MU Chancellor encourages entrepreneurship at MU Extension sites

Watch story: [http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=26967&zone=5&categories=5](http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=26967&zone=5&categories=5)

FULTON - MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin met with alumni and Fulton business and community leaders to discuss a new proposal to bring money into the university.

Loftin has been traveling around the state to gather input and information from community leaders about what he and the university are doing that works and what needs improvement.

"My goal is to go around the entire state of Missouri, hit it region by region, meet key people there from our alumni, meet key people from Extension, talk to leadership from the political spectrum as well," Loftin said. "And be sure I hear from them directly what Mizzou can do for them, and remind them what Mizzou does for them already."

Loftin said the university is actively trying to figure out a way to keep tuition costs low as state funding declines or flat lines. He said more philanthropic endeavors have been added in recent years to help with this, but it still hasn't generated enough money. He is now proposing a new initiative promoting student and professor business partnerships to share new ideas in order to bring more money back to MU.

"We think a way to do that is taking our creativity, something we do so well at Mizzou, and partner with the private sector to form new businesses owned partially by the inventors, the university and by our partners in the private sector" Loftin said. "And those businesses that succeed can become quite valuable. When they're sold or become public properties, that means a big transaction occurs bringing money back to the university to help pay the bills."

Loftin said one such business has already been sold for $40 million, and he hopes such initiatives can create new business in cities across the state.

"Fulton can be a place where we build great jobs coming from ideas built at the University of Missouri," he said.
Vice Provost and Director of MU extension Michael Ouart said Fulton and Callaway county have been focal points for years.

"Extension is organized by having county Extension Councils in every county who are the bridge between the local community and the campus to help inform us about what it is we need to do with regards to educational programs to educate the citizenry of the state," Ouart said. "It's very important and we certainly have it here in Callaway County."

Fulton Mayor Leroy Benton said he is thankful the chancellor is committed to the city and sees the economic and agricultural impacts MU programs have there.

"Fulton has considered ourself part of the Mizzou family," Benton said. "The Extension Council is a great resource for us. All of our businesses will utilize their expertise. And of course, in our agriculture industry, those folks are constantly seeking advice from the Extension Council."

But Loftin said MU Extension extends far beyond mid-Missouri.

"MU Extension has 1,200 people statewide. They're in every single county in Missouri. Everyone in this state is touched by them one way or the other fairly often," he said. "In fact, this past year, there were 2 million people served directly by Extension in the state of Missouri. Think about that. Two million out of six million people were served this past year alone. That touches your life as a farmer and rancher sure, but small businesses get benefits too. So do people who want to be well. We have health issues. We need to have good nutrition. We have arts programs. We have everything out there you can imagine now across this state providing at their location what people want to have."

Loftin called on those at the luncheon to help him plan for the 200th anniversary of the university.

"I'm looking forward now 25 years in the future when the university turn 200 years of age," Loftin said. "What will Mizzou be then? If we can define that and share a consensus view of it, that means our students, our faculty, our staff, our alumni all think the same way about our future, we can achieve it. We have the wherewithal to get where we want to go if we know where that is."

MU hears from third Title IX candidate

By Ashley Jost
Ellen Eardley wants to know if the University of Missouri is ready to talk about sex. If it’s not, it should be, she says.

Eardley is the third of four candidates vying for the MU Title IX administrator, the person who will ultimately lead the campus’ new Title IX office in implementing education and prevention programs and help oversee the investigations into sexual violence and discrimination complaints on campus.

“I want the ... office to be a place where we can say ‘penis’ and ‘vagina’ and no one bats an eye,” Eardley said.

Eardley is a partner at Mehri & Skalet, a Washington, D.C.-based law firm where she specializes in an array of civil rights issues, including race and gender discrimination cases, whistleblower and wage and hour cases. Eardley is also an adjunct faculty member at American University College of Law.

When working with women or minority populations who have been discriminated against, Eardley said, she believes in giving voices to victims and providing remedies for their situations, which she said the law often fails to do.

“I am always thinking about ways not to just solve clients’ problems but how we can put systems in place with settlement agreements or whatever so these individual client experiences never happen again,” she said.

First, Eardley said, she would need to assess what the university needs from the Title IX administrator. She said that assessment would involve a lot of conversations with students, faculty and staff.

“Are you all ready to talk about sex? I really think you have to be ready for me to come here and help you engage,” Eardley told than a dozen students, staff and faculty at the forum Thursday in the MU Student Center. “We’re at a place in the national dialogue that’s a tipping point where we can begin to snowball that momentum of what’s going on on college campuses. This isn’t a new issue. Most of you know that, but we have an opportunity here to hopefully make real, lasting, systemic change.”

Liz Zufall, a staff member in the College of Education dean’s office, told Eardley she was concerned the Title IX administrator might become focused on upholding MU’s reputation.

“I am afraid position will get swallowed up in protecting university from litigation, preventing scandal and less about changing what’s happening on campus as it relates to interactions with women on campus,” Zufall said.

Eardley said she shared that concern, as well as worries about how to keep the momentum alive when the issue becomes less prominent in the public mind. She said having systems in place that
foster dialogue with new students, faculty and staff will help keep sexual violence and discrimination on the forefront.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Fourth Title IX administrator candidate Olshak holds open forum

BY Michael Alvey

COLUMBIA — Donning a black-and-gold tie and a Missouri Tigers pin, Title IX administrator candidate Richard Olshak already looked the part as a member of MU's faculty.

Olshak spoke to faculty, staff and students at an open forum Thursday afternoon at Memorial Union.

Currently the associate dean of students at Illinois State University, Olshak said that although he thinks he could eventually become the dean of his department, his true passion lies in Title IX issues.

Olshak said he became interested in Title IX when he worked in the Office of Student Conduct at Georgetown University in 1990. Then after Sasha Menu Courey's death in 2011, he became familiar with MU Title IX policies.

"I said to my wife, 'My guess is Mizzou is going to look at creating a Title IX position,'” Olshak said. "When it got posted, that to me was something I wanted."

Olshak is the fourth and final candidate for the Title IX administrator position. Joe Gilgour, Andrea Hayes and Ellen Eardley have already interviewed for the role.

According to his resume, Olshak is a certified Title IX administrator and investigator, and he also serves on the advisory board of the Association for Title IX Administrators.

Olshak answered questions about his goals as a Title IX administrator, changing MU's culture and keeping Title IX in the forefront of campus conversations in the future.

Goals

Olshak said that if he were to be named Title IX administrator, he would have three "simple" goals in his first year on the job:

- to develop as many relationships as possible with stakeholders in Title IX issues.
• to address his own learning curve at MU, such as learning the university's processes and culture.
• to plan a mission, vision and strategic plan for the Title IX program.

"Just in the different groups I've met with today, different people respond to things very differently," Olshak said. "You can't always say what everybody wants to hear, but you just have to be transparent about what you're saying."

Olshak later said that it's going to take longer than a year for the program to see success. He conceded that he isn't an expert in Title IX prevention and education, so he wants to surround himself with people who are more knowledgeable in those areas.

"This is long-term, longitudinal thinking," Olshak said. "If I'm coming here for the long haul — a 10- to 15-year position — that gives me plenty of time to build those bridges."

**Changing the culture**

Olshak said changing the culture at MU to where people are more aware of Title IX issues is a long process.

"The metaphor that always occurs to me is, 'How long does it take to drip water on a rock before the rock begins to erode?'' Olshak asked.

He said that having deep and candid conversations is the best place to start, and that every discussion makes a difference.

"Every conversation we engage in intentionally is going to move people," Olshak said. "I believe in nudging and waiting, and letting people get to a place where we need them to be."

**Keeping Title IX in the forefront**

Olshak said that he doesn't measure Title IX issues by how they are portrayed in news headlines. He plans to focus on educating the public on steps to take in response to these issues.

"It may not be the flavor of the day, or the flavor of the month or the flavor of the year," Olshak said. "But hopefully our efforts affect how people think about this and begin to impact the knowledge people have about what to report, how to report, where to report, and how to engage people prior to things happening."

Olshak added that even if Title IX problems stay out of the news, they're never going to completely go away.

"This has existed as long as humanity's been around," Olshak said. "This is human nature we're talking about, complicated by societal issues. These issues will always be present, and we always have to have an equitable response."
How ‘worms’ end up in fool’s gold fossils

University of Missouri rightOriginal Study

Posted by Jeff Sossamon-U. Missouri on December 18, 2014

How did ancient soft-body creatures become part of the fossil record? New findings suggest that bacteria involved in the decay of those organisms play an active role in how fossils are formed—often in a matter of just a few tens to hundreds of years.

Understanding the relationship between decay and fossilization will inform future study and help researchers interpret fossils in a new way.

“The vast majority of the fossil record is composed of bones and shells,” says James Schiffbauer, assistant professor of geological sciences at the University of Missouri.

“Fossils of soft-bodied animals like worms and jellyfish, however, provide our only views onto the early evolution of animal life. Most hypotheses as to the preservation of these soft tissues focus on passive processes, where normal decay is halted or impeded in some way, such as by sealing off the sediments where the animal is buried,” he says.

“Our team is instead detailing a scenario where the actual decay helped ‘feed’ the process turning the organisms into fossils—in this case, the decay of the organisms played an active role in creating fossils.”

Fool’s gold and wormy creatures

Schiffbauer studied a type of fossil animal from the Ediacaran Period called Conotubus, which lived more than 540 million years ago. He notes that these fossils are either replicated by, or associated with, pyrite—commonly called fool’s gold.

The tiny fossils are tube-shaped and believed to have been composed of substances similar at least in hardness to human fingernails. These fossilized tubes are all that remain of the soft-bodied animals that inhabited them and most likely resembled worms or sea anemone-like animals.
“Most of the animals that had once lived on the Earth—with estimates eclipsing 10 billion species—were never preserved in the fossil record, but in our study we have a spectacular view of a tinier fraction of soft-bodied animals,” says Shuhai Xiao, professor of geobiology at Virginia Tech and a coauthor of the study.

“We asked the important questions of how, and under what special conditions, these soft-tissued organisms can escape the fate of complete degradation and be preserved in the rock record.”

Schiffbauer and his team performed a sophisticated suite of chemical analyses of these fossils to determine what caused the pyrite to form. They found that the fool’s gold on the organisms’ outer tube formed when bacteria first began consuming the animal’s soft tissues, with the decay actually promoting the formation of pyrite.

“Normally, the earth is good at cleaning up after itself,” Schiffbauer says. “In this case, the bacteria that helped break down these organisms also are responsible for preserving them as fossils. As the decay occurred, pyrite began replacing and filling in space within the animal’s exoskeleton, preserving them.

“Additionally, we found that this process happened in the space of a few years, perhaps even as low as 12 to 800. Ultimately, these new findings will help scientists to gain a better grasp of why these fossils are preserved, and what features represent the fossilization process versus original biology, so we can better reconstruct the evolutionary tree of life.”

The study is available in Nature Communications. Collaborators are from Virginia Tech, Northwest University in Xi’an, China, University of Delaware, University of Wisconsin, Indiana University, University of Maryland.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UPDATE: Two-story fall leaves MU student in critical condition

Thursday, December 18, 2014 | 7:42 p.m. CST; updated 7:50 p.m. CST, Thursday, December 18, 2014

BY Taylor Wanbaugh

UPDATE: This story has been updated to include more recent information about Jack Lipp’s condition.

COLUMBIA — An MU student remained in critical condition as of 5:40 Thursday at University Hospital after a two-story fall over the weekend.
Jack Lipp, 19, was at a house party in the 500 block of S. Fourth St. early Saturday morning when he fell off a balcony over a gravel driveway — about a 15-foot drop.

Mike Novak, who lives at the house, said the balcony's railing was broken and he told people it wasn't safe to stand on.

Novak said nobody in the house saw Lipp fall. "We came outside and he was lying on the ground," he said.

Novak, 20, said he kicked everyone out and called an ambulance. Emergency responders arrived shortly before 2:30 a.m., according to a Columbia Police Department news release.

Police said about a hundred people fled the party when police arrived, limiting investigators' ability to gauge the scene. Novak said fewer than 50 people were at the party, and he told people to leave in an effort to manage the situation.

The Columbia Police Department has asked witnesses to contact Detective Julie Ray at 874-7610 or jamarty@gocolumbiamo.com.

From party to critical condition: MU student recovers from two-story fall

Police look for witnesses’ stories about MU freshman Jack Lipp’s two-story fall from a Balcony on Dec. 13.

MU freshman Jack Lipp from Illinois reportedly fell off a two-story building during a party in the early hours of Dec. 13.

Officers were dispatched to the 500 block of S. 4th Street at around 2:30 a.m. to aid the Columbia Fire Department with the incident.

Lipp’s family asked Lipp’s close friends to not comment on the incident.

About 100 people were present at the party, but since they fled the scene as officers arrived, police have few witness testimonies about the incident that occurred according to a Columbia Police Department news release.

Lipp remains in critical condition, according to the release, while CPD are looking for witnesses to the incident to make statements. They will not be investigating alcohol violations related to the incident.
Missouri hydroponic farm says demand is growing

By JULIANA GOODWIN

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. (AP) — In late 2008 when the housing market collapsed, David and Terry Quick decided to get out of the construction business and into farming.

"People don't always need concrete patios, but they always need to eat," David Quick told the Springfield News-Leader (http://sgfnow.co/1AisTi0).

So after 30 years, the Quicks launched a new venture: a hydroponic farm. In a hydroponic operation, plants are grown in a water- and nutrient-rich solution, eliminating the need for soil. Produce can be grown year-round in a greenhouse.

They run Quickley Produce Farm in Galena with their daughter Alisha and son-in-law Russ Welch. While the family didn't have a background in hydroponics, David said he believes in its potential: the farmer can grow more crops in less space, has a longer growing season, is less susceptible to traditional diseases that can wipe out crops, and the consumer can buy locally grown produce in winter.

So far, it has paid off. They specialize in tomatoes and cucumbers and can't keep up with demand.

Now in their fourth season, they'd like to double their capacity.

"In the past three years, the acceptance of hydroponics has been overwhelming ... to where people are actually seeking it out," David Quick said.

Hydroponic farming is not a common method, but it is gaining interest, particularly with crops like lettuce and tomatoes, said Patrick Byers, regional horticulture specialist with University of Missouri Extension in Greene County.

"The method has been around a long time. It's not a new approach, but what has been developed is the technology with different types of greenhouses and growing setups," Byers said.

While people have toyed with this concept for centuries, the method was invented by William Frederick Gericke, a professor at the University of California Berkeley, in the 1930s. His vision was to create a farming technique that would produce higher yields in smaller spaces and help feed more people.

During World War II, it was put into practice by the American military, which grew crops for troops stationed in islands in the Pacific that were not conducive to growing food.
While hydroponic farming is practiced around the world, it hasn't take off the way Gericke expected it to, partially because more research went into traditional farming and how to increase those yields, and because the cost of hydroponics can be prohibitive, especially to smaller operations.

"Hydroponic farms, because of the need for protective structures such as greenhouses, specialized equipment and planting systems, specialized nutrient solutions, and intensive management, are more expensive to establish and operate than conventional farms," Byers said.

The cost is daunting but can be overcome by the longer growing season, Quick said.

No agency tracks the number of these farms in the United States, so it's difficult to say how many there are, but experts say the interest and practice is on the rise, especially in the last few years.

When Marilyn and Dan Brentlinger started CropKing, an Ohio business that helps farmers set up hydroponic farms, 32 years ago, this method was not mainstream. Today, the business is thriving.

"Back in the mid '70s, Dan and I got our start in the hydroponic industry when we bought two 30-by-96-foot hydroponic greenhouses located in Springfield, Missouri. Back in the 1970s, most people were not familiar with the word 'hydroponic' and those that were often had visions of weird plants growing in 'chemicals,'" Brentlinger said.

Dan, who died nine years ago, was a graduate of Southwest Missouri State University. In 1978, they grew their first batch of European hybrid cucumbers and couldn't sell them. They ended up giving most of the produce away.

"Much has changed over the past 40 years and especially the past five or six years. The consumers have come to recognize that hydroponic growing can be a much cleaner, safer method, and an even more ecologically friendly way to grow premium produce in a location where the weather or the soil may not be conducive," she said.

Because the produce is grown in greenhouses without soil, it eliminates soil-borne pathogens.

"There's no pesticide, no spray, no contamination. People seem to be looking for that now. It's clean and the only possible contamination is us handling it," Quick said.

Byers, who visits and consults with hydroponic farms in the area, said when he does, they are very clean; he wears surgical booties inside the greenhouse and doesn't touch the plants.

Lane McConnell, market manager at Farmers Market of the Ozarks, said consumers and hospitals are interested in the "clean" aspect of hydroponic farming. She's fielded calls from Cox and Mercy, whose staffs have expressed an interest in buying hydroponic food.

It's also an efficient way to farm. Last year, in 6,000 square feet of space, Quickley Produce Farms produced 45,000 pounds of beefsteak tomatoes, 10,000 pounds of heirloom and cherry tomatoes and 32,000 cucumbers.

"You look at how many acres of property it would take to produce that much poundage of produce and you are doing it on one-tenth of the water that it would take in soil-based production," Quick said. "You would think you'd use more water, but you actually use less. You can grow so much more in so much smaller space and your growing season is so much longer. We have ripe tomatoes in April and most others don't until mid-July. We have tomatoes with snow on the ground."

Earlier this year, market members organized a tour of Quickley Produce Farm and another hydroponic farm, New Horizons, which specializes in lettuce, and the tour sold out. Sixty-one people attended, including a number who drove in from northwest Missouri to learn more about this method of growing, McConnell said.
While the interest is there, hydroponic farming is not easy. According to Cornell University's Biological and Environmental Engineering, Controlled Environment Agriculture website: "It is a very technical skill needed. One needs a special eye to 'know' when the plants are ailing (before the average person can tell). One needs to know about horticulture, computers, environments, energy matters, mechanical systems, marketing, sales, personnel management, pest management, plant pathology, plant nutrient management."

After establishing the farm, it can be costly to operate, too. Farmers have to use propane to heat the greenhouses, and that can be expensive during a harsh winter, said McConnell.

When considering hydroponic farming, a niche market is important and so is a customer base that wants to support local growers, said Byers.

But that market is alive in this area, indicated Quick.

"You would think it would be hard to sell 32,000 cucumbers, but I believe I could sell 50,000. I just can't grow that many right now," Quick said.

Terry Quick said the thought of this business was scary at first, but she had faith it would take off.

The first year they sold at farmers markets, but the wholesale end of the business to grocery stores and restaurants has picked up so much, David Quick said he may put a larger focus on that.

Aside from the technical side, one of the best aspects of this business is it's a family operation, echoed the family. Their five grandchildren pitch in in the summer and they're learning farming skills, marketing, business and where their food comes from.

Daughter Alisha Welch considers herself fortunate to work with family. This is an old way of life with a modern twist, said Welch.

"Families have been running farms together for a very long time," Welch said. "My dad teaches my son work ethic and my son teaches him to run his smartphone. It's great."


The Chronicle of Higher Education

How the College-Ratings Plan Came About

NO MU MENTION

August 22, 2013. President Obama publicly announces the ratings plan in a speech on college cost at the University at Buffalo, part of the State University of New York. September 20, 2013. With the plan already under attack, Education Secretary Arne Duncan calls early criticism "more than a little silly"—parrying remarks by Terry W.
Hartle, of the American Council on Education, who says the department has an obligation to use "perfect data" for its system. Mr. Duncan says that is "exactly the wrong premise" to start with.

October 30, 2013. In a notice published in the Federal Register, the Education Department announces that four public forums will be held to gather feedback on the ratings system.

November 6, 2013. The first of the hearings, at California State University-Dominguez Hills, gives administrators, faculty members, and students a chance to voice concerns about the limitations of the system.

November 13, 2013. Speakers at the second hearing, held at George Mason University, in Virginia, warn the department to take diversity into account, and not to end up discouraging colleges from enrolling low-income students.

December 17, 2013. The Education Department publishes a notice in the Federal Register asking colleges for feedback on the ratings system.

January 22, 2014. The president of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, M. Peter McPherson, writes to Mr. Duncan to urge the adoption of an alternative system that would judge colleges based on their "retention and graduation rates; employment and continuing-education rates; and loan-repayment and default rates."

February 6, 2014. The Education Department holds a daylong symposium on the technical challenges of a ratings system. Among the takeaways: Federal data are deeply flawed, pleasing everyone is impossible, and a student-tracking unit-record system would solve almost every problem. But there are disagreements aplenty.

February 11, 2014. Community-college leaders grill the department at the Community College National Legislative Summit. Attendees wonder how the department would account for the differences in institutions’ missions and profiles.

March 19, 2014. The American Council on Education reiterates its disdain for the ratings system with a new report arguing, among other things, that applicants don’t rely on rankings or ratings when choosing a college.

April 30, 2014. At a hearing of a Senate subcommittee that oversees education appropriations, Mr. Duncan says the department will still produce the college ratings even if it doesn’t get the $10-million it asked Congress to allocate.
May 21, 2014. The department pushes back the expected publication date of its draft plan for the ratings from the spring to the fall.

June 10, 2014. Two congressmen, a Republican and a Democrat, introduce a resolution opposing the ratings system.

June 30, 2014. The departing chair of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators offers another alternative to the ratings system in a session at the group’s annual meeting. It would rate colleges based on "social responsibility" by assigning silver, gold, and platinum ratings.


September 2, 2014. After months of concern about "unintended consequences" of the plan, Jamienne S. Studley, deputy under secretary of education, acknowledges that education researchers’ worries about those consequences are valid.

September 6, 2014. Ted Mitchell, the under secretary of education, says the ratings system will "reflect and incorporate the different missions of institutions."

September 12, 2014. A public-comment hearing—held by the federal Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance—stresses four key questions about the forthcoming system.

November 4, 2014. The Republican Party registers a resounding victory in midterm elections, retaking control of the Senate, expanding its majority in the House, and creating unfavorable prospects for Mr. Obama’s plan in Congress. Sen. Lamar Alexander, the incoming chair of the Senate committee that oversees education, makes clear that he is no fan of the ratings.

December 19, 2014. The Education Department releases a draft version of the plan.
Education Dept. sets out college rating plan

By Nick Anderson Washington Post

WASHINGTON • By the start of next school year, the federal government plans to rate colleges on access, affordability and student outcomes — perhaps relying on graduates’ employment and earnings data. Schools could be rated as high performers, low performers or “in the middle,” according to a “draft framework” of the ratings plan that the administration of President Barack Obama is releasing today. The document, essentially a status report on an initiative Obama announced in August 2013, leaves many questions unanswered. But it makes clear that the Education Department still intends to assume a new role as an arbiter of the performance of thousands of colleges and universities.

“Designing a new college ratings system is an important step in improving transparency, accountability and equity in higher education,” said Ted Mitchell, undersecretary of education. “The public should know how students fare at institutions receiving federal student aid, and this performance should be considered when we assess our investments and set priorities.”

Mitchell acknowledged Thursday that the department was deliberating key issues: Which measures will be used? How will colleges be grouped for comparison? How will they be given credit for improvement? What does “in the middle” mean, the middle 50 percent or the middle 90 percent? Will each college receive a single composite rating, multiple ratings — or both?

The administration is seeking public input by Feb. 17 on several potential metrics it could use to rate schools.

• On accessibility, it is weighing the share of students who have enough financial need to qualify for federal Pell Grants; the pattern of expected family contributions to tuition; the distribution of students in groupings by family income; and the share of students whose parents did not attend college.

• On affordability, it is considering statistics on average net price and the net price paid by families at various income levels.

• On outcomes, it is considering graduation rates, transfer rates (for community colleges), graduate school attendance, loan repayment and “labor market success.” The latter, possibly including federal employment and earnings data, could be the most controversial element. One of the few things that appears to be settled is that the government plans to rate four-year colleges and two-year colleges, but not schools that only offer graduate degrees.

Some higher-education leaders say the very idea of government ratings is flawed.

“What we have repeatedly said is the federal government ought to provide lots of information, but not be in the position of picking winners and losers,” said David Warren, president of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, which represents about 1,000 private schools. This view is shared by many congressional Republicans.

Others say the administration faces a challenge of immense complexity in figuring out how colleges should be sorted and measured, especially if it is relying on data of uncertain quality.

“They have produced a thoughtful framework that demonstrates extensive consultation,” said Terry Hartle, senior vice president of the American Council on Education, which represents college and university presidents from public and private sectors. “But it only serves to underscore our concern that the department lacks the data and the time needed to do this well.”
Wallace Loh, president of the University of Maryland, has backed the ratings initiative from the beginning. Told about the framework, Loh said Thursday he still supports the federal effort to analyze college outcomes.

“The symbolism is almost as important as whatever practical impact it has,” Loh said. “The message it is sending is, ‘We want more accountability on the basis of results.’

The department circulated to reporters a “fact sheet” about the draft framework in advance of its release. In many respects, it echoes a document the White House released when Obama spoke about the initiative last year.

“We don’t know a whole lot more than we did in August 2013,” said Warren, one of several higher-education leaders briefed on the framework Thursday.

Mitchell, a former president of Occidental College in California, said the department has consulted “close to 9,000 people” about the ratings. In the next two months, it will hear from even more. Then there will be an all-out sprint to decide on a formula and publish ratings ahead of the next school year.

“This is hard work. It’s complicated work,” Mitchell said. “And we want to do everything we can to get version 1.0 as right as we can.”

Why Comparing Lots of Colleges Might Not Help as Many Students as You’d Think

By Beckie Supiano

There has been a proliferation of consumer information meant to help prospective students choose a college. A number of those tools seem to take it for granted that prospects will embark on a broad, national search. They assume that prospective students are shopping around, just as they might for a car or some other big-ticket consumer item, and that they’re willing to pick up and move anywhere in the country. That kind of college search might dominate hand-wringing news articles and cocktail-party chatter, but it’s far from standard.

For many students, the set of choices is not the thousands of colleges sprinkled across the country or the name brands clustered at the top of U.S. News & World Report’s rankings. It’s the contained, sometimes even sparse, group of colleges within a reasonable radius of home.
That reality raises questions about what sort of information is meaningful to the average prospective student—and about the utility of recent efforts to help them, not least the Obama administration’s college ratings, a draft outline of which was released on Friday.

The numbers show that many students who go off to college don’t go all that far. Fifty-four percent of freshmen attending four-year institutions in 2013 went to one no more than 100 miles from home, according to the most-recent Freshman Survey from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, part of the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles. Nearly 30 percent were 101 to 500 miles from home.

Moreover, that survey reflects only the experience of first-time, full-time students attending four-year colleges. It doesn’t count students enrolled part time or at community colleges—students who are particularly likely to choose a local option. Adults, especially, may have work and family ties that rule out a move.

It’s no accident that so many students go to college near where they already live. After all, a majority of students attend public colleges. States subsidize residents’ tuition and, in many cases, offer merit or need-based scholarships in an effort to educate and retain their work forces.

"Students more often than not are working in this closed system of institutions," says David A. Hawkins, executive director for educational content and policy at the National Association for College Admission Counseling. As a result, he says, the information that serves them best focuses on career options, and on what they’ll have to pay.

*The Importance of Cost*

Tara K. Lebar has seen this pattern play out in Kansas. Most students at Blue Valley West High School, where she is a professional school counselor, come from upper-middle-class families, Ms. Lebar says. But that doesn’t mean money is no object when it comes to choosing a college. "At the end of the day," she says, "the cost drives the decision."

The top 15 percent or so of the class tends to do a global search, Ms. Lebar says, but most students look to stay nearby.

In-state tuition isn’t the only cost savings if they do, Ms. Lebar adds. Flying to a distant college is an additional expense. And the cost of living is lower in Kansas and its neighboring states than on the coasts.
There are additional reasons to stay near home, Ms. Lebar says. Many students want to be near their families and in a place they know, she says—in other words, "where they are comfortable."

The school, in a suburb of Kansas City, sends a lot of its graduates to the University of Kansas and to Kansas State University.

Even for students who want to go farther afield, Ms. Lebar recommends visiting nearby colleges to get a sense of whether they prefer a large or a small campus. After all, she says, "we have every type of college within a two-hour driving distance." They can begin a national search with Ms. Lebar’s help once they have a better idea of what they’re looking for.

At North Central High School in Indianapolis, only about a quarter of the graduating class goes to college out of state, says Susie Bremen, coordinator for college counseling. There are lots of good options in Indiana, she says. And whether their parents went there or not, many students feel that Indiana University at Bloomington, an hour away, is "their legacy."

The high school has a sizable first-generation and multicultural population, Ms. Bremen says. Some students want to live at home during college, not only to save money but also to help their families by working or helping care for younger siblings. For them, the local community college or Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis can be good options.

Of course, just because students go to college relatively close to home doesn’t mean they never consider more-distant alternatives.

But there are some groups for whom that is probably true. Take community-college students. Many of them probably applied to exactly one college—the one that they’re attending, says David S. Baime, senior vice president for government relations and research at the American Association of Community Colleges. "They choose their local community college," he says, "precisely because it is their local community college."

For such students, Mr. Baime says, comparisons of programs might be more valuable than comparisons of colleges.

Community-college students are just one population whose needs are not necessarily met by tools that allow them to compare institutions across the country, says David A. Longanecker, president of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.
Other groups that probably won’t get much out of such tools, he says, are nontraditional-age students studying online and high-school students taking dual-enrollment courses.

The data the government collects can help colleges improve themselves and can be used to hold them accountable, Mr. Longanecker says. But that doesn’t mean the data convey what consumers need to know.

‘Education Deserts’
In some parts of the country, particularly larger cities, a prospective student might have multiple public colleges from which to choose. But there are other places where students have few, if any, choices. About 11 percent of Americans live in "education deserts," where there are limited public-college options—often, just one community college, according to a recent paper by Nicholas Hillman, an assistant professor of educational leadership and policy analysis at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. If a student is place-bound—unable to move because of family obligations, a job, or something else—and there’s one affordable local college, then what is the value of comparing that college to others? Furthermore, the paper argues, if the ratings are eventually tied to federal funding, as intended, a community that used to have one college might be left with none.

Since the paper came out, Mr. Hillman has wondered: "How do we build the capacity of those communities?" That’s a taller order than expecting potential students to make their way to someplace with a college that’s well rated.

Geography has been an underappreciated part of the college-selection process. Proximity to a college is associated with, and a possible causal factor in, applying to college, according to a 2009 paper by Ruth N. López Turley, now a professor of sociology at Rice University. The likely explanation, the paper argues, is convenience. Going to college is easier financially, logistically, and emotionally if there is one close by.

"Where you live constrains your choices," Ms. Turley says, especially for the most-disadvantaged students. Some more-recent research suggests that this may be changing, she adds, at least for high-achieving, low-income students.

Some prospective students might not be as place-bound as they imagine, says Robert Shireman, executive director of California Competes, a nonprofit education-reform group. Not everyone realizes that financial aid can be used toward living expenses as well as tuition, he says, and that knowledge could enable a student to go farther away than first seemed possible.
Part of the decision to leave home comes down to risk tolerance, Mr. Shireman says. And the level of risk involved varies.

Some students are being launched. Others are helping to prop up their families. "If you don’t have a safety net," Mr. Shireman says, "it’s a lot harder to make that leap."

Perhaps efforts to inform students’ choices should start by grappling with that.

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Behind the Ratings

December 19, 2014

By Michael Stratford

NO MU MENTION

Friday’s release of a college ratings “framework” was a relatively anticlimactic milestone that capped months of speculation, delays and sometimes-fierce criticism from higher education leaders.

The U.S. Department of Education published just a handful of pages of information, much of which underscores what officials have been saying publicly for months. There are, however, some new details about how the administration plans to approach the ratings. And more detailed information will be published Friday morning, an Education Department spokeswoman said.

The document is the product of more than a year of scrambling by several dozen officials and staffers at the Education Department and other federal offices to meet President Obama’s August 2013 directive to create a ratings system. A core challenge, several people working on the project said, was how to translate several
lines of presidential rhetoric about a system to measure the value colleges provide into a concrete policy proposal.

Department officials and their staff have been gathering weekly -- and at times daily -- since last August to try to pull together ratings that overcome a number of significant hurdles, said several people who worked on the project.

In addition to various Education Department teams, the ratings effort has involved several White House offices and other federal agencies, like the U.S. Department of the Treasury, which assisted with statistical modeling.

"It was a very, very difficult problem," said Tom Weko, who worked in the department’s policy and budget office until March, when he moved to the American Institutes for Research.

Weko said the ratings presented a unique policy challenge because the department wasn't working within the confines of a specific law or regulation, but rather had a largely amorphous goal.

"If you can't figure out what the problem is that you’re trying to fix," he said, "you’re at high risk for wheel spinning."

A widely discussed challenge -- both inside and outside the department -- was how to develop ratings based on the existing quality and availability of federal data.

"There were a lot of smart, hard-working people trying to figure out how to address this problem," said Weko. Beyond surveying the sets of data already available to the department, he said, staffers also tried to come up with creative ways to combine or mix other federal sources of data, such as the Internal Revenue Service or Social Security Administration.

Another challenge was trying to adjust existing sources of data to meet the needs of the ratings system, Weko said.

"A typical discussion was: 'Gosh, the University of Chicago bachelor's grads don't have high earnings after five years, but that's because they're all pursuing Ph.Ds.,' " he said. "How do you exclude those people from the cohort of people you're including in earnings?"

**Series of Delays**

The release of the ratings system was delayed several times. Last year, Arne Duncan, the education secretary, said he expected the department to produce draft metrics by spring 2014, with a "first cut" of ratings due out about now. The department’s public timeline for producing an outline of the system slipped from spring to summer to, finally, "by fall," a deadline that technically will be met, as winter officially begins on Sunday.

"They have now spent longer to get to the conceptual ratings than they took to draft, debate and pass the Affordable Care Act," said Terry Hartle, a senior vice president at the American Council on Education. "This cake has been in the oven for a very long
time, and that is because this is not easy.”

In the meantime, the lack of a concrete proposal hasn’t stopped college leaders or members of the U.S. Congress from slamming the administration’s proposal. For their part, department officials have said repeatedly that critics should refrain from judging the ratings system before it actually exists. Duncan last September dismissed higher education group's criticism of the ratings plan as "premature and more than a little silly" since the department had not yet published a plan.

Ted Mitchell is a former college president who took the helm of higher education policymaking at the department this summer as the ratings were already being developed. He acknowledged that it's been difficult to have a productive debate without more information about the department’s plan.

“We are probably more eager than anyone else to have a draft out in the public,” Mitchell said in an interview earlier this month. "The anxiety of not having something concrete to discuss has distracted the field and has made conversations difficult.”

**Listening Tour**

After the ratings plan was first announced last August, department officials fanned out across the country for a listening tour about the proposal. They held full-day public hearings in northern Virginia, California, Louisiana, and Iowa.

Denise Horn, a department spokeswoman, said Thursday that officials had received feedback on the ratings plan from more than 9,000 people at some 165 events. Department officials also regularly delivered what became an evolving campaign-like stump speech about college ratings.

“I sometimes think I might as well just wear a T-shirt that says 'ratings' because that is something that people are very interested in hearing about,” Deputy Undersecretary of Education Jamienne Studley quipped before a group of Ohio college presidents at a gathering on Capitol Hill earlier this year.

As was typical of department officials’ public remarks on the ratings, Studley sought in the speech to reassure college leaders that the government had heard their concerns about the possible pitfalls of a ratings system.

"Let me acknowledge first that this is complicated,” Studley told the Ohio college presidents. “We know it's a tough challenge. And we know that it's controversial." Those speeches had a few recurring themes, such as justifying the need for a ratings system for accountability purposes (the department spends $150 billion in taxpayer money on grants and loans each year). They've also argued that students and parents feel overwhelmed by the process of applying to and choosing between institutions and need access to better data.

But for all of the department’s outreach, some in higher education have said they worry that their concerns aren’t necessarily being heard.

"You have to give the department great credit for meeting with anyone who wanted to talk about it,” said Hartle. "But this has been a very closed process. The department
has been very unwilling to talk about their specific plans for a rating system."

Tod Massa, director of policy research and data warehousing at State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, was among the people whom the department turned to for technical advice on how to build a rating system. He said the department kicked off the ratings development well by soliciting a broad range of input, "but then it kind of fell apart."

"After that, all we heard was rumors and promises," he said. "They owe it to the community to have an open and transparent process all the way through."

Massa questioned why department officials did not work more closely with outside data experts as the process moved forward.

"Lots of us intimately know the available data. We know what can and cannot be done," he said. "It's not like they could have come up with anything that really hadn't been done before without new data sources."

The college-ratings plan that the Education Department is releasing on Friday can best be described as incremental.

The plan, the product of more than a year of discussion and debate, is less a proposal than a progress report—an update on metrics the department is considering using in its system. It’s unlikely to assuage colleges’ concerns, but it’s unlikely to increase their anxiety, either.

Which measures might factor into the ratings? The list includes a number of expected metrics, like a college’s average net price, its students’ completion rates, and the percentage of its students receiving Pell Grants. It also includes labor-market
outcomes and loan-repayment rates—measures that proved controversial during the protracted fight over the "gainful employment" rule.

But there’s a lot that the "framework," as department officials are calling it, does not do. It doesn’t assign weights to each metric. Nor does it offer a plan for how similar institutions will be grouped.

It doesn’t say what format the ratings will take, and it doesn’t clarify whether the department will publish a single, composite rating, or a series of ratings.

Those gaps have left colleges "a little mystified," said Sarah A. Flanagan, vice president for government relations and policy at the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, which has opposed the ratings.

"There isn’t much new here, and there isn’t much that gives us a road map as to where they’re going to go," she said.

Steve Gunderson, president and chief executive of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities, a group that has sparred with the department over the gainful-employment rule, said the delays show the impossibility of the department’s task.

"If after nearly a year and a half of work this is all the department can muster," he said, "it seems to support the long-held belief by many in higher education that while a college-rating system is admirable in theory, it is not feasible to create metrics that definitively assess the quality of so many institutions across the country."

Supporters of President Obama’s plan took a more optimistic view. "We’re making progress," said Kim Cook, executive director of the National College Access Network. "Obviously, this is a very complicated process."

In an interview Thursday evening, Ted Mitchell, the under secretary of education and the department’s top higher-education official, argued that the Obama administration had "moved a very long way, both conceptually and technically."

Conceptually, "we’ve moved from a huge basketful of ideas down to what we think are a few understandable, clear, and really important domains in which we want to rate institutions," he said.
On the technical side, he said, the department has "done a lot of work with our own data systems," pitting possible metrics against each other, and "pressure-testing them to see if they hold water and have explanatory power."

Mr. Mitchell said the department was still on track to release the first ratings by the start of the 2015-16 academic year. The department is taking public comment on the framework through mid-February.

Doubts and Debates

Publication of the much-anticipated draft plan comes almost three years after Mr. Obama used his State of the Union address to put colleges "on notice," stating that his administration would not continue to subsidize rising tuition. He announced his plan to rate colleges the following year, during a three-campus "college cost" bus tour through New York and Pennsylvania.

Since then, the administration has proceeded cautiously, holding a series of public meetings and forums to solicit feedback from experts and advocates on how to construct the ratings. Mr. Mitchell estimated that the department had talked to 9,000 people about the plan.

The president’s goals are threefold: to help colleges improve, to help students make better decisions about which institutions to attend, and to allow policy makers and the public to hold institutions accountable for their outcomes. Ultimately, the administration wants Congress to tie some portion of federal student aid to the ratings. But Republicans, who will control both chambers of Congress come January, aren’t likely to go along. They argue that the federal government has no business rating colleges, and they have threatened to cut off funding for the effort.

Colleges, meanwhile, worry the plan will punish institutions that serve low-income students and those that prepare graduates for much-needed but low-paying professions. A rating system that doesn’t adjust for student demographics and institutional mission, they say, could compel colleges to turn away at-risk students, relax their graduation standards, or drop degrees in low-paying fields.

Critics also complain that some of the information the Obama administration wants to use in its ratings is missing or incomplete. Federal graduation rates count only first-time, full-time students, for example, and data on graduates’ earnings are limited. According to those critics, rating institutions based on flawed data would be unfair to colleges and could mislead prospective students.
The new framework acknowledges those concerns, and describes ways the department might deal with them. It says the ratings will, "at a minimum," be divided into separate groupings for two- and four-year institutions. In addition, the department "is considering accounting for differences in institutional characteristics such as degree and program mix and selectivity."

The department is also debating whether to adjust the metrics to account for student demographics, an approach that public colleges have endorsed. The list of factors it might take into account includes students’ parental income, first-generation status, and SAT scores, Mr. Mitchell said.

Measuring Outcomes
On labor-market outcomes, Mr. Mitchell said, the department will not compare colleges based on whose graduates earn more. Rather, it will set a "threshold" that graduates’ earnings must meet—a multiplier of the minimum wage, perhaps, or earnings over the poverty line.

"We’re asking, Does attending Institution X prepare recent graduates for employment at a level that enables them to pay their bills and get on with life?" he said. "We think that eases a lot of the concerns about creating perverse incentives for colleges to produce more Wall Street lawyers and fewer social workers."

One test the department has already ruled out: a debt-to-earnings ratio, the metric at the heart of the controversial gainful-employment regulation.

As for critics’ doubts about the data, the department says it is exploring the feasibility of constructing a graduation rate using the agency’s central database for student aid. Such a rate would capture part-time and transfer students, though it would still be limited to federal student-aid recipients.

M. Peter McPherson, president of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, said the department should still allow colleges to substitute their own more-comprehensive graduation rates for the federal figure. Under the voluntary Student Achievement Measure, some public colleges are tracking outcomes for all their students, not just aid recipients.

Student and consumer groups, meanwhile, said they were glad the department had included labor-market outcomes and loan-repayment rates in the list of possible metrics.
"Students around the country tell us that one of the main reasons they go to college is to expand their career opportunities," said Jennifer Wang, policy director for Young Invincibles.

But others were troubled by the lack of detail in the department’s plan.

"This is a thoughtful paper that shows the result of extensive consultation, but it only serves to underscore concerns that the department lacks a clear framework, the data, and the time needed to do this well," said Terry W. Hartle, senior vice president for government and public affairs at the American Council on Education.

"This project is driven by a timetable set by the president," he said. "I would be much more comfortable if it were driven by a desire to get it absolutely right."

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Ratings Plan Arrives, Details Scant

December 19, 2014

By

Michael Stratford

WASHINGTON -- After nearly a year and a half of public debate over its proposed college ratings, the Obama administration on Friday provided the first glimpse into how it will structure such a system, including the criteria it will use to judge colleges.

The administration’s “framework” identifies nearly a dozen metrics that officials are planning to use -- but leaves a host of important questions unresolved (highlights here; full release here). A department spokeswoman said that more details would be
published Friday morning.

The most straightforward set of measures looks at the rate at which colleges enroll low-income and first-generation students -- and the extent to which institutions are affordable. Those measures include the percentage of students who receive Pell Grants, the financial need of students based on the federal aid formula, the students' family income levels, and the number of first-generation college students on a campus.

In addition, the department is considering the average net price of an institution, which is the actual amount that families end up paying after they receive aid. The Higher Education Act, which is the federal law that governs financial aid, already requires the U.S. Department of Education to publish an annual list of the highest-net-price institutions each year.

Among the most controversial elements of the ratings system has been its plan for measuring student outcomes. The outline released Friday says the department wants to judge colleges based on their completion rates (as well as transfer rates and how many students go to graduate school) as well as on graduates' earnings. “The outcome metric has always been the most complicated,” Undersecretary of Education Ted Mitchell said. "We don’t intend and ought not to intend to capture every outcome of higher education."

Overall, the department’s approach in the outline appears to be moving away from a system that lets students and families draw comparative value judgments between colleges and closer to something that resembles a set of minimum standards for institutions.

Mitchell said, for example, that the department thinks setting a "threshold" or a “floor” on the earnings metric would solve an issue of perverse incentives. Critics have warned about judging colleges based on graduates' earnings data, which could encourage institutions to graduate more bankers and engineers rather than teachers or public servants. Such a threshold would work, he said, by rating a college based on the share of students who go on to earn salaries that exceed some multiple of the minimum wage or poverty line rather than publishing median salaries.

The goal of the outcomes data, Mitchell said, is to produce ratings that identify which institutions "equip a student to graduate, go to work and in that work be able to pay their loans and get started with those big things in life like saving for a mortgage." Mitchell said the department acknowledges that the ratings system doesn't "aim to be comprehensive" or seek to "measure everything."

The framework offers few details other than 11 data points that department is considering. Mitchell said he expected the rating system would include fewer metrics than the ones outlined in the framework.

Officials said they will rate only degree-granting undergraduate institutions based on three different levels: high-performing, low-performing, and “middle.” But the department has still not decided whether a handful of metrics will feed into one single rating for an entire institution or whether it will issue separate ratings scores for each metric, according to Mitchell.
Regardless of whether there is a singular rating or a set of them, Mitchell said, the goal is to keep the number of institutions in the high- and low-performing categories relatively small, with the bulk of institutions falling into the “middle” category. The framework also leaves unanswered how to compare student outcomes among institutions.

The department has not decided -- though it is possible -- whether to create a statistical model to control for different institutional types (and perhaps colleges' location) and the population of students that an institution serves (such as low-income, first-generation students versus wealthier students who come to college better prepared).

So far, the department has settled only on one way to group colleges in the ratings system: separating two-year institutions from four-year institutions. But officials said they are exploring more granular ways to compare institutions of similar types. One possibility, they said, would be to group colleges by selectivity or the type of programs and degrees they offer. That might mean grouping liberal arts colleges together or looking at institutions that share a specialty, like engineering.

**Higher Ed Remains Skeptical**

Terry Hartle, senior vice president for government relations and public affairs at the American Council on Education, praised the department for producing a “thoughtful status report” but said the lack of details showed officials do not have a clear direction for how to proceed.

“For many institutions, this will heighten concerns that what matters to the agency is the need to get it done by the deadline and not necessarily the need to get it right,” Hartle said. “Does this increase our confidence that they would do this [rating system] well? The answer is no. They would get an incomplete on this.”

In announcing the plan in August 2013, the Obama administration said it would publish a first version of the ratings by the 2015-16 academic year.

David Warren, the president of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, was among the higher education leaders briefed on the outline by the department on Thursday. He said he was concerned the department had not made any significant changes to the ratings plan since it was first announced.

“They’ve had 16-and-a-half months to come to where we are,” he said. “And they’ve not changed the rudimentary metrics. I’m not clear where the feedback they received has altered the proposal.”

Warren said that although it generally would be acceptable for the department to publish more data about student outcomes, he remains concerned that combining multiple data points into a rating that carries the weighty "imprimatur of the federal government" would be reductive.
“It is a limited, arbitrary and narrow set of variables they picked,” he added. “Our concern is that it’s not going to provide a prospective student and parent with a very good picture of what it means to go to college.”

David Baime, senior vice president for government relations and research at the American Association of Community Colleges, said he was surprised by the "tentativeness" of the plan released.

"It looks a lot less specific than what we would've expected," he said.

M. Peter McPherson, president of the Association of Public Land-grant Universities, praised the proposal for incorporating some of his organization's recommendations, such as rating institutions based on a three-tier system.

"There should be consequences for the very bad performers and rewards for excellent ones," he said in a statement.

But McPherson also said the proposal fell short in relying on incomplete graduation data and not fully endorsing a "student readiness adjustment" to account for the demographics that an institution serves.

"The absence of such an adjustment as part of the ratings system could create perverse incentives for institutions to shift away from taking in more low-income and first-generation students, since it could negatively impact a school’s rating."

**Timeframe**

The release of a draft ratings system has twice been delayed, but officials insisted that they are still on track to publish actual ratings for the first time next year.

The department will solicit public input on the framework released Friday over the next several months, with a comment deadline of Feb. 17.

Mitchell said the first iteration of college ratings will be published for public consumption "in advance of the opening of the 2015-16 school year," which traditionally begins at the end of August or beginning of September.
Richard Baker’s first case as an administrator of Title XI of the Education Amendments of 1972 showed him how different this job was going to be. The vice president for equal opportunity at the University of Houston had worked on nondiscrimination issues for years, but dealing with a student’s report of sexual assault was more emotionally charged than anything he’d ever faced professionally.

When a complainant alleges discrimination based on race or ethnicity, or some other characteristic, Baker said, “there’s always a sense of disappointment or anger, but nothing to the degree of someone who has been the victim of a sexual assault.”

In that first sexual assault case four years ago and others since, he said, “there’s this sense of ‘Do you believe me? Do you really believe that this happened to me?’ That really stuck with me.”

Baker’s not alone. Experts say that the Title IX coordinator position is uniquely stressful in that these administrators are often some of the first people to interact with alleged victims, and must delicately ask for precise and difficult details to guide their investigations. And despite criticism from some victims’ advocates that Title IX coordinators aren’t always sympathetic enough, or prioritize their institution over its students, experts also say these administrators are often are drawn to their work because they enjoy helping students. So it’s trying, they say, for coordinators to maintain impartiality with victims and their alleged attackers so as not to taint the investigation.

Parents frequently get involved, and whatever a Title IX coordinator determines following an investigation will affect the lives of both complainant and respondent – sometimes gravely. Title IX coordinators’ recommendations as to whether or not an institution’s sexual harassment policy has been violated often determine whether or not a case will advance to a hearing or whether punishment will be given.

And although Title IX investigators are increasingly coming to their roles with legal backgrounds – especially as Congressional and attention shine a harsh light on campus sexual assault – they typically lack the training on resilience and coping that counselors and advocates receive. Those emotional pressures come on top of negotiating what is still a relatively new position, the isolation that comes with being the sole Title IX investigator on lots of campuses, mounting caseloads and demand for a quick turnaround on investigations.

Confidentiality also is key, limiting the ways in which administrators can vent to family and friends and – if they’re lucky enough to have them – colleagues in the same line of work.

“It’s emotionally and psychologically draining, especially for Title IX coordinators who don’t have a background in student affairs – who aren’t used to the emotional toll of these kinds of cases,” said Daniel Swinton, associate executive director of the
Association of Title IX Administrators, or ATIXA, a national professional group formed three years ago in part to provide a sense of community among coordinators. Some 325 members attended the association’s annual conference last month, he said, not only for professional development but to be “among a cadre of colleagues who know what you’re going through.”

Swinton, a former assistant dean and director of student conduct and academic integrity at Vanderbilt University and a current managing partner at the NCHERM group, which advises colleges and universities on security and other issues, said coordinators generally come to “rely on the process” by which they and their institutions investigate sexual assault. But they can still feel “pulled in both directions.”

Being a coordinator is a “tough role, because you can’t take sides, so to speak,” between accuser and accused, or assume the role of advocate – no matter how tough the case is, he said. “You have to be in the middle.”

Dan Jones, director of counseling and psychological services at Appalachian State University, has written about the toll sexual assault investigations take not only on Title IX coordinators but other faculty, staff and students involved. He said maintaining impartiality can be a particular challenge since many of the candidates drawn to such work are "kind, compassionate people" and because "these rape cases are often very ugly, and very often adversarial." He said he knew of investigators and advocates who had suffered stress-induced health issues or interpersonal conflict following their involvement in such cases.

Harriet Barlow has been Title IX coordinator and an assistant vice president for diversity at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas since 2011, the year the Education Department’s Office for Civil Rights released its Dear Colleague letter highlighting how sexual assault and harassment fall under the purview of Title IX; before that, the amendment was most commonly used to enforce gender equity in college sports. Barlow, who previously served as Las Vegas’s associate dean for graduate student services, said she, too, was “unprepared for how emotionally draining and stressful this work is,” although she noted she experienced “somewhat similar” stress working with issues related to student conduct as a dean.

Most stressful about her current role, she said, is knowing an investigation “involves real people and the resolutions may have real-life implications for all parties involved.” Maintaining impartiality is another challenge – along with meeting deadlines and complying with evolving and overlapping institutional, state and federal policies and mandates, she said.

Baker, who is also a lawyer, said that training has helped him avoid the pitfalls of partiality, which can lead to “looking at evidence through a tainted lens.” Instead, he said, it’s important to build connections to counselors and advocates on campus who can support both the alleged victim and the respondent.

He said he’s also clear that any decision he makes about a sexual harassment or assault claim is based on gathered evidence and held to a preponderance of evidence standard – not a judgment of either party.
“It’s just realizing that at the end of it all, there’s a process that should be relied upon,” he said. “I came into this business with the idea that civil rights is an issue I want to be part of, and this is another aspect of my job.”

Barlow noted that she personally found it helpful to meet twice a month with her small team of deputy coordinators to “discuss all things Title IX” -- updates on cases, whether they’re on track with investigations – and, perhaps just as important, “share the stress.”

Baker also meets with a team of colleagues on a regular basis. For coordinators who aren’t part of a team on their campuses, he recommended getting connected with peers on other campuses through professional associations or listservs, and exercising “self-care.”

Swinton said resiliency and self-care aren’t yet formal discussion topics at ATIXA training sessions or meetings, but that they probably should be. In any case, he said, they made for lots of informal discussions at the recent gathering.

Jones, the director of counseling and psychological services at Appalachian State, said the wave of sexual harassment and assault claims under Title IX has come on so fast that “people doing this work are having to literally play catchup, ahead of what you could say is the science – the research or literature – to prepare you for this.”

Jones guessed that training protocols and support "infrastructures" will be more "solid" a few years from now. In the meantime, he encouraged coordinators and others involved in sexual assault cases to talk with friends and family or participate in a favorite activity to de-stress, and to seek professional counseling if they need it.