

# Digging Deeper: Uncovering the Aftermath of Kristin Smart's Disappearance

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by

Kailyn Pope

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It took five days for an investigation to launch after Kristin Smart disappeared without a trace on May 25, 1996. The first-year Cal Poly communications major was never seen nor heard from again after attending a party off campus that Memorial Day weekend. Her dorm room and that of a potential suspect were not searched until ten days after her disappearance, allowing them to be cleaned of potential evidence.<sup>1</sup> In recent decades, a stir has arisen in regard to the handling of sexual assault cases, specifically against young women, reported at American universities. Cal Poly had a campus population of nearly 20,000 in 2005.<sup>2</sup> Yet only one case of rape and one case of sexual battery were reported that year by the University Police Department in accordance with the Clery Act.<sup>3</sup> In addition to scholarly writing, documentaries such as *The Hunting Ground* (2015) have brought to light issues surrounding how universities handle cases of sexual assault. Seeing as “only approximately 5%” of victims report their sexual assaults to campus authorities while in college, it is impossible to place all of the blame on the shoulders of the victims.<sup>4</sup> Other factors must be taken into account, such as aspects of university authorities, the faculty and police expected to protect and uphold campus ideals, that make students not want to report the crimes against them in the first place.

This paper will discuss two major components of past crimes at Cal Poly: the attentive student response to Kristin Smart’s disappearance in light of possible shortcomings of authorities, and how events such as these have shaped campus safety policies and regulations

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<sup>1</sup> Matt Fountain, “Kristin Smart’s disappearance remains a mystery, 20 years later,” *The Tribune* (San Luis Obispo, CA), May 24, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2ldP050>, accessed Jan. 31, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> “Cal Poly Registration Monitor Fall 2005,” *Cal Poly Institutional Research*, Oct. 26, 2005, <http://bit.ly/2lcWhOy>, accessed Feb. 02, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> University Police Department, “Campus Crime Statistics 2004 through 2006,” 2006, Safety Net box, folder 550.04, Special Collections and University Archives, California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo.

<sup>4</sup> Veronyka James and Daniel Lee, “Through the Looking Glass: Exploring How College Students’ Perceptions of the Police Influence Sexual Assault Victimization Reporting,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 14 (September 2015): 2, accessed Feb. 14, 2017.

since the 1990s. Even though the red handprints, indicators of areas in which someone had been sexually assaulted, have been removed from Cal Poly's campus, sexual violence is still a prevalent problem at Cal Poly and college campuses everywhere.<sup>5</sup>

Kristin Smart's 1996 disappearance, as well as other criminal acts against students in the 1990s and beyond, brought the Cal Poly student community together in solidarity year after year with programs such as Take Back the Night. Mustangs have never stopped letting these issues be important to them, have never let their voices waver in the face of adversaries and deniers. Cases like Smart's have sparked initiative amongst students on campus, even if the matter is not and has never been as important to those we trust with keeping our campuses safe. Despite alumni, parents, and even some students themselves insisting that these things just do not happen at Cal Poly, they do, and they have had and always will have the greatest impact on those who once shared a community with the victim, rather than those in authority.

### **Historiography**

Though there is hardly any literature on the Kristin Smart case that isn't contained within local newspapers and police reports, there has been a significant amount of research done on the prevalence and treatment of sexual assault on college campuses in recent decades, specifically after the Clery Act was signed in 1990 after the rape and murder of Lehigh University student Jeanne Clery. The act aimed to increase transparency amongst campus police units and hold them accountable for their work by having them publicly report their crime statistics every year in accordance with a mandate. However, in a recent article in the *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, Michael J. Kyle and his collaborators argue that it may be requirements such as

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<sup>5</sup> Brian McMullen, "Memorials to be unveiled across campus," *Mustang Daily*, 19 February 2008, 1-2.

consistent reporting that compromise a police unit's ability to use its resources toward more urgent safety matters. The text focuses primarily on the perceptions of college faculty and students as to who should be responsible for keeping the campus safe, and to what degree. According to them, underreporting by police occurs due to victims not coming forward.<sup>6</sup> In another recent article in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, researches Veronyka James and Daniel Lee present findings of a study that indicate most college students do *not* report the sexual crimes committed against them, which is a result that might fuel the argument of Kyle and his collaborators. However, throughout their article, they suggest that this is because students are either afraid of the personal and social repercussions that come with reporting, or wary of how well the authorities will handle the case and take it seriously, if at all.<sup>7</sup> Of the literature on the topic from before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Easton et al. seem to capture the overall attitude toward sexual assault in the '90s with their 1997 article in the *Journal of American College Health*. The article primarily discusses rape resistance, its effectiveness, and how women can take preventative measures to decrease their chance of being assaulted. This text focuses on the student rather than any larger authority, and holds the view that women have a responsibility to defend themselves from potential attackers should a crime occur.<sup>8</sup>

My research will fit in more with the more modern of these journal articles. However, this paper will bring the nationwide crisis of campus violence, specifically homicide and sexual assault, to a local level so as to demonstrate what happens to those surrounding the victim when these acts occur. It will also tie into the pre-existing arguments of the inefficiency of university police by highlighting the key aspects of controversy surrounding Kristin Smart's disappearance.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Kyle, *et al.*, "Perceptions of Campus Safety Policies: Contrasting the Views of Students with Faculty and Staff," *American Journal of Criminal Justice* (2016), accessed Jan. 31, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> James and Lee, "Through the Looking Glass."

<sup>8</sup> A.N. Easton, *et al.*, "College women's perceptions regarding resistance to sexual assault," *Journal of American College Health* 46, no. 3 (Nov 1997): 127-131, accessed Feb. 14, 2017.

This will counter the article by Kyle and other scholars by bringing up external factors as to why students do not report and discussing why colleges would want to cover things like this up. Even if the case of Kristin Smart was not of immediate importance to authorities, this paper will prove that the crime meant something to the Cal Poly community, which has not forgotten the victim even 21 years later.

### **An Overview**

A case with no concrete conclusion leaves room for a plethora of possible answers. This is why, in this paper, Kristin Smart's disappearance is handled as one that may have involved violence, or foul play. Despite the fact that almost anybody who has been living in San Luis Obispo county since around the time of her disappearance has a pseudo-knowledge as to what happened, there is no answer. In this paper, Smart's case will be examine through the lens of other crimes against college-aged women, which lean primarily toward cases of sexual assault. No matter what actually occurred, "it serves as a reminder that even in a seemingly safe community such as San Luis Obispo, horrific crimes happen."<sup>9</sup>

First-year Kristin Smart was never seen again after nearing her dormitory, Muir Hall, at Cal Poly in the early hours of May 25, 1996. She was last seen with an interloper named Paul Flores, who is still regarded as the prime suspect of the case by much of the community. "Her father and a fellow student" reported her missing within three days, but the University Police Department did not take progressive action until two days after the initial report.<sup>10</sup> Smart's story broke the front page of the *Mustang Daily* six days after her disappearance, when early details of the case were within reach of the public. Students who lived on Kristin's floor of Muir Hall, or

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<sup>9</sup> Fountain, "Kristin Smart's disappearance."

<sup>10</sup> Matt Berger, "Kristin Smart: still missing," *Mustang Daily*, 15-22 September 1996, <http://bit.ly/2jWD2wM>.

otherwise were acquainted, stated she was a bit “atypical,” and one student even added that he was “not surprised by her absence,” even though she had been missing for several days.<sup>11</sup>

The University Police Department gained much notoriety from the community both at Cal Poly and in the town of San Luis Obispo after not seeking aid from state or “other local law enforcement agencies” upon gaining knowledge of Smart’s disappearance. This sparked harsh criticism of not only Cal Poly Public Safety, but the school’s administration as a whole. As Sacramento political consultant Terry Black stated in an interview with the *Mustang Daily* in 2006, “This is a classic example of the system failing so badly on the campus that all key evidence on the case has been lost. They always denied that [the system’s failing] because it exposes them legally and it exposes their lack of ability to protect the students.”<sup>12</sup> This is not the first time that a university’s security, police department, and campus safety have come under fire. In 1986, ten years before Smart’s disappearance, Lehigh University student Jeanne Clery was raped and murdered in her dorm room. The school was accused, by her parents as well as the community, of providing insufficient campus security, which allowed a non-resident to enter Clery’s dormitory. They also stated that Lehigh had “a rapidly escalating crime rate, which they didn’t tell anybody about.” Like Smart, Clery was a nineteen year-old, first-year communications major and student athlete.<sup>13</sup> Her case is what led to The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, which is a federal mandate that colleges still abide by today.

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<sup>11</sup> Sandra Naughton, “Student disappears after party,” *Mustang Daily*, 31 May 1996, <http://bit.ly/2mrg2pN>.

<sup>12</sup> Olivia DeGannaro, “Where is Kristin Smart? 19 years later, Cal Poly student still missing,” *Mustang News*, 28 May 2015, <http://bit.ly/1d2T27X>, accessed Feb 28 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Beverly Beyette, “Campus Crime Crusade: Howard and Connie Clery Lost Their Daughter to a Crazy Thief; Now They're Angry and Fighting Back,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1989, <http://lat.ms/2mbSt3B>, accessed 01 March 2017.

A law was also passed in California, attributed to Kristin Smart's disappearance. As proven by Cal Poly's poor handling of the case, a law needed to be made to define the depth of responsibilities of campus police. The Kristin Smart Campus Safety Act of 1998 did just that, and ensures that university police units "enter into written agreements with local law enforcement agencies that clarify operational responsibilities for investigations of...violent crimes, sexual assaults, and hate crimes occurring on each campus."<sup>14</sup> This was, unfortunately, sparked by the confusing and improperly handled start to Kristin Smart's case.

Smart's disappearance came as a shock, or an oddity, to the population of Cal Poly because of the school's, and the town's, reputation for being safe and fun. According to an editor's note in a September 1996 issue of *The Mustang Daily*, the case "marred the university's good reputation," but also served as a reminder that heinous crimes can and do occur at Cal Poly.<sup>15</sup> This proved true years later, when Aundria Crawford and Rachel Newhouse went missing in 1998 and 1999, respectively, but their bodies turned up within months, along with the arrest of their murderer.<sup>16</sup> These two cases differ from Smart's and Clery's in that they happened off campus, and thus were dealt with primarily by local authorities, so the campus police were not at the center of attention. The victims of these cases, and cases like these that are covered the most in this country, are young white women that fit the blond-haired, blue-eyed mold of the "typical" American college girl. Another woman who fits this exact mold is Lauren Spierer of the University of Indiana, who has been missing from the small town of Bloomington, Indiana since 2011.<sup>17</sup> There is something almost sensational about someone from this demographic

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<sup>14</sup> CA Education Code § 67381.1 (1998), <http://bit.ly/2mR3bwy>.

<sup>15</sup> Berger, "Kristin Smart: still missing."

<sup>16</sup> Patrick S. Pemberton, "Families left with a void that can never be filled," *The Tribune*, 10 Feb 2010. <http://bit.ly/2mqRBIN>.

<sup>17</sup> Madeline Buckley, "Lauren Spierer search warrants will remain sealed, judge says," *The Indianapolis Star*, 2 Feb 2016. <http://indy.st/2mcrXXJ>, accessed 28 Feb 2017.

becoming the victim of a crime, which causes public outcry and support, especially in small towns such as San Luis Obispo, Bethlehem (where Lehigh University is located), and Bloomington.

### **Campus Safety: 1950s through the Turn of the Century**

By 1991, the students had had enough of Cal Poly's insufficient process of handling cases of sexual assault against women. The Academic Senate of that year boldly proclaimed that they had "found no evidence that women faculty, staff, or students [had] any confidence in the intention of the university to protect women from sexual harassment." This was followed by a list of recommendations aimed at the administration to better the training of officers and the handling of sexual harassment cases so as to prevent them from happening in the future.<sup>18</sup> Their requests, frankly, were completely valid. Cal Poly, among other schools across the nation, had unstable sexual harassment policies in place throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. In the '50s and '60s, after women were re-admitted to Cal Poly, there was no mention of the school's sexual harassment policy – if one even existed – in the employee handbook of the time.<sup>19</sup> It wasn't until around the 1980s that the sexual harassment policy got its own section in the handbook. This policy stated, however, that it was not the *police's* job to handle cases of sexual harassment, but rather the task fell into the hands of the "designated...Sexual Harassment Investigators," who were "the Director of Personnel and Employee Relations and the Associate Dean of Students." The piece on sexual assault in the employee handbook simply stated that it was wrong, it was a crime, and that perpetrators would be punished either by suspension or

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<sup>18</sup> Academic Senate Agenda, October 26, 1991, California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo. <http://bit.ly/2n81cBB>.

<sup>19</sup> *College Guide – Employee Handbook*, 300.06 Employee Guide, 1966-67, Box 0063-04, Folder 7, Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo, CA.

reprimand, depending on if they were a student or faculty member, respectively.<sup>20</sup> It is unclear what information students were given on the topic, if any, but Cal Poly's policies were shoddy at best before the 1990s.

In the year 2017, students receive text and e-mail alerts from the University Police Department whenever a sexual assault occurs to a Cal Poly on campus or areas nearby, and students who do not complete their informational online sexual harassment courses in a timely manner are punished with an unfavorable class registration date. Education on the topic has been, essentially, incentivized, whereas in the '80s and '90s it seemed like background noise. Around the 1994 to 1995 school year, the year before Smart's disappearance, Cal Poly produced several volumes of a *Safety Net Newspaper*, which allowed Public Safety Services to spread information to students and faculty regarding campus safety. However, these safety tips and information pertained to everything but sexual harassment, with one edition containing information on topics such as medical emergencies, commuting, and ladder safety.<sup>21</sup> Even after the passing of the Clery Act in 1990, most schools still did not know how to effectively talk about and prevent sexual assault, especially since the topic was backed by "little research" throughout the 1980s.<sup>22</sup>

Schools' lack of willingness to learn and educate on the topic of sexual harassment in favor of preserving a more pristine image or reputation may be what has kept the issue of sexual violence on college campuses so prevalent. Researchers James and Lee argued that it is this lack of effort by campus police and university administration that kept students from reporting. They found that students who trusted their campus police were "more likely to report sexual assault

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<sup>20</sup> *Staff Personnel Handbook*, 300.06 Employee Guide, 1989-90, Box 0063-04, Folder 9, Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo, CA.

<sup>21</sup> *Safety Net Newspaper* 1, no. 2, Safety Net Box, Folder 549, Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

<sup>22</sup> Kristen Day, "Assault Prevention as Social Control: Women and Sexual Assault Prevention on Urban College Campuses," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 15, no. 4 (1995): 261-281.

victimization” than those who do did not.<sup>23</sup> Could this be the reason why Cal Poly’s numbers reported in the Clery Act are so low in the area of sexual battery, rape, and other sexual crimes? Campus guidelines regarding sexual harassment skyrocketed in length and depth following the 1995-1996 school year, but Cal Poly’s reported sexual crimes have never broken ten per year. Since the 1980s, the excessively-researched number of women who have experienced sexual harassment by the time they graduate college has stayed relatively the same: 1 in 4.<sup>24</sup> Between 1999 and 2007, the highest number of rapes reported in one year at Cal Poly was 3, and the highest number of sexual batteries was 2.<sup>25</sup> Keeping the socially accepted and, again, highly-researched “1 in 4” statistic in mind, along with the assumption that Cal Poly had approximately 7,000 to 9,000 undergraduate female students enrolled during this period, these numbers, reported by the University Police Department, cannot possibly, or logically, represent all of the sexual crimes that occurred.

Perhaps Jeanne Clery’s parents were right in accusing Lehigh University of underreporting crimes on campus. Even today, more students in America are concerned about their safety on campus than those who are not, a fear that *should*, theoretically, be quelled by the presence of University Police.<sup>26</sup> There are a number of factors that could go into underreporting on the behalf of university authority, but there is no way around the possibility that, throughout the ‘90s and even today, sexual harassment cases that *are* reported aren’t being taken seriously enough. This was highlighted by the 2015 documentary *The Hunting Ground*, which looked into several stories of survivors of sexual assault whilst in college. The survivors, mostly female

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<sup>23</sup> James and Lee, “Through the Looking Glass.”

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> *Campus Crime Statistics 2001 through 2003*, and *Campus Crime Statistics 2005 through 2007*, Safety Net Box, Folder 550.04, Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Chekwa, *et al.*, “What Are College Students’ Perceptions About Campus Safety?” *Contemporary Issues in Education Research* 6, no. 3 (Third Quarter 2013): 325-332.

students, recalled having their cases brushed off or improperly handled by the university police in a way that fed into the stigma surrounding victims of sexual assault. Questions of “what were you wearing?” and “had you been drinking?” inappropriately arose out of these investigations, which would understandably dissuade any young woman from reporting her victimization.<sup>27</sup> The social stigma regarding sexual assault survivors undoubtedly plays a role in the lack of reporting of these crimes, but university administrations, including that of Cal Poly, have yet to recover from their lack of involvement in such cases throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Her Legacy**

A distrust of campus authority has not stopped the Cal Poly community from rallying behind victims such as Kristin Smart. The local community has kept her alive in spirit, too: her smiling face still watches over the Arroyo Grande Village from a billboard, and there is a memorial plaque in her honor at Dinosaur Caves Park in nearby Pismo Beach. But the student supporters and activists following Smart’s disappearance, as well of those of Crawford and Newhouse later in the decade, are the ones who let cases like hers make a difference on campus.

S.A.F.E.R. (“Sexual Assault Free Environment Resource,” now stylized as “Safer”) was founded at Cal Poly in the fall quarter of 1996, directly in response to the disappearance of Kristin Smart. Safer still exists today, and offers “crisis services” and “education and outreach” with regard to sexual assault, dating violence, etc.<sup>28</sup> Right after its inception, the program set up “safety awareness and security workshops” and educational materials for dorm-dwellers, as well as “[increasing] security patrols...in the residence halls,” all thanks to a \$60,000 grant through

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<sup>27</sup> *The Hunting Ground*, film, directed by Kirby Dick (New York, NY: The Weinstein Company), 2015.

<sup>28</sup> “History of Safer,” *Cal Poly Dean of Students*, accessed 20 Feb 2017, <http://bit.ly/2mgkeYN>.

the Department of Education for a “Violence Intervention Program.”<sup>29</sup> Safer aims to prevent sexual harassment and assault, as well as educate the campus on these issues as well as put on events to get students involved in activism. Sociologist Tara Streng suggests that strong policies for handling sexual assault on campuses are the first step to helping victims feel safer reporting, and Safer is working toward just that.<sup>30</sup> The organization, founded by students and faculty, had a stronger and more progressive reaction to Smart’s disappearance than the administration seemed to, and continues to spread awareness in the name of Smart, Crawford, Newhouse, and the millions of other women affected nationwide.

Cal Poly *did* begin its crusade against sexual assault a few years before the Kristin Smart case, potentially due to the unhappiness of the Academic Senate with regard to the treatment of crimes against women at Cal Poly, as previously discussed. Red, painted handprints began popping up all over the ground on campus in association with the “Take Back the Night” events that started at Cal Poly in 1992. The handprints, though no longer present, represented areas in which students had been sexually assaulted on campus, and served as a reminder that Cal Poly, nor any other college, was a crime-free area.<sup>31</sup> These handprints caused many Poly students to become aware of the seriousness of sexual assault and how often it occurs, and also put the issue into a local perspective that even had writers for the *Mustang Daily* questioning how many more cases may have gone unreported.<sup>32</sup> However, after Smart’s disappearance and Safer’s creation, the handprints were subject to vandalism, with male genitalia spray-painted over several of the meaningful markers in 1997. This sparked outcry from those in support of the handprints, and

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<sup>29</sup> “S.A.F.E.R. Program established on campus,” *Cal Poly Report* 50, no. 31, 16 May 1997, <http://bit.ly/2lyk1RN>.

<sup>30</sup> Tara K. Streng, “Sexual Assault Prevention and Reporting on College Campuses in the US: A Review of Policies and Recommendations,” *Journal of Education and Practice* 6, no. 3 (2015): 65-71.

<sup>31</sup> Cynthia E. Buizer, “Annual march to remind Poly about violence against women,” *Mustang Daily*, 19 May 1994, <http://bit.ly/2mZGEMm>.

<sup>32</sup> Rebecca Nordquist, “Red hands reminder of women’s pain,” *Mustang Daily*, 6 November 1995, <http://bit.ly/2mZAs6Y>.

even those who weren't actively involved in activist programs were upset by the defacing of something that stood for such a powerful issue.<sup>33</sup> The average student of the 1990s was becoming more and more aware of the impact and prevalence of sexual assault thanks to campaigns like these, which is quite a difference from the 1980s and earlier, when students and faculty alike were inadequately informed or kept in the dark about such issues..

After the news broke about the fates of Aundria Crawford and Rachel Newhouse in 1999, the Women's Center at Cal Poly named the week that encompassed Take Back the Night "Remember," which later came to be stylized as "ReMEember Week."<sup>34</sup> The week was initially dedicated to victims of all violent crime, but by the 2000s, it had become heavily focused on survivors and victims of sexual violence. Cal Poly no longer puts on this event, but that does not mean that students and faculty have stopped caring about sexual violence. What *is* telling, though, is that the vice president for student affairs at the time allowed the housing staff to paint over red handprints because they were inconvenient to have to explain to curious parents of prospective Mustangs. An organized protest occurred outside of Vice President Morton's office in response to the action, or lack thereof. Neither Morton nor the housing staff received punishment or reprimand for the ordeal, and even though the prints were repainted at the residence halls, they would eventually all be painted over and replaced with two small tower monuments on campus.<sup>35</sup> Though this change has been regarded by some passionate students as one of the biggest mistakes in Cal Poly history, it did not shake Safer's, nor any other campus group's, dedication to spreading awareness about sexual assault.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Stacey Johnston, "Red handprints defaced with painted penises," *Mustang Daily*, 19 November 1997, <http://bit.ly/2IWufYC>.

<sup>34</sup> Christine Janocko, "Poly students prepare to 'take back the night,'" *Mustang Daily*, 27 April 1999, <http://bit.ly/2mdBBI8>.

<sup>35</sup> McMullen, "Memorials."

<sup>36</sup> Ryan Miller, "Cal Poly's many wrongs," *Mustang Daily*, 9 March 2001, <http://bit.ly/2n1VTXB>.

However, modern Mustangs may not be surprised to hear of this past administrative blunder, as it has been viewed by some. Many students have grown outraged at current President Jeffrey Armstrong's administration and its shortcomings in appropriate and effective action in response to crime and hate speech on campus. Armstrong's usual tactic after a controversial or hateful event occurs on campus, such as deeply offensive statements written on the "Free Speech Wall" sponsored by the Cal Poly College Republicans, is to send out an email to all Cal Poly faculty, staff, and students that is full of blanket statements and generalities meant to appease most everyone reading it. A great number of Mustangs find this form of damage control laughable and wholly inappropriate, and there have been social media posts circulating that call for Armstrong's resignation. This mishandling of events that hold potential to be crucial for Cal Poly's growth is, sadly, nothing new to the university, but Mustangs continue to fight to let their voices be heard after such controversial occurrences.

Even 21 years after she was last seen, many students still know who Kristin Smart is, and take part in events put on by the organization created from the mist of her disappearance. Leads in the case in late 2016 sparked a bit of interest both locally and throughout the Cal Poly community, even though nothing has come of the investigation as of early 2017. As many news articles have said about Kristin Smart, she is gone, but not forgotten. The same goes for other victims, such as University of Indiana's Lauren Spierer, whose face was plastered on fliers all throughout Bloomington after her 2011 disappearance. Community efforts in hopes of finding her continue to this day, and supporters are "as determined as day one."<sup>37</sup> Jeanne Clery is forever immortalized by the federal Clery Act, as is Kristin Smart with the Campus Safety Act of 1998 created in her honor as well as the continued remembrance of her life. These young women will

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<sup>37</sup> "Help us find Lauren," accessed 01 March 2017, <http://findlauren.com/>.

not, cannot be forgotten because of the immense support system they have always had behind them, even after their deaths or disappearances.

## **Conclusion**

Despite shortcomings by campus police, Kristin Smart has had a lasting impact on Cal Poly after her 1996 disappearance. Many universities, including Cal Poly, have received backlash and criticism for the way their administrations, including their police units, have handled and attempted to prevent crimes of this nature. Smart has been “kept alive,” so to speak, by the Cal Poly student body, with programs such as Safer and events like Take Back the Night still existing to this day. Unlike college administration, students have no desire, and more importantly no reason, to cover up crimes against women on campuses. Thanks to research by sociologists and psychologists, as well as documentary makers, it is possible to see the various reasons why underreporting of sexual violence still occurs on college campuses. Even the students have become more aware of these problems as of the 1990s, whereas sexual violence was not treated as such a serious topic in the 1950s through the early 1980s. The powerful student response to the disappearance of Kristin Smart sent a boisterous message to the lackluster administration of the time: the voices of victims will never be silenced, even long after they are gone.

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