially grouped up and I met my team, I was disappointed - but not surprised - to see that our original group was all women. Though I understood the issue of sexual assault was more so a concern for people assigned female at birth (AFAB), I’d hoped that we would have had at least one of our male peers join the fight as a sign of solidarity; this lack of

men in our group was, ironically, unsurprising due to the stigma behind sexual assault perpetrated against men. We knew we had a hefty issue ahead of us with our all-women group. Many of our first class sessions (and outside-of-class meetings) consisted of ideating, but we strived to progress as quickly as possible - after all, the reality of the statistics hung heavily over our heads, like an anvil suspended on a rope over our heads.

With the magnitude of this issue being so great, we started where we were most familiar on campus - with the safety aspect, particularly the blue light system - and we opted to go from there. I was aware of the blue light system and its purpose, though it seemed like cold comfort in many aspects; walking alone at night on campus was an anxiety inducing experience due to the lack of light in many areas and the presence of many blind spots. When we pivoted to the resources that existed on campus to assist those who have faced sexual violence, I felt defeated. We quickly veered off from prevention to caring for survivors. Though caring for those who have faced sexual assault is immensely important, we had set forth trying to make campus safer for its students, and money already stood in the way of that mission. While knowing what resources exist for survivors on campus is very important, and I am glad we were able to give details of these resources when talking to others, those are the sorts of things we never wanted to *need*.

As HNRS3000 began, our group faced a new set of challenges. Our group was lucky enough to survive the cuts post-HNRS2000, but suddenly we found ourselves having to absorb new group members. Though these new members were immensely helpful throughout the duration of our project, the process of introducing new people to our group, acquainting everyone, and giving them a history of what our group had been through. We had to work backwards to move forward together. Throughout this process, a handful of my group members

set forth on specific missions - such as coordinating with LiveSafe - while I sort of served as a “yes man” to anyone who needed additional assistance or a sounding board for ideas. I served on the Student Safety Committee as we tried to secure our partnership with LiveSafe (an app geared towards college students - it had a multitude of safety features that we wished to improve), conducting interviews, and helping ideate towards our next steps.

The greatest difficulties for us, as a group, came with HNRS3000. First came the most dreaded subject matter of all: public speaking. Presenting in front of 200 of our peers in a packed auditorium brought forth great anxiety for all of us. Though I am quite the extrovert, the intense lines of questioning we often received from our professors meant that presentation day had all of us on edge; though we understood that their relentless directness was for our own edification, it meant that we worried in anticipation of our own time to present, or a question directed at one of us individually. My groupmates, however, were immensely supportive; in the days leading up to a presentation day, we prepped each other with the intensity of a lawyer prepping a witness to testify. We would cover important details, suggest specific anecdotes to beef up our presentation, and suggest answers to questions we anticipated being asked. We all understood full well how terrifying it can be to speak in front of 200 folks our own age, in addition to 5-10 professors you were both scared of and inspired by - we made it a goal to support each other as best as we could. Another issue that plagued our group was imposter syndrome. It seemed a common issue throughout the Honors College courses that we would fret about whether we could make a difference - after all, it is difficult to fathom that a group of 10 nineteen-year-olds could shape our world - or even our town. We required many pep talks from our mentors throughout this process, and they set us back on the right track.

Of course, the moment we felt like we were truly getting somewhere, the entire world shut down. When we had come up with our version of the “Angel Shot,” which we named the “Black Pearl Shot” (to pay homage to our pirate roots), I felt like we had finally gotten somewhere. As a group of college students who occasionally patronized the restaurants and other establishments in Uptown Greenville, many of us knew what it was like to feel unsafe in those environments with little awareness of our options; our group often swapped stories of dating app dates gone awry, creepy people following them around clubs, or, at worst, roofied drinks. We understood the urgency around keeping people safe, and this seemed like an excellent avenue to pursue. However, as March 2020 approached, none of us could foretell the travesties ahead. Our project quickly shut down with the rest of the world, and there was little else we could do.

Though we did not get to see our own group efforts come to fruition, it has been rewarding to serve as mentors to Honors College students of the years below us. Multiple groups have sought our insight with this wicked problem, and we have been able to talk them through the process we followed - the victories, the adversities, the bumps in the road, and the outlandish ideas that derailed our progress for moments in time. We happily instilled our insight in these younger groups, with the hope that they are able to lessen the prevalence of sexual assault on our campus.

Looking back over these last four years, I owe a great deal of my success to my involvement in the Honors College - not just as an EC Scholar, but as a member of this amazing community. When I set foot in the HNRS2000 class for the first time, I was overwhelmed and felt like I could never make any sort of a difference - however, throughout the course of this process, I realized that I can, in fact, effect change. I learned the value of collaboration; many of the things my group achieved could not have been accomplished without the guidance of our

own unique insights. Working together is what made us stronger; for the time that our group was active, we were able to divide and conquer to seek different solutions to this wicked problem. I also found myself greatly desensitized to the (former) horrors of public speaking. The first time I spoke in front of our whole class, I felt like I wanted to melt into the floor and simply dissipate. By my last presentation, I was able to speak with confidence, reassured by the fact that I knew what I was talking about and that everyone else was just as nervous as I was. I still wrestle with imposter syndrome, but this process has helped me believe in myself - that I am capable of effecting change, and that my words matter to others.

As for my plans for the upcoming year, they are not quite set in stone. I will be graduating in May of 2022 with a dual degree in Secondary English Education (Bachelor of Science) and English (Bachelor of Arts) with a minor in History. I have passed both the Praxis and the edTPA and will be graduating with a teaching license in the state of North Carolina to teach High School English. I have received multiple job offers thus far and, while I do not know precisely what the next year holds for me, I am very excited to begin my career as an educator. If I had not spent my freshman year of college speaking in front of 200 college freshmen, I would not feel so comfortable speaking in front of my classes daily (after all, student teaching was a breeze after being grilled in front of a large audience). I owe much of my success to this process, especially the first-year classes, and I will forever be grateful for the EC Scholars Program and the Honors College at East Carolina University for all I have learned. I will forever be grateful to be a Pirate.