SMU TASK FORCE RECEIVES CHARGE FOR DELIBERATIONS ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

DALLAS (SMU) -- SMU’s new Task Force on Sexual Misconduct Policies and Procedures held its first meeting today and received its charge from SMU President R. Gerald Turner, who appointed the task force October 4.

The charge, which will determine the topics of subsequent meetings, reads as follows:

Charge to the Task Force

SMU is committed to providing the best possible learning environment for students to achieve their educational and personal goals. Such an environment must support student safety through University policies, standards of conduct, educational programs, and campus resources.

Toward that end, SMU aspires to develop and maintain model programs that include policies and procedures related to sexual misconduct.

The President’s Task Force is charged with the overarching goal of examining SMU’s procedures and policies related to sexual misconduct in comparison with benchmark practices to determine if any updates or changes are needed, taking into account adherence to state and federal laws, especially Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. These policies and procedures aim to ensure that all students are treated with care and fairness.

Specifically, the Task Force is asked to review the following to determine if changes or additions are needed to strengthen SMU’s efforts:

- Sexual assault reporting procedures, including Clery Act compliance and effective coordination among campus offices, the SMU Police Department and the Dallas County District Attorney’s Office.
• The student conduct process as it relates to sexual misconduct, including the structure of the grievance procedure required by Title IX and the make-up of conduct review mechanisms.

• Programs and responses to ensure a harassment-free environment, particularly for the complainant.

• Policies regarding students who are accused of sexual misconduct.

• Support services on and off-campus for students who are victims of sexual assault.

• Orientation, training and education programs for all faculty, staff and students, especially for those who serve in roles in which a student might report a sexual assault (e.g., resident assistants), and who participate in conduct review activities.

• Sexual misconduct policies and procedures that treat all parties involved with care and fairness.

In addition, the task force heard from Edward N. Stoner II, an attorney formerly with the Pittsburgh office of Reed Smith LLP; he is an expert on student conduct issues who has authored more than 50 articles and presentations, including the nation’s most widely used model code of conduct for colleges and universities. He also is an expert on Title IX, which requires colleges and universities to investigate and to have grievance procedures related to sexual misconduct; these procedures are separate and independent of the criminal process. Stoner is the first of the external experts called in to speak to the task force.

“Our first meeting was productive and informative. As an SMU trustee and the parent of college-age students, I deeply appreciate the care and deliberation that is being given to this issue, which requires our best thinking and highest level of compassion,” said Kelly Compton, chair of the task force. “With the perspectives and expertise of the membership and the information provided by external experts, I’m confident that the best interests of our students will be well served by the task force. Everyone is united behind this goal.”

Upon completing its deliberations, the task force will submit recommendations to President Turner.

“It’s important that every institution of higher education revisit its policies and procedures, especially on topics that can so deeply affect a student’s well-being and that are being debated on a national level,” Turner said. “We are gratified that a number of external experts are willing to visit the task force to address the often technical regulations governing sexual assault allegations, grievance procedures, and privacy issues.”

The next meeting of the task force is Oct. 17.

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