109 reports of sex crimes, just 5 convictions

TRIBUNE WATCHDOG CAMPUS SEX ASSAULTS Few cases go to court in Cook County, and many are downgraded to misdemeanor charges

BY STACY ST. CLAIR, TODD LIGHTY AND JODI S. COHEN Tribune reporters

Chicago State University police Chief Ronnie Watson was convinced he had a rape case on his hands in the early morning hours of Feb. 20, 2010. An 18-year-old freshman reported being attacked by a fellow student after going to his dorm room to listen to music a few hours earlier. When she rejected his advances, he flipped her on her stomach, clapped his hand over her mouth and attacked her, she told police. Records show that abrasions on her body were consistent with her allegation.

Over the next 36 hours, Chicago State police aggressively investigated the case. They secured the crime scene, interviewed witnesses, took the student to a hospital for a DNA evidence kit and interrogated the accused. After a Cook County prosecutor said she could not approve felony charges unless the student and other witnesses picked the suspect out of a lineup, the department arranged for one.

In the end, the prosecutor declined to charge the suspect with felony sexual assault and suggested the officers arrest him on a less serious misdemeanor battery charge. The case, however, would still be prosecuted with the same set of facts that appear to describe a rape — that the suspect sexually penetrated her against her will.

Earlier this year, Cook County State’s Attorney Anita Alvarez appointed a new supervisor in the sex crimes unit, and the office started in September to track all campus assaults considered for felony charges. Alvarez’s spokeswoman said non-stranger sex assault cases are “among the most challenging to effectively prosecute.”
Few college sex cases reach court

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"The (male) student's attorney agreed to plea bargain, but the woman wouldn't go," Watson said. "He really thought they weren't going to get rape charges, but I'm glad we got something.""The Chicago state court, the Cook County state's attorney's office had filed rape charges against him because of what it now describes as its "scandalous behavior."However, he did not stop the office. "It's not the first, nor the last," he said. "The 26-year-old student, who was dating a female student at the time, agreed to the plea agreement. His lawyer, a 33-year-old, said: "We had a tough time convincing the judge, but we were able to reach a settlement."The settlement stipulated that the student would not be criminally charged and that he would perform 200 hours of community service and attend a domestic violence awareness program.

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