

Victim Advocate Statement Q & A:

Statement Summary: The argument is presented to WU administration to provide victim advocacy services by hiring a designated, confidential victim advocate.

What is a victim advocate? A victim advocate assists victims/survivors in understanding and navigating university policies and procedures related to victimization and promotes their academic and professional success and personal wellness. Advocates offer victims information about the different options available to them and support victims' decision-making. This professional position requires knowledge and competence in providing confidential, victim-centered, trauma-informed services in order to meet best-practice standards in responding to victims/survivors of sexual violence and harassment as well as all types of victimization. A confidential victim advocate is knowledgeable in crisis management, community referral services, and the criminal justice system. No other position on campus, including the Sexual Assault Education and Prevention Project Coordinator, currently provides these services, or has this cross-discipline professional development and competency.

The way our statement is crafted, anyone who has experienced a victimization event would be eligible to receive advocacy services; the victim's advocate would not be limited to advocating for victims of sexual victimization.

Do we really need a victim advocate at Washburn? Yes. Victim advocacy services are urgently needed at Washburn. A recent study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 1 in 4 college women will experience a completed sexual assault during their college careers. Less than 3% of sexual assaults get reported to school authorities. This same study concluded that concern related to confidentiality is one of the top three reasons students give as to why they do not report instances of sexual assault.

Furthermore, a Washburn study in 2015 found that 28% of students have directly experienced a victimization event. Another 19% have witnessed a victimization event. Such events directly affect schoolwork and grades and significantly increase the likelihood a victim/survivor will take time off from school, transfer, or drop out.

Finally, the presence of a victim advocate who would be available to collaboratively develop and continuously update and implement training to prevent sexual assault would help to ensure the sustainability of the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) grant Washburn just received and maintain Washburn's compliance with Title IX even after the conclusion of the grant in 2018.

How would the services a victim advocate provides differ from existing services at Washburn? To help answer this question, please consider the following job

descriptions of existing positions that would importantly overlap—but definitely not replicate—advocacy services:

- Washburn counseling services are focused on short-term counseling options in order to help students perform their best academically. The current therapy techniques offered include: solution-focused, biofeedback, cognitive behavioral therapy, and interpersonal techniques. Counseling is limited to 8 sessions per semester. Washburn counseling services does not advocate on behalf of victim/survivors. Counselors are not expected to provide information about the reporting or investigatory processes, or the criminal justice system.
- Title IX Coordinator has primary responsibility for coordinating the WU's efforts to comply with and carry out its responsibilities under Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in all its operations. The Title IX coordinator oversees the University's response to reports and complaints that involve possible sex discrimination to monitor outcomes, identify and address any patterns, and assess effects on the campus climate. Sexual misconduct against students, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape, and sexual exploitation, can be a form of sex discrimination under Title IX. The IX Coordinator is tasked with addressing the wider school community and is not committed to providing direct individual services. The Title IX Coordinator is not a confidential resource. ***The Association of Title IX Administrators (ATIXA), the nation's leading providing of Title IX training and certification, issued a position statement in August 2015 strongly endorsing the need for colleges and universities to provide free and confidential support and advocacy to students and employees to strengthen the ability of the Title IX Coordinator to equitably and effectively perform his/her job.***
- Sexual Assault Prevention Grant Coordinator is a temporary posited funded until 2018 by the Office on Violence Against Women Grant Washburn received in fall 2015. This person will develop training modules to prevent sexual assault at Washburn. She will also disseminate this training throughout the University. This is not an advocacy position. The advocate position would actually provide coordination and would likely be able to assist in dissemination of sexual assault training on campus. The victim advocate position could provide for the continuation of grant funded efforts following termination of the funding.

What kind of education would the victim advocate have? Because it is a direct service position to faculty, staff, and students, we recommend a minimum of a bachelor degree in a related area and experience with direct services. The most common bachelor degree held by victim advocates seems to be a social work degree.

Would it really be possible to find someone able to assist victims of both sexual assault and racial and ethnic bias? Yes. The special training victim advocates

receive makes them competent to provide assistance in both areas, as well as other types of victimization.

The need for confidentiality: It is absolutely critical that the victim advocate be a confidential resource on campus. By “confidential” we mean that disclosure to the advocate of sexual victimization would not initiate a university investigation.

Studies repeatedly demonstrate that confidentiality helps establish an environment in which victims/survivors feel more comfortable seeking assistance, thereby leading to higher rates of reporting among victims and increasing the likelihood that victims/survivors will participate in the formal investigation process. Recall the Bureau of Justice Statistics study cited above that listed lack of a confidential resource on campus as one of the top three reasons college victims of sexual assault do not report to school authorities.

Moreover, confidentiality plays a key role in the recovery process of victims/survivors by allowing them to exercise power within their right to choose what information to share, with whom, when, and how.

Finally, confidentiality is a respected part of many service providers’ ethical codes, including the ethics codes of all of the helping professions represented on this campus.

Would this be a full-time position? Yes. We anticipate that the number of students/employees seeking advocacy services will start out small and then grow considerably every year as trust in the advocate grows. This has been the case at other colleges and universities, including neighboring K-State and KU, which report 50% increases in the number of students seeking advocacy services per year. In order to build this trust, the victim advocate will need to spend considerable time doing outreach to students, faculty, and staff. In addition to doing outreach and providing services to clients, at Washburn, the advocate could serve as a dissemination vehicle for the sexual assault prevention education curricula that will be developed by the newly hired sexual assault prevention grant coordinator.

Logistics: This statement purposefully refrains from specificity on many important logistical points. ***We feel it is important to first build broad support for hiring a victim advocate before becoming too focused on logistics.***

Moreover, we recognize that an advocate would be an administrative position. It is not our intention to dictate to the administration exactly how the position should function.

With this statement, we do ask, however, that faculty and staff with expertise in victim advocacy be given a prominent role in the hiring process to select the confidential victim advocate and in determining the institutional processes

through which the confidential victim advocate would work with the Title IX officer and fit within the broader structure of the University. It is very important faculty and staff members trust the advocate because they must feel comfortable referring students to them in crisis situations.

The working group that drafted the statement certainly has ideas and recommendations about how the position *could* fit within the university's existing structure. Regarding organization and institutional hierarchy:

- We request that the position not report to the Title IX Coordinator
- The position could report directly to the president, as the IRB chair currently does. This would provide greater autonomy to the victim advocate.
- The advocate position could alternatively report to the Vice President of Student Life, as Counseling Services currently does.
- A question has been raised about how an advocate would handle a situation in which competing parties claimed the need for assistance. In civil cases, the advocate would likely need to refrain from providing services to competing claimants. In criminal disputes, WU could establish that a false claim is not a condition for which its advocate provides services.

Why can't these services be provided by a community partner? It is our recommendation that Washburn should provide advocacy services directly rather than working through a community partner to provide these services. As explained above, to be effective, the advocate will need to work to build trust on campus. It is thus critical that the advocate be a full-time, highly visible and accessible member of the campus community. Moreover, the advocate will need to have in-depth understanding of the campus community and culture. A college campus is a unique community requiring an advocate that has a comprehensive understanding of student life. An essential skill set for victim advocates is safety planning. If a student decides to report, or more importantly not report, a safety plan would be developed with the victim that addresses the unique features of academic setting. No student should be in a situation where fear and avoidance of a perpetrator drives decisions to attend class or withdraw from the university. A victim advocate would provide the support and safety planning requisite to retention and continued academic performance. In addition, it is important for this position to be a WU position so that WU can protect it from political issues in the Topeka community that might impact a community partner's ability to provide services to Washburn. All of this is not to say, however, that WU's advocate could not also coordinate with community partners in some areas.

Mitigating Faculty Members' Responsibility to Report: Though this is a logistical detail to be determined later, some of the motivation for writing this statement comes from the hope that the presence of a confidential victim advocate would mitigate faculty members' mandated responsibility under Washburn's non-discrimination policy to report instances of sexual assault or harassment disclosed

to them by students to the Title IX officer. An alternative model could be to allow faculty members to instead report such disclosures to the advocate, who would report numbers to the Title IX officer, but not individuals.

How much will it cost? Regarding salary for the position, average salaries in the Midwest for victim advocates are between \$31,000-\$43,000. Victim advocates at KU and K-State receive between \$38,000-4,000 + benefits.

However, it is our position that providing these services will actually generate income for Washburn by helping to retain students who have suffered victimization and recruiting students in search of a student-centered college experience. Indeed, as more and more colleges and universities across the nation begin providing these services, Washburn will look out of touch if it does not.