MU's Office of Student Conduct handles few sex offense cases

By Samantha Sunne
September 24, 2013 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — One MU student was expelled for a sex offense in 2012. Another was suspended. Although dozens of sex offenses were reported to campus counselors and police last year, only those two students faced punishment from the Office of Student Conduct.

Assistant Director of Student Life and Student Conduct Director Donell Young said the office received two reports of "non-consensual sexual behavior" last year and both ended in penalties for the offenders. He declined to specify what the behaviors were but said they violated a university code of conduct prohibiting acts ranging from sexual harassment to rape.

Media accounts, statistics and police reports show there were far more than two sex offenses at MU last year. The Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center, a campus resource office known as the RSVP Center, received 92 such reports last year. MU Police received 14.

Neither RSVP nor MU Police routinely notify Student Conduct of the incidents, RSVP Center Coordinator Danica Wolf and MU Police Department Capt. Brian Weimer said. Both said they try to follow victims’ wishes rather than advise them to take action in a certain way.

“I provide survivors with options and information and let them make the best decision for their individual situation,” Wolf said.

Wolf said eight victims told her last year that they would go to Student Conduct with their stories. Neither Wolf nor Young know why that office ended up with only two reports.
Young, who was Student Conduct coordinator for nine years and left that position in June, said Student Conduct only handles offenses perpetrated by students, whereas the RSVP Center and MU Police handle cases perpetrated by anyone. Wolf and Weimer declined to say how many of their cases involved students.

A recent national study found that 16 percent of college students were the victims of unwanted sexual contact, but only 3 percent of them told authorities. At a university of MU’s size, that would be more than 5,000 victimizations in one academic year.

Police agencies such as the MU Police and the Columbia Police Department receive far more reports than Student Conduct. Missouri’s public records law stipulates that sex victims’ names are private until their cases reach court. Because Student Conduct staff are members of the public, they are not entitled to the victims’ names. And if employees at the Student Conduct Office don’t know the victims’ names, the office would have no indication that they are students, Weimer said.

Obstacles to pressing charges

The small proportion of reports and penalties at MU mirrors that of the city of Columbia and society at large: Sexual offenders are rarely reported, charged or convicted. And try as they might, campus officials can’t explain why.

The Center for Public Integrity found in 2010 that college campuses across the country regularly fail to impose penalties on students who commit sex offenses.

Culture and law conspire to create inadvertent barriers for victims of sex offenses, especially of rapes, said Tracy Cox of the National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

“We want people to come forward, but when they do, there are so many obstacles placed in front of them,” she said.

She said some victims are discouraged because they know the perpetrator or don’t want to believe they’ve been victimized. Others are afraid they won’t be believed.

“I think we live in a culture — and it's very sad — that a lot of responsibility is placed on the victim, rather than focusing on the accountability of the perpetrator,” Cox said.
MU had its own example of a victim facing backlash last year. A student withdrew from the university after **publicly accusing basketball player Michael Dixon of rape**. The accusation was followed by a storm of harsh criticism on social media, some of it directed at Dixon but much more at the victim herself.

Another student who accused Dixon of rape in 2010 didn't take her case to court. She said she was afraid **she wouldn't be believed and didn't want to deal with harassment from the public**.

"When a woman comes forward about sexual assault, she all too often faces skepticism and humiliation," the **MU Feminist Student Union** wrote in an op-ed in the Missourian **last November**. "It is hard enough to report your attack without the harassment of your entire community."

Young said in his experience, university students often don’t know what sexual assault really is. Peers and friends minimize the crime or deny it.

“Everyone is still in this mindset that it has to be someone jumping out of the bushes,” he said.

RAINN, the **Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network**, said only 9 percent of all rape cases are ever prosecuted. Many lack the hard evidence needed to prosecute because they’re based almost solely on the victim’s assertions.

For example, Boone County assistant prosecutor Tracy Gonzalez said that of 86 sex offense cases received by her office last year, 36 were found to have sufficient evidence to file charges. Of those, 20 ended in convictions.

On the other hand, Young, with the Office of Student Conduct, needs to find only that the student “more likely than not” violated conduct rules. That’s a much lower standard of evidence than what is needed by a prosecutor, who must convince a jury the defendant is guilty “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

In a **Wall Street Journal article from April**, a woman whose son was accused of "non-consensual sex" criticized the disciplinary process at his university, which she said showed "scant regard for fundamental fairness (and) due process of law." Media accounts show **other universities have faced criticism for the same allegations**.
“The vast majority of our cases end up ... where the (accused) admits to what happened,” Young said.

Young can’t sentence students to jail but can issue a penalty such as writing a reflection paper or performing community service. Suspension and expulsion, the penalties imposed in the sex offense cases last year, are two of the harshest sanctions he can impose.

**Protections become barriers**

Research has revealed other possible explanations for why students might not report sex offenses. A 2007 report from the National District Attorneys Association found that a woman was less likely to identify an event as a rape if she had been drinking at the time.

The report also warns prosecutors against subjecting victims to “re-victimization.” With that goal in mind, many authorities go to great lengths not to force victims into the court system, which sometimes leads them to drop charges.

Young said he warns students, in their first meeting, that the information they give him might require him to take action. Once or twice in his nine years at MU, he said, he had to investigate a student even when the victim didn't want to go forward because the accused student could have been a danger to the university community. He said that unfortunately, warning students of that possibility can discourage them from going forward.

Weimer said ideally more students would go to Student Conduct, but he said police don’t want victims to feel pressured.

“The victim is in control of what they want done,” Weimer said. “If a victim comes to us and does not want to do anything legally, we would remind them of (the Student Conduct option).”

MU Police’s annual campus crime report instructs sexual assault victims to seek medical attention and support from counselors but emphasizes that they have no obligation to prosecute.

“You are the person in control when you contact the police department, and you decide how you want the incident handled,” the report reads. “However, IT IS YOUR CHOICE.”
Jennifer Long, director of AEquitas, an organization that helps prosecutors with cases of violence against women, said prosecutors need to strike a balance between preparing victims for what lies ahead and actually dissuading them from pressing charges. Long is a former prosecutor in Pennsylvania.

She said prosecutors should go ahead and charge suspects even if they’re not sure they can win a conviction. Otherwise, many sex offenders go completely unpunished, and many of them go on to commit more offenses.

"That's again why it's so important that we don’t dissuade people from reporting these cases," Long said.

**Records and data not easily available**

Those who deal with sex crimes admit that the low prosecution rate is a major problem. But the causes and solutions for that low rate are much less clear than they are for other crimes.

Data often doesn’t match up. Agencies have contradicting definitions of crimes, and those definitions change with time. Behavior varies enormously among victims and suspects, and the cases are fraught with emotion, a 2007 study found.

And Student Conduct, unlike the county courthouse, operates in near total secrecy.

A 1998 law requires universities to divulge the outcomes of disciplinary cases in which students were found responsible for violent or sexual offenses. Despite that law, the Office of Student Conduct and the UM System only shared some of the required information at the Missourian’s request and only after a nine-month dispute.

They cited the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA, which they said makes all disciplinary records private.

“We believe (the student disciplinary process) functions best in a context of confidentiality,” said records custodian Robert Schwartz.

MU law student Patrick Nolan said universities' “culture of secrecy” discourages people from requesting records because they don’t realize they’re public.
Nolan requested the final results of students’ disciplinary proceedings while working as an editor at the *Southwest Standard*, the student paper at Southwest Missouri State University, which is now Missouri State University in Springfield.

In Nolan’s case, the university released the information only after it lost a lawsuit and received a judicial order.

“It’s in their interest to discourage dissemination of crimes on campus,” Nolan said. “Nobody wants to talk about their dirty laundry.”

It took Young and an administrative assistant more than two hours to determine how many sex offense reports the office had received in 2012, a number they later revised.

The MU Office of Student Conduct handles other cases involving students including hazing, disorderly conduct, academic dishonesty and drug offenses.

The search was complicated by the fact that the university didn't place sex offenses in one category until July 2012. At that time, the student code was revised to add four categories: non-consensual sexual behavior, stalking, harassment and invasion of privacy. Non-consensual sexual behavior used to fall under the broad category of a physical abuse violation.

Young said he worked with representatives from all four University of Missouri campuses to include the new category. "We wanted to make the student code more understandable to the average student" and more transparent, he said.

MU Police publishes a campus safety report every year and reports sex offenses and other crimes to the U.S. Department of Education. But the police calculate those numbers differently for another national data house, the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports.

Even the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the primary source for data on victimization in the U.S., lists caveat after caveat when describing sex offense statistics.
Meanwhile, Young said, the Office of Student Conduct is looking at how it can improve. He said he hoped increasing staffing and awareness about the office’s services would help. The office added the position of coordinator in June to assist in handling the volume of cases. Rony Die is the new coordinator.

The office has sent out surveys to see how it can help students better understand what the office does. Young worked with MU Women’s Center to get grant funding from the Department of Justice so that he and other campus officials can attend conferences to learn how to better handle cases of sexual assault. MU has had the grant funding for six years.

Young said he wished more victims would come forward.

“It troubles me,” he said. “I need to be more sensitive to victims. All law enforcement needs to be more supportive.”

Society in general, he said, needs to become more sensitive to the problem of sexual assault.

*Supervising editor is Katherine Reed.*

**How the Office of Student Conduct works**

Students can report transgressions by other students to the Office of Student Conduct. The office doesn’t investigate crimes, which are defined by law and handled by courts. Instead, the Student Conduct coordinator, Rony Die, meets with accused students to determine if they violated the University of Missouri Rules and Regulations. Because he’s not an officer of the law, the harshest penalty he can impose is expulsion. If a student disagrees with his decision, both the student and the staff member can argue their cases before the Student Conduct Committee. If the student still doesn’t agree, he can appeal to the chancellor.

Former coordinator Donell Young said in most cases, the student simply admits to what happened. The entire process is confidential due to FERPA laws, unless the student is found responsible for a violent or sexual crime.

Boone County prosecutors filed charges in almost half of the sex offense cases they received in 2012. They won a conviction in more than half of the cases in which charges were filed.
MU’s Office of Student Conduct received two reports of sex offenses in 2012, far fewer than the MU Police Department or the RSVP Center. According to national studies, many more sex offenses occur annually on U.S. college campuses than are reported.
Sources: MU POLICE, RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION CENTER, OFFICE OF STUDENT CONDUCT
Missouri journalism school to seek drone permit

COLUMBIA, Mo. • The University of Missouri’s journalism school plans to seek approval from the Federal Aviation Administration to resume the use of news-gathering drones.

The federal agency has ordered the university as well as the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to stop flying the drones outdoors until they obtain government authorization.

Scott Pham of Missouri’s university-owned station KBIA-FM said the school will apply for a federal permit known as a certificate of authorization. His counterpart in Nebraska has said the school also plans to seek the federal permit.

Journalism researchers and their students were using the airborne robots to shoot aerial photos and video from difficult-to-reach news scenes.
University of Missouri Provost Brian Foster on Wednesday announced his plan to retire at the first of the year, which means MU's top two administrative chairs will have new inhabitants. Some professors said that might be a good thing.

In June, Chancellor Brady Deaton announced he would retire effective Nov. 15 after nine years in the position. Foster has been provost since August 2005, a tenure he said has been longer than average.

"The average is four or five years, and I've done it for 13," he said, counting his tenure at the University of New Mexico.

Foster's official retirement date is Jan. 1.

Stephen Montgomery-Smith, a professor of mathematics, said the provost's decision came as a happy surprise.

"With the retirement of the provost, we have the opportunity to really make some good progress," he said, regarding shared governance and communication, which he had mentioned as problems with Foster.

Last year in a campuswide faculty council survey, professors indicated Foster's weaknesses included the two issues cited by Montgomery-Smith.

Craig Roberts, faculty council chair and professor of plant sciences, said shared governance means not making decisions at the top and relaying them to the rest of campus. "In the new provost, I hope we look for someone who can grasp and implement shared governance," Roberts said. Roberts said after Foster steps down, he believes Mizzou Advantage, which was an initiative of the provost and a high priority, will be re-examined.
Tim Evans, associate professor of veterinary medicine, also said Mizzou Advantage will likely undergo a review when a new provost is in place.

"Some people that I know that work with" Mizzou Advantage "have had a lot of success, and it's been a really positive experience. For others, it's been less," Evans said.

On Wednesday, during the Coulter Foundation Grant Awards, Deaton said Mizzou Advantage and the subsequent interdisciplinary work had laid a foundation for Coulter grants worth $600,000 as well as future successes at MU.

Deaton added he and Foster had done everything they can to ensure the programs at MU will continue forward in a smooth pathway after their retirements.

Mary Jo Banken, spokeswoman for MU, said it will be up to Deaton's successor to replace the provost. Banken said a national search would likely be conducted to fill the position, but the next chancellor would oversee the selection process.

Deputy Provost Ken Dean, who will serve as provost in the interim, said he would not be a candidate for the permanent position, according to a news release.
MU Museum announces earlier than expected closing date

By Emily Donaldson
September 23, 2013 | 7:23 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA – The MU Museum of Art and Archaeology will close its doors to the public Sept. 30 to start its move to a new location north of campus.

Alex Barker, the museum's director, said movers need more time to safely relocate its contents to the Mizzou North building by the end of 2013.

The move is part of the $22.85 million Renew Mizzou project to renovate Jesse, Pickard and Swallow halls. The cost of renovating Mizzou North to accommodate the museum is projected at $1.5 million.

Mizzou North, located at the intersection of Garth Avenue and Business Loop 70 West, is the former site of the Ellis Fischel Cancer Center.

Campus Facilities Communications Manager Karlan Seville said in an email that the renovation of Mizzou North is planned for completion in April. An official reopening date for the museums has yet to be scheduled.

Some MU faculty members have expressed concern that an off-campus relocation for the museum could reduce foot traffic or detract from its academic purpose.

Rachel Harper, coordinator of the humanities sequence in the Honors College, said she doubts students will go to the museum once it has moved off campus.

Barker said the museum is working on a program to bring the museum into local schools in an effort to continue to engage the interest of students after the museum moves off campus.

Harper doesn't think the program is equal to a museum visit, though.
"A small box of objects is not the same as seeing a ... gallery," Harper said.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

New MU program to help students prepare for Peace Corps

By Jamie Newman

September 23, 2013 | 5:21 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — **MU will launch a new program to prepare students for Peace Corps service.**

Students taking part in the Peace Corps Prep program, which will be part of the Office of Service-Learning, will earn a minor in public service and a multicultural certificate.

The program won't guarantee admission to the Peace Corps, but it will make students more competitive applicants, said Michael Burden, the project coordinator at the Office of Service-Learning, who completed his service in Mongolia.

"We believe we can produce really strong candidates for Peace Corps service," Burden said. "They'll have had service experience already, and they will have been thinking critically about who they are and why they want to join the Peace Corps."

The program will include a course called Global Service: The Peace Corps Experience, which will teach students about the Peace Corps and give them volunteer experience around Columbia. Students will complete a week-long service trip to another country as part of the class.

Burden described the goals of the class as "having an engaging dialogue of the challenges and realities of serving globally, discussing people's motivations and really trying to equip and prepare them for those challenges."

Columbia, which is home to more than 200 former Peace Corps volunteers, is a "no brainer" location for a Peace Corps Prep program, said Donald Spiers, an MU animal science professor. Spiers, who served in the Peace Corps in Venezuela in the '70s, helped bring the program to MU.
The Peace Corps already has a presence on campus, including a recruiter and a Peace Corps Fellows graduate school program. Seven other colleges across the nation also have their own Peace Corps Prep program, but MU will be the largest institution involved.

Anne-Marie Foley, director at the Office of Service-Learning, stressed that students from a variety of academic backgrounds could get involved in Peace Corps Prep.

"We are looking for any student, anywhere campuswide, who's interested in achieving the Peace Corps someday," Foley said. "And that's students from all walks of academic life."

A formal ceremony inaugurating the program will be held Wednesday in the Reynolds Alumni Center. MU Chancellor Brady Deaton, who is a former volunteer, and Peace Corps Associate Director Helen Lowman will solidify the partnership by signing an official Peace Corps document.

*Supervising editor is Richard Webner.*
Data indicate median income down in county

Health coverage beats average.

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Monday, September 23, 2013 at 2:00 pm Comments

Boone County's heavy population of college students might skew poverty statistics, but data released Thursday by the U.S. Census Bureau show a bleak picture of poverty for single moms and their children.

Just less than 66 percent of households with single mothers and children 5 and younger are living in poverty. By comparison, children younger than 5 in homes with married couples make up only 3 percent of the county's poverty population. The overall Boone County poverty rate in 2012 was 21 percent — nearly double the statewide poverty rate of 11.7 percent. The national poverty level is 15 percent of the population.

"When you throw in the students, it looks like we're one of the poorer counties," said John Blodgett, senior programmer and analyst for the Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis at the University of Missouri. "Very few Mizzou students are really poor."

The poverty line is defined as an annual income of $23,492 or less for a family of four. The Census Bureau definition does not include non-cash government aid such as food stamps.

The data also indicated Missouri was one of just two states where median incomes fell in 2012 from the previous year. The same was true for Boone County, which reported a median income of $44,201 — a drop of $3,000 from 2011 and $5,700 less than 2008.

The median income for U.S. households in 2012 was $51,017.

Blodgett said median household income is the "single most-used indicator of economic well-being," and he believes it is "the best available" indicator.

The numbers for Boone County indicate 29 percent of households earn less than $24,999, with 10.8 percent of 6,850 households bringing in less than $10,000 annually. Conversely, 16 percent of Boone County households had earnings in 2012 of $100,000 or more.
Statewide, nearly 270,000 of the 1.5 million families who participated in the annual American Community Survey reported household incomes less than $24,999.

The median earnings for a male working full time were $43,304, compared to $35,188 for a female working full time.

Boone County fares better, however, in the percentage of people without health insurance. The state figure was 13.6 percent, compared to Boone County's 8.5 percent. Just less than 80 percent of Boone County residents get health insurance through an employer, and one-fifth receive public assistance through either Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Boone County data were derived from a 2012 sampling of 955 housing units in the American Community Survey that was conducted as part of the 2012 census, bureau spokesman Robert Bernstein said.

The report lists a margin of error for the estimates, but the data are considered "very reliable" among government agencies and policymakers, he said. "It's the only kind of data we have on these topics."

© 2013 Columbia Daily Tribune. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Posted in Local on Monday, September 23, 2013 2:00 pm.
Local GDP surpasses $7 billion

By Jacob Barker

Monday, September 23, 2013 at 2:00 pm

Columbia’s economy surpassed $7 billion in economic output last year, according to new numbers from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

The Columbia metropolitan statistical area, defined as Boone County, reported $7.12 billion in 2012 local gross domestic product, or GDP, which measures the total amount of all goods and services produced in an area. That was up 4.8 percent from Columbia’s GDP of $6.797 billion in 2011.

Adjusted for inflation, the local economy grew 2.9 percent in 2012, rising to $6.044 billion in 2005 dollars. That rate of growth was the 97th-fastest out of all metro areas measured by the government and a tick above the 2.8 percent growth rate the area saw in 2011.

The Jefferson City MSA, defined as Cole, Callaway, Osage and Moniteau counties, recorded a 0.1 percent increase in its GDP, rising to $6.034 billion. That increase, however, was not as fast as inflation. Adjusted for inflation, the area’s GDP shrank for the second year in a row, falling from a 2011 GDP of $5.168 billion — in 2005 dollars — to $5.084 billion last year.

The heaviest drag on Columbia’s GDP came from reductions in government spending as Republicans in Congress and the General Assembly rein in tax dollar outlays. Columbia’s GDP was 0.3 percentage points lower than it would have been because of shrinking government budgets. The area is heavily reliant on spending from the University of Missouri and state workers who live here but commute to Jefferson City.

Bolstering its economy were professional and business services, which accounted for more than half the area’s GDP growth. Trade, education and health care also contributed significantly.