



From 22-26 July 2024, the Army SHARP Academy hosted the first of two pilot sessions of the DoD Encounter Skills curriculum. The Encounter Skills curriculum was created by the DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) in partnership with the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS). The lessons were developed in response to the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military (IRC-SAM) and the Secretary of Defense-approved recommendation to develop and administer a core curriculum of trauma and response training for Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARC) and SAPR Victim Advocates (SAPR VA) that builds their capacity to provide culturally competent care to victims.¹

SAPRO's Training and Education Center of Excellence (SAPRTEC) leads the collaborative development and pilot delivery of the curriculum, which aims to improve the non-clinical advocacy skills of SARCS and SAPR VAs. Research has shown that victims report better personal outcomes when they have trusted professionals who provide trauma informed support and empower them to make their own decisions. The Encounter Skills course focuses on improving SARC and SAPR VA victim encounter skills through an evidence-informed practice model including expressing empathy, active listening, empowering decision making, rapport building, and establishing trust throughout the case management process.

¹ <https://www.defense.gov/Spotlights/Independent-Review-Commission-on-Sexual-Assault-in-the-Military/>

As the only formal sexual violence response and prevention education center within the DoD, the Army SHARP Academy (ASA) agreed to host the two Encounter Skills pilot sessions. Eighteen (18) students from across all the military Services and the National Guard Bureau attended the DoD SAPRTEC course. Three USUHS instructors delivered the pilot with all Services providing one assistant instructor. The assistant instructors attended a train-the-trainer course at the ASA, sponsored by DoD SAPRTEC, and taught by USUHS instructors in April 2024. Observing the July session, Dr. Nathan Galbreath, Director of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, stated, “We are grateful for the first-class support provided by the SHARP Academy leaders and staff, which enabled us to bring together a talented group of instructors and students from across the DoD to conduct this pilot. These sessions are vital to enhancing preparation and capabilities of our SAPR professionals. Victim assistance is a calling, and leaders at the Department will continue to pursue efforts that ensure our SAPR professionals receive the tools they need to respond to sexual assault and provide quality care and support to victims.”

The second pilot is scheduled for 09-13 September 2024 and will be taught by a team of instructors from all the Military Services with the USUHS instructors supporting as assistant instructors. The Encounter Skills curriculum is expected to be finalized during Fiscal Year 2025.