Empowering songs aid sexual assault survivors, Ohio State program finds

By Megan Henry

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At first glance, a Spotify playlist featuring a collection of songs by artists such as Selena Gomez, The Beatles and Florence and The Machine looks like any other playlist.

A quick glance up at the name of the playlist, By Survivors For Survivors, proves otherwise. The playlist, which includes more than 50 songs, was created by Ohio State University’s Sexual Civility and Empowerment Program for survivors of sexual assault.

Blaire Teaford, a then-intern for the SCE program, came up with the idea for the playlist while she was driving home to Cincinnati.

“I was listening to all the songs that I really enjoy through my journey as a survivor,” Teaford said. “I was thinking about how I really wish I knew other people’s songs because I wanted to build up this list of only five songs that I related to.”

That got her thinking about how a Spotify playlist could be a good way to help survivors, so she talked to Natalie Spiert, the assistant director of the SCE program, who welcomed the idea.

“It’s a very innovative, fun way of being able to provide another resource to students that they can use during their free time,” Spiert said.

The playlist of empowering songs, by mostly female artists such as Rachel Platten, dates back to February 2016. Teaford, a rising senior at OSU who now volunteers at the SCE program, has been in charge of managing the playlist.

Survivors can anonymously suggest songs to be added to the playlist through a Google Form that goes to Teaford, who has to approve the music.

“I try to stay away from things that are triggering, but obviously I know that things that are somewhat sad can be somewhat comforting to other people,” Teaford said.
She looks at the lyrics and listens to the song, and she adds it to the playlist if it passes her test.

Typically, Teaford doesn’t interact with people who listen to the playlist, but one time she heard how a student listened to the songs during her walk to class.

“That was a ‘yea’ moment for me,” Teaford said.

The SCE program received a lot of song submissions within the first year of the playlist starting, but has since seen a decline in recommendations.

“I think a lot of people who were initially enthused already told me their songs,” Teaford said.

She encourages people to submit songs and said the best part of the playlist is knowing the music is helping survivors.

“If you’re ever feeling down or possibly something triggered you and you want to calm down, or you’re just having a really bad day,” Teaford said, “you can put it on and it will lift your spirits up.”

**Empowering music**

The first 10 songs on the By Survivors for Survivors playlist on Spotify:

1. “Revival” by Selena Gomez
2. “Stand By You” by Rachel Platten
3. “Television” by You Won’t
4. “Rise” by Selena Gomez
5. “I Am Leaving” by Blue Roses
6. “Warrior” by Demi Lovato
7. “Sweet Disposition” by The Temper Trap **SUBSCRIBE TODAY**
8. “Survivors” by Selena Gomez
   Choose the plan that’s right for you. Digital access or digital + print delivered
9. “Babylon” by Typhoon
Ohio State closes sexual-assault center, fires 4 after complaints

By Jennifer Smola
The Columbus Dispatch

Ohio State University will permanently close its Sexual Civility and Empowerment unit amid concerns that it failed to properly report students’ sexual assault complaints.

The university also is eliminating four positions that fell under the unit, known as SCE, and terminating those employees.

A team of independent auditors are assisting with a review of SCE files to ensure Ohio State has fulfilled its obligations to report certain offenses to law enforcement, federal regulators and other authorities, according to the university.

The findings of the external review of SCE have spurred a university-wide review of Title IX practices, with Ohio State engaging experts to conduct an evaluation of its policies and help create a new, redesigned and “best-in-class” model to support victims of sexual assault, the university said Tuesday.

Ohio State began investigating the SCE in February 2016 through an Office of Student Life human resources review, leading to additional independent reviews of the unit’s structural and reporting issues. The university suspended the unit in February, amid the latest ongoing external review, completed May 28, and concerns that it was not properly supporting victims.

The closure resulted in pushback from students and survivors, seeking action from the university to provide survivors with resources. An April letter signed by nearly 60 student organizations called for the university to provide a centralized and personalized resource for survivors of sexual violence.
“Ohio State will do all that we can to be a national leader in preventing and responding to sexual misconduct,” Ohio State President Michael V. Drake said in a statement. “Our campuses must be safe places for all members of our community to learn, work and grow. We remain steadfastly and unwaveringly committed to this goal.”

Documents obtained by The Dispatch through a public records request detail a variety of complaints about the SCE center and its leadership.

In one document, the OhioHealth Sexual Assault Response Network of Central Ohio, or SARNCO, outlined a list of concerns with SCE and its treatment of survivors. That document indicated that some survivors were subjected to victim-blaming, unethical and re-traumatizing treatment by SCE advocates. Some victims were told they were lying or delusional, suffer from mental illness, have an active imagination, don’t understand their own experience or fabricated their story, according to SARNCO’s concerns.

SARNCO also wrote that it had received reports that SCE advocates have written survivor conduct hearing and other legal documents, and have told survivors they need to embellish their stories because “their real experience wasn’t serious enough” to receive justice or legal protection.

Some survivors were reportedly told they wouldn’t receive support from SCE because they weren’t credible, were not “ready to heal,” or because they would not disclose the identity of a perpetrator.

Another document from a former SCE employee describes one SCE leader as exaggerating her credentials, openly disavowing the use of advocate best practices, and training SCE hires to do the same.

Rules for reporting sexual assaults on campus can be complex. Even if a student doesn’t want to go to law enforcement about a sexual assault, Federal Title IX and Clery Act policies indicate colleges who receive Title IX funding must report the number of sexual assaults that occur on-campus, or through an off-campus educational program or activity of the school. Most university employees are responsible for reporting such incidents, but mental-health or pastoral counselors and psychologists have a confidentiality exemption and are typically exempt from those federal reporting requirements.
Sometimes, federal and local laws clash when it comes to reporting sexual crimes to law enforcement. The Violence Against Women Act stipulates that educational programs must provide victims of sexual violence on campus information about their options regarding law enforcement, including a victim’s choice to either notify proper law enforcement or decline to notify such authorities. At the same time, Ohio law requires a person to report to law enforcement if they know that a felony has been committed.

Indications that SCE failed to adequately comply with policy requirements appear to cover a range or incidents, according to the university. Some appear to have occurred off campus or in other cities or before the survivor was enrolled at the university. But other on-campus incidents weren’t properly reported to police or to the university in a timely fashion.

Students can currently seek support through the university’s Counseling and Consultation Service, Student Advocacy Center, Student Wellness Center and Student Health Services, as well as SARNCO and the Mount Carmel Crime and Trauma Assistance Program.

“This is an immensely important issue, and Ohio State is committed to having the very best systems in place to support and protect our students, faculty and staff,” Bruce McPherson, Ohio State executive vice president and provost, said in a statement Tuesday.

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OSU closes sexual-civility unit

By Jennifer Smola

The Columbus Dispatch

Ohio State University will permanently close its Sexual Civility and Empowerment unit amid concerns that it failed to properly report students' sexual-assault complaints and that some victims were told they were lying or suffering from delusions.

The university also is eliminating four positions that fell under the unit, known as SCE, and terminating those employees.

A team of independent auditors is helping to review SCE files to ensure Ohio State has fulfilled its obligations to report certain offenses to law enforcement, federal regulators and other authorities, according to the university.

Documents obtained by The Dispatch through a public-records request detail a variety of complaints about Ohio State's SCE and its leadership.

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Some survivors reportedly were told they wouldn't receive support from SCE because they weren't credible, were not "ready to heal" or because they would not disclose the identity of a perpetrator, the network said.

"At OhioHealth SARNCO, our mission is 'To Empower All Survivors: To End Sexual Violence,'" SARNCO manager Heather Herron Murphy said in a statement to The Dispatch on Tuesday. "If we receive information about survivors' needs not being met, or survivors' concerns not being heard, we work to amplify those voices."

Another document from a former SCE employee criticized the leadership of Natalie Spiert, assistant director of SCE, and Karen Kyle, director of the Student Advocacy Center. The former employee said she was frequently discouraged from working with campus community partners, including the Title IX office, Student Conduct, Health and Wellness Center and Counseling and Consultation Services, among others. The employee described Spiert as exaggerating her credentials, openly disavowing the use of advocate best practices and training SCE hires to do the same.
The findings of the external review of SCE have spurred a university-wide review of its federal Title IX practices. Title IX, the federal law prohibiting discrimination in education based on gender, has helped ensure that women have an equal opportunity in athletics, but more recently it has been used in efforts to curb sexual misconduct on campuses.

Ohio State has engaged experts from the Philadelphia-based law firm Cozen O'Connor to conduct an evaluation of its policies and help create a new and redesigned model to support victims of sexual assault, the university said Tuesday.

Ohio State began investigating SCE in February 2016 through an Office of Student Life human resources review, leading to additional independent reviews of the unit's structural and reporting issues. The university suspended SCE in February, amid the latest ongoing external review, completed May 28, and concerns that it was not properly supporting victims.

The closure resulted in pushback from students and survivors seeking action from the university to provide survivors with resources. An April letter signed by nearly 60 student organizations called for the university to provide a centralized and personalized resource for survivors of sexual violence.

The university said Tuesday it will reach out to students who have been in contact with SCE to ensure they have received necessary support services.

"Ohio State will do all that we can to be a national leader in preventing and responding to sexual misconduct," Ohio State President Michael V. Drake said in a statement. "Our campuses must be safe places for all members of our community to learn, work and grow. We remain steadfastly and unwaveringly committed to this goal."

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Indications that SCE failed to adequately comply with policy requirements appear to cover a range of sexual-assault incidents, Ohio State says. Some appear to have occurred off campus or in other cities or before the survivor was enrolled at the university. But other on-campus incidents weren't properly reported to police or to the university in a timely fashion.

SCE was established in 2015 as part of a larger university plan, dubbed Buckeyes ACT, to combat sexual misconduct and relationship violence. On its website, SCE's mission is described as "inspiring students to intervene, heal, and interrupt patterns of personal behavior." SCE worked to implement prevention
initiatives and advocacy support for survivors of sexual violence and reduce all forms of sexual misconduct, its website said.

With SCE’s closure, students can seek support through the university’s Counseling and Consultation Service, Student Advocacy Center, Student Wellness Center and Student Health Services, as well as SARNCO and the Mount Carmel Crime and Trauma Assistance Program.

“This is an immensely important issue, and Ohio State is committed to having the very best systems in place to support and protect our students, faculty and staff,” Bruce McPheron, Ohio State executive vice president and provost, said in an emailed statement Tuesday. jsmola@dispatch.com @jennsmola
Ohio State News (https://news.osu.edu/)

August 21, 2018

University announces steps to address sexual misconduct

Changes and enhancements coincide with start of new academic year

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Ohio State University announced today the creation of a centralized office for responding to sexual- and gender-based harassment, violence and other forms of discrimination and harassment. This centralized report-and-response office provides informed and compassionate responses to students, faculty and staff impacted by discrimination and harassment. The office provides a dedicated system to assist members of the university community who have experienced, witnessed or are aware of sexual misconduct, have questions about the university’s Sexual Misconduct Policy or are seeking more information about resources or reporting options.

“The university will continue to focus on advancing our efforts in this vital area,” President
Michael V. Drake said, "The members of our Buckeye community deserve nothing less."

The immediate focus will be on enhancing the university's Title IX resources for intake and assessment. The ultimate structure and nomenclature of the office will be finalized over the course of the fall semester with the opportunity for participation and feedback by students, faculty and staff. The new office reports to Executive Vice President and Provost Bruce A. McPherson.

Intake-and-outreach coordinators, under the oversight of the Title IX Coordinator, will be dedicated specifically to helping students, faculty and staff understand their rights, options and services available to them; report concerns; coordinate interim measures (academic, residential, etc.); make referrals to confidential campus, community and other resources; as well as file required reports to police and other appropriate agencies. Coordinator staff can be reached by calling 614-247-5838. More information will be available at https://titleix.osu.edu/.

Intake-and-outreach coordinator staff will work with complainants, respondents or any member of the university community to facilitate access to the full range of available resources. Staffing is in place and will be expanded this semester with the hiring of three additional coordinators. Investigation and adjudication functions will continue to be supervised by Deputy Title IX Coordinators in Student Conduct and the Office of Human Resources.
In addition to this centralized report-and-response model, the university continues to provide a continuum of confidential resources for students, faculty and staff. As a reminder, university community members can choose whether to seek confidential assistance or disclose their experience to the university. To facilitate access to confidential resources, the university has established a confidential phone line for students who wish to be connected directly with a confidential resource, including licensed psychologists and physicians. The phone line is available from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday at 614-688-3956.

Additionally, students can access confidential counseling on campus through the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service and Student Health Services, offering medical confidentiality and support. Confidential advocacy services are also available in the community 24 hours a day, seven days a week through the Sexual Assault Response Network of Central Ohio (SARNCO). Faculty and staff can access confidential resources through Ohio State's Employee Assistance Program and SARNCO. The Wexner Medical Center's STAR Program also provides on-campus confidential advocacy and counseling in addition to the services currently available through the medical center's Emergency Department and the Mount Carmel Crime and Trauma Assistance Program.

These actions are part of an ongoing review and enhancement of the university's Title IX programs and procedures. Additional steps
coinciding with the start of the academic year include the below.

- An online course, now in pilot mode, will be launched widely this fall to provide students, faculty and staff with required education in prevention and tools to challenge and report inappropriate and harmful behavior when witnessed.

- The university is continuing to expand opportunities for student engagement. For example, two additional students will be included on the task force for Buckeyes ACT, the university’s comprehensive plan to combat sexual misconduct and relationship violence.

- An enhanced sexual- and gender-based harassment and violence website will provide detailed information about the comprehensive support services available.

The actions align directly with interim recommendations from nationally recognized experts Gina Maisto Smith and Leslie M. Gomez from the Philadelphia-based law firm Cozen O’Connor. In June, the university announced that it had engaged Smith and Gomez to help create a redesigned, best-in-class model to support victims of sexual assault and conduct a thorough evaluation of the broader Title IX program.

“Through this audit, we have observed Ohio State’s strong commitment to fostering increased reporting, coordinating university
responses and creating an environment free from sex- and gender-based harassment and violence,” Smith said.

A final, comprehensive set of recommendations from Cozen O’Connor is expected this semester, with further implementation to take place throughout the academic year.

“We spent several weeks at Ohio State over the spring and summer meeting with a wide range of university administrators, and we look forward to the opportunity to speak with students now that they are back on campus,” Gomez added. “The actions taken thus far are part of a series of efforts that will continue to enhance the university’s prevention and response programs. Student input and feedback are critical to those efforts.”

Smith and Gomez observed further that navigating the complex and evolving arena of campus and community services related to sexual- and gender-based harassment and violence is a national challenge. A centralized, report-and-response approach in which the university offers personalized guidance can help impacted community members more quickly find the support they desire and enable the university to take responsive action to eliminate sexual misconduct, prevent its recurrence and address its effects.

“Ohio State has an existing and extensive system for providing support and services,” Smith said. “Our goal is to enhance the strength of those programs and provide a continuum of
support and resources tailored to the specific needs of the university community.”

Related information can be found at titleix.osu.edu or www.osu.edu/buckeyesact.

“We strive each day to make Ohio State the best possible place to live, work and learn,” McPheron said. “Our work toward preventing and responding to sexual misconduct on campus is vital to that effort.”
OSU office helps victims of sexual harassment

By Jim Woods

The Columbus Dispatch

Ohio State University announced Tuesday the creation of a new centralized office to address issues involving sexual misconduct and gender harassment.

The school promised in June that it would create a new office by the start of fall semester, after closing its troubled Sexual Civility and Empowerment Center and eliminating four positions. The closure followed an independent review that found the center had failed to properly report and handle some students' sexual-assault complaints.

Ohio State says the new centralized office — which has yet to be given a formal name — will respond to sexual and gender-based harassment, violence and other forms of discrimination and harassment.

"The university will continue to focus on advancing our efforts in this vital area," President Michael V. Drake said in a prepared statement.

Ohio State has been under scrutiny for its practices concerning compliance with federal Title IX, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender and also deals with issues concerning sexual harassment and sexual assault. A university that receives federal funds could be held legally responsible when it knows about or ignores such complaints.

Beyond the independent review, there also were complaints about the former Sexual Civility and Empowerment Center that survivors were subjected to victim-blaming and re-traumatizing by the center’s staff. According to the complaints, victims were told they were lying or delusional, had an overactive imagination, failed to understand their own experience or fabricated their story.

The university suspended the center’s operations in February, prompting complaints from students that the school was not providing victims with resources. Ohio State closed the center and brought in independent auditors to determine whether the school fulfilled its obligations to report certain sexual offenses to law enforcement, federal regulators and other authorities.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Education opened a Title IX investigation last week into how Ohio State handled allegations of sexual misconduct involving former university physician Richard Strauss. More than 100 students have made sexual abuse claims against Strauss, who killed himself in 2005.

Ohio State hired the Philadelphia firm of Cozen O’Connor in June to conduct an evaluation of the Title IX program and create a redesigned program to support victims of sexual assault. Creation of the new office is based on its interim recommendations; the law firm will deliver a full report and recommendations in the coming months.

The new office will be dedicated to helping students, faculty and staff understand their rights and make referrals to confidential campus, community resources and appropriate law-enforcement agencies, the university said in its news release.
There is staff in place and three additional people will be hired. The staff will be supervised by deputy Title IX coordinators who work in the school's Office of Human Resources.

The university also has established a phone line for those who want access to confidential resources, including psychologists and physicians. The line is available from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays at 614-688-3956. Confidential counseling also is available through the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation and Student Health Services. jwoods@dispatch.com @Woodsnight
Trustees also heard an update Thursday on Ohio State's Title IX program. The university has been reviewing and evolving its policies around the federal gender-discrimination law since last year, when it shuttered its Sexual Civility and Empowerment center amid complaints.

The university is moving forward with a new centralized office for handling sexual- and gender-based harassment and misconduct and all other forms of discrimination and harassment complaints, said Ryan Schmiesing, vice provost for outreach and engagement.

The working name of the new program is the Office of Institutional Equity, which will be housed within the Office of Academic Affairs, Schmiesing told the board’s Audit and Compliance committee. The university is in the final stages of a national search for an associate vice president to lead the new office.

Thanks to a Victims of Crime Act grant from the Ohio attorney general, OSU also is working to bring on two confidential advocates from the OhioHealth Sexual Assault Response Network of Central Ohio who can help students and staff members deal with trauma and share information about reporting processes and resources.

The university hired three intake and outreach coordinators last fall to assist students and staff members in understanding their options and resources when dealing with harassment and discrimination.

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OSU names head of new harassment office

By Jennifer Smola

The Columbus Dispatch

Ohio State University has named the leader of a new office that will oversee the school’s response to reports of sexual and other harassment and discrimination.

Katherine Lasher, who has led Central Michigan University’s Office of Civil Rights and Institutional Equity since 2013, will be the associate vice president for Ohio State’s Office of Institutional Equity, OSU announced Wednesday in a news release. In her role at Central Michigan, she also served as the school’s Title IX coordinator and affirmative action officer.

Ohio State announced the new Office of Institutional Equity in August, two months after permanently closing its troubled Sexual Civility and Empowerment unit and terminating four employees who worked in that office. The university closed the unit amid concerns that it failed to properly report students’ sexual-assault complaints and that some students were subjected to victim-blaming or re-traumatizing treatment from the unit’s advocates.

The university has said the new Office of Institutional Equity, which will be housed within the school’s Office of Academic Affairs, will oversee Ohio State’s response to sexual- and gender-based harassment, violence and other forms of discrimination and harassment. The office is responsible for Ohio State’s compliance with federal Title IX regulations, the Americans with Disabilities Act, other federal and state laws and university policies.

“Our students and employees must learn and work in an environment that is fair, safe and just,” Ohio State Provost Bruce A. McPheron said in a news release. “Ohio State is committed to that standard, and Katherine will guide our work to ensure we meet this level of excellence.”

Lasher will report directly to McPheron and be paid $265,000 per year, Ohio State spokesman Ben Johnson said. She is scheduled to begin her new role Aug. 1.

A lawyer, Lasher was previously an attorney with Graydon Head & Ritchey, LLP in Cincinnati, a judicial law clerk for the First District Court of Appeals in Ohio for Judge J. Howard Sundermann, and a judicial law clerk for the Office of Administrative Law Judges.

“Ohio State is one of this nation’s great land grant universities, and I look forward to collaborating with students, faculty and staff to advance this office’s important mission,” Lasher said in a prepared statement in the release. “I am pleased to be returning to my home state to continue my work to ensure equitable treatment for all.” jsmola@dispatch.com @jennsmola
Glenn museum makes national historic registry

By Sheridan Hendrix

The Columbus Dispatch

The John and Annie Glenn Museum will be added to the National Register of Historic Places this month in the late astronaut’s hometown of New Concord.

The museum, which was John Glenn’s boyhood home, will be dedicated at a ceremony May 19 at 2 p.m. at the home at 72 W. Main St. in the Muskingum County village.

The Glens’ daughter, Lyn, will also be at the ceremony to help dedicate the property.

John Glenn was born in Cambridge and moved to New Concord with his family in 1923.

The house has also been designated an Ohio historic site and is on the National Park Service’s Register of Historic Places. shendrix@dispatch.com @sheridan120
Office of Institutional Equity

FOCUS AREAS  HOW WE CAN HELP  POLICIES AND STANDARDS  NEWS

If you need immediate help, call 911

The Office of Institutional Equity exists to help the Ohio State community prevent and respond to all forms of harassment, discrimination and sexual misconduct. This centralized office houses the university's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Protection of Minors, and Title IX functions. University policies and changes to the Student Code of Conduct are being updated effective Aug. 1, to reflect the Office of Institutional Equity.

The Ohio State University is committed to building and maintaining a diverse community to reflect human diversity and improve opportunities for all. The university is committed to equal opportunity, affirmative action, and eliminating harassment and discrimination. Ohio State will not tolerate retaliation in any form. The university is also committed to providing the best experience possible for minors while entrusted to our care. These commitments are both a moral imperative consistent with an intellectual community that celebrates individual differences and diversity, as well as a matter of law.

Ohio State does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, race, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, pregnancy, protected
veteran status, or any other bases under the law, in its activities, academic programs, admission, and employment.

MORE INFORMATION

The following areas are part of the Office of Institutional Equity:

**ADA ACCESSIBILITY**
- Guides the university’s efforts to provide seamless access to all of its programs, the physical and digital environments
- Focused on disability-based discrimination such as exclusion, refusal to accommodate, harassment and retaliation
- Provides oversight for the reasonable accommodations for students, employees, visitors and other program participants
- Provides training, information and resources on access and accommodations

**AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY**
- Ensures equity in all employment processes from time of hire to separation through the university’s Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) programs
- Consults with the university community to educate on the key principles of Affirmative Action and EEO and works to strategically align internal operations with applicable regulations
- Coordinates the collection, analysis, and reporting of key demographic and operational data to assess program impact

**PROTECTION OF MINORS**

**TITLE IX**
- Promotes the safety and welfare of minors who participate in activities and programs with minors, whom are entrusted to the university's care
- Outlines what is required of individuals interacting with minors, with the goal of safeguarding the wellbeing of minors
- Informs individuals of their reporting obligations in instances of known or suspected child abuse or neglect
- Responds to all incidents of sex- and gender-based harassment and discrimination, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, and pregnancy discrimination
- Provides support resources, investigation options, and interim measures
- Oversees prevention education and training around sexual misconduct for university community

The Office of Institutional Equity will also coordinate the university's response to all complaints of harassment and discrimination based on age, ancestry, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, race, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, pregnancy, protected veteran status, or any other bases under the law.

REPORT HARASSMENT OR DISCRIMINATION

HOW INSTITUTIONAL EQUITY CAN HELP

The Office of Institutional Equity will coordinate Ohio State's response to all complaints of harassment, discrimination and sexual misconduct affecting students, employees, graduate associates, appointees, volunteers, visitors, suppliers and contractors, including providing information on rights and options for formal investigation.

The office will also provide coordinated support to anyone impacted to help them access on- and off-campus support resources, including confidential resources.
Dedicated coordinators will help arrange interim measures to ensure continued access to educational and employment opportunities, such as no contact directives, changes in class or work schedule, emergency housing, counseling, and academic support.

The Office of Institutional Equity is also responsible for implementing and enforcing policies that govern accessibility and protection of minors.

These areas — which are currently housed within Human Resources, the University Office of Compliance and Integrity, and the Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator's Office — will all be part of the Office of Institutional Equity as of Thursday, Aug. 1, 2019.

NEWS

July 26, 2019

University policies updated

May 8, 2019

Ohio State names associate vice president for new Office of Institutional Equity
OSU sex assault center failures listed

By Jennifer Smola

The Columbus Dispatch

Ohio State's now-shuttered Sexual Civility and Empowerment center failed to report nearly 60 potential felonies as required by state law during its three-year existence, The Dispatch has learned.

The university announced in June 2018 that it was dissolving the unit, known as SCE, and firing four employees after an external review found it failed to properly document and report at least 20 sexual-assault complaints by students.

At that time, the university hired independent auditing specialists to review files at SCE, which opened in 2015. That audit identified 57 potential felonies that SCE should have reported to law enforcement but did not, the university said, revealing the review's findings for the first time in response to public records requests from The Dispatch. Given the nature of SCE's operations, it is likely that most, if not all, of the unreported crimes involved sexual assaults.

"This failure is unacceptable, which is one of the reasons the university shut down the office and engaged nationally recognized experts to create a redesigned, best-in-class model to support victims of sexual assault," Ohio State spokesman Chris Davey said in an emailed response to the audit findings.

The university paid more than $1.1 million in legal fees to create the redesigned Title IX program and review the SCE cases, according to payment totals obtained by The Dispatch. Most of that went to Philadelphia law firm Cozen O'Connor, which helped Ohio State create the new program, followed by national auditing firm Margolis Healy, which reviewed whether SCE cases were properly reported.

All 57 cases have since been reported to the appropriate law enforcement agencies, Ohio State said. Of those, 20 have been reported to university police, 30 have been reported to Columbus police and seven have been reported to other agencies.

As part of the audit, Ohio State told survivors about available resources and their rights and options, Davey said. That could include filing a police report or proceeding with a university investigation, for example. In all 57 cases, none pursued police investigations or authorized Ohio State to share their names with law enforcement.

Numerous federal and state laws can impact sexual violence reporting on or near a college campus, said Taylr Ucker-Lauderman, a spokeswoman for the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence.

Sexual assault survivors may not want to pursue police involvement, but reporting processes must be followed and survivors must know what to expect, especially since they often struggle with whether, when and how to report what happened to them, Ucker-Lauderman told The Dispatch in a statement.

"When these processes are not followed, that leaves the possibility of breaking the survivor’s trust, causing additional trauma, and interrupting their healing process," she said.
The 20 cases reported to Ohio State police — in November and February, in the wake of the SCE review by auditing specialists — occurred mostly in 2016 and 2017. Two occurred in 2014 or 2015, according to campus police reports obtained by The Dispatch. Because survivors did not pursue police action and their names were not included when Ohio State did report the crimes, police did not pursue investigations and the cases were closed, according to the police reports.

Columbus police did not respond to inquiries about the 30 cases reported to them by Ohio State.

The 20 campus felonies that initially went unreported to Ohio State police until the audit was completed were also required to be included in Ohio State’s annual crime data reporting mandated by the federal Jeanne Clery Act. However, all were properly reported under the Clery Act — either by SCE, through other university channels, or as part of the SCE review before the annual Clery Act reporting window had closed. Clery Act campus safety reports are due each year by October for the crime statistics from the previous calendar year.

Separately from the 57 potential felony cases that had gone unreported to law enforcement, two SCE cases that had been properly reported to law enforcement had not been included in Ohio State’s Clery Act campus safety reports, the auditing specialists found. Ohio State notified the U.S. Department of Education about the ongoing audit of SCE cases and the Clery reporting errors and identified the discrepancies in its 2018 campus safety report. No fines have been issued to date, Davey said.

Documents obtained by The Dispatch when Ohio State closed the center last year detailed a variety of complaints about SCE and its leadership. The records indicated some survivors were subjected to victim-blaming, told they were delusional or lying, or advised that they needed to embellish their stories because “their real experience wasn’t’ serious enough” to receive justice or legal protection.

Since the SCE’s closing, Ohio State has announced it is forming an Office of Institutional Equity, which will oversee the university’s response to sexual- and gender-based harassment violence, and other forms of discrimination and harassment. The office will be responsible for Ohio State’s compliance with Title IX, the Americans with Disabilities Act and other federal and state laws and university policies.

Leading the new office is Kathy Lasher, who oversaw a similar office at Central Michigan University.

Lasher said more colleges nationwide are shifting to such offices, and Ohio State’s commitment to addressing sexual misconduct was part of what drew her to the university.

“We are starting to see more universities move to this model because it’s important to have the same individuals who are trained specifically in this area — addressing concerns of harassment, and discrimination and sexual misconduct for all individuals at the university,” she said. jsmola@dispatch.com
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Stakes are high as OSU again addresses sexual equity issues

For all of the grief Ohio State University has taken for its handling of sexual assault matters in recent years, the casual observer might wonder what business an institution of higher education even has wading in such troubled waters.

One might be tempted to ask why such matters shouldn’t be left to police and courts.

But by choice and by law, that is not an option.

So with the inaugural director of OSU’s new Office of Institutional Equity beginning her duties this month, the university makes another attempt to deal effectively with students’ myriad issues around sexual conduct, harassment and relationship violence. We hope it gets it right this time.

It was just four years ago that Ohio State kicked off a new campaign it called Buckeyes ACT — an initiative around action, counseling and training — as it staked an ambitious claim to be a national leader in combating sexual misconduct and relationship violence on college campuses.

Then-Vice President Joe Biden, as President Barack Obama’s point person on this issue, was brought in to help announce new efforts for dealing with misconduct. These included establishing a Sexual Civility and Empowerment center.

But by June 2018, the SCE was shuttered amid complaints that some students were retraumatized by conduct including victim-blaming and failure to report assault complaints to law enforcement. The move was not without controversy, with some students who had been counseled by SCE staff upset to have lost their assistance.

We now know, as Dispatch Reporter Jennifer Smola recently revealed, that 57 potential felony crimes were not reported to police as they should have been by four fired SCE staff. All 57 cases were subsequently referred to appropriate law enforcement agencies, including campus and Columbus police, as part of an audit of the failed center and development of its successor.

The new institutional equity office is headed by Katherine Lasher, who held a similar position at Central Michigan University since 2013.

It is good to see the high importance OSU invests in this new position, with Lasher reporting directly to the university’s second in command, Provost and Executive Vice President Bruce McPherson.

Universities’ responsibilities for dealing with issues of sexual misconduct are spelled out by Title IX of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits gender discrimination at institutions receiving federal funds, and by the federal Jeanne Clery Act, which calls for annual crime reporting.

But even absent those mandates, Ohio State recognizes an obligation to the safety and well-being of students, especially given national data that 1 in 5 women report being subjected to sexual assault during their college years, said OSU spokesman Chris Davey.
OSU ran afoul of Title IX in 2010 and signed an agreement with the U.S. Department of Education in 2014 to address concerns, including complaints of a sexualized culture in the OSU marching band.

The university also is dealing with lawsuits alleging failure to protect hundreds of student athletes from sexual assault by Dr. Richard Strauss during a 20-year span that he worked with sports teams and in Student Health Services, ending with his retirement in 1998. Strauss committed suicide in 2005.

Given today’s #MeToo momentum and high intolerance for sexual misconduct, Lasher’s margin for error is slim, and the opportunity to be a national leader in gender equity is great.