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Brandeis facing federal probe for handling of sexual assault

By **Matt Rocheleau**

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The US Education Department has opened an investigation into Brandeis University's handling of a sexual assault complaint, the college said Thursday, making it the 10th school in the state and one of more than 75 nationwide facing such an inquiry.

The Education Department, in a document obtained by the Globe, said it is investigating a student's allegation that the school wrongly and unfairly found him responsible for sexual misconduct this past spring and subsequently disciplined him.

Brandeis spokesman Bill Schaller would not comment directly about the investigation, or the complaint that prompted it.

"The safety, health, and well-being of our students is paramount," Schaller said in a statement. "In the words of [university] president [Frederick M.] Lawrence, it is a 'sacred

trust, and we take it as such.’ ”

He pointed out several initiatives the school has undertaken recently to prevent and respond to sexual assault.

Brandeis opened a rape crisis center, hired a psychological counselor who specializes in trauma and sexual violence, and relocated its office of sexual assault services and prevention to a more central location on campus.

The university has also conducted bystander-intervention training for students and created a informational website and distributed resource guides to students, faculty, and staff to increase awareness of sexual assault services and prevention efforts.

The recent steps followed demands of an online petition, which has collected more than 2,700 signatures, calling on the university to do more.

In May, the Education Department took the unprecedented step of identifying every college and university in the country under investigation for possibly violating rules governing the handling of sexual violence and harassment cases. Those rules are outlined in Title IX, a federal law that mandates gender equality in campus life.

That initial list included 55 campuses, including six in Massachusetts: Amherst College, Boston University, Emerson College, Harvard University’s undergraduate college, Harvard Law School; and the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

The list has since grown to more than 75 colleges, including the additions of the Berklee College of Music, Hampshire College, UMass Dartmouth, and now Brandeis.

Other New England schools under investigation include Brown University, Dartmouth College, the University of Connecticut.

In the spring, Tufts University initially denied, then accepted findings from an Education Department investigation that the university was not complying with Title IX rules around handling sexual assault cases.

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