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EDITORIALS OPINION

Editorial: Unhealthy Secrecy Surrounds Faculty Records In State University System

By EDITORIAL
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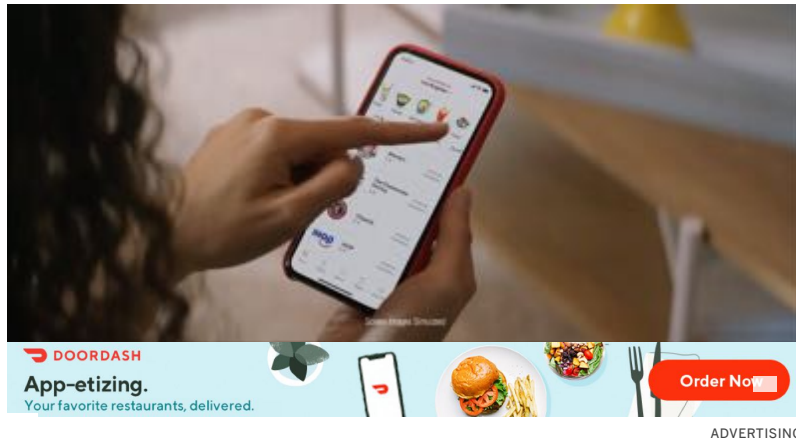


Two former Central Connecticut State University students and a former faculty member relate their stories of the sexual harassment they witnessed or withstood from Theatre Department faculty member, Joshua Perlstein.

An unhealthy secrecy surrounds faculty records in the Connecticut State University System. Those records are off-limits to the taxpayers who employ the professors.

Because of that secrecy, it's unclear just what Central Connecticut State University has done to discipline a theater professor **accused of sexually harassing women on campus.**

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CCSU recently **put the professor on paid leave** while an outside law firm tries to investigate the allegations, which go back years. The allegations **were first reported** by the CCSU student newspaper, The Recorder, in April.

The Courant's own digging, by writer Kathleen Megan, found that the professor's unwelcome advances "**constituted sexual harassment,**" according to a 2005 investigation of one complaint.



One, the state hides the entire personnel files of faculty in the Connecticut State University System, which includes Central Connecticut State University in New Britain. Those files can normally only be opened by court order. So victims who file complaints may never know the outcome.

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This is a gaping exception to the state's Freedom of Information law. But it was written into the contract between the faculty union — the Connecticut State University American Association of University Professors — and the Connecticut State University System's board of trustees. The clause in question says, "The entire contents of personnel files shall be considered private and may not be opened to any outside scrutiny except when ordered by a court of law."



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The **current contract** with that odious “outside scrutiny” language expires in three years, and state negotiators and legislators really need to get that out of the next contract.



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The lost records have greatly hampered the current investigation. The university has had to piece together what it can from emails and documents that somehow escaped the shredder.

In fact, the university had to get the 2005 report on Associate Professor Joshua Perlstein's harassment of a student from the reporter, Ruth Bruno, who broke the story in *The Recorder*, President Toro said.

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Dr. Toro has, commendably, ordered a stop to the record-shredding in the departments that handle harassment complaints.

open about the current investigation by Hartford law firm Shipman & Goodwin.

She's justifiably angry that she had to learn about the allegations involving Professor Perlstein through the Recorder story in April. When she arrived on campus in January 2017, she'd made a point to ask department heads "what was keeping them awake at night," she said Thursday. The theater professor's name never came up.

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Now complaints about him occupy a lot of her time as she tries to sort out what happened over the years, with few documents to help her and with strictures designed to protect professors like him from scrutiny.



CCSU President Zulma Toro (Handout)

High Rate Of Harassment

In an interesting coincidence, a study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine said this week that **"the academic workplace ... has the second highest rate of sexual harassment"** — second only to the military.

That's in part because universities are more focused on avoiding lawsuits than preventing harassment, the study said.

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They should consider changing that strategy because protecting harassers is obviously not stopping the harassment.

Here in Connecticut, the state legislature seems focused on setting up obstacles to the public finding out about the transgressions of faculty at certain taxpayer-supported universities.

The legislature, in kowtowing to unions on this, is shielding wrongdoing and wrongdoers.