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UMass Amherst Says Compliance Review, Not A Complaint, Prompted Title IX Investigation



The UMass Amherst campus. *Credit: (Globe file photo)*

By Matt Rocheleau

The University of Massachusetts Amherst today said that a “compliance review,” not a Title IX complaint, prompted the federal education department’s ongoing investigation into whether the school violated rules around the handling of sexual violence and harassment complaints.

The US Education Department’s Office for Civil Rights for the first time [today released](#) a complete list of all of the higher education institutions nationwide that are under investigation for possible Title IX violations.

[Officials said](#) the list of 55 institutions includes some that are being investigated because of specific complaints individuals made to the Education Department and others that are being investigated as part of a “compliance review.”

In response, UMass Amherst issued a statement today saying that the education department's investigation there was initiated as a compliance review and not due to a Title IX complaint.

"The Department of Education regularly conducts proactive compliance reviews of schools that receive federal funds," the university said in a statement.

But, Dorie Nolt, press secretary at the Education Department, said in a statement that "compliance reviews are not random audits of schools — they are selected based on various sources of information, including

statistical data, news reports and information from parents, advocacy groups and community organizations.”

“Compliance reviews are initiated in order to remedy possible violations of students’ rights,” Nolt added. “Both compliance reviews and complaint-based investigations can include narrower allegations pertaining to one or more individuals; issues related to school policies or practices that are systemic in nature and impact entire student bodies, schools, or school systems; or a combination of these elements.”

UMass Amherst, like many other colleges and universities, has come under fire in recent years for allegedly mishandling sexual assault cases.

In 2010, a [report](#) by the New England Center for Investigative Reporting and published in the Globe detailed how a UMass Amherst student had allegedly confessed to raping a friend on campus yet was allowed to remain enrolled at the campus.

The report [prompted outcry](#) and led the university’s administration to establish a special committee to review the campus-wide student code of conduct.

The university said in its statement today that it has since revised that code of conduct “to strengthen its sexual misconduct policy.”

The Education Department’s compliance review began on June 30, 2011 and no conclusions have been reached, the university said.

UMass officials said two campus-wide emails were sent out in the fall of 2011 to explain the review and to encourage participation.

“Compliance reviews are designed to address systemic issues and ensure that violations are readily identified and promptly eliminated,” said one of the messages sent to the campus at the time. “We applaud the work of the OCR and are confident that any information that results from this compliance review will have a direct and positive impact throughout the university.”

Campus officials also noted that the university this year [launched](#) the “UMatter at UMass” campaign, which includes “extensive bystander intervention training for students and employees,” and it is launching a “Men and Masculinity Center” to engage men on the issue of sexual assault.

The university also pointed to its partnership with the Center for Women

and Community, which has been housed at UMass Amherst for four decades providing support to survivors of sexual assault and offering sexual assault prevention education.

Officials said that center recently received a \$270,000 federal grant to bolster its efforts.

Last year, the center's sexual assault hotline responded to more than 500 calls from area college students and provided crisis intervention and support to 227 victims of violence affiliated with UMass and four other nearby colleges, according to Becky Lockwood, associate director of counseling and rape crisis services at the center.

The Education Department said today it released the list of schools under investigation to try to "bring more transparency to our enforcement work and to foster better public awareness of civil rights."

The department said it will not disclose details about any cases aside from when the investigations began.

When an investigation is completed, the department will disclose, upon

request, whether the schools have been found in violation and entered into an agreement to address compliance concerns or whether insufficient evidence of a violation was found.

The decision to publicize the list comes two days after a newly-established White House task force published its first report and a list recommendations for combating sexual assault on college campuses.

“The task force has done outstanding work in providing strategies to prevent sexual assault, respond compassionately to victims and hold perpetrators accountable,” said a statement from UMass Amherst’s vice chancellor for student affairs and campus life Enku Gelaye.

“We fully support their work, and we have already been actively engaged in implementing many of the best practices recommended by the task force,” she added. “Much more must be done to safeguard our students and we are committed to that effort.”

Other local schools named on the list responded today.

A Boston University spokesman [told the Globe](#) that the university is under

investigation for a complaint filed last fall. He said the university believes it did not violate Title IX, but is cooperating with the investigation and is open to any recommendations that could lead to improvement.

Harvard's undergraduate college and its law school were both named in today's list. A university spokesman [told the Globe](#) administrators there take sexual violence and harassment seriously and has taken steps to improve its prevention and victim support services.

Other Massachusetts schools listed as being under investigation were: Emerson College and Amherst College.

Earlier this week, the Education Department announced it found through an investigation that Tufts University violated Title IX rules. The university [denied](#) the department's findings.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, officials said.

Colleges, universities and K-12 schools that receive federal funds are required to comply with Title IX rules. Institutions that violate the law and fail

to address problems can lose their federal funding and can be referred to the US Department of Justice for further action, officials said.

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A federal judge in Washington ordered the U.S. military on Friday to at least temporarily stop force-feeding a hunger striking prisoner at the Guantanamo Bay naval base.

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Genetically Modified Foods Confuse Consumers

Genetically modified foods have been around for years, but most people in the United States have no idea if they are eating them.

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Vt. Sex Offender Faces Sentencing in Niece's Killing



A convicted sex offender who killed his 12-year-old niece after luring her to his house with a ruse about a pool party is due to be formally sentenced to life without the possibility of parole.

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Hike with Caution at White Mountains



Campgrounds in New Hampshire's White Mountain National Forest are open, but the Forest Service is warning people that some areas still have snow, and spring melt-off can lead to some slippery footing.

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Will Connecticut Schools Ban Chocolate Milk?



Connecticut lawmakers moved forward this week on a new nutrition bill that could remove chocolate milk from public schools.

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Lacrosse Team Honors Fallen Officer and Coach

The girls lacrosse team at Exeter High School is honoring their late coach Stephen Arkell, a New Hampshire police officer who was killed in the line of duty.

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Celebrating 10 Years of Gay Marriage

On May 17, 2004, Massachusetts offered the first marriage licenses to same-



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10 Parting Shots at SNL Heading Into The Season Finale

Here are "10 Parting Shots at SNL" as the show's 39th season comes to a close Saturday night with Andy Samberg as host.

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Environmentalists in Portland Oppose Tar Sands Oil

Environmentalists will rally at the Deering Oaks Park bandshell in Portland to oppose the Keystone XL oil pipeline and the shipping of tar sands oil through Maine.

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Broke Beats: F.Stokes – ‘Liquor Sto’ Diaries’



Broke Beats is BDCwire’s open-source hip-hop column. Every Saturday, we showcase the best new albums, EPs, and mixtapes available for free stream or download. The Midwest has long been a stronghold for spirited rappers and producers who haven’t quite pierced the East Coast market. F.Stokes is among the most fearless of of these artists, and the... [Read more »](#)

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Oprah’s Network Postpones Sam Documentary



The planned documentary by the Oprah Winfrey Network on Michael Sam, the NFL's first openly gay player, has been postponed.

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Woman Falls Down Elevator Shaft at Fenway Park

A 22-year-old woman is hospitalized after falling down an elevator shaft at Fenway Park Friday during a Red Sox game, according to the Boston Fire Department.

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Obama, Congress Move to Address Veterans Affairs Firestorm



The Obama administration and Congress are moving quickly to respond to a growing political firestorm over allegations of treatment delays and falsified records at veterans hospitals nationwide.

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Conn. Exhibit Looks at Benedict Arnold as Hero

A new exhibit on display at the Slater Memorial Museum is the latest effort to bring heightened visibility to a subject Norwich has deliberately ignored for centuries.

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Testing Inconclusive, Suspected Bobcat Returned

A judge has returned a 38-pound feline to a New Jersey woman after DNA testing couldn't conclusively say whether it was a purebred bobcat.

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Clearing This Afternoon with Sunshine for Sunday

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Nissan's Taxi of Tomorrow Hoping for a Fare Future

Members of the New England Motor Press Association had the dual experiences





of driving and riding in this Taxi of Tomorrow when Nissan brought a pair of the hackney versions of its NV200 van to town.

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Teen's Arm Reattached After Pasta Accident



Four surgeries later, 17-year-old Brett Bouchard can move his arm after it was severed below the elbow.

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Red Sox Fall to Tigers, 1-0, Back Under .500

The loss drops the Sox back below .500, at 20-21, and 10-12 at home.

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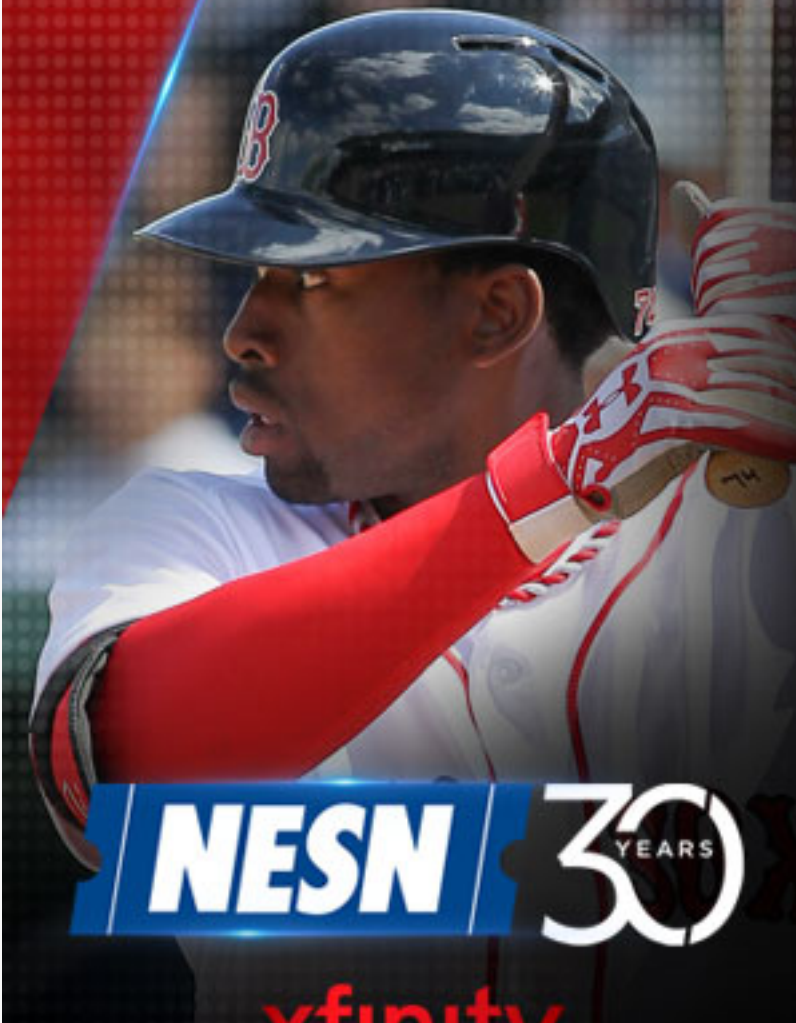


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Life Share

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