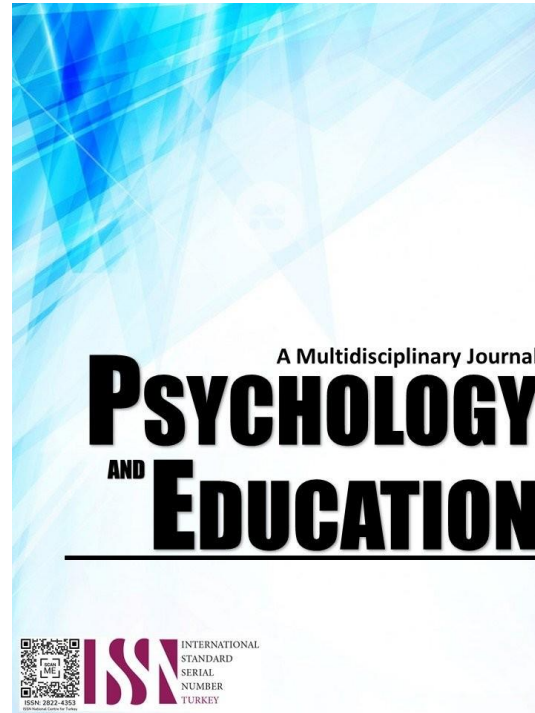


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PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Volume: 41

Issue 9

Pages: 1004-1010

Document ID: 2025PEMJ4019

DOI: 10.70838/pemj.410903

Manuscript Accepted: 06-20-2025

The Safe Spaces Act (R.A. 11313): Student Awareness and Adherence in a Private Higher Education Institution

Ralph Arjay C. Dela Cruz,* Jhoniel C. Samoling, Danilo R. Tubeo Jr.
For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) enforced and implemented the Safe Spaces Act (Republic Act 11313) for both public and private higher education institutions. It includes all forms of sexual harassment based on gender that occur in public, at work, in schools, and online. This study addresses the limited understanding of student awareness and adherence to the Safe Spaces Act (Republic Act 11313) at Saint Francis of Assisi College – Las Piñas Campus. 228 respondents, utilized a descriptive-correlational design, the study aimed to examine the correlation between the awareness and adherence with the Republic Act 11313. Results revealed a significant and moderately strong positive correlation in the area of physical spaces ($R = 0.5737$) followed by social spaces and institutional policies. Quantitative data indicated that respondents agreed that the institution promotes a safe environment within its facilities, although there were gaps in the visibility of some services designed to assist students. For this purpose, the methodological triangulation result revealed the three key themes: inclusive environment, awareness and support system. These emphasized the need for students and institutional aid within defined frameworks. It was concluded that increased awareness explains to a better adherence to policy suggesting a need for adequate orientation programs, clear reporting pathways or mechanisms, and a clear designated Gender and Development office. Findings support efforts to strengthen a culture of respect, equality, and accountability in higher education settings. The results will help in making the suggestions for the improvement of safety, inclusivity, and student wellbeing in higher education settings.

Keywords: *safe spaces act, student awareness, high education, gender and development, policies compliance*

Introduction

The Safe Spaces Act (Republic Act 11313), also known as the Bawal Bastos Law, has been rigorously enforced and implemented by the Commission on Higher Education across both public and private higher education institutions. This landmark legislation comprehensively addresses all forms of gender-based sexual harassment occurring in public spaces, workplaces, educational institutions, and online environments. Recognizing the pervasive nature of harassment, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have established policies to foster awareness, prevention, and adherence to the Safe Spaces Act, thereby safeguarding students and employees. As Gonzales (2022) aptly notes, no space is inherently safe, and the enactment of the Safe Spaces Act provides crucial protection for individuals of all genders in both workplaces and educational settings. In addition, gender issues are faced in the absence of an explicit and overarching gender policy on campus (Rodriguez, 2019).

In recent years, Philippine HEIs have significantly amplified their efforts to comply with the Safe Spaces Act. This includes ensuring students are informed of their legal rights and responsibilities, establishing comprehensive awareness programs and gender-sensitivity training, and implementing clear reporting procedures. Ragusta (2025) stated that there is a need for continuous campaigns for the awareness and compliance of students to enhance the understanding, implementations, and interventions for an effective Safe Spaces in an institution. In line with this, there is a recognized need to continuously implement proposed action plans to enhance or sustain the awareness, attitude, and compliance of college students towards RA 11313 (Borito & Yango, 2022). However, despite these efforts and the nationwide implementation of the law, a critical gap exists in understanding its effectiveness, particularly within private higher education institutions.

Saint Francis of Assisi College, as a private higher education institution, is equally committed to upholding the Safe Spaces Act. While the law mandates implementation across all HEIs, research specifically focusing on student awareness and adherence within private colleges like Saint Francis of Assisi College remains limited. Most existing studies tend to concentrate on public universities, leaving a significant void in our understanding of how private institutions enforce the law and, more importantly, how students perceive and comply with it. This lack of focused research means that challenges such as students' reluctance to report incidents, potential inconsistencies in policy enforcement, and varying levels of awareness remain largely unexplored in this specific context. Understanding these nuances is crucial for developing truly effective institutional policies that resonate with the experiences of students in private settings.

This study aims to address these critical gaps by assessing student awareness and adherence to the Safe Spaces Act at Saint Francis of Assisi College. The findings will provide essential insights to enhance existing institutional policies and programs, ultimately fostering a safer and more inclusive academic environment for all.

This study is significant as it provides valuable insights into the level of student awareness and adherence to the Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313) at Saint Francis of Assisi College. For the Institution, the administrators can evaluate the effectiveness of the current policies

and programs being implemented and could provide data-driven recommendations. For the students, this will empower them with the knowledge about their rights and responsibilities under the Safe Spaces Act promoting a safe learning environment. For policymakers, this study can serve as a reference in assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of the Safe Spaces Act in a private institution. Lastly, for future researchers, this study can serve as a foundation for further research on the implementation of policies and effectiveness of the Safe Spaces Act in a private higher education.

Methodology

Research Design

The researchers utilized the descriptive-correlational research design, it focuses in determining the level of awareness and adherence to the Safe Spaces Act (R.A. 11313) of the college students of Saint Francis of Assisi College – Las Piñas Campus. The researchers also aimed to investigate the importance of a link between two or more variables or elements using this research design (Stangor & Walinga, 2019). Through its descriptive aspect, the study depicted student legal understanding and compliance clearly while its correlational component examined potential significant links between awareness and adherence. The application of this non-experimental design proved suitable for examining naturally occurring variables within real-life environments like Saint Francis of Assisi College – Las Piñas Campus. The study generated essential information that institutions could use to develop policies and programs that would boost student adherence to the Safe Spaces Act.

Respondents

The respondents of this study are the college students of Saint Francis of Assisi College – Las Piñas Campus. For the academic year 2024-2025, the officially enrolled students are 531 from first year to fourth year level. Using the Slovin formula, a sample size of 228 respondents was provided from population (531) to obtain a statistically reliable result considering a 0.05 margin of error. The actual sample was chosen through the random sampling technique. For the inclusion criteria, all officially enrolled college students are eligible to participate in the study.

Instrument

The researcher adapted a questionnaire from Borito and Yango (2022), Awareness, Attitude, and Compliance with RA 11313 – Safe Spaces Act Among College Students in a Higher Education Institution in Laguna, International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis. The adapted questionnaire was validated by three research experts: one licensed psychometrician and two postgraduate-degree holders with expertise in educational research and assessment, selected based on their professional qualifications and experience in instrument validation both face and content, pilot tested, and checked its validity and reliability through Cronbach alpha test with validated and reliability results of 88% that is interpreted as Good.

The Instrument is a two-part questionnaire. The first part focused on the respondents' level of awareness on the Safe Spaces Act and the second part focused on the respondents' adherence to the Safe Spaces Act. The statistical scale of measurement used was the 4-likert scale. For the data analysis, the statistical treatment that was utilized was mean and frequency to determine the level of awareness and level of adherence of the respondents to the Safe Spaces Act and to answer if there is a significant relationship between the level of awareness and level of adherence of the respondents to the Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313) the researcher utilized Pearson's R Correlation and a methodological triangulation was used to enhance the validity of the findings of the quantitative data from a structured questions with qualitative insights gathered through open-ended items in the same questionnaire.

Procedure

An adapted and validated survey questionnaire was used to gather the study results. First, a permission from the administrators were secured. A brief orientation about the stud, its benefits and purpose, additionally, informed consent were provided and placed, secured with signatures of the respondents. The researcher ensured the respondents had the right to withdraw and participated voluntarily in the study. Anonymity and confidentiality were observed before, during and after the data gathering. The identity and data collected from the respondents was kept private. The researchers ensured that there were no physical or social harm affected the process of the data gathering. After the respondents completed the questionnaires, the data gathered were tallied, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted by the researchers with the aid of a statistician. The researcher ensured an accurate and honest report in all aspects of the research, including methods, data collection, analysis, and results. This includes avoiding fabrication, falsification, or misrepresentation of data.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted with the approval from the executive heads of Saint Francis of Assisi College. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study through a statement attached with the survey questionnaire. An informed consent was secured emphasizing the respondents' voluntary involvement and the option to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were strictly maintained, with data used only for academic purposes in accordance to the Data Privacy Act of 2012. There were no physical or social harm affected the process of the data gathering. An accurate and honest report in all aspects of the research, including methods, data collection, analysis, and results is enforced. Ensured the avoidance of fabrication, falsification, or misrepresentation of data. The study was patterned by the Ethical Review Boards of Saint Francis of Assisi College.

Results and Discussion

The table below presents the respondents' level of awareness of the Safe Spaces Act (R.A. 11313), specifically categorized into three key areas: Physical Spaces, Social Spaces, and Institutional Implementation. These dimensions reflect how well students understand the provisions of the law across different environments within the academic setting.

The respondents' level of awareness to the Safe Spaces Act (R.A. 11313) in terms of: Physical Spaces, Social Spaces, and Institutions Implementation of R.A. 11313

Table 1. *Physical Spaces*

No.	Criteria	Mean	Interpretation	Level
1	The classroom is secure and free from physical hazards.	3.53	Strongly Agree	High level
2	The policies on maintaining the physical safety within and outside the classroom for all students are implemented.	3.47	Strongly Agree	High level
3	The management and storage of documents are practiced properly with confidentiality by teachers and staff.	3.46	Strongly Agree	High level
4	The teachers and staff participate on tasks in security and monitoring that ensures the safety and security of students during and outside class hours.	3.42	Strongly Agree	High level
5	The students are aware of the different support services that help in ensuring their safety and needs.	3.30	Strongly Agree	High level
Grand Mean		3.43	Strongly Agree	High level

Legend: Strongly Agree (4) 3.26-4.00; Agree (3) 2.51-3.25; Disagree (2) 1.76-2.50; Very Disagree (1) 1.00-1.75

The table shows the respondents' level of awareness of the Safe Spaces Act (R.A. 11313) in terms of Physical Spaces. Data reveals that in terms of physical spaces, criteria no. 1: "The classroom is secure and free from physical hazards" got the highest mean of 3.53 and an interpretation of Strongly Agree. On the other hand, though criteria no. 5: "The students are aware of the different support services that help in ensuring their safety and needs" got the lowest mean of 3.30, the respondents still assessed it as "Strongly Agree". This still suggests that the administration should strengthen the visibility of the support services or offices that could help and ensure the physical safety of students.

Generally, the respondents strongly agree that they are aware of R.A. 11313 in terms of physical spaces based on the overall mean of 3.43. Further, the result implies that, from the respondents' point of view, the physical spaces that the institution provide is safe and does not have any physical hazards that could harm the students. In addition, the respondents strongly agree and feel the implementation and monitoring of safety protocols, confidentiality, and support systems to ensure their safety inside the institutions. According to Saputra and Lael (2025) improving and overseeing the quality of the infrastructure is a crucial element to guarantee a sustainable, inclusive, and secure education for all the students. Support Services such as Safety Officers, Security services, and Engineers together with the teachers in the institution play an essential role in ensuring and promoting safety of the students in terms of physical spaces.

Table 2. *Social Spaces*

No.	Criteria	Mean	Interpretation	Level
1	The students are allowed to express their beliefs and identities without judgement.	3.36	Strongly Agree	High level
2	The students can actively seek help and ask for peer support in class.	3.38	Strongly Agree	High level
3	The institution maintains a positive vibe in making the students feel welcomed and respected.	3.49	Strongly Agree	High level
4	The institution implements policies on maintaining psychological safety within the school. (e.g. zero tolerance of harassment/bullying)	3.45	Strongly Agree	High level
5	The teachers and staff encourage students to interact with one another in positive ways.	3.53	Strongly Agree	High level
Grand Mean		3.44	Strongly Agree	High level

Legend: Strongly Agree (4) 3.26-4.00; Agree (3) 2.51-3.25; Disagree (2) 1.76-2.50; Very Disagree (1) 1.00-1.75

Displayed in the table is the respondents' level of awareness to the Safe Spaces Act (R.A. 11313) in terms of Social Spaces. The result reveals that criteria no. 5: "The teachers and staff encourage students to interact with one another in positive ways" got the highest mean of 3.53 and an interpretation of Strongly Agree. On the contrary, though criteria no. 1: "The students are allowed to express their beliefs and identities without judgement" got the lowest mean of 3.36, the student-respondents still assessed it as "Strongly Agree". This suggests that students have a freedom and safety to express themselves without getting judgements from others. Overall, the grand mean for the Social Spaces is 3.44 and interpreted as Strongly Agree. It implies that, from the point of view of the respondents, students are aware with the Safe Spaces Act in terms of Social Spaces wherein the support system encourages them to seek help and interact with each other, felt the warm welcome of the institution's community, and implemented policies to maintain psychological safety. As



stated by Middleton-Moz et al. (2025), an important element in fostering safety in the classroom is to establish a value-based learning community wherein everyone respects the diverse opinions and beliefs, allowing students to share personal narratives in a friendly atmosphere where there is no judgement and criticisms.

Table 3. Institutions implementation of R.A. 11313

No.	Criteria	Mean	Interpretation	Level
1	The institution has integrated the Safe Spaces Act during orientation programs to educate students about their rights and responsibilities under this law.	3.44	Strongly Agree	High level
2	The institution has included information about the Safe Spaces Act in its student manual or handbook, ensuring that all students have access to clear guidelines and policies.	3.34	Strongly Agree	High level
3	The institution actively promotes the Safe Spaces Act through posters, announcements, or online platforms to ensure widespread awareness within the campus community.	3.40	Strongly Agree	High level
4	The academic departments include topics related to the Safe Spaces Act and its importance in relevant subjects or classroom discussions.	3.35	Strongly Agree	High level
5	The Guidance Office provides counseling and support services for students who experience or witness violations of the Safe Spaces Act.	3.51	Strongly Agree	High level
Grand Mean		3.41	Strongly Agree	High level

Legend: Strongly Agree (4) 3.26-4.00; Agree (3) 2.51-3.25; Disagree (2) 1.76-2.50; Very Disagree (1) 1.00-1.75

Shown in table is the respondents’ level of awareness to the Safe Spaces Act (R.A. 11313) in terms of Institutions implementation of R.A. 11313. Result reveals that criteria no. 5: “The Guidance Office provides counseling and support services for students who experience or witness violations of the Safe Spaces Act” got the highest mean of 3.51 and an interpretation of Strongly Agree. Moreover, all the criteria under the institutional implementation of R.A. 11313 were assessed as Strongly Agree and has a grand mean of 3.41. On the other hand, though criteria no. 2: “The institution has included information about the Safe Spaces Act in its student manual or handbook, ensuring that all students have access to clear guidelines and policies” got the lowest mean of 3.34 it is still interpreted as Strongly Agree. It implies that the strategies and implementation of the institutions should be maintained and still be improved or enhanced to better feel and see by the students. In addition, the responsible administrators should strengthen the awareness of the students on the information of R.A. 1131 that is indicated in the student manual and better access to the guidelines and policies. As stated to the Commission on Higher Education – Regional Office XI (CHED, 2022), the memorandum outlines guidelines aligned with institutional compliance of the integration of salient features and the corresponding sanctions of R.A. 11313 in the Student Handbook and Faculty Manual is necessary. Furthermore, Higher Education Institutions is mandated to educate their students about the provisions of R.A. 11313 and the processes of reporting and monitoring. It is also important that the institution’s values must always be aligned with the protection and promotion of safety of all its stakeholders, especially the students (Borito & Yango, 2022).

Table 4. The respondent’s level of adherence to the Safe Spaces Act (R.A 11313)

No.	Criteria	Mean	Interpretation	Level
1	I actively avoid catcalling or making unsolicited comments about someone's appearance.	3.63	Strongly Agree	High Level
2	I refrain from making misogynistic, transphobic, homophobic, or sexist slurs in any setting.	3.58	Strongly Agree	High Level
3	I do not make or share sexual jokes or content that could make others uncomfortable.	3.62	Strongly Agree	High Level
4	I ensure that my online behavior does not include cyberbullying, cyberstalking, or gender-based online sexual harassment.	3.69	Strongly Agree	High Level
5	I avoid behaviors like wolf-whistling, making unwanted invitations, or engaging in groping or sexual assault.	3.69	Strongly Agree	High Level
6	I consciously avoid making offensive body gestures or engaging in actions that could be considered sexually inappropriate.	3.68	Strongly Agree	High Level
7	I respect personal boundaries and avoid cursing, taunting, or using intrusive gazing toward others.	3.64	Strongly Agree	High Level
8	I report incidents of gender-based harassment or discrimination to the appropriate authorities if I witness or experience them.	3.48	Strongly Agree	High Level
9	I actively call out or discourage peers from making derogatory remarks or engaging in inappropriate actions against others.	3.53	Strongly Agree	High Level
10	I believe that my school is fostering a safe and inclusive environment and is shared responsibility among all students.	3.55	Strongly Agree	High Level
Grand Mean		3.61	Strongly Agree	High Level

Legend: Strongly Agree (4) 3.26-4.00; Agree (3) 2.51-3.25; Disagree (2) 1.76-2.50; Very Disagree (1) 1.00-1.75

The table shows the respondents’ level of adherence to the Safe Spaces Act (R.A 11313). The result reveals that criteria no. 4: “I ensure that my online behavior does not include cyberbullying, cyberstalking, or gender-based online sexual harassment”, and criteria no. 5:

“I avoid behaviors like wolf-whistling, making unwanted invitations, or engaging in groping or sexual assault” both have the mean of 3.69 and an interpretation of Strongly Agree got the highest mean. It implies that students are aware of their behaviour and of the Act may it be virtual or physical, which gives them the initiative to adhere with the policies and guidelines. On the other hand, though criteria no. 8: “I report incidents of gender-based harassment or discrimination to the appropriate authorities if I witness or experience them” with the mean of 3.48 is the lowest, the interpretation is still Strongly Agree. It suggests that administration should strengthen the communication and system or mechanism wherein students can safely report incidents of gender-based harassment or discrimination.

Overall, the grand mean is 3.61 which is interpreted as Strongly Agree. It implies that the respondents strongly agree that they adhere to R.A. 11313. This suggests the administration to enhance and maintain the policies and guidelines being implemented in the institution. Monitoring and evaluating once in a while to assess its effectivity to the students. According to Borito and Yango (2022), students should be required to attend and participate advance topics related to gender and development, gender equality, and other related topics to enrich awareness and maintenance of knowledge about Safe Spaces Act. In addition, a Gender and Development Office and Coordinator should be available to implement, monitor, and evaluate programs related to R.A. 11313.

The table below presents the statistical analysis of the relationship between the respondents’ level of awareness and their level of adherence to the Safe Spaces Act (R.A. 11313), determining whether a significant correlation exists between the two variables.

Table 5. Significant relationship between the respondent’s level of awareness and level of adherence

	<i>R Value</i>	<i>P Value</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Physical spaces	0.5737	0.00001	Significant	Reject the Null Hypothesis
Social spaces	0.5301	0.00001	Significant	Reject the Null Hypothesis
Institutions implementation of R.A. 11313	0.4798	0.00001	Significant	Reject the Null Hypothesis

Level of Significance = 0.05

The table show the results of the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant and moderate positive relationship between the respondents’ level of awareness and their level of adherence to the Safe Spaces Act (R.A. 11313) across three specific aspects: physical spaces, social spaces, and institutional implementation. The correlation coefficients (R values) ranged from 0.4798 to 0.5737, indicating consistent moderate positive correlations in all domains. These values show that as awareness of the Safe Spaces Act is greater, so is the level of compliance among respondents. Of the three dimensions discussed, the highest correlation was in physical spaces, where the R value was 0.5737. This shows that respondents with greater awareness of the rules and regulations that govern physical environments are more likely to comply with them. Social spaces, however, had a relatively lower but still statistically significant correlation (R = 0.5301), which shows that awareness of the right conduct in social environments also results in compliance. Lastly, the institutional enforcement of the Act had a moderate correlation (R = 0.4798), which shows that awareness of institutional measures and policies is also associated with compliance, albeit to a lesser extent. All of the respective P-values were 0.00001, which is significantly lower than the 0.05 level of significance. This shows that the observed relationships are highly statistically significant and are unlikely to be observed by chance. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which suggests no significant relationship between awareness and compliance, is rejected for all three dimensions. These findings support the argument that greater levels of awareness of the Safe Spaces Act are significantly related to greater levels of compliance with its principles. The findings highlight the necessity of educational campaigns and institutional interventions to raise awareness of the Safe Spaces Act. As awareness rises, people are more likely to understand, accept, and comply with the provisions of the law. This relationship highlights a pragmatic recommendation for institutions to continue improving awareness programs, which are sure to result in increased compliance with safe conduct in physical, social, and institutional environments. In summary, there exists a close and critical relationship between awareness and compliance, hence the need for uninterrupted information flow and advocacy for the Safe Spaces Act.

To support the quantitative data a methodological triangulation was done by the researchers, through In Vivo coding, which surfaced three main themes: First, an Inclusive Environment emphasizes the importance of creating safe physical and social spaces for all students regardless of gender, identity, or background. This aligns with the high scores in physical safety and classroom security, confirming that students generally feel protected within institutional spaces. However, it also reveals the need for more conscious and visible efforts towards inclusivity, especially in social settings where unconscious biases remain dominant.

Awareness, the second overarching theme, supports directly the conclusion of the study that awareness and knowledge of the provisions of the Safe Spaces Act has a direct correlation with student compliance and good behavior. Students with awareness of institutional policy, safety, and reporting processes are most likely to know of violations, respond accordingly, and follow guidelines. The quantitative high scores in this category attest to the fact that most of the respondents know the provisions of the Act, although more specific targeted awareness campaigns can further enhance compliance, especially in less-targeted areas such as institutional support and policy awareness.

Lastly, Support System theme points to the critical role played by institutional support services—counseling, safety officers, and supportive faculty—in generating a feeling of safety and support among students. Though respondents indicated high overall agreement, the findings indicated lower mean in awareness of these support services that may reflect a gap in communication or visibility. This suggests that institutions need to not only offer these services but also bring them into focus and make them more visible

and accessible to the student community.

Conclusions

The finding of the study confirms a significant positive relationship between respondents' level of awareness and their compliance with the Safe Spaces Act (R.A. 11313). Pearson correlation coefficients ranging from 0.4798 to 0.5737—statistically significant at $p = 0.00001$ which indicates a very high to moderately strong correlation. Furthermore, the strongest relationship was observed in the physical spaces category, suggesting that heightened awareness of classroom and campus safety directly correlates with greater adherence to safety measures and institutional policies. Substantial, albeit slightly lower, correlations were also found in the domains of social spaces and institutional implementation.

Quantitative data in the assessment of physical spaces yielded a grand mean of 3.43, interpreted as "Strongly Agree", reinforcing that respondents perceive their institutions as proactive in maintaining physical safety and infrastructure. However, the relatively lower mean in support-related items (e.g., visibility of support services such as supports for gender expressions, safety officers, or help desks) suggests areas for improvement (Rejoj, 2021). These findings are complemented and deepened by the qualitative themes generated from the methodological triangulation method through In Vivo coding, which surfaced three main themes: Inclusive Environment, Awareness, and Support System.

The research verifies a distinct and statistically established correlation between awareness and observance of the Safe Spaces Act. The institutions must reinforce inclusive practice, maintain awareness programs, and enhance the visibility and responsiveness of support mechanisms. The Institution must reinforce three key areas; these are: Report mechanism, information dissemination through manuals and orientations, and Gender and Development Office and Coordinator establishment. This will not only continue to ensure the safety of the students but also develop a culture of respect, equality, and responsibility—strong pillars of the Safe Spaces Act. These interventions, based on data and students lived realities, are critical in creating a safe, inclusive, and caring environment.

For the Future research direction, further investigation into the long-term effects of Safe Spaces Act awareness campaigns could be achieved through longitudinal studies, allowing us to monitor shifts in student behavior and institutional culture over extended periods. A comparative analysis of private versus public higher education institutions might also shed light on variations in implementation and efficacy. Furthermore, researchers could delve into the impact of incorporating gender-sensitivity education into the curriculum, examining its influence on student awareness and compliance.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Ralph Arjay C. Dela Cruz

Saint Francis of Assisi College – Philippines

Jhoniel C. Samoling

Saint Francis of Assisi College – Philippines

Danilo R. Tubeo Jr.

Saint Francis of Assisi College – Philippines