

# Title IX Training Series Part II: Informal Resolutions and Investigations

Allan Hancock College | November 28, 2022

Presented By: Jenny Denny & Amy Brandt



## Title IX Training Series Part II: Informal Resolutions and Investigations

Presented By:

Jenny Denny & Amy Brandt / November 28, 2022

### Agenda

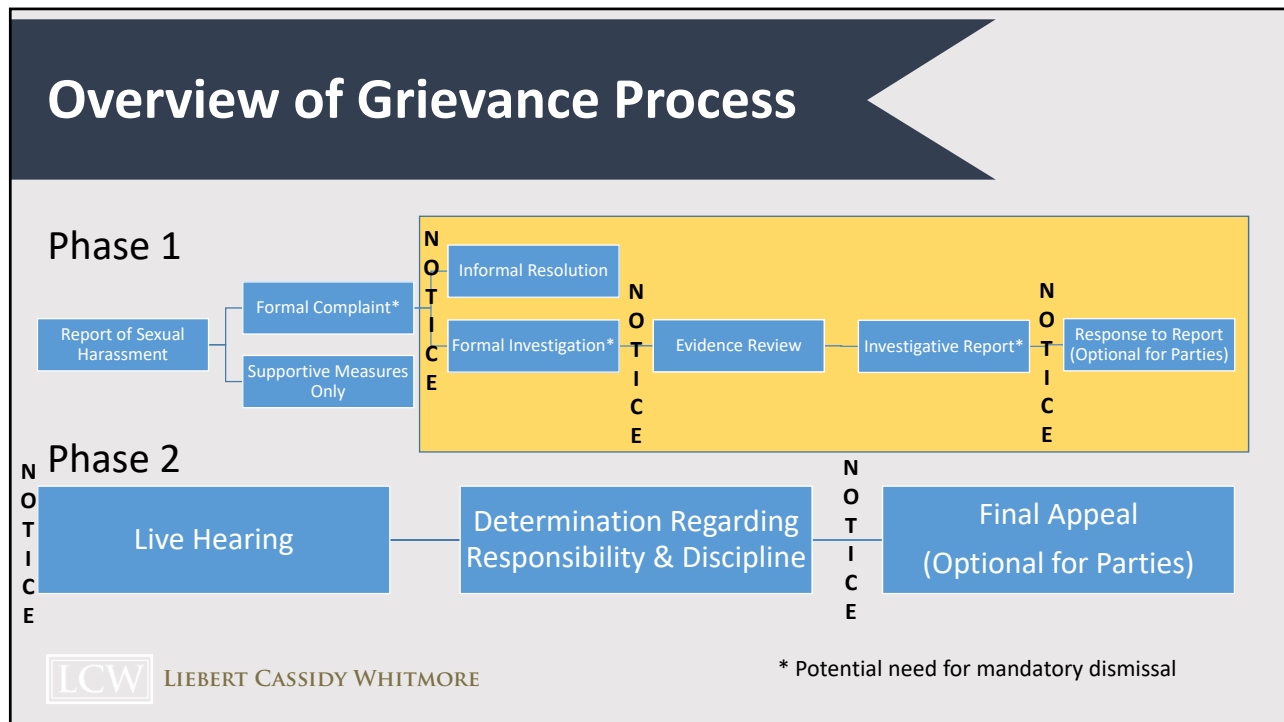
- Notices
- Trauma Informed Practices
- Serving with impartiality, and how to identify potential conflicts of interests
- Informal resolution process
- Investigations
- Relevant evidence v. directly related evidence
- Privileges
- Evidence review
- Providing the investigative report to parties



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## The Grievance Process – Issues Before the Investigation



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## Notice of Allegations

Must provide written notice to the parties:

- Notice of the allegations with sufficient detail (identity of the parties, conduct allegedly constituting sexual harassment, date, location if known)
- Notice of the grievance process, [including the availability of an informal resolution process](#)
- Presumption that Respondent is not responsible
- Statement that determination occurs at end of grievance process

34 CFR § 106.45(b)(2)(i)



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## Notice of Allegations

Must provide written notice to the parties:

- Sufficient time to prepare before interview
- Right to Advisor
- Right to evidence review
- Code of conduct provisions re: false statements and false information
- Reissue notice if new allegations are added

34 CFR § 106.45(b)(2)(i)



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## Timeline

- Must be reasonably prompt
- Can delay for good cause
  - Must provide written notice to the Parties

34 CFR § 106.45(b)(1)(v)

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## Trauma Informed



## Trauma Informed Practices

- Q&As on the Title IX Regs on Sexual Harassment (July 2021) Answer to Question 28 states, "A school may use trauma-informed approaches to respond to a formal complaint of sexual harassment."
- California law requires that employees processing grievances be trained on trauma-informed investigatory and hearing practices to help ensure impartial and equitable process. Ed Code § 66281.8

## Trauma Informed

- Understand and be sensitive to the effects of trauma
- Avoid re-traumatization
- Provide safety and support

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## Neurobiology of Trauma

- Impacts reporting and interactions with investigators and others
- Trauma causes neurobiological effects in a person's brain chemistry resulting in interference with memory
- May cause inability to recall facts in chronological order
  - See *The Neurobiology of Sexual Assault: Implications for First Responders* (2012)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuirVplhI0g>
  - Rebecca Campbell, Ph.D. research on neurobiology of trauma

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## Trauma and Investigations

- Memory may be incomplete
- Conduct cognitive interviews; ask about the sensory experience, including touch, smell, sound
- Discussion of the traumatic event may trigger the witness to relive/re-experience certain aspects of a traumatic event (fear, agitation, panic)

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## Trauma and the Grievance Process

- Investigators and decision makers must be aware of biases that may impact their work
- Consider potential effects of trauma and other factors, including cultural factors, etc.
- Avoid assumptions of responsibility or veracity based on the status of the witness: complainant/victim and respondent/perpetrator
- Explain and use open ended questions

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## Higher Education Statistics

- All students: 13% experience rape or sexual assault
- Graduate and professional students: 9.7% of females and 2.5% of males experience rape or sexual assault
- Undergraduate students: 26.4% of females and 6.8% of males experience rape or sexual assault
- All students: 5.8% experience stalking  
<https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence> (1-19-2021)

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## Higher Education Statistics

- 23.1% of TGQN (transgender, genderqueer, nonconforming) college students have been sexually assaulted
- Male college-aged students (18-24) are 78% more likely than non-students of the same age to be a victim of rape or sexual assault
- Female college-aged students (18-24) are 20% less likely than non-students of the same age to be a victim of rape or sexual assault

<https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence> (1-19-2021)



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## Impartiality





## Lack Impartiality = Consequences

- Conflict of interest or bias may be grounds for appeal - 34 CFR § 106.45(b)(8)(i)(C)
- Creates lack of confidence in integrity of the process



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## Impartiality

Title IX Coordinator, **Investigator**, Decision-Maker, and **Individual Facilitating an Informal Resolution Process** must be free of:

- Conflict of interest or
- Bias

34 CFR § 106.45[b][1][iii]



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## Impartiality

### Separation of Roles

Title IX Coordinator or Investigator cannot serve as a Decision Maker:

- Prevents influence on decision
- Avoids consideration of non-relevant information obtained/gleaned as a Coordinator or Investigator

See Preamble 30370



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## Impartiality

- Serve impartially; without
  - Pre-judgement of the allegations
  - Conflicts of Interest
  - Bias



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## Impartiality

### Free of Conflicts of Interests

- Actual or perceived conflict between personal interest and professional title IX duties
- Personal interests should not be allowed to enter the decision-making process



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## Impartiality

### Biases

- Personal feelings or attitudes that impact our actions
- Ideas, beliefs, and assumptions
- Often based on stereotypes and without full awareness
- Past experiences and current perceptions drive our perspectives and our actions
- Under stress or pressure, we gravitate even more strongly toward our unconscious bias



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## Impartiality

### Types of Biases

- Anchoring
  - The tendency to rely too heavily on one piece of information when making decisions
  - Fixation on initial information and fail to adjust to later information
- Bandwagon effect
  - The tendency to do (or believe) things because many other people do (or believe) the same thing



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## Impartiality

### Types of Biases

- Bias Blind Spot
  - The tendency to see oneself as less biased than other people, or to identify more bias in another than in oneself
- Confirmation
  - The tendency to confirm what we already believe is true
  - Influences



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## Impartiality

### Types of Biases

- Affinity/Similar to Me Effect
  - The tendency to have an affinity or get along better with people similar to you



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## Impartiality

- Be self-aware and mindful
- Assess actual or perceived conflicts of interest
- Recognize possible biases
- Use conflict checks form, self-report conflicts or bias, or recuse



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## Case Study

*At a hearing, the Respondent claims the investigator had a conflict of interest because the investigator's wife works for the Complainant's father. The Respondent also claims the investigator was biased because the investigator did not speak to witnesses the Respondent identified. The investigator testifies that the surveillance video captured the entire incident and that is why he did not see the need to speak to witnesses Respondent identified who were not at the scene.*



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## Discussion

*Additionally, the investigator testifies that he could not possibly be biased because he regularly teaches and writes about equity and inclusion.*

***Are there issues of conflict of interest or bias in this investigation? How can these be avoided? What are the possible consequences of bias or conflicts of interest?***



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## The Grievance Process – Informal Resolution



### Informal Resolution

- Does not involve a full investigation and adjudication
- Possible at any time prior to determination regarding responsibility
- Cannot use for student complaint against employee

34 CFR § 106.45(b)(9)



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## California Law : SB 493

- “An institution shall not mandate mediation to resolve allegations of sexual harassment, and shall not allow mediation, even on a voluntary basis, to resolve allegations of sexual violence.” Ed. Code § 66281.8
- Mediation is only available for unwelcome conduct that a reasonable person would find so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it denies a person equal educational access (not sexual violence or employee v. student complaint)

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## Informal Resolution

Must provide notice of:

- Allegations
- Rules/requirements of the informal resolution process
- Circumstances under which the IRP precludes Parties from resuming formal complaint arising from the same facts
- Consequences of participating
- Records that will be maintained or could be shared
- Right to withdraw from process

34 CFR § 106.45(b)(9)

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## Informal Resolution

- Only after Formal Complaint
- Not required, totally voluntary
  - May not be appropriate for all formal complaints
  - Title IX Coordinator should determine if Informal Resolution is appropriate
  - Requires both Parties' voluntary, written consent
- Title IX Coordinator should not be facilitator
- Understand pros and cons

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## Determining Whether to Offer Informal Resolution

- Considerations
  - Outcome of an individualized safety and risk analysis
  - Nature of the alleged conduct
  - Whether allegations involve multiple victims
  - Whether allegations involve a pattern of conduct
  - Other evidence-informed factors indicative of increased risk to campus safety
  - Whether the circumstances warrant the Title IX Coordinator signing a formal complaint

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## Required Training

Facilitators must also be trained on how to conduct informal resolution processes

*“It is not the intent of the Department in referring to resolution processes ... as ‘informal’ to suggest that personnel who facilitate such processes need not have robust training and independence..”*

85 CFR § 30405



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## Examples of Informal Resolution Processes

- Mediation
  - Participant-focused, structured dialogue facilitated by a neutral and impartial mediator
  - Parties' needs and interests are explored without judgement to reach a mutually agreeable solution



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## Examples of Informal Resolution Processes

- Arbitration
  - Parties agree that one or several individuals can make a decision about the dispute after receiving evidence and hearing arguments
  - Different from mediation because the arbitrator has authority to make a decision about the dispute

## Examples of Informal Resolution Processes

- Restorative Justice
  - Focuses on harm caused rather than the guilt or responsibility of the offender
  - In conference, Parties and a District representative discuss their perspectives, feelings, needs, and expectations of each
  - Intent is to acknowledge and understand the harm caused and work collaboratively to identify ways to repair that harm and restore community

## Examples of Informal Resolution Processes

### Restorative Justice Resources:

- University of San Diego Center for Restorative Justice: PRISM - Promoting Restorative Initiatives for Sexual Misconduct on College Campuses
  - <https://www.sandiego.edu/soles/restorative-justice/campus-prism.php>

## Examples of Informal Resolutions

### Informal Resolution Agreements can include:

- Academic accommodations
- Apology or agreement to repair harm
- Education/Training
- Mutual restrictions/stay away orders
- Counseling/Treatment
- Other sanctions or discipline
  - Restrictions on participation in district's programs
  - Voluntary resignation, withdrawal, accepting lesser discipline

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## Case Study: Informal Resolution

*Carlos reports to the Title IX Coordinator that he broke up with Rudy last semester. At the time of the breakup, Rudy was a student at the District, but he is no longer enrolled. Carlos recently realized Rudy was stalking him on campus and filed a formal complaint. Rudy who is a talented mechanic is now an adjunct employee at the District. The District initiated its grievance process. Can the District offer the Parties informal resolution?*

**Yes, No, or Maybe?**



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## Case Study: Minors on Campus

*A minor student in the dual enrollment program filed a formal complaint against another minor student in the same program. The Parties are interested in informal resolution. The Complainant agrees to participate in informal resolution with the following caveat: she does not want her parents to find out about her formal complaint or the informal resolution because she was cutting class and drinking during the incident.*

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



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## 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

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## 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

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## The Investigation

- Parties have right to discuss allegations, gather evidence, identify witnesses/evidence
- District can 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 the regulations



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## 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



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## 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

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## 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

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## 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



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## 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



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## Consent

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



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## Case Study

*The mother of a 16-year-old 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.*



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## Yes, No, or Maybe

Can the investigator consider this information?

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## Evidence Review

Complainant and Respondent:

- At least 10 days time
- Right to 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)

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## Case Study

*After reviewing the evidence, a Respondent's advisor, who is a lawyer, requests that the investigator interview an expert—a medical doctor, who will provide his opinion that medication taken by the Complainant affects memory.*

***Are parties allowed to produce expert witnesses to provide evidence?***

***Yes, No, or Maybe***

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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)

## 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



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Questions?



## Next Title IX Training Series

### Part III: Hearings, Determinations of Responsibility, and Appeals

An interactive review of the requirements for live Title IX hearings, including the role of advisors and decision-maker;

- The hearing, including suggested procedures
- Relevance and privileges
- Consent
- Credibility Determinations



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## Next Title IX Training Series

### Part III cont'd: Hearings, Determinations of Responsibility, and Appeals

- Testimony and questioning
- Burden of proof
- Determination Regarding Responsibility
- Findings and Conclusions
- Sanctions and Remedial Measures
- Appeals

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## Thank You!

### Jenny Denny

Associate | Los Angeles

310.981.2048 | [jdenny@lcwlegal.com](mailto:jdenny@lcwlegal.com)

<https://www.lcwlegal.com/people/jenny-denny/>

### Amy Brandt

Associate | San Francisco

415.512.3045 | [abrandt@lcwlegal.com](mailto:abrandt@lcwlegal.com)

<https://www.lcwlegal.com/people/amy-brandt/>

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