

THE BLUE BANNER

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The Blue Banner is UNC Asheville's student newspaper. We publish each Tuesday except during summer sessions, finals week and holiday breaks. Our office is in Karpen 019.

The Blue Banner is a designated forum for free speech and welcomes letters to the editor, considering them on the basis of interest, space and timeliness. Letters and articles should be emailed to the editor-in-chief or to the appropriate section editor. Letters should include the writer's name, year in school and major, or other relationship to UNCA. Include a phone number to aid in verification. All articles are subject to editing.

EDITORIAL

NEW POLICIES THREATEN SAFETY OF SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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One would not hear of a burglary, a shooting, a murder, and assume the information provided is more likely than not false. Yet with unfounded reports in the United States falling between two and eight percent according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, sexual assault remains an anchor for skeptics to steady themselves in their decision on who to believe.

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos continues to make incredible progress toward the perpetuation of rape culture on college campuses. While current university standards provide only so much recourse as an educational process and not a legal process, DeVos prepares new policies reinforcing the rights of those accused of sexual violence and reducing the liability for institutions such as colleges and universities.

According to *The New York Times*, who obtained DeVos's proposed policies, the new parameters would restrict instances in which institutions of higher education would be required to investigate, require a higher standard of proof in cases chosen for investigation and allow for the definition of sexual harassment to be altered into a more restrictive framework.

The policies seem reasonable—by executing these new guidelines, universities and colleges receive less legal recourse from students attempting to tamper with a peaceable community. Moreover, the

accused finally have ground to stand on, as accusations of sexual violence are followed by stress and other emotional strain. DeVos blatantly prioritizes institutional headaches and protections for the accused instead of the vulnerable and violated survivors searching for relief in their injustice.

These new policies would make it much more difficult to hold perpetrators accountable, leaving survivors to fend for themselves on a campus where they do not feel safe. Despite the encouragement of increased remedial resources, no such variety can mend the violation survivors experience twofold: first by their perpetrator, then by their institution who allows the perpetrator to stay.

According to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, two college women experience sexual assault for every one robbery. But, are two survivors believed by their institution compared to the one who was robbed?

DeVos and others who view sexual violence as a liability for institutions and alleged perpetrators alike grotesquely overlook the survivors who deserve support from their institution, a community who committed to them when they were admitted. Institutions of higher education should be a safe place for all students, not just the accused, but this is often not the case even before DeVos's proposed guidelines become an unfortunate reality.