

In 1982, 21,113 people in the United States lost their lives to drinking and driving. That would make it the 27<sup>th</sup> most likely way to lose your life overall, but clearly in the top 10 ways to die if you eliminate the very old and the very young from the data. It killed more people than many types of cancer and even murder. In 2013 that number of drunk driving deaths dropped in half to 10,076. Wow! That is a remarkable reduction! But how did it happen? Did everyone just decide that enough was enough and stopped drinking and driving?

Not at all. For 30 years groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) began to change people's perception of drunk driving from somewhat acceptable to outright demonizing it by making people keenly aware of the often devastating consequences. MADD was formed by parents who had lost a child to this very avoidable tragedy. They took their pain, grief, and loss and channeled it into action. In so doing others rose up to help.

State lawmakers passed more and more severe punishments for DUI. High schools did presentations and "after prom" parties to keep students safe. Advertising campaigns were released to show the dangers to others on the road and the consequences of what happens if you get caught. One of those ad campaigns proved very effective.

The "Friends don't let friends drive drunk" campaign enlisted the help of bystanders, empowering them to take the keys from someone who might be headed for danger. The designated driver was created as well – a friend who would not drink, but instead, make sure all of the drunk friends got back home safe. It worked.

We have a problem in colleges and universities across the country that may not be as fatal, but is just as serious as drunk driving – sexual assault. According to the Centers for Disease Control about 1 in 5 (18.3%) women experience rape in their lives. Many of those cases (37.4%) happen to women between the ages of 18-24 or "college age." Men are victims too, just not as many. Speaking as a college president, charged with the safety of over 4,000 students each year, and as the father of two girls who will be going off to college in just a few years, I want something done about that now.

And I'm not alone. The US Department of Education through Title IX law has issued a series of letters requiring colleges to do more to ensure the safety of students and curb the incidences of sexual assault at America's institutions of higher learning. Much like the methods of lowering drunk driving deaths, institutions like NCCC are springing to action in many different ways.

The first thing we must all do, like MADD did to drunk driving, is fully demonize this horrible behavior. No more "boys will be boys" or "blaming the victim" attitude when it comes to nonconsensual sex. "Well, that's what she gets for going to a party and drinking." No. She did not deserve to be raped. The old-school statement that really gets my goat is, "If you go through with the charges against him you'll be ruining a promising young man's life." Please. He ruined his promising life when he sexually assaulted the other person. ( Please forgive me for using the "woman as the victim, men as the perpetrator" in my examples, but it is the most common situation.)

So what specific actions has NCCC done? We have established a new Title IX coordinator on campus, Ben Smith, who oversees our processes and prevention efforts. The Board has established a series of new policies designed to clarify the definition of consent to make it clearer and has created a new master Title IX policy. We have clarified our disciplinary action processes and made sure we have a litany of resources to bring to bear for any victim. More policy changes will be coming soon.

Members of my staff have trained every athletic team and student government group on sexual assault awareness and prevention. We have added prevention curriculum to our freshmen orientation class, required of nearly every new fulltime student. NCCC also added an online resource for all students called Campus Clarity that combines both sexual assault prevention with alcohol awareness, as alcohol is involved with many of the assault cases, as you can imagine. We teach the meaning of consent and that folks who have been drinking cannot give consent.

I have great hope for something called “bystander intervention,” and it has been interwoven with all of the prevention education we are doing. Much like the “Friends don’t let friends drive drunk” campaign, it is the bystander who can often stop the situation through direct action or even distracting the would-be assailant. You can’t take their keys per se, but you can wake them up to what they are about to do or at least distract them from doing it. It empowers the friend to keep another friend out of danger or making a terrible choice that can ultimately ruin two lives.

To this end NCCC has joined the national movement, “It’s On Us” whose pledge is, “to recognize that non-consensual sex is sexual assault, to identify situations in which sexual assault may occur, to intervene in situations where consent has not or cannot be given, and to create an environment in which sexual assault is unacceptable and survivors are supported.” You can read more about it at [www.itsonus.org](http://www.itsonus.org).

This last Wednesday we hosted an “It’s On Us” night during the basketball games to bring greater attention to the movement and to the seriousness of this problem. Our students made a video about it as well. All of our student athletes took the “It’s On Us” pledge listed above.

I am happy to report that NCCC, both at the Chanute and Ottawa campuses, have had no reported cases of sexual assault on our Clery Crime Report that we post online. That report goes back several years. (Our biggest crime – alcohol consumption as you might have guessed.) But we want to be proactive and keep that number to 0.

Turning attention to a problem is the first step in solving it. One must first acknowledge a problem exists, then get motivated enough to find a solution and work through it. MADD did that with drunk driving and look at the impact. They save an estimated 10,000 lives every year. We, Higher Education in the United States, have a problem with sexual assault on our campuses. And we are going to acknowledge it, solve it, and keep students safe.

If you have any comments or questions please feel free to contact me at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).