

UTICA COLLEGE TO HELP FIND SEX OFFENDERS CENTER STUDYING HOW TO IMPROVE REGISTRATION

By Rebecca Croniser, Observer-Dispatch
March 6, 2009

An estimated 100,000 convicted sex offenders are missing from state registries.

And a new study through the Utica College Center for Identity Management and Information Protection is expected to help track them down, or at least identify how they get away without registering.

The 18-month study will be funded through a \$670,000 grant from the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. It involves partnering with ID Analytics, a research team from the criminal justice department at the University of Massachusetts Lowell and The Fraud Management Institute in San Diego.

"We want to know how offenders go missing and how they stay missing," said Don Rebovich, executive director of the college's center and principal investigator in the study. "The goal of the study is to address the fact that currently we know very little about the problems."

In New York state, sex offenders are classified in three categories — Level one (low risk), Level two (medium risk) and Level three (high risk), according to the state Department of Criminal Justice Services.

Level 1 offenders are required to register for a minimum of twenty years, and Level 2 and 3 offenders must register for life.

More than 28,000 sex offenders are registered in the state — 141 in Herkimer County and 588 in Oneida County, according to the department.

Allen Jost, vice president of business strategy for ID Analytics Inc., said he believes many sex offenders change their identities.

"Not only do some sex offenders simply disappear from the National Sex Offender Public Web site, others use false addresses or create new false identities to avoid detection," Jost said.

Such was the case in Arizona when 29-year-old convicted sex offender Neil Rodreick posed as a 12-year-old student.

"There is a large pool of people not being accurately tracked," Rebovich said. "We will provide research that will be applied to effectively reduce the number of offenders who are hiding in plain sight."

Rebovich said this is the first study that he knows of that has focused on this issue.

"This is something people can agree that the applied research has a real value," he said.

The study is in its first phase — researchers are preparing to survey the sex offender registry systems across the country. The focus then will turn to analyzing the states that have good tracking systems and those with bad systems.

Rebovich will be supported by a graduate of Utica College's economic crime program, and he said current students will aid in the research.

While final results of the study are not expected until 2010, Rebovich said preliminary results could be released at various times during the study.