In 2011, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) issued a “Dear Colleague Letter” instructing universities to take action regarding sexual assault on college campuses. Using Title IX as a guide, the OCR called upon universities to better investigate, adjudicate, and educate on issues of sexual assault, with the hope of reducing violence against women (Ali, 2011). Since then, universities have struggled to comply with the recommendations (Kelderman, 2012). In particular, the response by athletic departments to sexual assault is troubling, as evidenced by recent cases at the University of Montana (Krakauer, 2015), Baylor University, Florida State University, and others (Luther, 2016). A recent U.S. Senate report revealed that nearly 20% of athletic departments oversee sexual assault cases and more than 30% of schools do not provide training for their students on sexual assault issues (McCaskill, 2014). In response, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) issued legislation in August 2017 requiring member institutions certify that all student-athletes receive sexual assault prevention education.

Further, athletic departments are uniquely positioned to impact the sexual culture of college campuses. Student-athletes are more prone to rape myth acceptance, as well as sexually aggressive attitudes, than their non-athlete peers (Boeringer 1996, 1999; Koss & Gaines, 1993; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Sawyer et al., 2002; Young, Desmarais, Baldwin, & Chandler, 2016). Additionally, some research indicates that student-athletes are more likely to be perpetrators of sexual assault (Cross et al., 1996; Fritner & Rubinson, 1993; Sawyer et al., 2002). It is in this national spotlight that more, and more effective, sexual assault prevention education is needed specifically targeting intercollegiate athletes.

A Zero Tolerance Approach: Sexual Assault Prevention Education for Student-Athletes is a 10-hour comprehensive sexual assault bystander intervention program designed specifically for college athletes. It is influenced by both the existing literature and data collected from the lead author’s dissertation (in preparation for publication). A Zero Tolerance Approach hopes to be successful by providing participants with an expanded sexual assault prevention curriculum employing active learning methodologies that are more effective in educating student-athletes specifically (Banyard, et al., 2007). It is a step-by-step curriculum that may be adopted for use by intercollegiate athletics departments at other universities, and offers participants a unique opportunity to engage in an education program that blends research targeted at student-athletes with the best practices of a public health approach to sexual assault prevention. A Zero Tolerance Approach emphasizes four curricular components: (1) awareness of sexual assault and consent, (2) healthy sex education, (3) risk reduction, and (4) bystander intervention. Awareness, risk reduction, and bystander intervention are typical topics in sexual assault education. Healthy sexuality, however, is both less common and even more critical because, according to Herman (1984), “as long as sex in our society is construed as a dirty, low, and violent act involving domination of a male over a female, rape will remain a common occurrence” (p. 52).

A pilot program utilizing A Zero Tolerance Approach curriculum will take place at an NCAA Division III institution in Winter 2017. Male and female student-athletes from four athletic teams will participate (n = 70). Several 60- to 90-minute sessions, with participants segregated by sex, will be conducted during a three-week period. Research indicates sex-segregated training is more effective (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Berkowitz, 2002; Breitenbecher, 2000; Jackson & Davis, 2000), in part because men often behave defensive in the presence of women (Brecklin & Forde, 2001; Koss & Rozee, 2001). Educating with same-sex instructors will ensure receptive audiences for what can be difficult material. The four athletic teams were chosen due to their availability during this time of the school year break; additionally, each team’s coach is supportive of the program, eliciting buy-in from student-athlete participants. A Zero Tolerance Approach will be held during the institution’s winter break; though class is not in session, the
student-athletes are required to be on campus for their winter practices and competitions. This timing is critical; younger student-athletes have more rape-supportive attitudes (Sawyer, et al., 2002), requiring intervention, ideally, in their first year on campus. Moreover, because student-athletes function in tightly knit, team-based communities, each with its own identity or “family” atmosphere (McMahon, 2004), all student-athletes from each pilot team will be educated, including upper classmen. The sessions are solely focused on sexual assault prevention education, rather than offered in combination with other topics (e.g., compliance, social media, alcohol/substance abuse), as Anderson and Whiston (2005) demonstrated that “programs that included more than one topic appeared to be less effective than more focused programs” (p. 383). This model achieves an intense “saturation” which is more effective with sexual assault prevention and bystander intervention techniques (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Flores & Hartlaub, 1998). Also, A Zero Tolerance Approach will be conducted in a space that provides more “authority” (e.g., a classroom), rather than one that is “comfortable” (e.g., a locker room, study hall) as it lends more credence to the program (Moynihan & Banyard, 2008).

The effectiveness of A Zero Tolerance Approach will be assessed through pre- and post-surveys, which will measure changes in participant attitudes regarding sexual assault/rape myth acceptance and gender roles using two scales, the Attitudes Toward Women scale (ATW; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973) and the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression scale (AMMSA; Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007). The ATW scale assesses traditional gender role attitudes, whereas the AMMSA scale assesses attitudes regarding sexual assault. These measures will indicate if programming changed student-athlete attitudes toward gender roles and sexual assault/rape myth acceptance. Participants will take the pre-survey prior to beginning A Zero Tolerance Approach education and the post-survey within one week of completing the program. Surveys will be hosted on the university’s Qualtrics account and distributed to participants via university email addresses. Additionally, up to 15 student-athletes will participate in qualitative interviews. It is important to hear participant voices to gain narrative insight to the effectiveness of A Zero Tolerance Approach. For instance, participants may be able to tell an interviewer precisely how they engaged in bystander intervention, and the interviewer can ask follow-up questions to gain further awareness of how A Zero Tolerance Approach was effective in changing attitudes and behaviors. In accordance with Institutional Review Board oversight, participant data will be confidential and/or anonymous.

This presentation will provide an overview of curricular components for A Zero Tolerance Approach, discuss assessment methods, and conclude with initial results on the effectiveness of this pilot program. Pre- and post-survey data will reveal how/a student-athlete’s attitudes toward gender roles and sexual assault changed after participating in the program. Qualitative data will illuminate the strengths of the program’s curriculum, as well as areas for improvement for future interventions. Implications of the pilot program’s efforts will also be discussed.