Backlash at U. of Missouri Highlights Questions About Health Subsidies for Grad Students

By Vimal Patel

The last few years have been a struggle for Jennifer McKinney, a fifth-year graduate student in sociology at the University of Missouri at Columbia. Missouri provided her a stipend of around $11,000 for the academic year, an amount at the low end nationally for doctoral financial support. She works an extra job to pay the bills, but says she has still racked up about $130,000 in student loans.

Despite the stress and financial burden of earning a Ph.D., it wasn’t until Friday that Ms. McKinney, who is expecting to go into labor in less than three weeks, questioned her decision to earn a Ph.D. The university announced then that, starting at midnight, it would no longer pay for graduate students’ health insurance, in order to comply with a provision of the Affordable Care Act.

"Now," Ms. McKinney said, "they are asking more than we can give."

The decision led to a revolt among graduate students on the campus. Several hundred of them gathered for a meeting on Monday and took to social media to denounce the move and what they said was the university’s failure to give them enough notice about it. They talked about organizing a walkout next week. By late Monday, the university’s chancellor, R. Bowen Loftin, issued a statement apologizing for what he called the "lack of appropriate notice and prior consultation." He announced the creation of a task force that will examine how to provide affordable health care to graduate students.

At issue is a provision of the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, that states that businesses can’t provide employees subsidies to buy health insurance from individual market plans. The Internal Revenue Service classifies graduate students as employees, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services classifies student health plans as individual market plans.

Here are answers to key questions raised by the University of Missouri controversy.

The Affordable Care Act went into effect last year. Why is this an issue now?

The IRS recently issued guidance stating that the method many universities use to provide health insurance to graduate students — student health-insurance plans — is not compliant with the
Affordable Care Act, and that institutions could be fined up to $36,500 a year for every employee with a student plan.

The provision went into effect July 1, and university officials have been uneasy about how they should respond. The provision was initially viewed by many as applying to businesses, not universities. According to a statement from the Council of Graduate Schools, "The application of this ruling to universities has caused frustration and confusion among institutions that provide partial or full health-care subsidies to their graduate students."

What is the IRS’s concern?

The government is concerned about employers sidestepping Obamacare’s "employer mandate" — which requires businesses with more than 50 employees to offer health insurance to those working at least 30 hours a week — by giving employees money to buy health insurance on the individual market. The IRS, experts say, worries that universities may be doing the same with student health-insurance plans.

Steven Bloom, director of federal relations for the American Council on Education, however, says the insurance that universities provide to students shouldn’t be categorized as individual-market plans. "It functions almost like a group plan, like an employer plan," he says.

How many universities are dealing with this Affordable Care Act provision?

Mr. Bloom says that many universities provide student health-insurance plans, including the majority of flagship research universities. Not all colleges have such plans. Colleges that provide students the same health insurance as employees avoid this issue. So do colleges in which graduate students are unionized, for example, as the students are treated as a block, says Kristofferson Culmer, president of the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students, an advocacy group.

Mr. Culmer, who, incidentally, is a computer-science Ph.D. student at Missouri, says that unless the IRS changes its guidance, more universities in the weeks and months ahead will have to figure out how to respond to the provision.

Why are students upset with Missouri if this is an issue with the Affordable Care Act?

In addition to giving students just hours notice that they would no longer be insured, graduate students raised a litany of complaints in interviews with The Chronicle and on social media. One student, Michael Horton, asserted that the administration had demonstrated "a pattern of disrespect" toward his peers.

Students complained about low and stagnant stipend support that isn’t keeping pace with cost of living, poor housing prospects, and the recent elimination of an on-campus Student Parent Center that was heavily used by graduate students. Some students also said that while it’s true that the university is wading into murky waters, it could have responded differently. In fact, Mr. Loftin’s
message to the campus acknowledged that "there may be other options available to us than the one announced last week that will serve you over the long term."

Some students also saw the university using the provision of the Affordable Care Act as an opportunity for cost savings. While Mr. Loftin noted that the $3.9 million the university spent last year subsidizing the health insurance of more than 3,000 graduate students would be spent on fellowships to partially offset graduate students’ health care costs this coming year, no such promises exist for the future.

How has the university responded to the concerns raised by students?

In addition to his apology, Mr. Loftin announced the creation of a task force that will be led by a dean and include other campus representatives, including four graduate-student leaders. Mr. Loftin said he expects the task force to provide him with options no later than the end of October. Many students, like Ms. McKinney, are left uninsured for now. Other students have signed up for individual-market plans.

What’s next?

Higher-education groups plan to lobby the federal government, asking it to clarify its guidance in order to reassure universities that they won’t be fined for providing student health insurance plans. Groups like the American Council on Education and the Council of Graduate Schools are making their case to Treasury Department officials. Mr. Culmer, of the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students, says that after learning about the Missouri move Friday, his group is also planning an advocacy campaign to educate lawmakers and officials at the IRS and the Health and Human Services Department.

What happened at Missouri, he says, is not in the spirit of the Affordable Care Act. "It was created to protect people like graduate students who need health insurance but can’t really afford it," Mr. Culmer says, "not kick them off plans that universities provide them."

University of Missouri ends graduate student subsidies for health insurance
Aug 18, 2015, 7:03am CDT
INDUSTRIES & TAGS
Ryan Collins
University of Missouri officials, citing changes in federal policy and IRS rule interpretation, said the school will no longer provide subsidies for graduate students’ health insurance.

The announcement came Aug. 15 — just nine days before the start of the fall semester.

In past years, subsidies for graduate students who chose to have insurance were paid from a qualifying assistantship or fellowship. Under the Affordable Care Act, employers cannot give employees money to purchase insurance on the individual market; graduate teaching and research assistants are classified as employees by the IRS. The IRS categorizes the university’s student health insurance plan an “individual-market plan,” officials said in a release.

The university became aware of the policy change July 21 and said efforts to find the best alternative were the reason for the late announcement.

Because of the policy change, the university will allocate one-time fellowships for the fall semester to qualifying graduate students in addition to the stipends they receive from their academic work. The amount of the fellowships will vary from $620 to more than $1,200 based on whether the student is domestic or international and the amount of their full-time equivalent appointment, officials said. The amount of the fellowship will be less than the previous years’ subsidies due to a larger population receiving the fellowships, according to the release.

In a letter to students, Mizzou Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin apologized for the “lack of appropriate notice and prior consultation,” saying he understands the fellowships are “only a short-term fix.” He appointed Dean Kristofer Hagglund of the School of Health Professions to chair a task force to propose alternative plans in a report no later than Oct. 31.
“Immediately after that report is received, I will convene appropriate administrators and graduate student leadership to decide the way forward,” Bowen wrote.

The cost of the fall fellowships for the university will total about $3 million. To give all students a fellowship equal to the past subsidy for insurance would cost the university $7.6 million, according to the release.

Domestic students may purchase student health insurance for more than $3,000 for a full-year coverage. The enrollment deadline is Sept. 11.

MU graduate student employees hold forum regarding loss of insurance subsidies

By Megan Favignano

Tuesday, August 18, 2015 at 2:00 pm

More than 500 University of Missouri graduate student employees filled the Walter Johnson Auditorium on Monday — standing along the walls and filling the hallway space outside the room — to learn about their health insurance options and ways to pressure officials for change.

Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin created a graduate student insurance task force Monday to explore long-term options for providing affordable insurance to graduate students. The task force has until Oct. 31 to give Loftin its recommendations.

The graduate student forum Monday came a few days after graduate student employees learned that because of a new IRS interpretation of health insurance law, MU would stop giving them subsidies to help pay for insurance premiums.

Graduate student leaders encouraged students to write and call their lawmakers and MU administrators and use social media to advocate for changes. At the forum, students discussed a possible graduate student walkout during the first week of classes.
“We shoulder a tremendous amount of responsibility at this university. We teach the undergraduate classes, we do the research,” graduate student Eric Scott said. “If we’re not there, this place doesn’t run.”

At Monday’s forum, students also suggested unionizing and potentially taking MU to small claims court. The Graduate Student Association and Graduate Professional Council are forming a committee to continue discussing ideas students mentioned at the forum.

MU administrators emailed graduate student employees Friday — the day before student health insurance plans expired — to let them know MU can no longer provide the subsidy because of a recent IRS interpretation of a section of the Affordable Care Act.

The law, which requires adults to have health insurance or face tax penalties, “prohibits businesses from providing employees subsidies specifically for the purpose of purchasing health insurance from individual market plans,” the university said in the letter Friday. MU found out about the interpretation July 21.

The IRS considers MU’s student health insurance plan, which is open to all students, an individual market plan. If the university continued to give graduate student employees the subsidy, the IRS could fine MU $100 per employee, per day for an entire year, which is about $36,500 per student employee.

MU Associate Vice Chancellor for Graduate Studies Leona Rubin said about 70 percent of MU’s eligible graduate student employees took the subsidy last school year. The university spent $3,938,793.28 on health insurance subsidies for more than 3,000 students last year.

MU is distributing the money it would have used on insurance subsidies for graduate employees as a one-time fellowship this fall. Many students at Monday’s forum described the fellowship as a short-term fix.

Loftin informed students of the task force and apologized to graduate student employees for the lack of advance notice in a letter Monday.

Graduate student Carrie Miranda, one of the forum’s organizers, said students can enroll in MU’s student health insurance and would not experience a gap in coverage by doing so. If students enroll for just the fall, MU’s one-time fellowship will cover the cost, $1,240. If students enroll for the full year, they will owe about $1,800 after the fellowship. For international students who are required to enroll in student health insurance, paying the full premium is their only option. Insurance costs less for international students, leaving them to owe about $970 for the year.

Students have until Sept. 11 to enroll in the student plan. Graduate student employees also can obtain insurance from the ACA marketplace, transfer to a spouse or parent’s insurance plan or, in some cases, qualify for Medicaid. With those options, students might experience a brief gap in insurance coverage. Also, if students choose to buy from the marketplace, they may be eligible for a tax credit to help pay their premiums if they meet income guidelines.
MU graduate students come together after losing insurance subsidies

Watch story:  http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=30100&zone=2,5&categories=2,5

COLUMBIA - University of Missouri graduate students and leaders are all looking for solutions on how to make up for lost health insurance subsidies.

Following MU's decision to drop its graduate students' health insurance subsidies because of legal conflicts with the Affordable Care Act, more than 500 graduate students gathered on campus Monday to express their concerns and outrage while discussing potential long-term solutions.

In response, MU Chancellor Bowen Loftin announced on his website that he assigned Dean Kristofer Hagglund of the School of Health Professions to chair a task force to find long-term solutions for graduate students.

Some students at the forum discussed possibly 'walking out' if the university doesn't find an alternative method of funding the health care aid they said they were promised.

Students said they provide many vital services through the graduate program such as teaching that they will leverage if the university does not try to find a solution.

Other students said they are trying to push for changes in state and federal laws to allow the university to subsidize their health care again.

Loftin set a deadline of October 31 for the task force to present options to him so he can work with university administrators and graduate students to 'decide the way forward.'
MU said the IRS would penalize the university $100 per day for every student it gave subsidies to, citing a provision within the Affordable Care Act that prevents employers from giving employees money to pay for health insurance.

The university said the IRS considers graduate students employees rather than students because they provide research and teaching services as part of their studies.

In response, MU offered graduate students a one-time fellowship of $1,200 for the fall semester to help offset health insurance costs, but said it did not have a long-term solution to provide the rest of the $3000 it previously offered.

Students said they were angry that the university waited weeks to announce the changes and said they think the university isn't doing enough to address the issue.

KOMU 8 News reached out to the University of Missouri News Bureau Tuesday to learn more about the task force, but did not receive a response back.

MU doctoral candidate Jeff Stilley said he's skeptical of the task force and thinks it probably will not be effective in resolving the issue.

"We'll see what they say," Stilley said. "They're apparently not going to release anything to resolve the issue until late October, which is not acceptable. I think they should have done that over the summer."

Many graduate students have taken to social media to speak out against the university's decision and to express their concerns amid uncertainty about if they will be able to pay for health care.

@MoBLeap The task force has been up and running for 13+ hours. Longer than we had to find health insurance. Any solutions yet? #GradInsurance

@JoshBolton235 Day 4 of no #GradInsurance just have to not get hurt or sick. Thanks @Mizzou @bowtieger

@rachelsnavarro Can't concentrate on writing my syllabus because I'm worried about #GradInsurance @Mizzou

Some graduate students tweeted they are upset state leaders haven't addressed the issue yet.

@MikeHortonMU That @clairecmc and @GovJayNixon have tweeted about other things since news about #Mizzou #GradInsurance is upsetting. We won't be ignored.

Missouri Rep. Kip Kendrick (D) offered his support to graduate students, though, and attended the Monday graduate forum.

@Kipk45 Interested in a long-term solution with a graduate representative at the table. #gradinsurance
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

FAQ: So you've lost your MU health insurance — now what?

GEOFF WEST, 10 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — MU officials on Friday announced they would no longer provide subsidized health insurance for graduate students, but instead would offer one-time fellowships to help cover some of the costs. Read on to learn what that means for students:

What are my options for health insurance now?

- International students: You'll get $709 for 20-hour assistantships and $620 for 10-hour positions, but you'll owe an additional $970 to stay on the university's insurance plan for 12 months.
- Domestic students: You can stay on the university’s plan by paying $3,051 for one year of coverage or $1,240 for the fall semester. You'll receive a one-time fellowship of $1,240 for 20-hour assistantships and $620 for 10-hour positions.
- Students younger than 26 can be covered under their parents’ insurance plan.
- Insurance can be bought through the federal health insurance marketplace at healthcare.gov.

Am I eligible for federally subsidized health insurance?

Possibly. You need a minimum annual income of $11,670 to qualify for subsidized insurance coverage through the federal health insurance marketplace.

If so, you can apply at healthcare.gov. While open enrollment begins Nov. 15, you’ll be eligible to enroll immediately because of a special exemption.
What about Medicaid?

Missouri legislators decided not to accept federal funding to expand Medicaid coverage for those who don’t earn enough to qualify for federal subsidies.

In Missouri, only disabled adults, pregnant women and individuals with incomes near the poverty level may be eligible. Families may be eligible if their monthly income is less than:

- $2,333 for a family of two
- $2,944 for a family of three
- $3,554 for a family of four
- $4,165 for a family of five
- $4,775 for a family of six.

How long will I be without coverage?

You’ll have continuous coverage if you stay on the university’s plan.

Through the federal marketplace plan, insurance coverage typically begins on the first of each month. Enroll and pay the first month premium of a plan by the 15th of the month, and coverage will begin two weeks later.

Will I pay a penalty if I don’t enroll in insurance coverage?

If your income is low enough that you don’t need to file a federal tax return — in 2014, that income was $10,150 — then no. Otherwise, yes.

Who’s representing me?

Graduate student organizations have created a Facebook group to share updates and information on the issue. The group is known as the Forum on Graduate Rights (formerly the Forum on Graduate Health Insurance).

How can I share my story?
Forum organizers recommend using the hashtags #Mizzou and #GradInsurance on Twitter as well as posting stories on YouTube. If you do so, you can send a link to MizzouGradInsuranceSocialMedia@gmail.com.

You can also get involved with the Forum on Graduate Rights by emailing MizzouGradInsurance@gmail.com.

Share your story with the Missourian on Facebook or Twitter @CoMissourian.

What's next?

MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin has requested the creation of a task force for recommendations on providing affordable insurance to graduate students. The recommendations are due to Loftin by Oct. 31.

Schaefer asks MU for papers on Planned Parenthood abortion license

By Rudi Keller

Tuesday, August 18, 2015 at 2:00 pm

The Senate investigation of the abortion license granted to Planned Parenthood’s Columbia clinic is now focused on the relationship between University of Missouri Health Care and the doctor who will perform the procedure.

Sen. Kurt Schaefer, chairman of the Senate Interim Committee on the Sanctity of Life, sent a letter Monday to MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin asking for the documents granting Colleen McNicholas “refer and follow” privileges at MU Health as well as any other agreements between the university and Planned Parenthood. Schaefer gave the university until the end of Tuesday to voluntarily provide the papers.
The university has a duty to provide medical care to Missouri residents, Schaefer said, which includes women experiencing complications from an abortion.

“That is what the hospital does,” he said. “But there is nothing in law that requires them to basically enter into a voluntary agreement with the entity in order for the entity to get a license.”

Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri resumed offering medical, or drug-induced, abortions Aug. 3 at the Providence Road clinic and intends to begin offering surgical abortions in early 2016. The Department of Health and Senior Services issued a license for the abortions July 17. The clinic stopped providing abortions in 2012, when the physician who provided abortions resigned.

Schaefer’s committee made the license part of its investigation of whether Planned Parenthood was providing fetal tissue for research from Missouri abortions. Doctors working in abortion clinics must have privileges allowing them to perform surgeries at a nearby hospital or an agreement between the clinic and the hospital to accept patients in an emergency.

During testimony Thursday before the committee, health department Director Gail Vasterling refused to name the hospital granting privileges to McNicholas, the St. Louis doctor working at the Columbia clinic, or the required agreement. Documents showing how the clinic met the legal requirements are necessary for the committee’s work, Schaefer said.

Missouri law also bars the spending of public money “for the purpose of performing or assisting an abortion, not necessary to save the life of the mother” or to “counsel or encourage” a woman to have an abortion. The agreements will show whether the university has done anything to violate that law, Schaefer said.

At press time, university officials had not said whether they would comply with the request. The “refer and follow” privileges for McNicholas do not include permission to perform surgery at the hospital, spokeswoman Mary Jenkins said Friday in an email.

The committee obtained documents from the department under a subpoena that also compelled Vasterling’s appearance. Schaefer declined to say whether he would do the same if the university refuses. “At this point, I have no reason to believe that they will do anything but give us what we are looking for,” he said.
MU Health Care grants abortion doctor privileges


Last week ABC 17 alerted viewers when a Senate committee grilled the Health and Senior Services Director for not knowing if a Planned Parenthood physician in Columbia met state licensing requirements.

It was disputed that the physician did not have privileges at a hospital within 15 miles of the clinic.

**ABC 17 News obtained a letter from MU Chancellor Bowen Loftin.**

In the letter, it clearly states MU Health Care does have "working agreements" with Dr. Colleen McNicholas.

Last week, a Senate panel brought into question if she had privileges at a hospital within 15 miles of the Planned Parenthood abortion clinic in Columbia.

Chancellor Loftin said, "Refer and follow privileges are limited and do not allow the physician to admit patients to MU Health Care facilities or to write orders, prescribe treatment or perform procedures, for patients at any MU Health Care facility. The granting of such privileges to Dr. McNicholas will not require public funds to be used to perform or assist in abortions."

That statement sounds like the doctor has needed privileges, but Missouri law states the doctor must have "admitting privileges"-and if the doctor performs an abortion without those admitting privileges, and is not within 30 miles of the hospital with said privileges, it's a Class-A misdemeanor.

Chancellor Loftin said, "Regarding 'working agreements'-MU Health Care does not have a working agreement with Dr. McNicholas, Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri or Comprehensive Health of Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri that guarantees transfer and admittance of patients for emergency treatment whenever necessary."
Students, staff talk pedestrian safety on MU campus

COLUMBIA, Mo. - Syed Ejaz took a walk around campus. He, and the others from the Missouri Student Association, were not looking for anything in particular. They wanted to see if anything stood out to them as a pedestrian on the campus, and some of the struggles that sometimes comes with it.

Ejaz spoke about these struggles, and what he hopes the University does in response, to the Mayor's Task Force on Pedestrian Safety Tuesday afternoon. Columbia Mayor Bob McDavid asked when he formed the task force for a session specific to the University, which MUPD said had 11 pedestrian accidents in the 2014 school year.

Ejaz pinpointed problems with the "closed campus" portions of the University. Currently, only stretches of Rollins St. by the Student Center, Hitt Street by Memorial Union and Conley Avenue by Speaker's Circle restrict traffic to buses and University-owned vehicles. Ejaz said the sometimes confusing placement of the "closed campus" barriers can cause some drivers to bypass them into areas with hundreds of students trying to quickly make it to their next destination.

"Once they accidentally, or intentionally, enter closed campus, you have pedestrians asking 'Why are they here?'," Ejaz told ABC 17 News. "Or, they're not asking that, and their on their phones and they're not paying attention to the traffic situation."

Ejaz hoped the University would expand closed campus to connect the existing sections, and make the area a safer space for pedestrians.

He said he and MSA would focus on curbing both distracted driving and distracted walking on campus.
"If the pedestrian isn't looking out for cars, and the car isn't looking out for the pedestrian, that's a really bad situation," Ejaz said.

University of Missouri Police Chief Doug Schwandt said of the 11 pedestrian accidents in the last school year, six of them happened at crosswalks, and two of them on sidewalks. Two of those 11 accidents happened at the corner of College Ave. and Rollins St., an area Ejaz said he wanted to see improvements. He cited the 16-second timer for crossing College Ave. as too short, especially since students come from the closed campus portion of Rollins St. and think they are safe from traffic. Ejaz said if the pedestrian scramble project at Ninth Street and Elm Street in downtown Columbia was successful in moving pedestrians and traffic along quickly and safely, he would ask the University put in the same at that intersection.

The Mayor's Task Force on Pedestrian Safety will meet in September to discuss issues for Columbia Public School students.

'Yes Means Yes' Orientation

August 19, 2015

By Jacqueline Thomsen

NO MU MENTION

When students at Indiana University at Bloomington are asked to describe consent, they can often recite the lyrics from a student-written musical.

"Consent is unmistakable ... it’s often verbal ... it’s uncoerced ... it’s freely given ... and if you’ve got those things together, that’s consent! Consent ... whoa consent!" (The full lyrics of the song are at the bottom of this story.)

And as college campuses across the country adapt to a culture -- and legislation -- calling for affirmative consent and "yes means yes" policies, freshmen orientations are often just one touch point for a larger conversation about sexual misconduct policies across campuses. Many colleges are adding programming or are revising past education on sexual assault prevention to focus on teaching the ideas behind affirmative consent, although some institutions already had relevant programs in place.
The entire Indiana University system revamped its sexual misconduct policy in March, calling for affirmative consent from students participating in sexual acts and clearly outlining resources for students who are seeking to report an incident or find other sources of support. Under affirmative consent, both parties must indicate that they want to participate in a sexual act, either verbally or with specific actions -- and the lack of a no isn't enough to continue.

Carol McCord, the associate dean of students at the Bloomington campus, said little had to be changed in programming for students this year to adapt to the new policy. Students will continue to be required to complete an online module on sexual assault and misconduct before coming to campus, and at orientation will see a musical, written by a student who has since graduated, that ends with a song about consent.

“It sounds cheesy, but let me tell you that many students will tell us that they remember the definition of consent from that song and sing it to us later,” McCord said. This year, after viewing the musical, the incoming students will take part in discussions led by their student orientation leaders, who have been trained to lead the conversations by administrators and other university officials, including McCord. The doors to the rooms where the conversations are taking place are kept ajar so officials can check and make sure discussions are staying on track.

McCord said parents also attend an orientation to explain university policies, but tend to be focused on topics that aren’t as prevalent on campuses, like the presence of nonstudents, faculty or staff on campus or the placement of blue lights, a feature that can ease the concerns of worried parents but that are rarely actually used effectively. Education on consent will be included in the presentation, including information on how students can file a report of sexual violence or harassment and other university resources available for students.

She said programming on consent and other related topics will continue throughout the academic year. This year, for the first time, posters with information on university resources will be placed in bathroom stalls in each building across campus. But above all, McCord said, she and others have focused on making sure that students are able to recognize consent when they have it, and also acknowledge when they don’t have affirmative consent.
“The reality is, that while we must have the university definition, legally and judicially, the reality is that we want them to understand what students need to have consent,” she said. “They don’t need the actual verbatim definition, but they have to be clear when they have it, they need to be clear when they do not have it, clear on how to get it and how to intervene if they see people going forward who can’t give consent.”

A Statewide Approach
As sexual assault becomes a more prominent topic on college campuses, more and more institutions are adopting -- or being forced to adopt -- affirmative consent policies. Legislation in California and New York requires campuses in both states to include affirmative consent in their sexual misconduct policies, meaning that students, faculty and staff must now be trained using “yes means yes.” This is the first year that all orientations in the states will be covered by these laws.

Within the State University of New York system, each campus is adapting its own way to teach about affirmative consent, building on the system’s involvement in crafting the New York legislation. Joseph Storch, an associate counsel at SUNY, was one of the leaders in creating the legal language about consent.

“As the most comprehensive system of higher education in the country, SUNY has the capacity -- and frankly, a responsibility -- to serve as the national model,” said a statement from Chancellor Nancy Zimpher. “We are proud to fulfill a leadership role as colleges and universities across the country are challenged to prevent and effectively address incidents of sexual assault and violence. We will continue to work with our students and faculty to increase awareness and ensure safety on SUNY campuses, and our experts are happy to work with others nationally to do the same.”

And at private institutions in New York, each college has adopted the new mandated language. At Daemon College, in Buffalo, parents and students attend orientation sessions on consent as well as on dating violence and other similar topics. The students then complete online training before returning to campus for the start of the semester, where they again attend a theatrical performance and discuss the topics, including affirmative consent, during a first-year seminar course.

“I think one of the things is that unless you have context for the information, it’s hard to understand it,” said Greg Nayor, vice president for student affairs at Daemon. “It’s
not that the content is all that challenging .... There’s no silver bullet to do this, but people have this information in a variety of different ways, and they don’t realize that they need it until they need it.”

St. Bonaventure University in New York also takes on a three-phase approach, including skits on life on campus (one of which centers on sexual violence) and workshops to discuss the skits at orientations, an online module and a class called The Hook-Up, presented to students by an outside company during the first week on campus. Students are also asked to reflect on what they learned during orientation and other training during a course called University 101, which is taken by all freshmen.

And at a Roman Catholic university, where premarital sex isn’t always considered a socially acceptable topic of conversation, the training is a priority for officials and administrators, said Chris Brown, St. Bonaventure’s director of first-year experience and orientation. “We’re a relatively small campus -- our incoming freshman class is just under 400 -- so we do have the ability to tailor a lot of these programs to this small-scale audience and repeat information in different methods and different ways.”

At Molloy College, in Long Island, students will undergo training and role playing in a session called “Are You Getting the Signal?” Students receive materials outlining college policies and discuss the topic of consent at least five times during orientation. A survey is also administered to freshmen during the sessions, gauging how many have had previous experience with relationship violence.

But at larger, urban campuses like Columbia University and New York University, administrators emphasized repetitive training to get information across to the entire student body.

Incoming freshmen at Columbia receive materials over the summer before starting classes and are also required to reflect on the link between sexual respect and participation in a university community, whether it’s through watching films and participating in discussions or creating a piece of art as a part of the reflection. Columbia’s sexual assault policies fell under a national spotlight last year when a student carried a mattress with her on campus in protest of a university ruling that her alleged assaulter was not at fault in a complaint she filed in 2013.
Students benefit from both large discussions during orientation and smaller ones with their resident advisors, said Suzanne Goldberg, the executive vice president for university life at Columbia.

“I think part of what’s important is that education and engagement on these issues extends well beyond orientation and aims to shape an environment that supports all students and reinforces the link between sexual respect and community citizenship,” Goldberg said.

At New York University, matriculating students of all levels participate in online training, student leaders -- including members of Greek life, varsity athletes and members of the executive boards of NYU’s student clubs -- receive bystander training, and freshmen see a theatrical performance put on by members of the Tisch School of the Arts. Voluntary workshops focused solely on consent in different communities, such as for LGBT students, are also offered throughout the year, meaning that the education doesn’t end for students once classes start.

Zoe Ragouzeos, the associate vice president for sexual misconduct support services at NYU, said that so many options are offered in order to reach as many of the university’s roughly 50,000 students as possible and get an important message about consent across.

“If I had 800 freshmen and I could put all of them in an auditorium and make them listen to what I have to say, it’d be a different situation for us,” Ragouzeos said. “But the fact is that we have 6,000 new students, 22,000 undergraduate students, and it makes us have to make as many things as possible mandatory so we can make sure that people have a basic understanding.”