



## THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

I fully remember that in my opening column for the *Connection* two weeks ago, I talked about the fact that most of what I write in this space will have to do with system-wide concerns for SIU. But as you would expect, much of my attention this past week has been focused on allegations of two recent sexual assaults on the Carbondale campus. Though campus-specific incidents, I can't *not* talk about the situation for this edition — particularly in light of the national conversation that reignited earlier this summer around campus sexual violence...then moved on to the NFL outrages...and has now become the focus of the White House's attention (more on that below).

Most on the Carbondale campus are aware of the general outline of what happened on the weekend of September 13-14. For SIU colleagues in Edwardsville and Springfield, there is little information I can share here except to say that the reported sexual assaults resulted in the arrests of six individuals that same weekend. Criminal prosecution, as you know, is ultimately at the discretion of the Jackson County State's Attorney. Of course, we also are mindful of the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act — usually referred to as "FERPA" — which prohibits universities from discussing specific cases or disciplinary actions of individual students. And I should say too that it is not my intent to get ahead of what are essentially parallel investigations in these matters, until they run their full course — both on the criminal side, as well as the student conduct side.

However, please be assured that in a case involving an allegation of a serious crime, or one that could otherwise pose a threat, we will move to suspend students on an interim basis during the required investigation phase. From there, if a student is found responsible for violating the respective student conduct code for sexual assault, sanctions can and will include suspension or expulsion.

One sad irony of all this is that the Carbondale campus has been especially proactive this fall in conducting training for both students and staff. All new students were required to go through an online program before coming to campus; the program, called "Haven," provides tools and approaches for students to protect themselves from relationship violence. Once physically on campus, students then had to participate in another program, "Step UP!" that trains students how to help other students in challenging situations. Schedule holds are even placed on students until the on-site training is done. Also, over 90 percent of SIUC faculty and staff underwent comprehensive training to assist them in understanding their responsibilities for assisting students and reporting sexual assault and other crimes of sexual violence. In the next few weeks, SIUC staff will conduct that training with our School of Medicine employees in Springfield, and later this fall, SIU Edwardsville plans to introduce an online training program for the entire faculty and staff.

But still...these incidents happen. And for all our training — and as much as we all must work to prevent them — they will occur again on our campuses. When they do, we have to first ensure we provide every available assistance and support to the victims of these acts. Based on my multiple conversations with SIU Carbondale Chancellor Paul Sarvela and his leadership team, I believe the campus has been responsive to the victims and their families. That's absolutely key.

(On a side note: I can tell you that I've heard from *many* parents over these last few days...and I know Paul has too. They are expecting — rightfully so — that we will throw everything we have to combat this problem. I daresay that all of us who are parents would feel the same.)

Next, while ensuring all due process rights are granted to alleged perpetrators, student conduct investigations should be thorough, completed with dispatch, collecting the best information we can, and levying the full range of sanctions that are available to the university. We want every SIU student at every location to know they are not alone. We take reports of sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking — indeed all crimes — very seriously, and we will provide a strong response.

Finally, in the wake of something like this, we need to review all of our prevention and response efforts — and beef up areas when we identify weaknesses. You cannot come out of this kind of week and not ask the question: What more should we be doing?

What the Carbondale campus has witnessed, in addition to similar tragic stories we're hearing from around the country, serve to once again remind all of us that "Job One" in the SIU System — and this is true for any college or university — is the safety and security of our students and staff. Every one of us has some role to play in ensuring that we are maintaining an environment that contributes to student welfare and success.

As I mentioned above, campus sexual assault has now become a national issue...and appropriately so. This past Friday, President Obama and Vice President Biden announced a new initiative called "It's On Us", which emphasizes the importance of bystander intervention (similar to that training SIU Carbondale provided to new freshmen).

One thing we know is the most meaningful leadership on these efforts comes from students themselves. A benefit that's already emerged from all this is the student leadership that came together yesterday on the Carbondale campus to announce the formation of the Students Against Violence Task Force. This group, with campus and community representatives, will adopt and promote the national "It's On Us" campaign for SIUC. Kudos to everyone involved in this, including SIU Board of Trustees member Adrian Miller and other student government leaders. The overarching message they shared is important for all of us to remember at times like this: The vast majority of our SIU students are responsible, hard-working, compassionate, and focused on bettering their own lives and those of others. We are here to help them toward those ends.

Randy Dunn