



Ginette Lafrenière, Associate Professor
Faculty of Social Work
519-884-0710 ext. 5237 or glafreniere@wlu.ca

Kevin Crowley, Director
Communications & Public Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University
519-884-0710 ext. 3070 or kcrowley@wlu.ca

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Laurier researcher receives provincial funding to study gendered-violence reporting processes

WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University Faculty of Social Work Professor Ginette Lafrenière will receive nearly \$50,000 in funding from the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services for the research project, **“The Silence and Silos Project: Breaking Down Barriers and Enhancing University and Police Collaborations.”**

The study will address a pressing need for more information about the relationship between the university’s special constables, municipal police, and students who disclose any element of gendered violence, including sexual violence, in order to improve reporting mechanisms available to victims on Laurier campuses.

Daiene Vernile, Member of Provincial Parliament for Kitchener-Centre, announced the funding at an event on Feb. 10, 2016, at Laurier’s Kitchener-based Faculty of Social Work.

“By supporting research and collaborating with experts at Wilfrid Laurier University, we’re delivering on our “It’s Never Okay” action to keep Ontario campuses and communities safer and more responsive on this serious issue,” said **Vernile**. “I cannot stress this enough – when it comes to sexual violence and harassment, it’s never okay.”

Lafrenière will receive \$49,850 in funding for the project.

“This research will help us identify best practices so that we can ensure police services across the province are doing all they can to support victims,” said **Yasir Naqvi**, Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. “Sexual assault is a particularly difficult area of the law for both victims and the justice system, but I believe we can make a difference if we consider all perspectives, from survivors to academics to police to victim support providers.”

Lafrenière’s study aims to interview key informants from special constables, police services, as well as other stakeholders in the academic and larger communities of Waterloo, Kitchener and Brantford. The goal is to discern and address the gaps, barriers, challenges, and best practices of university and police in response to reports of gendered violence, including hate crimes, homophobia, as well as sexual violence.

More importantly, this study will aim to translate the findings of this research for universities in Ontario in order to address low reporting rates and improve survivor confidence in systematic responses to gendered violence

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“Special constables and police services are vitally important in our fight to end gendered violence,” said Lafrenière. “We are deeply grateful for this funding as it not only builds on Laurier’s leadership in addressing gendered violence in an authentic manner but, more importantly, will allow us to explore the complexities and tensions relative to police and special constable responses to sexual and gendered violence. I hope this research will enhance the ways in which we can be more nurturing and responsive to victims and inspire other campuses in Ontario.”

Lafrenière’s research has been integral in addressing gendered violence on university campuses. She was a principal investigator on [The Change Project](#), a comprehensive needs assessment on gendered violence prevention and response at Laurier. The study identified 13 significant gaps to be addressed at Laurier and made 11 recommendations for action. Since its release, Laurier has adopted several of the resulting recommendations and is working on others. This includes the introduction of a pro-social bystander program and the formalization of leadership for university gendered violence initiatives.

Laurier has also created the [Gendered Violence Task Force \(GVTF\)](#), an organizing body that includes over 150 student, staff, faculty and community volunteers. It oversees and supports numerous gendered-violence prevention and awareness initiatives being undertaken at Laurier. The university has also assigned three [Faculty Gendered Violence Colleagues](#), and a Gendered Violence Task Force Coordinator, who support the efforts of approximately 200 faculty, staff and students doing work in the area of gendered violence.

Lafrenière serves as a faculty colleague working closely with senior campus leaders in collaboration with the GVTF to focus their efforts on strategic planning and decision making aimed at addressing the root causes of gendered violence and sustaining efforts to address gendered violence at Laurier.

Laurier’s [Diversity and Equity Office](#) has also been instrumental in ensuring the institutional support in addressing gendered and sexual violence as well as ensuring a holistic understanding of the specificity of violence on minoritized students on our campus.

To find out more about Laurier’s initiatives to address gendered violence on campus, visit wlu.ca.