

Margaret Gros reflects on her path to recovery

By Thea Gonzales
Watchtower Team

Since her sexual assault case gathered attention in January of this year, senior Margaret Gros has become the face of Title IX reform at Augustana, a status that she said has only brought her pain.

"Being the face of this has destroyed me and my life, to some extent," she said. "I really didn't think it was going to be this big."

According to Gros, she originally started speaking about her experience at Greek chapter meetings because she wanted to minimize the risk of assault with more sober members at parties. Following the aftermath of

the open panel discussion in January, it has escalated.

Her talks at chapter meetings have evolved into a campus-wide movement to critically investigate Title IX practices at Augustana, creating several sexual assault task forces and events designed to bring survivors support.

But for Gros, the lasting impact of a case so publicized have been devastating, especially in the wake of her mother's passing in December.

Her closest friend on campus, senior Bennett Tomlin, has been with her during the long and continuing healing process.

"It's bad. She's been severely depressed, suicidal, anxious. She feels like she can't walk around campus because she feels like no one believes her," Tomlin said. "Because she doesn't know who did it, she has a lot of fear."

In addition to developing heightened depression and anxiety, Gros breaks out into panic rashes when touched by any man, even if it's a male friend that she's known for a while. Since sharing her story earlier this year, she said she's worn down from trying to find a balance between bringing awareness to the issue and her own privacy.

"I don't want to be on campus anymore. I'm tired of people giving me looks and being known as that girl who got sexually assaulted," she said. "They might not even know my name, but they know my face."

Though she has withdrawn her case from the school's investigation, her case with the Rock Island Police Department is ongoing. She still does not know who her attacker is.

During the winter, Gros relied on strength from her sorority, Delta Chi Theta, to drive the movement forward and support her in the moments without cameras, just talking in her living room at night.

She has since deactivated from the group after nearly four years of membership.

Gros said her roommates – also members of the sorority – asked to see her evidence from the police, including her toxicology report, hospital records, official statements and photos. When she refused,

Gros said her roommates persisted and she felt attacked.

"I said no because in my eyes, that report is the last thing I have left," Gros said. "Some girls don't even have evidence. They don't have what I have, but it still happened to them. It doesn't matter because whether you believe me or not doesn't mean it didn't happen to me."

Without the support of the sorority behind her, Gros has spent most of her days only knowing the journey between her last classes and the solitude of her room, locked every time because she no longer feels safe at home.

"It's been awful without them. I thought these girls were truly my best friends, but it doesn't feel like that much anymore," Gros said. "I'm really lonely and sad all the time. I'm by myself the majority of the time."

Senior and Delta Chi Theta, Erin Ansusinha, was close friends

See GROS P16

Task force update: progress takes time



Photo by Brady Johnson

Jaime McLean, senior, and Dr. Jennifer Popple, chair of the Task force, converse during one of the Task force's meetings.

By Brady Johnson
Watchtower Team

The Task Force on Sexual Assault Response and Prevention has been meeting throughout the term. Their goal is to formulate the guidelines that Augustana could follow based on a variety of data. This data comes from students and outside groups.

"The initiative was that the forum presented at a moment of crisis for the college," Jennifer Popple, the chair of the Task force, said. "If everything was going smoothly then we would not have had what happened in the forum and then some of the resulting things that came after that."

Popple said that she is in charge with collecting the questions and concerns from the student body. The Task force is filled with students and other faculty and administrators. Recently, the Task force has heard back from the law firm tasked with reviewing Augustana policies, Husch-Blackwell, and will be looking over their recommendations.

"We spent some time in our meeting talking about how they sent back a lot of good information on how our policy can better connect to the laws," Popple said. "At the same time policy is one piece and implementation is another piece, so there are moving pieces that we need to get a hold

of."

Popple and Sheri Curran, the principal legal counsel for Augustana, met with President Bahls this past Monday to inform him on what the findings are.

The Task force also released their survey to gain feedback on campus; that survey ends today. Carrie Hough and Emilee Goad, who are both members of the Task force, will then spend time going over the raw data from the survey. The reason the survey took awhile to be released to the public was due to crafting.

"We didn't want the survey to go out in a way that people were pressing a button," Popple said. "We wanted them to be able to write text. At the same time we are mandatory reporters so we didn't want it coming directly to us and then have to launch a Title IX investigation. That then creates a trust problem."

So, the information will be carried out by confidential readers through SafePath to protect identities, but still achieve the goal of analyzing the data. Hough and Goad will then shift through the data once the Task force receives the data from SafePath.

Popple said the information from Husch-Blackwell and the student survey are only just a few pieces in this very big puzzle.

The student committee, which is formally known as the Student Advisory Committee, started meetings a few weeks ago. The

committee is a way to bridge the gap between students and administrators.

Their voices will also be a part of the Task force once the Task force supplies their report.

Student Government Association (SGA), has been discussing creating the Student Advisory Committee to the Title IX Team. SGA views the committee as a tool to inform Title IX members of student concerns and questions.

"They have put together a really nice looking committee, but at the same time because we have one working right now I feel a little bit that it could be confusing in some way," Popple said. "That is something we are continuing conversation about. Ultimately, I think we just want to do what is best for students. I think we will get there we just need to figure out what the answer in terms of what the student committee looks like."

Popple said there will be a report out before students go home for summer break.

"Over the summer there is going to be work done on a variety of different places," Popple said. "Then we are going to implement it in the fall so we need to assess how that implementation went." Popple believes that the Task force should continue and adapt over time, so assessing around end of fall term or beginning of winter term is an idea currently being discussed.