MU News Bureau

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EDITORIAL: TAX POLICY SHOULD MATCH PRIORITIES. IN MISSOURI, THAT'S EDUCATION

By the Editorial Board

The University of Missouri Board of Curators should follow university president Tim Wolfe's advice when it meets later this week: Keep tuition flat for the 2014-15 school year.

Gov. Jay Nixon has asked all of the state’s public universities to avoid tuition hikes this year. In exchange, he promised “additional” funding.

The word “additional” is in quotes because Mr. Nixon’s proposed 5 percent increase in core funding, plus various increases to add slots for mental health and math studies, science and engineering fields and some more scholarship money, is truly only “additional” if you ignore recent Missouri history.

It’s nice. It’s better than last year. But it’s nowhere near adequate.

For instance, as David Lieb of the Associated Press pointed out in a weekend story, even with all the increases proposed by Mr. Nixon this year, total funding for the state’s universities will be below the $969 million that was budgeted back in 2002. In the past 12 years, as a result of two recessions and a Legislature that doesn’t value education funding, Missouri continues to fall behind. Missouri ranks worse for state support for higher education than all but four other states.

Freezing University of Missouri tuition at its current average level — $9,464 per year — is the least state lawmakers can do.

But before the board votes on the tuition freeze, here’s what the curators should do: Ask Mr. Wolfe for his thoughts on Missouri’s tax policy and how it fits with the stated priorities of the state as set out in the Constitution. The views of this former corporate CEO are dead-on.

Mr. Wolfe knows that Missouri’s decades-long history as one of the lowest-tax states in the nation is directly related to its position as one of the poorest supporters of both K-12 schools and higher education.

“We have got to do something different in our state to be more competitive,” he said Friday in a meeting with the Post-Dispatch editorial board. “We run the risk of having an educational system that is only available to those in the ‘have’ category.”

Most worrisome is that even though Missouri has one of the lowest tax rates in the country (6th lowest, according to Mr. Nixon), state lawmakers want to cut taxes even more.
Last week, for instance, a Senate committee passed this year’s version of a tax cut bill similar to the one Mr. Nixon vetoed last year. The governor was quick with a news release, pointing out that the legislation, if it became law, would ultimately rob the state of about $1 billion in revenue.

That’s $1 billion less for education, for roads, for health care, for basic state services.

Republicans who vote for such garbage argue that cutting taxes ultimately leads to a better economy. If it were true, Missouri would be booming. Over the past four decades, it has had the 47th lowest tax burden in the nation. Winning the race to the bottom will not help.

When it comes to tax policy, lawmakers are asking the wrong question, Mr. Wolfe points out.

“I think tax change can be a good thing, but it should be very intentional,” Mr. Wolfe told us. “We should change tax policy to fund the objective, and the objective is the priorities we have as a state.”

In Missouri, those priorities are set out in the constitution. First is paying debt. Second is funding education.

Last summer, Mr. Nixon flew around the state making the same argument: If the state’s top priority is to fund schools, then tax policy must meet that end. Freezing tuition is a good first step, but the real work remains. Mr. Wolfe should grab a megaphone, borrow Mr. Nixon’s new state plane and take his message to every corner of Missouri.

If education is truly a Missouri priority, our state lawmakers have a pretty poor way of showing it.

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Police investigate alleged rape of collegiate swimmer who died in suicide

By George Howell and Paul Vercammen,

Columbia, Missouri (CNN) -- She went to the University of Missouri to fulfill her childhood dream of becoming a competitive swimmer.

Sasha Menu Courey made the team there, on scholarship, in 2009.
But the following year, something happened that changed the course of her promising college career -- something her parents didn't learn about until after she died.

"People were telling us that she had been raped and she wrote it in her journal," said Lynn Courey, Courey's mother.

Courey committed suicide in 2011.

In light of a 16-month investigation by ESPN's "Outside the Lines" program, new questions are being raised about what the university knew about the alleged assault, and when officials knew it.

The president of the university sent a letter to school officials late Sunday, saying that he is asking to hire independent counsel to conduct an investigation of the school's handing of the case.

The investigation has now also been referred to the Columbia Police Department from the University of Missouri Police Department.

"Our detectives will do the best they can with the investigation. It was not reported to us until now and we are almost four years behind," Sgt. Joe Bernhard, a Columbia police spokesman, told CNN.

"We can make a difference for others"

According to the ESPN report, in February 2010, after a night out drinking with friends, Courey said she went home with a former university football player -- off-campus -- and had consensual sex.

Months later, she told a rape crisis counselor and wrote in her journal that after the former football player left, another football player entered the room, locked the door and raped her.

Courey's parents say their daughter also talked about the alleged assault with a campus nurse and a campus doctor, 11 months after the attack.

The school never launched an investigation.

School officials say they weren't told about the suspected attack by either the nurse or the doctor because of a policy of not reporting sexual assaults without a victim's consent.

Courey's parents say their daughter had a long history of depression, and in the months after the alleged rape, she grew more and more despondent.

In 2011, Courey took her own life.
"We lost our daughter and we cannot bring her back, but we can make a difference for others," her mother said.

"The University did the right thing"

School officials say they later discovered and turned over to Courey's parents a transcript of Courey's conversation with the rape counselor. They also sent her parents a letter asking if they wanted the matter investigated. Officials say they got no response.

Courey's father, Mike Menu, said, "We did not feel supported in this letter. This letter was a check-the-boxes letter and, really to be honest, it did not deserve a response."

In its defense, the university is raising the issue of privacy.

"Victims of sexual assault need to know that they can seek medical care without the concern that reports will be made to police or campus officials without their consent. Otherwise some victims will be deterred from seeking medical care," it said in a statement.

"We continue to believe that the University did the right thing in trying to be respectful of Sasha's parents and determine their wishes. We think it is strange and inappropriate for the University to be criticized for not undertaking an investigation when Sasha's parents chose not to respond to our request for their input. If they wanted an investigation, they simply could have responded or made a report to law enforcement," it continued.

According to Title IX, a federal law that guarantees college men and women are protected equally on campus, universities are legally required to investigate allegations of rape -- even if the alleged victim is no longer alive.

Brett Sokolow, executive director of the Association of Title IX Administrators, said he doesn't get the sense there is any clear evidence of a coverup at this point.

However, he added: "I certainly feel that the university should have been a little more proactive at trying to bring in information and find out more."
Many questions remain surrounding Sasha Menu Courey’s life and death

January 27
BY VAHE GREGORIAN
The Kansas City Star

Even after a few days of marinating in the sad saga of former Mizzou swimmer Sasha Menu Courey, a lot of it still seems complex, vague and thorny.

So it’s too easily over-simplified in the search for answers and perhaps scapegoats.

Despite the ESPN “Outside The Lines” insinuations that MU was negligent in factors that may have led to her death, and despite my wish Missouri had extended itself more consistently and personally to her family all along, I also believe Mizzou personnel generally were trying as best they could to handle a complicated and delicate matter while being largely constrained by factors (i.e. privacy laws) outside their control.

Even Menu Courey’s grieving parents, though left to wonder about a lot and still angry about some matters, suggested that in a phone interview from Toronto on Saturday that was reflected in our Monday story and more in these expanded sentiments:

We “give the benefit of the doubt and say, ‘You’ve done the best you can.’ … And maybe those were the best decisions in terms of all the information that they had at the time and what they knew to do,” her father, Mike Menu, said. “So now it is the opportunity to say, ‘We did the best we can; now we can do better.’ ”

And MU surely can, starting with what it learns from the announced impending outside investigation about her case, including a statement made in Menu Courey’s diary and repeated by former Tiger receiver Rolandis Woodland that she had been sexually assaulted in 2010.

Columbia police opened an investigation on Monday, though with this caveat:
“It’s always challenging when the victim’s not there to give their account, kind of like in a homicide investigation, and it’s four years afterward, so I would imagine physical evidence and things like that will be hard to track down, too,” Columbia police Sgt. Joe Bernhard told The Star’s Tod Palmer.

Who knows what that will yield, but it’s a step forward.

As for other elements of this, I am rather certain that swimming coach Greg Rhodenbaugh and former MU academic counselor Meghan Anderson are less than the heartless villains they seem to be portrayed as by ESPN.

While each could have been more accessible to her parents, who feel they withdrew from them and weren’t properly supportive of their vulnerable daughter, seems to me there is much yet to be understood about those lines of communication.

And I also think Rhodenbaugh truly was trying to find a way to compel her to go to therapy for her back and counseling he had been told she was missing by holding her out of competitions and practices as he came to learn about the physical and emotional challenges she was dealing with during his first year on the job.

It seems that reassuring her as well would have worked better, but I’d also venture that there remains plenty to be filled in about what their understanding of each other and the situation was.

Meanwhile, by all logic, Anderson was, in fact, looking out for Menu Courey when she presented the academic withdrawal form to her in the hospital in April 2011 with a deadline for failing classes looming.

The timing seemed cold, yes. But consider, too, the apparent need for immediacy with the semester soon coming to an end and with Menu Courey’s status in flux.

She signed on the form as reason for withdrawal “hospitalization for inpatient direct care in Canada,” and ESPN reported she was moved to a hospital in Kansas City that night before ultimately being moved a psychiatric hospital in Boston.

(That was where on June 17, 2011, she inexplicably was able to get a hold of a bottle of Tylenol and commit suicide by swallowing 100 of them, a matter that would seem to merit an investigation of its own.)

As for the conflict over what Menu Courey did or didn’t tell Anderson over the telephone in May 2011 from Boston, it’s important to consider that Menu Courey may have asked that anything she said be in confidence … or at least that Anderson took it that way.

That was implied to a degree by Menu Courey’s journal entry cited as evidence she told Anderson, an entry that also expressed relief Anderson hadn’t discussed it further.

“My voice was firm and direct when I told her I’d been raped and then I moved on to telling her how I’m doing well now … I was pleased that she didn’t mention the rape again and simply told me she was happy I was at McLean [Hospital] getting better.”
There’s many ways to read all this, of course, but the point is very little is absolutely clear.

Another element clouded in the rush to judgment:

Menu Courey wasn’t diagnosed with borderline personality disorder until April 2011, weeks before she committed suicide at age 20, her parents said.

But it’s evident that at some point before then she was afflicted what the National Institute of Mental Health calls a “serious mental illness marked by unstable moods, behavior, and relationships.”

Those who suffer from it, writes the institute, typically have “problems with regulating emotions and thoughts … impulsive and reckless behavior … (and) unstable relationships with other people.”

She had demonstrated at least some illness and vulnerability as far back as age 16, when she attempted suicide.

Indicative of the convoluted web surrounding mental illnesses, though, Mizzou wasn’t told about that episode when it was recruiting Menu Courey from Toronto.

“Because of the stigma of mental health for everybody, including us,” Sasha’s father, Mike Menu, said.

The stance is perfectly understandable, but it’s also further representative of the quandary of trying to navigate the best interests for all concerned in this case and many others.

For all that, though, MU until Sunday had been so convulsively concerned about technically covering itself as an institution instead of conveying compassion and a desire to work to assure its system is the best possible that it did itself a disservice in perception.

And one way or another, for one reason or another, the school and/or its representatives withdrew rather than extend, the family said, when the family sought more contact and humanity and information in 2012.

But being defensive and guarded instead of transparent and proactive, though unbecoming in many ways, isn’t the same as being complicit in a tragedy.

And much more remains to be sorted out about all this before any conclusions can really be drawn. Maybe some things never really will be answered.

So let’s just hope this investigation answers more questions than it creates.
BURWELL: 'INDEPENDENT' PROBE NOT ENOUGH AT MIZZOU

By BRYAN BURWELL bburwell@post-dispatch.com 314-340-8185

When policies seem to let us down, when powerful institutions under attack prefer to bombard us with calculated prepared statements rather than empathetic real people, when heartbreaking tragedies occur and young people die far too soon, our reflexes often can take us to conclusions based on pure emotions rather than cold-blooded facts.

The University of Missouri is an organization feeling that severe emotional lash of public opinion now, struggling to defend itself against charges it could have — maybe should have — done so much more that could have saved the life of Sasha Menu Courey.

There are so many disturbing questions surrounding the tragic death of the former Mizzou swimmer, who said she was sexually assaulted in 2010 — possibly by members of the football team — and committed suicide in 2011.

It's incredibly complicated and decidedly difficult to understand whether there was something institutionally that could have been done at MU that could have prevented her death.

I don't know what happened. I don't know if something more could have been done.

I don't know what Missouri athletics department officials knew and when they knew.

But I do know this: We're still one investigation shy of what it ultimately will take to discover whatever is the complete and uncomfortable truth.

Since ESPN's “Outside the Lines” released its report last Friday on the circumstances surrounding Menu Courey's death, a flurry of activity has occurred. The university turned over information to the Columbia police and a criminal investigation was launched officially on Monday.

Twenty-four hours earlier, university system president Tim Wolfe requested that the board of curators launch an independent investigation into the case.

All this is great, and while there are two sides to the argument over whether any of these probes could have or should have commenced sooner, there should be no debate that either investigation will answer some essential questions that still remain in this tragic saga.
These are questions of whether there was a total failure by responsible members of the MU athletics department. These are questions about whether someone knew about Menu Courey’s allegations of the sexual assault and failed to report it. These are questions about whether MU athletics department officials were more interested in extracting her and her high-maintenance mental health issues from the school than helping get them solved. These are questions about whether the response to the ESPN report was more interested in covering the university with plausible deniability or providing the unvarnished truth.

Make no mistake about what questions I’m raising.

This isn’t an accusation.

This isn’t an automatic presumption that just because someone accused them of wrongdoing that they did anything wrong.

But make no mistake about this, either. This also isn’t an automatic presumption that Mizzou officials did everything right, either.

We don’t know, but we need to know.

And the best way for that to happen isn’t with “independent” investigators investigating the institution that hired them.

This tragedy requires a far more potent probe, one that involves either the state attorney general’s office or a federal investigation similar to the one that was launched last week to look into the way Penn State handled sexual assault and harassment complaints in the aftermath of the Jerry Sandusky child sex abuse scandal.

The Penn State inquiry was begun by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights on Thursday, when it informed PSU that the agency had concerns after it saw a huge spike in “forcible sex offenses” in the school’s annual crime data.

Penn State’s crime data showed 56 forcible sex offenses on its main campus in 2012, fourteen times the number reported in 2010.

Clearly, Missouri didn’t have that sort of disturbing spike in its annual crime data. However, MU also had a spike in forcible sex offenses in 2011, with 19 total cases, nearly double the 2010 figures (10) for the same crime.

So I see these stats and it makes me feel that we’ve just discovered another question to add to the list; we need to find out if these stats mean anything in connection to the troubled life of Sasha Menu Courey.

There needs to be an investigation that has the clout of subpoena power armed with the fear of the consequences if you don’t tell the truth to investigators.

There needs to be a thorough probe that won’t contain even a trace of subjectivity, politics or cronyism. There must be a probe that will spare no feelings and find out who knew what, when they knew it and if
anyone intentionally acted to ignore or cover up a possible sexual assault by scholarship athletes on the MU campus.

This investigation isn’t simply about Sasha Menu Courey. It’s about every young female student who attends a University of Missouri system campus fully expecting to be protected from this despicable crime.

Menu Courey said, “The system failed me.”

Those powerful words resonate from her grave and ought to give everyone involved at the university a moment to pause and reconsider what happened.

The emphasis so far from all official statements issued by the University of Missouri is that it did everything right, followed all the proper procedures, never once veered off the correct course in dealing with the tragic circumstances that perhaps led to Menu Courey’s suicide.

I hope they are right.

But that doesn’t mean the system worked, because clearly it didn’t.

I repeat this again for anyone who thinks there is some agenda-driven conspiracy by the media to harm the university:

No one is saying the university committed any wrongdoing.

We don’t pretend to know what happened.

But make no mistake, we desperately want to know what happened.

And so should you.

A couple of presidents push zero tolerance on college sexual assaults

January 27

The tragedy of sexual assaults against women on college campuses across America, including many crimes still not reported, is finally getting needed new attention.
Two recent developments are steps forward, one promoted by President Barack Obama and the other supported by University of Missouri system president Tim Wolfe.

• Obama last week launched a task force that will have three months to recommend how universities can better prevent and respond to rape and other sexual assaults, which are overwhelmingly carried out by young men against women.

Notably, Obama wants the public better informed about how safe colleges are, information that could damage the worst-ranked schools in the pocketbook if women avoid them in the future.

The report should includes ways to make universities much more proactive in ensuring they and local police investigate and prosecute sex crimes.

The White House Council on Women and Girls this month released damning data that about one of every five university students are sexually assaulted during their time at school, yet only 12 percent of victims report the incidents to authorities.

The report’s chilling summation of a problem that no school acknowledges on its informational brochure: “No one is more at risk of being raped or sexually assaulted than women at our nation’s colleges and universities.”

• Wolfe said Sunday he would support the Board of Curators in hiring an independent counsel to review the University of Missouri’s handling of sexual assault allegations by former MU swimmer Sasha Menu Courey, who committed suicide in 2011.

Wolfe’s tough stance should ensure the public that all of the actions taken in this case by MU officials are diligently scrutinized by someone outside the university’s control.

The university system must respond swiftly and appropriately if “any shortcomings with respect to MU’s handling of the matter,” as Wolfe put it, are uncovered. A university’s top job is to protect its students.

Wolfe properly also called for the four Missouri system chancellors to review their schools’ sexual-assault policies. If these reviews are truly tough, they will find problems that need to be corrected.

Given the appalling number of rapes and other sexual assaults of women on university campuses, there is plenty of room for improvement.

Read more here: http://www.kansascity.com/2014/01/27/4780295/zero-tolerance-on-college-sexual.html#storylink=cpy
Columbia police open criminal investigation into alleged rape of Sasha Menu Courey

January 27

BY TOD PALMER
The Kansas City Star

COLUMBIA — The Columbia Police Department confirmed Monday that it has opened a criminal investigation into the alleged rape of former Missouri swimmer Sasha Menu Courey.

Menu Courey was a freshman on the Tigers’ swimming team four years ago when she was allegedly raped by one or more football players. She later committed suicide June 17, 2011, at McLean Hospital near Boston, where she was being treated for borderline personality disorder.

MU officials announced Sunday that the school had forwarded information to Columbia police after determining the alleged crime may have occurred in the 600 block of Huntridge Drive, which is off campus.

Columbia Police Sgt. Joe Bernhard said Menu Courey’s death and the length of time that has passed since the alleged assault will complicate any investigation.

“There will be some challenges during the investigation, but our detectives will do the best they can,” Bernhard said.

He continued, “It’s always challenging when the victim's not there to give their account, kind of like in a homicide investigation, and it’s four years afterward, so I would imagine physical evidence and things like that will be hard to track down too.”

Menu Courey’s story — and the university’s handling of Menu Courey’s allegations — was the focus of an investigation by ESPN’s “Outside the Lines,” which was published online Friday and aired Sunday.

Menu Courey told healthcare workers at MU about her sexual assault, but she never filed a formal complaint with MU police.
The “Outside the Lines” report alleges that Menu Courey told a former Missouri athletics staffer, Meghan Anderson, about the assault during a phone conversation one month before she died, a charge Anderson denied to ESPN.

Menu Courey wrote about her conversation with Anderson in a journal, which her parents, Lynn Courey and Mike Menu, found after her death.

MU maintains that it knew nothing about the alleged sexual assault until the fall of 2012, when it uncovered a chat transcript with a rape crisis counselor in Menu Courey’s email drafts after an open-records request from her parents.

At the time, MU asked Menu Courey’s parents if they wanted the university to investigate the alleged rape, but Menu Courey’s parents didn’t respond.

After learning new information as a result of the “Outside the Lines” report, MU said Sunday that it was now forwarding information to Columbia police.

Read more here: http://www.kansascity.com/2014/01/27/4780129/columbia-police-open-criminal.html#storylink=cpy
information contains and decide what course of action is best. The Department will not make any further comment on the details of the investigation as it is an ongoing sexual assault case.”

Those with information on the case are encouraged by the police to contact the department at 442-6131 or at its anonymous line at 875-8477.

The sexual assault allegedly took place in February 2010 in the 600 block of Huntridge Drive. MU announced Sunday it had released materials relevant to a possible investigation to the Columbia police because the alleged assault took place off campus.

A 16-month investigation by ESPN’s “Outside the Lines” revealed the university had access to materials that suggested MU had information that suggested an assault had taken place at least as early as Feb. 21, 2012, the day an article in the Columbia Daily Tribune that contained that information was published.

“As a result of information that first came to the University of Missouri’s attention in a Friday, January 24th report by ESPN’s Outside the Lines program related to former student-athlete Sasha Menu Courey, the MU Police Department submitted information to the Columbia Police Department (CPD) on the evening of Saturday, January 25th,” the news release said. “This information from ESPN’s story included names of individuals who might have relevant information regarding the alleged February 2010 assault.”

University System President Tim Wolfe sent a message to university chancellors Sunday calling for a review of the campuses’ policies regarding sexual assault and also a third-party investigation into whether there was any wrongdoing on MU’s part in regards to the Menu Courey case. The Board of Curators will decide whether or not to hire an investigation firm during its meetings from Wednesday through Friday in the Reynolds Alumni Center.

U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, who is a Missouri alumna and former prosecutor, also released a statement on the case.

"As a mother of a daughter in college, my heart breaks for this young woman and her family,” she said in the statement Saturday. “We must create a safe space for all women
to report sexual assault to law enforcement — and no matter who the alleged perpetrator is, there must be a thorough and professional investigation. There are real questions about why none of that happened in this case, and it's important the University figure out why and what must be done to fix it."

Mike Menu and Lynn Courey told the Missourian on Saturday that they still wanted an investigation to take place. They also released a statement in the wake of the news. “I think it is important to highlight that our goal is not to point fingers, place blame or bring anyone down, but is rather to take action and transform the way students struggling with mental health issues are supported,” Menu Courey’s sister, Kayla, wrote in the statement. “My sister went through what my mother calls a perfect storm of unfortunate events that led to her suicide. Out of this, I hope to see a transformation of the process in how colleges and universities deal with students struggling with mental health issues, whether they are athletes or not.

"This will never bring Sasha back, but it is something we do have the opportunity to change now to prevent another situation like this to occur again.”
A former University of Missouri swimmer’s allegations that she was sexually assaulted by several football players as a freshman will come up at a curators’ meeting this week, two members of the board said Monday. The woman later committed suicide.

Meanwhile, Columbia police said they would begin their own investigation into the matter.

University of Missouri President Tim Wolfe has called for an external legal review into Sasha Menu Courey’s death in June 2011, and curators David Bradley and Wayne Goode told The Associated Press the board will review that request.

The Board of Curators’ regularly scheduled meeting begins Wednesday in Columbia and concludes Friday.

Menu Courey’s family has accused the university of failing to properly investigate the alleged attack, which the swimmer said happened off campus in February 2010. The allegations have gained attention since ESPN published a story about the swimmer.

The school says neither Menu Courey, nor her parents, who live in suburban Toronto, sought a police investigation and didn’t respond to a later request for more information.

But on Saturday — after the story was posted online — the school said it was turning over information about the off-campus incident to Columbia police, citing new details including “names of individuals who might have relevant information.”

Then on Sunday, Wolfe said he would seek an outside review of the school’s handling of the case.

Bradley said Monday he’s “open to listening” to the request but declined to comment further. Goode, an ex-state lawmaker and the group’s former chairman, suggested he’s likely to approve an outside investigation.

“The university needs to take this situation very seriously,” he said. “We need to see if there’s something we haven’t been able to find that could be brought to the surface.”

The family released a written statement Monday supporting a new look at the case. Menu Courey was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder after the alleged assault.

“It is not until universities are willing to take responsibility for the seriousness of these issues that young people will be safe on campuses and families can rest easy knowing that others will not have to go through the horror that (we) and Sasha went through,” the statement reads. “The system failed Sasha in many ways.”

On Saturday, Columbia police received information from the University of Missouri Police Department regarding the possible rape, the department announced in a statement Monday. The incident possibly occurred in the 600 block of Huntridge Drive, which is located in a neighborhood south of the Mizzou campus. The assault had not previously been reported to Columbia police.

The Columbia police Criminal Investigation Division will review the available information, and detectives will follow up on any leads, the statement read.
Sasha Menu Courey’s parents: Response is move in right direction

Sasha Menu Courey, at left during a light moment with teammates, was a popular member of the MU swim team known for her vivacious personality and booming laugh. She committed suicide June 17, 2011. MU has asked Columbia police to investigate Menu Courey’s claims before her death that she was raped, and UM System President Tim Wolfe has called for an independent review of MU’s handling of the situation.

Shortly before Sasha Menu Courey's suicide in June 2011, the former Missouri swimmer started talking about wanting to write a memoir of her experiences with borderline personality disorder.

At that point, Menu Courey was showing improvement while undergoing treatment at a Massachusetts hospital, bouncing back from an alleged sexual assault and a stream of emotional stressors that followed.

She wanted to be an example for others going through the same issues, her parents, Lynn Courey and Mike Menu, said. They're hoping she still can be.

"We're hoping that this is Sasha's legacy," Courey said. "That she will have driven that change."

University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe in a statement yesterday called for an independent review of how Missouri handled Menu Courey's case and for all four campuses within the system to review their processes for dealing with sexual assaults and mental health services for their students.

MU’s News Bureau also issued a statement yesterday saying the university had turned Menu Courey's case over to the Columbia Police Department because the alleged incident appears to have happened off campus.

The case will be handled by the special victims unit of the criminal investigation division of CPD, police spokesman Sgt. Joe Bernhard said. This morning, Bernhard said he didn't think detectives had reviewed the file.

Investigating the case is a challenge because the alleged incident took place almost four years ago, there's no clear knowledge about where the crime happened and there is no physical evidence or a victim, Bernhard said. "It's difficult, but it's possible," Bernhard said.
Wolfe's statement came two days after an ESPN story first raised potential issues with the way MU handled Menu Courey's alleged sexual assault in February 2010, both before she died and after more details on the incident became available through public-records requests made by ESPN and Menu Courey's parents in 2012.

Menu said Wolfe's message fit very closely with the family's objectives.

"We're very pleased by the developments that have happened until now," Menu said. "We're not done. We really look forward to some changes there. It's not claiming victory, but it certainly looks like things are moving in the right direction. They're looking at this very closely."

MU athletic department spokesman Chad Moller said athletic department officials first became aware of the incident in fall 2012 and that the school wrote a letter to Menu Courey's parents last January asking whether they would like MU to turn the case over to law enforcement.

Courey said the school had not been in contact with the family since the ESPN story broke, other than through publicly available statements on MU's website.

"Sexual assault and rape are unacceptable. We have to stop this, and we have to change that culture. Something has to be done promptly," Courey said. "Those are the two big messages we hope to come out of this, and that the college will embrace this and implement proper process, and they'll be really leading this cause."

Courey and Menu said Sasha's 21-year-old sister, Kayla, wrote them a note from school to keep them mindful of their mission as they deal with the fallout of their family's pain becoming a national story.

It's not about blame, she reminded them. It's about progress.

"We're all doing the best we can, and we can all do better," Menu said. "There are a whole bunch of situations and forces at play that make people make mistakes. That is the best they can do at that time. It doesn't mean that it's justifiable. It just means that it is what it is. And things can change."

Ashley Jost contributed to this report.

This article was published in the Monday, January 27, 2014 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "Parents hope story leads to change."

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Posted in Local, Mu on Monday, January 27, 2014 2:00 pm.
COLUMBIA — The parents of an MU student who committed suicide in 2011 issued a statement in response to the university's decision to hand over the investigation to the Columbia Police Department.

Sasha Menu Courey was an MU student and swimmer when she told several people, including a rape crisis counselor, that she was raped by a member of the football team in February 2010.

In email correspondence between ESPN reporters and the MU athletics department, spokesman Chad Moller said the athletics staff had no knowledge of Menu Courey's allegations until after her suicide.

ESPN’s "Outside the Lines" published an investigation last week detailing Menu Courey's correspondence about the assault and alleging the university's negligence for failing to investigate. Under an interpretation of Title IX, universities that receive public funding are required to respond to sex discrimination in the form of sexual harassment or sexual violence against its students.

The Columbia Police Department confirmed in a statement Monday that it had received information about the case from the university. The department said in a news release that the incident possibly occurred in the 600 block of Huntridge Drive. No other details or comment will be available about the investigation because it is an ongoing sexual assault case, police said.

After the ESPN report aired on Sunday, UM System President Tim Wolfe announced that the Board of Curators would vote at this week's meeting to determine whether an independent investigator will be hired to look into whether the university properly responded to Menu Courey's allegations.
The text of the family's statement is below:

"The family and friends of Sasha Menu Courey are pleased to hear that the University of Missouri is initiating an independent investigation into its handling of the alleged sexual assault and matters related to mental illness. The family feels that it is not until universities are willing to take responsibility for the seriousness of these issues that young people will be safe on campuses and families can rest easy knowing that others will not have to go through the horror that they and Sasha went through. The system failed Sasha in many ways.

"Sasha's sister, who is currently a university student, has the following to say: 'It is my hope that we do not lose sight of our ultimate goal of removing the stigma surrounding mental health issues. We are striving for a change for the better. I think it is important to highlight that our goal is not to point fingers, place blame or bring anyone down, but is rather to take action and transform the way students struggling with mental health issues are supported. My sister went through what my mother calls a perfect storm of unfortunate events that led to her suicide. Out of this, I hope to see a transformation of the process in how colleges and universities deal with students struggling with mental health issues, whether they are athletes or not. This will never bring Sasha back, but it is something we do have the opportunity to change now to prevent another situation like this to occur again.'

"Although we cannot change the past, we hope that the issues uncovered by ESPN and lessons learned from the upcoming investigations will lead to positive changes for future athletes and students. The system failed Sasha and we can't let this happen to anyone else.

"In Sasha’s memory, the Sashbear Foundation, was created with the vision of Making Waves on Mental Health by building environments for the advancement of life coping skills. The foundation’s goal is to lead a mental health reform by promoting awareness for the need of early prevention, recognition, timely intervention and access to affordable treatment of individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder. For more information on this topic, please visit www.sashbear.org."
UM System president calls for independent review, campus inquiries after Menu Courey report

President also tells all campuses to act.

By David Morrison and Ashley Jost

Monday, January 27, 2014 at 2:00 pm Comments (18)

University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe has asked the UM Board of Curators to hire an "outside independent counsel" to investigate the University of Missouri's handling of the alleged rape of an MU swimmer and directed campus chancellors to initiate their own reviews of how their respective schools respond to sexual assaults.

The moves come after a story by an ESPN program, "Outside the Lines," that questioned MU's response to the reported sexual assault of Sasha Menu Courey, a former MU swimmer who committed suicide in 2011 about 16 months after she allegedly was raped by a Missouri football player.

"Such an independent review will be beneficial to all our campuses so that we can determine if there were any shortcomings with respect to MU's handling of this matter and, if so, ways in which to improve the handling of such matters in the future," Wolfe said in a statement.

John Fougere, chief communications officer for the UM System, said the Board of Curators is expected to put Wolfe's recommendation up for discussion during a meeting in Columbia that starts Wednesday afternoon and continues through Friday at the Reynolds Alumni Center.

Wayne Goode, curator and former chairman of the board, said he thinks it's a good idea to bring this discussion to the curator level, and he likes Wolfe's proposal to bring in an outside investigator.

"There seems to be a lack of any documentation between the student and the university regarding this issue, so I think an independent review to see if anything of that nature was found would be a really good idea," Goode said.
Any discussion from the board likely would take place during executive, or closed, session, he said in an email.

Fougere said Wolfe's letter was provided to incoming MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin, "so he is certainly involved in the discussion going forward." Loftin's first day in office is next Monday.

Christian Basi of the MU News Bureau said Loftin can't speak on the topic because he hasn't started his post as chancellor. Loftin didn't respond to a request for comment left for him on Twitter.

Wolfe directed the chancellors to lead comprehensive reviews of their "campuses' respective policies, training and procedures concerning the prevention and reporting of sexual assaults and the availability of mental health services."

The MU News Bureau released a statement yesterday morning shortly after ESPN's report, which was posted online Friday, aired on television. The statement said the university turned over the case to campus police department Saturday night after learning more from ESPN's report, including "names of individuals who might have relevant information regarding the alleged February 2010 assault."

The MU Police Department determined the alleged assault occurred off campus and then passed the case to Columbia police.

Columbia Police Department spokesman Sgt. Joe Bernhard said the department received the case Saturday. A special victims unit will investigate, he said.

"MU was previously unable to go forward with an investigation because there was no complaint brought forward from the alleged victim or her parents, and there was otherwise insufficient information about the incident," the MU News Bureau statement said. "Privacy laws prohibited MU medical personnel from reporting anything Sasha might have shared with them about the alleged assault without her permission."

MU athletic department spokesman Chad Moller said multiple people within and outside the department became involved with Menu Courey to see what could be done to help after she attempted suicide at a Columbia hotel in April 2011.

At that point, Moller said, nobody within the department knew about her alleged rape at the hands of one or more football players more than a year earlier.

MUPD spokesman Brian Wiemer said although the department isn't involved in the case, MU police have been and will continue to be involved in the discussion with administration addressing the issues brought up in Wolfe's letter.

This article was published in the Monday, January 27, 2014 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "Wolfe calls for outside review: President also tells all campuses to act."
MU student reports dorm room invasion, assault

By the Tribune's staff

Monday, January 27, 2014 at 1:46 pm Comments (2)

A female University of Missouri student told police Sunday night that two men forced their way into her dorm room and assaulted her, according to a news release from the University of Missouri Police Department.

The student told police the incident took place between 1:30 and 2 a.m. Sunday, and she reported it just before 8 p.m. that night.

According to the release, the victim said she was getting ready for bed when an unknown male entered her room in Laws residence hall through an unlocked door and physically assaulted her. The victim reached for her cellphone and noticed a second male in the room. Both men left when the victim said she was calling the police.

The victim said her assailant was white, about 6 feet to 6-feet-2-inches tall with an athletic build, short, dark hair and a large nose.

The second male in the room is described as white, about 5-feet-7-inches to 5-feet-8-inches tall and skinny and tall, with short, “dirty blonde” hair.

Anyone with information is asked to call Officer Crystal Becker at 573-884-4495 or Crime Stoppers at 573-875-8477.

MUPD suggested students remember to lock their doors, don’t prop doors in the residence hall and report suspicious activities and individuals.

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Laws Hall resident assaulted in her room
Monday, January 27, 2014 | 8:02 p.m. CST
BY JENNIFER BEATTY

COLUMBIA — A woman who lives in Laws Residence Hall at MU was assaulted early Sunday morning after two men entered her room, MU police said.

MU Police Captain Brian Weimer said the victim was getting ready for bed around 1:30 a.m. when a man entered through her unlocked door. He assaulted her, and she noticed a second man had entered the room. She reached for her cellphone and said she was calling the police, and the men left.

Police received the woman's report Sunday evening.

The security cameras inside the residence hall will be part of the investigation, Weimer said.

The victim said the man who assaulted her was about 6 feet tall with an athletic build and said he had short, dark hair and a big nose.

She described the second man in the room as skinny and about 5 feet, 7 inches tall and had very short, dirty-blonde hair.

The investigation is ongoing.
MRI goggles help put patients at ease

MU Women's and Children's Hospital gets goggles to entertain MRI patients

The hospital purchased the device to help MRI patients relax during the procedure. The goggles are made by Cinemavision. Patients can watch movies, listen to music and talk to MRI technicians.

BY JOSH BENSON

COLUMBIA — These days, the inside of the MRI machine at Women's and Children's Hospital might look a lot like the Death Star — or Gotham City, or Hogwarts. It really depends on which movie the patient chooses.

Last month, the hospital bought a pair of MRI goggles to make the machine's confines less stressful for patients, said Colin Planalp, a media relations coordinator with MU Health Care.

The goggles let the patient watch movies, listen to music or talk with the MRI technician, according to the manufacturer's website.
Before the hospital bought the goggles, people who felt uncomfortable in tight spaces might have had to be sedated or anesthetized for the scans, which can sometimes last longer than an hour.

Some doctors who have used the goggles said they make a noticeable difference.

"We've been happy with it, definitely," said Jesse Courtier, a pediatric radiologist with the University of California - San Francisco's Benioff Children's Hospital. He has used the goggles for about two years.

Courtier pointed out another upside to the goggles: cheaper medical procedures. Anesthesia can cost up to $2,000 per dose, he said. These devices might eliminate the need for such drugs during an MRI.

The goggles cost the hospital about $50,000, Planalp said. It was purchased with a donation from several central Missouri credit unions.