



Dear Chancellor Green, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Laurie Bellows, and Dr. Susan Swearer,

We write to you on behalf of the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) to express our concerns and disappointment in the administration’s handling of the Title IX Collaborative (the Collaborative from this point forward) selection process, including, but not limited to: the lacking communication between the Collaborative’s points of contact and elected GSA officials, the lacking transparency in the appointed members’ selection/appointment, and the clear disregard of survivors’ experiences in this process. In this letter, we will outline our experiences with this process and provide recommendations to better serve the campus community and, most importantly, center survivors in efforts to reform and develop the Title IX process and other sexual misconduct dynamics on campus.

In late September, President Ratcliff was approached by the Chancellor’s Chief of Staff Mike Zeleny and asked to recommend a member of the GSA to serve on the Collaborative as a voice for graduate students. When asking for parameters, President Ratcliff was informed those recommend should meet the following qualifications: 1) no **open** investigation in the Title IX process, 2) ability to bring an important lens and perspective related to graduate student experiences with Title IX and sexual misconduct/assault, and, if possible, 3) an understanding of sexual assault on college campuses and cares deeply about creating a safe, campus environment. Important to note, we have yet to find these requirements in any tangible form (e.g., by-laws, documents, etc.). Within the structure of the GSA, the person who is most qualified – both personally and based on elected responsibilities – is our Vice President of Student Affairs Luz Sotelo. After running these qualifications by Sotelo, an e-mail was sent the Zeleny recommending Sotelo. It is here where we began to experience lacking clarity and unprofessionalism on behalf of the administration and Collaborative’s senior members.

At onset, President Ratcliff and VP Sotelo were told communication would be made to the members of the Collaborative within the coming weeks. However, no communication was made about the selection processes or timing beyond a vague “few weeks” statement. On October 15, Sotelo followed up with Zeleny about the formation status of the Title IX Cooperative Work Group. There were no e-mails following up with Sotelo about this and, thus, Sotelo sent a follow-up e-mail to Zeleny once again asking for yet another update on October 23. Around this time, President Ratcliff was made aware the originally proposed single Working Group would be split into two working groups – the Collaborative and a student-focused group within ASUN – and was asked to provide additional recommendations for the Collaborative’s two working bodies. Continuing to wait on a follow-up from Zeleny, Sotelo sent a 3rd follow-up e-mail to Zeleny on November 14. Once again, we received no notice nor response from Zeleny, or any other members of the Collaborative despite repeated requests for information. Informed by other members of the Collaborative on November 15, President Ratcliff and Sotelo were informed the Collaborative was having its first meeting. Despite our multiple attempts to contact and receive information from various points of contact, we were never provided information nor justification about Sotelo’s role on the committee (or lack thereof) and the convening of the Collaborative.¹

¹ We are happy to provide e-mail evidence as these were all conducted using UNL e-mails and, thus, are public record.

In an article published shortly before the Collaborative's first meeting on November 15, we were made aware of the individuals that were selected to serve on the "University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Campuswide Collaborative on Sexual Misconduct".² Broken down by student-type (i.e., undergraduate, graduate), faculty, and staff, the numbers are as such: With 45 total members, 9 (20.0%) are undergraduates, 1 (2.2%) is a graduate student, 14 (31.1%) are Faculty, and 20 (44.4%) are Staff members. This does not include the two ex-officio members: Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Laurie Bellows and Title IX Coordinator Tami Strickman. We have two major concerns/questions: *First, the limited student representation on this committee concerns us immensely as those are more impacted by this Collaborative's efforts and initiatives, and specifically the lack of graduate student representation as they are one amongst the groups most vulnerable to sexual misconduct in higher education.*³ *Second, how were these members selected?* Sotelo, our recommended member of the Collaborative, is our VP of Student Affairs and *met all qualifications* as provided to President Ratcliff at the time. However, both President Ratcliff and VP Sotelo have both been told conflicting information on whether or not people who have *ever* had a Title IX case could serve on the Collaborative. Obviously, we cannot speak to the experiences of all members on this committee; however, if this is true, excluding survivors from serving on this Collaborative communicates a lack of care for centering survivors and defies the University's commitment to shared governance.

It is disappointing and concerning that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has not made any concrete efforts for centering survivors in the formation of the Title IX Collaborative, and in the conversation surrounding sexual misconduct climate, culture, policies, and practices on our campus. Student survivors have directly experienced the flawed process and are keenly aware of the available services and support on campus, the level of institutional preparedness to support survivors, the availability of safety measures and accommodations, and the barriers and challenges in current practices on campus. This is just to name a few. Both the Anti-violence coalition at the University of Iowa and the NASPA Culture of Respect Initiative – initiatives from which the University of Nebraska-Lincoln claims to be modeling this Title IX Collaborative from – recognize the importance of centering survivors in the conversation: "Survivors of sexual violence—those who have and those who have not sought assistance from the institution—have firsthand experience of the challenges of balancing academic needs with personal safety, the (lack of) support from the student body and staff, and areas of success and for improvement in the institution's support efforts... Because efforts to prevent and respond to campus sexual violence are aimed at providing a better educational experience for students, it is essential to seek their feedback as part of any evaluation efforts."³ However, those who have been vocal about these shortcomings at UNL and have direct experiences in this process have been excluded.

We understand the Collaborative has been convened, but we deeply encourage the administration to reconsider the exclusion of not only VP Sotelo, but also ASUN member Mar Lee, from being active, contributing members. Although we cannot speak to your intention, the impact this has on excluding those who speak out on unjust processes and critique the handling of these issues related to sexual assault and Title IX on campus is a complete violation of personal freedoms. Each and every one of us is interested in helping UNL better support survivors on this campus, decrease the number of sexual assaults at UNL (and across the country), and making sure the systems in place are considerate and trauma-informed.

² <https://news.unl.edu/newsrooms/today/article/chancellor-selects-45-to-serve-on-sexual-misconduct-collaborative/>

³ a) Cantalupo, Nancy Chi and Kidder, William, A Systematic Look at a Serial Problem: Sexual Harassment of Students by University Faculty (June 30, 2018). Volume 2018 of the Utah Law Review pages 671-786.

b) <https://osmrc.uiowa.edu/anti-violence-coalition/2018-anti-violence-plan#policy>

c) <https://cultureofrespect.naspa.org/focus-areas/violence-prevention/culture-of-respect>

As aspiring leaders of the Big 10 and colleges across this country, we request two actions: First, VP of Student Affairs Sotelo be appointed to this committee as a Graduate Student representative. Currently, there is only 1 graduate student serving on this committee compared to 9 undergraduate students – an appalling and tokenistic disparity. If VP of Student Affairs Sotelo cannot serve due to clearly laid out criteria keeping her from serving, we request – *in writing* – the reason for why and justification for her exclusion. Second, the Collaborative should remove Tami Strickman from the committee as her presence presents, in and of itself, a conflict of interest.⁴ Part of this collaborative comes off the heels of activism on behalf of DearUNL members and their perseverance, who have loudly voiced their concern about Strickman’s abilities in this position. Although she is an ex-officio member, there is no need in her presence if the one purpose of this committee is to “[review] sexual misconduct-related policies, practices, and procedures to ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and agency guidance.”⁵

We hope you realize these requests come from a place of justice and vested interest in the University. It is imperative the University of Nebraska-Lincoln provide justice for survivors by having a diversity of experiences and background on this committee, especially those with first-hand experience in sexual misconduct/assault and trauma-informed care. We look forward to a quick response from you all. Please direct all responses to President Ratcliff (gsa@unl.edu OR sratcliff@huskers.unl.edu) via e-mail only.

Sincerely,

The Association of Students of the University of Nebraska Lincoln’s Graduate Student Assembly

⁴ See <https://www.dearunl.com/faq> for our concerns regarding Strickman’s conflict of interest.

⁵ <https://news.unl.edu/newsrooms/today/article/new-group-to-focus-on-campus-safety-reducing-sexual-assaults-supporting/>