

# Los Angeles Times

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To the judges,

The California State University is a cornerstone of prosperity for the state and the largest public four-year university system in the nation. Half of the students come from marginalized communities and nearly 50% are Pell Grant recipients. Over the course of a year, Los Angeles Times reporters Robert J. Lopez and Colleen Shalby detailed how officials across the 23-campus network failed to properly investigate sexual misconduct and retaliation accusations, exposing students and employees to harassment, assault and hate. They also uncovered how former top executives, including some swept up in misconduct scandals, received [lucrative payouts and perks](#) after stepping down. The reporting exposed troubling flaws in oversight that prompted state lawmakers to [order an independent investigation](#) and led to reforms and leadership changes in the sprawling system.

Shalby and Lopez produced [more than 20 articles](#) based on key confidential and internal campus communications obtained from sources, as well as thousands of pages of public records and interviews with students and employees who were victims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and homophobic and transphobic hate. Among their findings, the journalists revealed how women and transgender students for years endured [sexual misconduct and hate](#) at a maritime academy on the San Francisco Bay. They reported how top officials in the CSU chancellor's office [failed to formally investigate](#) multiple allegations of sexual harassment against the husband of a campus president in Northern California. And they detailed [an alleged gang rape](#) of an underage teen by San Diego State University football players, an incident that had not been publicly disclosed or investigated by campus officials.

The Times' reporting repeatedly broke new ground and prompted coverage by other local news organizations based upon the paper's revelations. Following The Times' investigation of a gang rape allegation at San Diego State, for example, several media outlets, including the San Diego Union-Tribune and local television and radio stations, reported numerous stories about the accusation and its affect on the community. Outcry over the allegations reverberated across the NFL after The Times was [the first to report](#) that one of the players named in a civil lawsuit filed by the teen was a punter for the Buffalo Bills. And on the day The Times published its investigation into allegations of harassment and retaliation involving Sonoma State's president and her husband, which involved months of obtaining records from sources and the CSU, the Press Democrat published a story broadly outlining the claims.

Shalby and Lopez’s investigative reporting launched early last year after the university system’s chancellor resigned amid an outcry over the way he handled sexual harassment allegations against a friend while he had been president of Fresno State. The reporters began investigating whether this was an isolated incident or part of a wider problem. They faced challenges posed by the sheer size of the system, a constellation of far-flung campuses directed by presidents who report to a chancellor’s office that sets systemwide policies. A key finding of one of their investigations was that the CSU [does not track misconduct allegations](#), making it difficult to identify systemwide wrongdoing. The reporters knocked on doors from San Francisco Bay to San Diego Bay and gained the trust of sources, including those with access to key records and victims who feared coming forward.

Those who [shared their stories](#) were essential to the reporting. In most cases, victims were not identified in records; it was no small feat to find them or to gain their trust. The reporters relied on context clues from redacted records and scoured social media, faculty directories and campus blogs to try to find those who had been subjected to harassment and misconduct, or knew of someone who had experienced wrongdoing. Shalby and Lopez spent hours [talking with victims](#), allowing each to determine the pace of the conversation to prevent retraumatization. Many, fearing retaliation, spoke on the condition of anonymity. Some, with time, made the decision to go on the record. At the Cal Maritime Academy, after multiple face-to-face interviews, several students agreed to come forward publicly and to be photographed.

All who spoke with Shalby and Lopez hoped that doing so would lead to changes in a system they believe has failed to protect them.

The reports led to swift and substantial actions by the California Legislature, top CSU administrators and the federal agency that oversees maritime operations. The CSU [halted its executive payout program](#) less than two weeks after The Times reported that millions of dollars had been paid with little accountability for consulting work that was supposed to have been done by officials, some of whom had resigned amid sexual harassment controversies. In announcing a revamped program, [the CSU acknowledged](#) the need for “clarity about the responsibilities of participants and transparency.” The new program requires that executives be in good standing when they apply and submit monthly reports detailing their work, along with other recordkeeping.

In a letter calling for an independent investigation by the California auditor, 44 state lawmakers cited Los Angeles Times reports that uncovered [breakdowns and inconsistencies](#) in how officials handle sexual harassment and retaliation complaints and detailed the millions of dollars in payouts to top executives. A committee from both chambers of the Legislature voted to approve the inquiry. The auditor’s investigation is examining procedures for handling misconduct cases and policies on providing golden handshakes to top officials who step down amid controversies.

Shalby and Lopez’s reporting also led to the [resignation of the president of Sonoma State University](#). After several weeks obtaining records and developing information from confidential sources, the reporters detailed how the CSU paid \$600,000 to the campus provost to settle a [retaliation accusation](#) against the president. The provost had reported to system officials that women on campus had accused the president’s husband of sexual harassment – allegations that

were never formally investigated by the chancellor's office. At the Cal Maritime Academy, the reporters spoke to students, alumni and faculty who shared concerns about [long-standing problems](#) with sexual harassment and sexual assault, homophobia, transphobia and racism at the school. Two weeks after they visited the campus office of the president to seek his response, he announced that he was retiring. After the report was published, the vice president overseeing student life submitted her resignation. And the U.S. Maritime Administration said it was concerned about the accusations and that its office of civil rights would investigate whether the school is complying with federal law that prohibits discrimination and harassment based on sex, race or gender.

There have been no objections, requests for corrections or retractions or other controversies after publication. We are proud to submit this work for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin E. Meida". The signature is written in a cursive style with a light blue rectangular highlight behind it.