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Civil rights office asks UIS to evaluate Title IX compliance

BY HOLLY DILLEMUTH

After a former faculty member at University of Illinois Springfield issued a formal complaint to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights that the university was violating federal law, UIS has come to an agreement with the Office for Civil Rights to settle the matter.

Derek Schnapp, public relations director at UIS, told faculty members Feb. 16 through a mass e-mail that the university will review how well it applies Title IX on issues like financial aid, disciplinary action, equipment, facilities, practice times and game schedules.

Title IX is a federal law that safeguards students from discrimination based on sex. The law is most notably used to protect female athletes from discrimination on the basis of sex but the law extends to all educational programs.

Schnapp says UIS received a notice in September from the Office for Civil Rights regarding an issued complaint. "The bottom line is we're going to work with the Office for Civil Rights and it's a process we want to make sure we're following properly," he says.

Barbara Hayler, who issued the complaint on Aug. 20, 2010, is professor emerita of criminal justice at UIS, and has chaired the ad hoc Committee to Investigate Intercollegiate Athletics as requested by the UIS faculty senate. When asked what Hayler thought of UIS' statement to faculty about the complaint, she says, "I think the statement released indicates a certain ignorance or denial of what the facts are."

Hayler's complaint says that UIS should "...improve its athletic program so that women have an equal opportunity to participate in athletics, and women's sports have comparable financial support from UIS."

Schnapp says he has not seen the original complaint and is unaware if university officials have either.

"I know we've asked for the original complaint," he said in a phone interview on Feb. 22.

Schnapp says that the university is not responding to the initial complaint made by Hayler but is following up on an agreement with the U.S. Department of Education. He confirmed that the university has been in communication with the Office for Civil Rights.

When asked if UIS has always been in compliance with Title IX, Schnapp said he was unaware of any time the university has not been in compliance with the 1972 ruling. "We don't anticipate discovering significant problems," he said.

Schnapp says the assessment will take some time, given so many different areas for review, but he says the cutoff for the assessment will be sometime in 2012.

Deanie Brown, associate chancellor for access and equal opportunity at UIS, will coordinate the self-assessment for the university. She declined to comment on the agreement made between the university and the Office for Civil Rights. Brown referred all other questions to the public relations director at UIS.

The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights requested the test on the basis of four allegations made by Hayler: UIS failed to let students know how to reach the Title IX coordinator, had harsher discipline for female athletes than for male athletes, failed to award an equal amount of financial aid for female students, and hasn't provided females with as many chances to play as male students.

When asked about the complaint, Schnapp reiterated that UIS will respond only to what the Office for Civil Rights has asked of the university. His e-mail to UIS staff states that the self-evaluation, which will take place this spring, will show that the university has a "continued compliance with Title IX."

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