

PROPOSED UO POLICY MAY HELP SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS

A new motion by the University of Oregon Senate may change the mandatory reporting policy on sexual assault to favor the wishes of the victims.

The current UO mandatory reporting policy requires all staff members to report sexual assaults they hear about from students, regardless of the actual desires of the victims themselves, according to Jennifer Freyd, a professor of psychology at UO and a nationally recognized activist on sexual assault issues.

“Our [new] policy would say that most faculty and staff would report or not based on what the student wanted. It would give the control and autonomy to the student and survivor,” Freyd says. “I think it’s much more trauma-informed — it’s responsive to the needs of trauma survivors.”

UO President Michael Schill has 60 days to review the new policy. In that time, he will approve it, reject it or send it back to the senate with proposed changes.

Jane Cramer, an associate professor at UO and a member of UO Senate, says the original policy was implemented because “sexual assault is essentially an epidemic on campuses, and a lot of offenders are repeat offenders.” The mandatory reporting policy that was instituted last spring was designed to catch these repeat offenders, she says.

But after some backlash against the policy and further dis-

ussion, the Senate Responsible Reporting Working Group decided that the policy caused more harm than good by not letting sexual assault victims choose if they want their attack reported.

According to Freyd, the old policy limited a victim’s right to privacy if they divulged information to a trusted advisor or faculty member. The policy faced severe backlash when it went before the Senate in the spring.

Laura Hanson, a UO alum and outspoken victim of campus sexual assault, made a statement to the UO Senate in the spring against the mandatory reporting policy. “I am a public survivor because the UO’s mandatory reporting policy made me one,” Hanson wrote. Hanson and other survivors came forward against the policy, arguing that it caused more harm than good.

The Senate voted the policy down, but Schill implemented it as an emergency measure until the Senate could write a better policy. The newly written policy was passed in a motion on Nov. 16, and now awaits review by the UO president’s office.

The new policy splits faculty members into three distinct groups: designated reporters, student-directed employees and confidential employees. While the first group must report all allegations of sexual assault in accordance with Title IX, student-directed employees must discuss options with the stu-

dent victim, and only reports if the student directly asks them to.

Confidential employees offer an additional layer of privacy protection that may “enable them to oppose successfully an application for a court order seeking disclosure of communications.”

Freyd hopes the university will also implement an online reporting tool “that allows students after an assault to log on and explain what happened in private.” These tools allow students to wait before reporting while also getting vital information recorded after an assault to help them prosecute. It also gives students the option to come forward only if another student reports an assault by the same perpetrator — an aspect of the tool that allows universities to find repeat offenders, and allows students to come forward together.

Darci Heroy, the Title IX director for UO, says she hopes to see the policy implemented. “I wouldn’t envision it dramatically increasing the training cost — we have a lot of training requirements as it is,” she says. Heroy says that both in-person and online training will be involved in implementing the new policy.


According to Heroy, the working group “came up with something that’s pushing the envelope a little bit and could become a model for other institutions in how to handle this.” This sentiment was echoed by Cramer, who says, “I think it’s going to change the conversation in the country.”

Freyd says, “It was a unanimous vote in the University Senate, which indicated that there is very strong support for this policy on campus.”

Schill must respond to the motion by Jan. 15, 2017. ■

IT'S ABOUT TIME

BY DAVID WAGNER



Gray whales are headed south this month and most of next month, led by females keen on giving birth in warm lagoons along the coast of Baja California, Mexico. Whale watching is not as good as during northward migration in spring, when whales move more slowly and closer to shore. But more whales per hour pass Oregon points in winter than in spring. Seeing whales is almost guaranteed. Looking from a high vantage point helps. The West Shelter close to the observation lookout at the top of the St. Perpetua Trail in the Cape

Perpetua Scenic Area is an excellent spot. From there one can see far over the ocean while being offered shelter from wind and rain should you pick a more challenging day for a coast trip.

This is Orion time of the year, my favorite night companion through winter Solstice season. When fleeting clouds part to give a glimpse of the starry night sky on my bedtime walk, Orion is an old friend. I must settle for the “Summer Triangle” as my most familiar celestial marker to track summer Solstice passage.

When I talk to my brother in New England, I come to appreciate how his woods seem to shut down for the winter. Here in western Oregon, the beginning of rainy season — our surrogate for winter — means that woods are perking up. Mosses and licorice ferns on tree branches have their prime growth surge while our valley herbaceous perennials start their flush of leafy spring greens.

David Wagner is a botanist in Eugene teaching moss classes and leading nature walks. His 2017 Oregon Nature Calendar is now available at Down to Earth stores in Eugene or online from his web site: fernzenmosses.com.



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