

Case Study: Informal Resolution of Sexual Assault Complaints

Nikhil alleges he was sexually assaulted while he was asleep after he had a dental procedure by Valeria, his ex-girlfriend. Valeria and Nikhil are both in the nursing program. Valeria allegedly took photos of Nikhil during the incident and posted them on social media when Nikhil broke up with her. Nikhil reports that Valeria continued to stalk him on campus and at the hospital where they work. Nikhil claims she showed the photo to doctors at the hospital and claimed Nikhil sent her the photos to harass her. Would you recommend the District offer the Parties an opportunity for informal resolution?

Yes, No, or Maybe?

Pop Quiz

A district can use emergency removal to remove an employee Respondent from campus if it determines the employee presents an immediate threat to the physical health or safety of the Complainant arising from the allegations of sexual harassment.

True or False?

Case Study: Informal Resolution

*The District began an investigation into a student's formal complaint of sexual harassment against another student. The investigator completed her interviews of the Complainant and two other witnesses. The Complainant called the Title IX Coordinator and stated she wants to engage in the informal resolution process. **Did the Complainant waive her right to participate in the informal resolution process by completing the investigative interview?***

Yes, No, or Maybe?

Case Study: Minors on Campus

The parties who seek informal resolution are minors. They attend a joint enrollment program on campus. They are both seniors at the local high school. They both agree that they want to enter into a mutual stay away agreement. One party expressly states she does not want her parents to find out because they were cutting class and drinking during the incident.

Discussion: Should the informal resolution process be offered to these students? What are things to consider?

Possible Outcomes of Informal Resolution

- No Agreement Reached
 - District begins/resumes formal complaint investigation
- Formal Resolution Process Agreement Reached
 - Parties bound by terms
 - Allegations resolved
 - End of grievance process (depending on stage, no investigation, hearing or determination of fault)

Documenting Informal Resolution

- If complaint resolved:
 - Parties sign agreement (parents if minors are involved);
 - District closes complaint;
 - Parties cannot appeal resolution; and
 - District will not re-instate formal complaint process.
- If Party withdraws from the informal resolution process:
 - Document withdrawal in writing; and
 - Resume/Begin investigation.

Case Study: Withdrawal

Before the Parties signed the resolution agreement, the Complainant called the Title IX Coordinator and requested to proceed with a formal investigation. Can the District enforce the resolution agreement?

Yes, No, or Maybe?

Case Study: Documentation

After the Parties resolved a complaint of sexual harassment through informal resolution and fully executed the resolution agreement, the Title IX Coordinator closed the file. Should the Title IX Coordinator shred the original formal complaint and the informal resolution facilitator's notes since the matter was resolved?

Yes, No, Maybe?

The Grievance Process – The Investigation



Title IX Investigations

- Fact-finding investigation to find out:
 - Did the misconduct occur?
- Investigations may vary, but must be:
 - Prompt
 - Adequate
 - Reliable
 - Impartial



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Title IX Investigator

- Title IX Coordinator can serve as the Title IX Investigator
- The Title IX Investigator cannot be the Decision Maker or the Informal Resolution Facilitator

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The Investigator

- The investigator must
- Be free of biases and conflicts of interest
 - Conduct the investigation– gather inculpatory and exculpatory evidence
 - Be trained on issues of relevance to create an investigative report that fairly summarizes relevant evidence
 - Write the report

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The Investigation

- Inculpatory evidence tends to support a determination that the respondent's *is* responsible for alleged conduct; evidence that tends to establish guilt
- Exculpatory evidence tends to support a determination that the respondent *is not* responsible for the alleged conduct; evidence that tends to exonerate

The investigation

- Parties have right to discuss allegations (no gag orders), gather evidence, identify witnesses, and other inculpatory and exculpatory evidence
- The District can also present evidence: “[T]he Department recognizes that the recipient is not a party to the proceeding, but this does not prevent the recipient from presenting evidence to the decision-maker, who must then objectively evaluate relevant evidence...”

Standard of Evidence

- Title IX regulations require “preponderance of the evidence” or “clear and convincing evidence standard” 34 CFR § 106.45(b)(7)(i)
- California law requires “preponderance of the evidence” Ed. Code, § 67386
 - It is more likely than not that the fact occurred

Credibility Determinations

- Investigator may include credibility assessment but not determination of responsibility
- If an investigator’s credibility determination is actually a determination of responsibility, it violates § 106.45(b)(7)(i)

Assess Witness Credibility – DFEH Guide’s Factors

1. Inherent plausibility
2. Motive to lie
3. Corroboration
4. Extent an individual was able to perceive, recollect or communicate about the matter
5. Evidence of dishonesty

Assess Witness Credibility – DFEH Guide’s Factors

6. Habit/consistency
7. Inconsistent statements
8. Manner of testimony
9. Demeanor

Evaluating the Evidence

- Report must fairly summarize relevant evidence
- The report may include recommended findings or conclusions
- Decision-maker cannot give deference to recommended findings
- Decision-maker has obligation to objectively evaluate relevant evidence

Preamble at p. 30308

Relevance

- Not defined in regulations
- Evidence having any tendency in reason to prove or disprove any allegation at issue (Cal. Evid. Code CFR § 210)
- Can rely on logic, common sense, experience or science

Relevance Considerations

Does the evidence:

- Indicate bias on the part of a witness
- Corroborate an allegation
- Provide motive/justification for an allegation
- Provide witness leads
- Provide evidence that might exonerate accused

Relevance of Privileged Information

The District cannot use, seek disclose, or consider legally privileged information unless the party has waived the privilege voluntarily and in writing

- Attorney/Client, Marital, other privileges
34 CFR § 106.45(b)(1)(x)
- Doctor/Patient/Therapist (Medical Records)
34 CFR § 106.45(b)(5)(i)

Info deemed not relevant per September 4, 2020, Q&A Guidance

Relevance of Sexual History

- Questions and evidence about Complainant's sexual predisposition or prior sexual behavior are not relevant
- Unless
 - Questions/evidence offered to prove someone other than Respondent committed the alleged conduct; or
 - Questions/evidence concern specific incidents of the Complainant's prior sexual behavior with respect to Respondent and offered to prove consent.
34 CFR § 106.45(b)(6)(i)-(ii)
 - But, Ed Code section 67386, consent can be revoked at any time, past relationship by itself does not indicate consent

Consent

- Affirmative consent standard (Ed. Code § 67386)
 - Affirmative, conscious, and voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity

Relevancy Determinations

Initial steps for determining relevancy of evidence in Title IX Sex Harassment Complaint Process

- Step 1: Review the evidence being offered
- Step 2: Consider the allegations
- Step 3: Ask yourself whether the evidence being offered has the potential to prove/exonerate/explain or disprove an incident under investigation

Case Study

The mother of the minor student complainant provides the investigator with medical records and a written waiver and release to use the records, to show the student told the campus medical center staff about the sex assault and later about depression and anxiety from the alleged incident. The student complainant objects.

Yes, No, or Maybe

Can the investigator consider this information?

Evidence Review

Complainant and Respondent:

- At least 10 days time
- Right Inspect and review evidence *directly related to the allegations (note this is different from relevance)*
- Right to submit written response to evidence
- Investigator must consider response before completing report

34 CFR §106.45 (b)(5)(vi)

Case Study

After reviewing the evidence, which includes the medical reports produced by the minor complainant's mother, the respondent's advisor, who is a lawyer, requests that an expert be interviewed, a medical doctor, who will provide his opinion that medication taken by the student complainant affects memory.



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Yes, No, Maybe

Are parties allowed to produce expert witnesses to provide evidence?



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Investigative Report

- Introduction / statement of scope of investigation
- Methodology and persons interviewed (taped?)
- Chronology: factual and procedural steps (complaint, notices, interviews)
- Summarize allegations
- Factual findings (depends on policy)
- Relevant evidence
- Credibility assessments (depends on policy) but never determinations of fault
- Summarize policies allegedly violated
- List attachments



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Investigative Report

- Must provide final investigative report to Parties at least 10 days prior to hearing
- Parties must have opportunity to review and provide written response

34 CFR §106.45 (b)(5)(vi) and (vii)



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How parties may raise bias or other challenges to report:

Report on its face reveals that investigation was not thorough, neutral, or fair :

- Key witness identified not interviewed
- Key document provided not reviewed
- Key questions not asked
- Findings don't seem supported by evidence

Case Study: Supportive Measures

After the Parties resolved a complaint of sexual harassment through informal resolution and fully executed the resolution agreement, the Complainant asked the Title IX Coordinator whether they were still able to have a campus escort, which was a supportive measure the District provided after it received the Complainant's formal complaint. Because the complaint process is closed, the District can no longer offer supportive measures.

Yes, No, Maybe?

Breakout Room Discussion



Case Study for Discussion

Gregory, a student volunteer in the Performing Arts Division, reports that he has been in a relationship with the Division Chair, Gina. According to Gregory, Gina threatened him by stating that if he ends the relationship or tells HR, she would post several compromising pictures she took of him on the Internet.



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Case Study for Discussion

Gregory says Gina made this threat when he was volunteering as an usher at the college's production of Goldilocks and that she was yelling at the time. He reported that two other student volunteers, Tracy and Morgan, were nearby when Gina made this threat. Gregory files a formal complaint.



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Case Study for Discussion

1. Does this trigger the District's Title IX obligations? Why?
2. Should the District offer informal resolution? Why?
3. Should the District investigate? Why?
4. If the District initiates an investigation, what do you investigate?
 - a. Who should be interviewed?
 - b. List three examples of relevant evidence and irrelevant evidence
5. Must the District share the evidence collected? Why?



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Questions?



Next Title IX Training Series

- Part 3
 - Hearing
 - Determination of Responsibility
 - Discipline



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Thank you!

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