

ODR Training 2025-2026

Policies and Procedures on Sexual Harassment and Other Sexual Misconduct



Major Subject Areas

- Overview: Policies and Legal Landscape
- Prompt and Equitable Investigations and Hearings
- Informal Resolution
- Confidentiality in Investigations and Hearings
- Initial review
- Conducting Interviews
- Investigative Planning and Identifying and Evaluating Evidence
- Investigative Reports
- Community Relationships in Investigations
- The Neurobiology of Trauma
- Cultural Sensitivity: Cultural Factors in Investigations



Overview: Policies and Legal Landscape



Overview: Policies

- Understanding Title IX's requirements as reflected in Harvard's [Interim Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy](#) ("ITIXSHP") applicable to certain alleged conduct occurring on or after August 14, 2020
- Identifying other sexual misconduct prohibited by Harvard's [Interim Other Sexual Misconduct Policy](#) ("IOSMP") applicable to certain alleged conduct occurring on or after August 14, 2020
- Identifying sexual and gender-based harassment prohibited by Harvard's [Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment Policy](#) ("S&GBHP"), applicable to alleged conduct between September 1, 2014, and August 13, 2020. For more information on the S&GBHP, see prior ODR Training materials, e.g., [ODR Training 2024-2025](#).



Title IX Regulations

The U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (“OCR”) [Title IX Overview](#) page (accessed September 2, 2025) reads, in relevant part:

2024 AMENDMENTS TO TITLE IX REGULATIONS

In April 2024, the Department issued a [Final Rule](#) amending the Department’s regulations implementing Title IX. The 2024 Title IX Regulations took effect on August 1, 2024.

[34 CFR Part 106](#) (2024 regulations, effective August 1, 2024)

On January 9, 2025, a federal district court issued a decision vacating the 2024 Final Rule. Consistent with the court’s order, the 2024 Title IX regulations and these resources are not effective in any jurisdiction.

Accordingly, these training materials refer to the amendments made in 2020 to the Title IX regulations, which were published in the Federal Register on May 19, 2020, at 85 Fed. Reg. 30026 (codified in 34 C.F.R. Part 106), and related OCR guidance documents.



2020 Title IX Regulations Are Not Retroactive

From the Questions and Answers Regarding the Department’s Final Title IX Rule, question 1 ([September 2020 OCR Q&As](#)):

“The Title IX Rule will not be enforced retroactively. [. . . T]he Rule does not apply to schools’ responses to sexual harassment that allegedly occurred prior to August 14, 2020. The Department will only enforce the Rule as to sexual harassment that allegedly occurred on or after August 14, 2020. With respect to sexual harassment that allegedly occurred prior to August 14, 2020, OCR will judge the school’s Title IX compliance against the Title IX statute and the Title IX regulations in place at the time that the alleged sexual harassment occurred. In other words, the Rule governs how schools must respond to sexual harassment that allegedly occurs on or after August 14, 2020.”



Title IX Regulations (2020): Training Requirement

§ 106.45(b)(1)(iii): “A recipient must ensure that Title IX Coordinators, investigators [i.e., the Investigative Team], decision-makers [i.e., the Hearing Panel], and any person who facilitates an informal resolution process, receive training on the definition of sexual harassment in § 106.30, the scope of the recipient’s education program or activity, how to conduct an investigation and grievance process including hearings, appeals, and informal resolution processes, as applicable, and how to serve impartially, including by avoiding prejudgment of the facts at issue, conflicts of interest, and bias.”



Title IX Regulations (2020): Training Requirement, cont.

§ 106.45(b)(1)(iii), cont.: “A recipient must ensure that [Hearing Panelists] receive training on any technology to be used at a live hearing and on issues of relevance of questions and evidence, including when questions and evidence about the complainant’s sexual predisposition or prior sexual behavior are not relevant A recipient also must ensure that [Investigative Teams] receive training on issues of relevance to create an investigative report that fairly summarizes relevant evidence Any materials used to train Title IX Coordinators, [Investigative Teams], [Hearing Panelists], and any person who facilitates an informal resolution process, must not rely on sex stereotypes and must promote impartial investigations and adjudications of formal complaints of sexual harassment[.]”



Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Regulations

Section 668.46(k)(2)(ii) of the VAWA regulations provides that “the procedures for institutional disciplinary action in cases of alleged dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking” will “be conducted by officials who, at a minimum, receive **annual training**” on issues related to these four areas of concern and “on how to conduct [a] process that protects the safety of victims and promotes accountability[.]”



Legal Landscape

The University's policies and procedures relating to sexual harassment, other sexual misconduct, and sexual and gender-based harassment were designed to ensure a safe and non-discriminatory educational and work environment and to meet legal requirements, including: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in the University's programs or activities; relevant sections of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act (VAWA); Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in employment; and Massachusetts laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity.



Title IX Statute

“No person . . . shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”



Assessing Potential Violations of the ITIXSHP

Sexual Harassment?

- Unwelcome Conduct
- On Basis of Sex
- Quid Pro Quo *OR/*
- So Severe, Pervasive, *and* Objectively Offensive, it Effectively Denies Equal Access *OR/*
- Sexual Assault, Dating Violence, Domestic Violence, and Stalking

Jurisdiction

- Against a person in the United States
- Harvard Property
- Off Harvard Property
 - University Program or Activity
 - Substantial Control Over Person Accused and Context
 - Building Owned or Controlled by Recognized Student Organization
- Procedures: Complainant at time of filing must be participating in University Program or Activity, or attempting to

Note: In view of the [Executive Order](#) issued on January 20, 2025, and the U.S. Department of Education's [Enforcement Directive](#) issued on February 4, 2025, allegations of harassment based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity are no longer addressed under the ITIXSHP and are, instead, prohibited by the IOSMP, effective January 20, 2025.



Assessing Potential Violations of the ITIXSHP, cont.

See Appendix A to the Interim Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy: Current Definitions in Federal Law of Sexual Assault, Dating Violence, Domestic Violence, and Stalking.

Note: The definitions of sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking in Appendix A of the Interim Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy were updated consistent with federal law on September 2, 2025. The definitions that apply to Title IX sexual harassment occurring between August 14, 2020, and September 1, 2025, may be viewed here: [Interim Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy 8.14.20 to 9.1.25.](#)



Assessing Potential Violations of the IOSMP

Other Sexual Misconduct?

- Unwelcome Conduct
- On Basis of Sex, including Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
- Quid Pro Quo *OR/*
- So Severe, Persistent, *or* Pervasive, it Effectively Denies Equal Access (Hostile Environment)

Jurisdiction

- Harvard Property
- Off Harvard Property
 - University Program or Activity
 - Hostile environment for member of Harvard community



Jurisdiction: Program or Activity, ITIXSHP

- The ITIXSHP, consistent with the Title IX regulations (2020), applies to sexual harassment that is committed by students, faculty, staff, Harvard appointees, or third parties against a person in the United States, whenever the misconduct occurs: on Harvard property; or off Harvard property if in connection with a University or University-recognized program or activity which includes locations, events, or circumstances over which the University exercised substantial control over both the person accused of the conduct and the context in which the sexual harassment occurred, and also includes any building owned or controlled by a student organization that is officially recognized by the University.
- The procedures for the ITIXSHP provide that at the time of filing a formal complaint, a Complainant must be participating in or attempting to participate in the education or work program or activity of the University.



Jurisdiction: Program or Activity, IOSMP

- The IOSMP applies to sexual misconduct that falls outside the ITIXSHP (discussed further below).
- The IOSMP applies to other sexual misconduct that is committed by students, faculty, staff, Harvard appointees, or third parties, whenever the conduct occurs on Harvard property; or off Harvard property if in connection with a University or University-recognized program or activity; or the conduct may have the effect of creating a hostile environment for a member of the University community.



Program or Activity: ITIXSHP, Complainant, cont.

From [September 2020 OCR Q&As](#), Question 5: **If a complainant either withdraws from school because of sexual harassment and then files a complaint, or files a complaint but then withdraws as a result of the sexual harassment or stress of the grievance process, how would the regulations affect the complainant's ability to pursue a formal complaint?** [. . .] Students and others who are participating or attempting to participate in the school's program or activity also have the right to file a formal complaint. [. . .] In the Preamble to the Title IX Rule, at pages 411-12, the Department further explains:

A complainant who has graduated may still be 'attempting to participate' in the recipient's education program or activity; for example, where the complainant has graduated from one program but intends to apply to a different program, or where the graduated complainant intends to remain involved with a recipient's alumni programs and activities. Similarly, a complainant who is on a leave of absence may be 'participating or attempting to participate' in the recipient's education program or activity; for example, such a complainant may still be enrolled as a student even while on leave of absence, or may intend to re-apply after a leave of absence and thus is still 'attempting to participate' even while on a leave of absence. *By way of further example, a complainant who has left school because of sexual harassment, but expresses a desire to re-enroll if the recipient appropriately responds to the sexual harassment, is 'attempting to participate' in the recipient's education program or activity.*

(emphasis added).



Program or Activity: ITIXSHP, cont.

Preamble, p. 30093: The Department will interpret a recipient's education "program or activity" in accordance with the Title IX statute and its implementing regulations, which generally provide that an educational institution's program or activity includes "all of the operations of" a postsecondary institution [. . . .] For instance, incidents that occur in housing that is part of a recipient's operations such as dormitories that a recipient provides for students or employees whether on or off campus are part of the recipient's education program or activity."



Program or Activity: ITIXSHP, cont.

Preamble, p. 30197: “Federal court opinions [. . .] have considered whether sexual harassment occurred in a recipient’s education program or activity by examining factors such as whether the recipient funded, promoted, or sponsored the event or circumstance where the alleged harassment occurred. While it may be helpful or useful for recipients to consider factors applied by Federal courts to determine the scope of a recipient’s program or activity, no single factor is determinative to conclude whether a recipient exercised substantial control over the respondent and the context in which the harassment occurred, or whether an incident occurred as part of ‘all of the operations of’ a school, college, or university.”

- ODR consults with OGC about “program or activity” questions, as appropriate.



Program or Activity: ITIXSHP, cont.

Preamble, p. 30197: “Where a postsecondary institution has officially recognized a student organization, and sexual harassment occurs in an off campus location *not* owned or controlled by the student organization yet involving members of the officially recognized student organization, the recipient’s Title IX obligations will depend on whether the recipient exercised substantial control over the respondent and the context of the harassment, or whether the circumstances may otherwise be determined to have been part of the ‘operations of’ the recipient.”



Program or Activity: ITIXSHP, cont.

Preamble, p. 30202: “[T]he statutory and regulatory definitions of ‘program or activity’ encompass ‘all of the operations of’ [postsecondary institutions], and such ‘operations’ may certainly include computer and internet networks, digital platforms, and computer hardware or software owned or operated by, or used in the operations of, the recipient. [. . . A]n education program or activity includes circumstances over which the recipient exercised substantial control over both the respondent and the context in which the harassment occurred, such that the factual circumstances of online harassment must be analyzed to determine if it occurred in an education program or activity. For example, a student using a personal device to perpetrate online sexual harassment during class time may constitute a circumstance over which the recipient exercises substantial control.”

(See also [OCR’s Online Digital Sexual Harassment under the 2020 Title IX Regulations resource document](#), January 2025.)



Program or Activity: ITIXSHP, cont.

Preamble, p. 30206: “[E]ven if a recipient must dismiss a formal complaint for Title IX purposes because the alleged sexual harassment did not occur against a person in the U.S., such a dismissal is only for purposes of Title IX, and nothing precludes the recipient from addressing the alleged misconduct through the recipient’s own code of conduct.”

- At Harvard, the IOSMP may be applied to such a scenario, if otherwise appropriate.



ITIXSHP: What is Sexual Harassment?

Three categories of sexual harassment:

- Quid Pro Quo
- Unwelcome conduct determined by a reasonable person to be so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it effectively denies a person equal access to the University's education or work programs or activities
- Sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking (see Appendix A of the ITIXSHP for definitions)

All three categories are based on unwelcome conduct on the basis of sex.



IOSMP: What is Other Sexual Misconduct?

Two types of other sexual misconduct (i.e., sexual misconduct that falls outside the jurisdiction of the ITIXSHP):

- Quid Pro Quo (i.e., when the conduct does not meet the jurisdictional requirements of the ITIXSHP)
- Hostile Environment

Both are based on unwelcome conduct on the basis of sex, including sexual orientation and gender identity.



A Variety of Factors to Consider

Whether the alleged conduct violates the relevant policy (ITIXSHP or IOSMP) may depend on a variety of factors, including: the degree to which the conduct affected one or more person's education or employment; the type, frequency, and duration of the conduct; the relationship between the parties; the number of people involved; and the context in which the conduct occurred.



What Constitutes Quid Pro Quo Harassment?

- Unwelcome conduct on the basis of sex (ITIXSHP), including sexual orientation and gender identity (IOSMP).
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct is condition to employment or academic standing or used as basis for employment decisions or academic evaluation
- Implicit or explicit condition
- Resists and suffers harm OR submits and avoids harm



What Constitutes Quid Pro Quo Harassment? (cont.)

Preamble, pp. 30147-30148: “Making [. . .] benefits or opportunities contingent on a person’s participation in unwelcome conduct on the basis of sex strikes at the heart of Title IX’s mandate that education programs and activities remain free from sex discrimination; thus, the Department interprets the *quid pro quo* harassment description broadly to encompass situations where the *quid pro quo* nature of the incident is implied from the circumstances. [. . .] The Department notes that when a complainant acquiesces to unwelcome conduct in a *quid pro quo* context to avoid potential negative consequences, such ‘consent’ does not necessarily mean that the sexual conduct was not ‘unwelcome’ or that prohibited *quid pro quo* harassment did not occur.”



Hostile Environment Analysis: IOSMP



IOSMP: What Constitutes a Hostile Environment?

- Unwelcome conduct or on the basis of sex, including sexual orientation and gender identity;
- Sufficiently severe, persistent, OR pervasive; and
- Effectively denies a person access to the University's education or work programs or activities



Hostile Environment, Policy and Procedures, FAQs* #2 and #47

FAQ #2: *“What is a ‘hostile environment’ in the context of a sexual harassment claim?”*

“A hostile environment interferes with or limits a person’s ability to participate in or benefit from the University’s education or work programs or activities. The University will consider the effects of off-campus conduct when evaluating whether there is a hostile environment in connection with a person’s educational or work experience at Harvard.”

FAQ #47: *“When might conduct that occurs in non-University housing or on non- University property be covered by the Procedures?”*

“If harassing conduct that takes place outside of Harvard’s property is in connection with a Harvard program or activity or has the effect of creating a hostile environment for a member of the University community, then it is covered by the [S&GBHP or IOSMP, as applicable]. This includes conduct that occurs in non-University housing.”

* While the [FAQs](#) were specifically written regarding the S&GBHP, they include information that may still be helpful in understanding certain topics that may arise under the IOSMP and/or the ITIXSHP. Reference to the “hostile environment” standard is not applicable to the ITIXSHP.



Hostile Environment: Objective and Subjective Perspective, FAQ #3

FAQ #3: *“Does the University employ a subjective or objective analysis in determining whether there has been a ‘hostile environment’ in the context of a sexual harassment claim?”*

“Both. In order to find a hostile environment sufficient to make out a violation of University Policy, the University must find, from both an objective and a subjective perspective, that the conduct was unwelcome and that the unwelcome conduct was sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive that it created a hostile environment. The University must determine both that a reasonable person considering all the circumstances would find the conduct unwelcome and the environment hostile and that the complainant viewed them as such.”



Hostile Environment Considerations

Consider, on the totality of the circumstances, various objective and subjective factors, e.g.:

- Extent to which conduct affected education or employment
- Type, frequency and duration of the conduct
- Relationship between the parties
- Number of people involved
- Context in which conduct occurred



Type, Frequency, and Duration

- Severe, persistent, or pervasive standard
- More severe the conduct, less need to show repetitive series of incidents
 - Single, severe incident may be sufficient, on the totality of the circumstances (e.g., penetration, exposure of genitalia, recording of sexual activity or nudity)
 - The less severe the conduct, the more the need to show a repetitive series of incidents; this is particularly true if the conduct is verbal
- Pattern or practice of harassment, e.g., when incidents are taken into consideration together
- Sustained and nontrivial
- Generally more than isolated/casual incident



Context

- Consider power dynamics if applicable, e.g., employee vs. a student
- Harassing conduct in a personal or secluded area, such as a dormitory room or residence hall, can have a greater effect (e.g., be seen as more threatening) than would similar conduct in a more public area
- On the other hand, harassing conduct in public may be more humiliating
- Each incident must be judged individually



IOSMP: Consent

Conduct is unwelcome if a person did not consent to it. Consent is agreement, assent, approval or permission given voluntarily and may be communicated **verbally or by actions**. That a person welcomes some sexual contact does not necessarily mean that person welcomes other sexual contact. Similarly, that a person willingly participates in conduct on one occasion does not necessarily mean that the same conduct is welcome on a subsequent occasion.

In addition, when a person is **incapacitated**, meaning so impaired as to be incapable of giving **consent**, conduct of a sexual nature is deemed unwelcome, provided that the Respondent knew or reasonably should have known of the person's incapacity. The person may be incapacitated as a result of drugs or alcohol or for some other reason, such as sleep or unconsciousness. A Respondent's impairment at the time of the incident as a result of drugs or alcohol does not, however, diminish the Respondent's responsibility for other sexual misconduct under this Policy.



Procedures for the IOSMP: Evidence for Determining if Conduct is Unwelcome, Etc.

In gathering and weighing evidence, the Investigative Team will consider both whether a reasonable person considering all the circumstances would find the conduct unwelcome and, when applicable, the environment hostile and whether the complainant viewed them as such. The following types of information may be helpful in making that determination, while avoiding prejudgment of the facts at issue: an objective evaluation of all relevant evidence – including both inculpatory (tending to support that the alleged conduct occurred) and exculpatory (not tending to support that the alleged conduct occurred) evidence; statements by any witnesses to the alleged incident; information about the relative credibility of the parties and witnesses, so long as credibility determinations are not based on a person’s status as a complainant, respondent, or witness; the detail, consistency, and plausibility of each person’s account; the absence of corroborating information where it should logically exist; information that the Respondent has been found to have committed sexual misconduct or harassment; information that the Complainant has been found to have made false allegations against others; information about the parties’ reaction or behavior after the alleged incident; and information about any actions the parties took immediately following the incident, including reporting the matter to others.



IOSMP: Determining if Conduct is Unwelcome, FAQ #5

FAQ #5: *“Does a person have to indicate that sexual conduct is unwelcome?”*

“Not necessarily. Whether conduct is deemed unwelcome depends on the context in which it occurred and must be determined based on the totality of the circumstances. Acquiescence in the conduct or the absence of an objection does not always mean that the conduct was welcome. On the other hand, if a party responds positively to sexual conduct, without indicating by statement or conduct that he or she objects, then the evidence will often not support a conclusion that the sexual conduct was unwelcome.”



Sexual Harassment Analysis: ITIXSHP



The ITIXSHP Does Not Use the “Hostile Environment” Concept

ITIXSHP sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct on the basis of sex that satisfies at least one of the following:

1. Quid pro quo;
2. Conduct determined by a reasonable person to be so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it effectively denies a person equal access to the University’s education or work programs or activities (somewhat similar, but *not* the same analysis as IOSMP “hostile environment”);
3. Sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking (defined in Appendix A).



Title IX Regulations (2020) and the *Davis* Standard

Preamble, p. 30032: The U.S. Supreme Court in *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*, 526 U.S. 629 (1999) ("*Davis*") "crafted a definition of when sex-based conduct becomes actionable sexual harassment, defining the conduct as 'so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive' that it denies its victims equal access to education."

Preamble, p. 30033: "Including the *Davis* definition of sexual harassment for Title IX purposes as 'severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive' conduct that effectively denies a person equal educational access helps ensure that Title IX is enforced consistent with the First Amendment. At the same time, the Department adapts the *Davis* definition of sexual harassment in these final regulations by also expressly including *quid pro quo* harassment and [the four] Clery Act/VAWA sex offenses [sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking]."



Title IX Regulations (2020) and the *Davis* Standard, cont.

Preamble, pp. 30033: “This expanded definition of sexual harassment ensures that *quid pro quo* harassment and Clery Act/VAWA sex offenses [sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking] trigger a recipient’s response obligations, without needing to be evaluated for severity, pervasiveness, offensiveness, or denial of equal access, because prohibiting such conduct presents no First Amendment concerns and such serious misconduct causes denial of equal educational access[.]”



Title IX Regulations (2020) and the *Davis* Standard, cont.

Preamble, p. 30142: “The Department assumes that a victim of *quid pro quo* sexual harassment or the [four] sex offenses included in the Clery Act, as amended by VAWA, has been effectively denied equal access to education. The § 106.30 definition captures categories of misconduct likely to impede educational access while avoiding a chill on free speech and academic freedom. [. . . *Q*]uid pro quo harassment and the four Clery Act/VAWA offenses constitute *per se* actionable sexual harassment, while the ‘catch-all’ *Davis* formulation that covers [for example] purely verbal harassment also requires a level of severity, pervasiveness, and objective offensiveness. The ‘catch-all’ *Davis* formulation is a narrowly tailored standard to ensure that speech and expression are prohibited only when their seriousness and impact avoid First Amendment concerns” (footnote omitted).



ITIXSHP: Objective/Reasonable Person Perspective, Subjective Perspective

Preamble, pp. 30169-30170: indicates that to determine whether a person has been effectively denied equal access to a school's education program or activity, a school must evaluate "whether a reasonable person in the complainant's position be effectively denied *equal* access to education compared to a similarly situated person who is not suffering the alleged sexual harassment [(emphasis in the original). . . . Some examples may include] skipping class to avoid a harasser, a decline in a student's grade point average, or having difficulty concentrating in class; however, no concrete injury is required" to prove an effective denial of equal access.



ITIXSHP: Objective/Reasonable Person Perspective, Subjective Perspective, Intent

Preamble, p. 30091, fn. 437: “[The Title IX regulations (2020) do] not impose an independent intent [. . .] requirement on conduct that constitutes sexual harassment; however, the Department notes that the sexual offense of ‘fondling,’ which is an offense under ‘sexual assault’ as defined under the Clery Act [see Appendix A of the ITIXSHP*], includes as an element of fondling touching ‘for the purpose of sexual gratification.’ Courts have interpreted similar ‘purpose of’ elements in sex offense legislation as an intent requirement, and recipients should take care to apply that intent requirement to incidents of alleged fondling so that, for example, unwanted touching [. . .] – with no sexualized intent or purpose – is distinguished from Title IX sexual harassment and can be addressed by a recipient outside these final regulations.”

*Note: the definition of “Criminal Sexual Contact” in Appendix A of the ITIXSHP contains a similar “purpose of” element, reflecting an intent requirement.



ITIXSHP: Objective/Reasonable Person Perspective, Subjective Perspective, Intent, cont.

Preamble, p. 30167: “The Department believes that a benefit of the *Davis* standard as formulated in the [Title IX regulations (2020)] is that whether harassment is actionable turns on both subjectivity (i.e., whether the conduct is unwelcome, according to the complainant) and objectivity (i.e., ‘objectively offensive’) with the *Davis* elements determined under a reasonable person standard, thereby retaining a similar ‘both subjective and objective’ analytic approach that commenters point out is used in the 2001 Guidance. [. . .] The *Davis* standard does not require an ‘intent’ element; unwelcome conduct so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it denies a person equal educational opportunity is actionable sexual harassment regardless of the respondent’s intent to cause harm.”



ITIXSP: Consent

Conduct is unwelcome if a person did not consent to it. Consent is agreement, assent, approval or permission given voluntarily and may be communicated **verbally or by actions**. That a person welcomes some sexual contact does not necessarily mean that person welcomes other sexual contact. Similarly, that a person willingly participates in conduct on one occasion does not necessarily mean that the same conduct is welcome on a subsequent occasion.

In addition, when a person is **incapacitated**, meaning so impaired as to be incapable of giving **consent**, conduct of a sexual nature is deemed unwelcome, provided that the Respondent knew or reasonably should have known of the person's incapacity. The person may be incapacitated as a result of drugs or alcohol or for some other reason, such as sleep or unconsciousness. A Respondent's impairment at the time of the incident as a result of drugs or alcohol does not, however, diminish the Respondent's responsibility for sexual harassment under this Policy.



Procedures for the ITIXSHP: Evidence for Determining if Conduct is Unwelcome, etc.

In gathering and weighing evidence, the Investigative Team and the Hearing Panel will note that whether conduct is unwelcome is subjective, that is, based on whether the person subject to the conduct viewed it as unwelcome. However, in making determinations as to whether consent was communicated by the person subject to the conduct, and as to the elements of severity, pervasiveness, objective offensiveness, and denial of equal access, consideration should be given not only to the subjective perspective of the person subject to the conduct, but also to the objective view of a reasonable person, based on the totality of the circumstances.



Procedures for the ITIXSHP: Evidence for Determining if Conduct is Unwelcome, etc., cont.

The following types of information may be helpful in making that determination, while avoiding prejudice of the facts at issue: an objective evaluation of all relevant evidence – including both inculpatory (tending to support that the alleged conduct occurred) and exculpatory (not tending to support that the alleged conduct occurred) evidence; statements by any witnesses to the alleged incident; information about the relative credibility of the parties and witnesses, so long as credibility determinations are not based on a person’s status as a complainant, respondent, or witness; the detail, consistency, and plausibility of each person’s account; the absence of corroborating information where it should logically exist; information that the Respondent has been found to have committed sexual misconduct or harassment; information that the Complainant has been found to have made false allegations against others; information about the parties’ reaction or behavior after the alleged incident; and information about any actions the parties took immediately following the incident, including reporting the matter to others.



Retaliation, Not in Good Faith, False or Misleading



Retaliation, Not in Good Faith, False or Misleading: Agenda

- Review the IOSMP and the ITIXSHP regarding these areas of concern
- Review the Title IX regulations (2020) regarding these areas of concern
- Review the five-prong retaliation analysis
- Review the analysis for claims re not in good faith/false or misleading



Interim Other Sexual Misconduct Policy (IOSMP) and the Interim Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy (ITIXSHP): Retaliation

The IOSMP Provides: “Retaliation against an individual for making a report or complaint of sexual harassment, or for participating or refusing to participate in any proceeding regarding such a complaint, or for opposing discriminatory practices is prohibited.”

The ITIXSHP Provides: “Retaliation against an individual for making a report or complaint of sexual harassment, or for participating or refusing to participate in any proceeding regarding such a complaint, or for opposing discriminatory practices is prohibited by the Interim Other Sexual Misconduct Policy.”



IOSMP and ITIXSHP: Not in Good Faith, False or Misleading

- IOSMP: “Submitting a complaint that is not in good faith or providing materially false or misleading information in any such proceeding is also prohibited, provided that a determination regarding responsibility or lack of responsibility, alone, is not sufficient to conclude that any party made a materially false statement in bad faith.”
- ITIXSHP: “Submitting a complaint that is not in good faith or providing false or misleading information in any investigation of complaints is also prohibited by the Interim Other Sexual Misconduct Policy.”



Jurisdiction and Procedures for Retaliation, Not in Good Faith, False or Misleading

Jurisdiction: For allegations of retaliation, not in good faith complaint submissions, and false or misleading submissions, jurisdiction is the same as that for the IOSMP.

Procedures: ODR follows the procedures for such claims in the same manner as other sexual misconduct allegations under the IOSMP.



Retaliation, FAQ #9

“The University Policy prohibits retaliation not only against an individual raising an allegation but also against anyone cooperating in the investigation. What does that mean?”

“The University Policy prohibits retaliation against persons who are cooperating with the investigatory process in any way, including the complainant, the respondent, and any witnesses [. . . .] Retaliation can take many forms, including dissemination of information in a manner intended to pressure or shame participants and witnesses in connection with the ODR process (such as, through social media) or to discourage participants or witnesses from assisting with that process.”



Title IX Regulations (2020): Retaliation

§ 106.71 Retaliation.

(a) *Retaliation prohibited.* No recipient or other person may intimidate, threaten, coerce, or discriminate against any individual for the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege secured by Title IX or this part, or because the individual has made a report or complaint, testified, assisted, or participated or refused to participate in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing under this part. Intimidation, threats, coercion, or discrimination, including charges against an individual for code of conduct violations that do not involve sex discrimination or sexual harassment, but arise out of the same facts or circumstances as a report or complaint of sex discrimination, or a report or formal complaint of sexual harassment, for the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege secured by Title IX or this part, constitutes retaliation. [. . .]



Title IX Regulations (2020): Retaliation, cont., and False Statement in Bad Faith

§ 106.71 Retaliation, cont.

(b) *Specific circumstances.* (1) The exercise of rights protected under the First Amendment does not constitute retaliation prohibited under paragraph (a) of this section.

(2) Charging an individual with a code of conduct violation for making a materially false statement in bad faith in the course of a grievance proceeding under this part does not constitute retaliation prohibited under paragraph (a) of this section, provided, however, that a determination regarding responsibility, alone, is not sufficient to conclude that any party made a materially false statement in bad faith.



Preamble to the Title IX Regulations (2020): Materially False Statement in Bad Faith

- p. 30262, regarding § 106.71(b)(2) in the previous slide: “This provision acknowledges the reality that a complainant’s allegations may not have been false even where the ultimate determination is that the respondent is not responsible and/or that the complainant may not have acted subjectively in bad faith (and conversely, that a respondent may not have made false, or subjectively bad faith, denials even where the respondent is found responsible).”
- p. 30279: “[T]his ‘warning’ about making false statements applies equally to respondents, as to complainants.”
- p. 30279: “This emphasizes that the mere fact that the outcome was not favorable (which could turn on a decision-maker deciding that the party or a witness was not credible, or did not provide accurate information, or that there was insufficient evidence to meet the recipient’s burden of proof) is not sufficient to conclude that the party who ‘lost’ the case made a bad faith, materially false statement warranting punishment.”



Preamble to the Title IX Regulations (2020): Materially False Statement in Bad Faith, cont.

- p. 30537: “This regulatory provision is intended to permit [. . .] recipients to encourage truthfulness throughout the grievance process by reserving the right to charge and discipline a party for false statements made in bad faith, while cautioning recipients not to draw conclusions that any party made false statements in bad faith solely based on the outcome of the proceeding.”



Title IX Regulations (2020):

Written Notice, Not in Good Faith, False or Misleading

§ 106.45(b)(2) Notice of Allegations

(i) Upon receipt of a formal complaint, a recipient must provide the following written notice to the parties who are known: [. . .]

(B) [. . .] The written notice must inform the parties of any provision in the recipient's code of conduct that prohibits knowingly making false statements or knowingly submitting false information during the grievance process.



What is Retaliation?

In determining whether retaliation has occurred, considering both objective and subjective factors on the totality of the circumstances, ODR examines five factors:

1. the complainant engaged in a protected activity – that is, exercised a right or took some action that is protected under the Policy;
2. the alleged retaliator had notice of the individual's protected activity;
3. the alleged retaliator took a materially adverse action against the complainant;
4. there is a causal connection between the protected activity and the adverse action.



What is Retaliation, cont.

If any one of those four elements is NOT established, then ODR will find insufficient evidence of a violation. If all the elements ARE established, then ODR will determine:

5. the alleged retaliator has identified a legitimate, non-discriminatory reason for taking the adverse action. If so, ODR will determine whether this explanation (or any other reason it uncovers) is merely a pretext for retaliation.



Elements of Retaliation: Protected Activity

Was Complainant engaged in a **protected activity**, prior to or contemporaneous with the time the allegedly retaliatory action occurred?

- Opposing discriminatory practices
 - If express opposition in a manner that, e.g., disrupts a program or activity, then not necessarily protected – determine case-by-case
 - Practice protested does not actually have to be in violation of the relevant Policy (reasonable good faith belief is enough)
- Making a report or complaint, participating or refusing to participate in an investigative process

Examples: party to a formal complaint, assisting another in filing a complaint, assisting in an investigation or not (e.g., serve or decline to serve as witness), refusal to participate in a discriminatory practice



Elements of Retaliation: Notice and Adverse Action

- Notice: The party alleged to have retaliated must have **notice** of the protected activity.
- Was there a material **adverse action** against complainant?
 - An **adverse action** is one that is materially adverse, that is, one that would dissuade a reasonable person from, e.g., raising a concern under the relevant policy, making a report or complaint, or participating in/cooperating with an investigative process, or refusing to do so; this standard can be satisfied even if the individual was not in fact dissuaded – a context-specific analysis is needed
 - An **adverse action** must be significant rather than trivial. To constitute retaliation, the **adverse action** must go beyond the ordinary tribulations of education or work settings



Elements of Retaliation: Causal Connection

Causal connection between protected activity and adverse action? Timing:

- When did adverse action occur? Must be after the protected activity. More time between protected activity and adverse action results in weaker presumption of a causal connection

Other ways to establish **causal connection**, e.g.:

- Complainant treated differently than others in similar situations who did not participate in the protected activity?
- Deviation from established practice?
- Peer-to-peer: subjective and objective evidence of what prompted the adverse action?
- And of course, direct evidence (i.e., sometimes the causal connection is readily evident)



Elements of Retaliation: Legitimate, Nondiscriminatory Reason; Pretext

Any **legitimate, nondiscriminatory reason** for adverse action?

- Show objectively justifiable reason for the action
- Individual treated no differently than others; consistent with rules/policies/procedures/routine practices
- Individual retaliator did not have notice of complainant's protected activity

Was the nondiscriminatory reason a **pretext**?

- Show retaliatory motive more likely or nondiscriminatory reasons not credible



Some Examples of Retaliation from the Preamble to the Title IX Regulations (2020)

- p. 30296, fn. 1161: “[A]buse of speech unprotected by the First Amendment [or similar provisions], when such speech amounts to intimidation, threats, or coercion for the purpose of chilling exercise of a person’s Title IX rights, is prohibited retaliation.”
- p. 30437: “Threatening to publicize or make a written determination public for the purpose of retaliation [. . .] is strictly prohibited under § 106.71 of these final regulations.”
- p. 30438: “[I]f confidential documents are used for retaliation as defined in § 106.71, then these final regulations would prohibit such retaliation.”
- p. 30536: “The Department acknowledges that persons other than complainants, such as witnesses may face retaliation, and seeks to prohibit retaliation in any form and against any person who participates (or refuses to participate) in a report or proceeding under Title IX and these final regulations.”

Note: Additional examples may be found in the Department of Education’s January 2025 guidance document, *Civil Rights Protections Against Retaliation* ([Civil Rights Protections Against Retaliation Resource \(PDF\)](#))



Analysis of Not in Good Faith, False or Misleading

- Do the totality of the circumstances, both subjective and objective, indicate an intention to knowingly mislead, e.g., that the complaint allegation, and/or information provided in support of it, was willfully false, or do they indicate a reasonable, good faith belief in the allegation and/or the information provided to support it?
- In investigating such an allegation, ODR bears in mind that there may be reasonable explanations for, e.g., an unsubstantiated allegation other than a lack of good faith, including the complainant's sincerely held but incorrect belief that harassing conduct or other sexual misconduct occurred, and lack of sufficient evidence to prove an allegation that is nonetheless true.



Intoxication and Incapacitation



Language from the ITIXSHP*

When a person is incapacitated, meaning so impaired as to be incapable of giving consent, conduct of a sexual nature is deemed unwelcome,

- provided that Respondent knew or reasonably should have known of the person's incapacity.
- The person may be incapacitated as a result of drugs or alcohol or for some other reason, such as sleep or unconsciousness.
- Respondent's impairment at the time of the incident as a result of drugs or alcohol does not, however, diminish their responsibility for sexual harassment under this Policy.

* See also the relevant language in the IOSMP



FAQs Regarding Incapacitation and Use of Drugs or Alcohol

- Is intoxication the same as incapacitation? No.
- Can a person request or invite sexual activity even after use of drugs or alcohol?
Yes, unless they are incapacitated.
- How does someone know if a person is incapacitated? It varies widely.
 - Non-exhaustive list of signs that may indicate incapacity:
 - Stumbling or difficulty maintaining balance, vomiting, inability to focus eyes, disorientation, unresponsiveness, inability to communicate coherently, and unconsciousness (See also FAQs 6-8.)
 - Blackout does not necessarily = incapacitated.



“Blackout Drunk”

- Does being “blackout drunk” mean one appears incapacitated to an objective observer? Not necessarily.
- “A blackout from intoxication is due to a brain malfunction. Your brain stops saving the things you do as memories. *You may act normal and do things like socialize, eat, drive, and drink.* But your brain is impaired and does not record your memories during this time” (emphasis added). ([Fainting: What It Feels Like and What Causes It \(web MD\)](#), accessed September 2, 2025.)



Definition of One Drink

12 oz Beer
at 5% alcohol



5 oz Glass of Wine
at 12% alcohol



1.5 oz Shot of Hard Liquor
at 40% alcohol or 80 proof



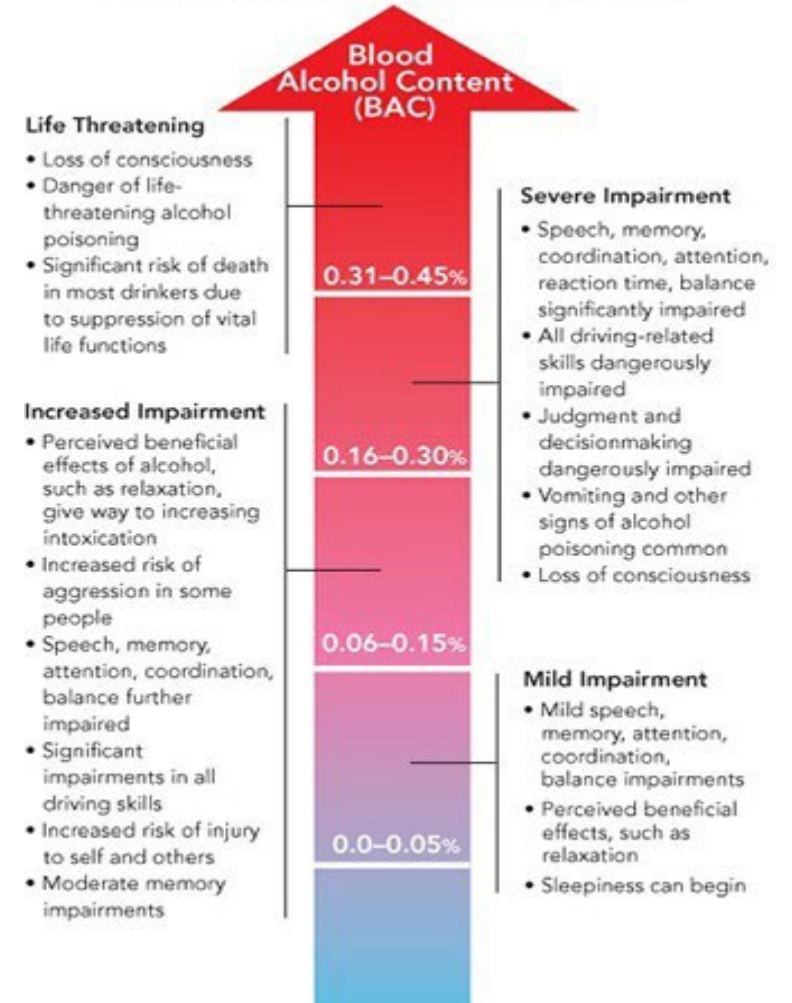
SOURCE: https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/standard-drink-sizes/index.html#cdc_generic_section_2-standard-alcohol-drink-sizes



Individual Reactions to Alcohol Vary

- Age
- Gender
- Race or ethnicity
- Physical condition
- Amount of food consumed before drinking
- How quickly the alcohol was consumed
- Use of drugs or prescription medicines
- Family history of alcohol problems
- Prior consumption patterns (tolerance)
- **As BAC increases, so does impairment**

As BAC Increases, So Does Impairment



Mixing Alcohol and Drugs



- Antibiotics + Alcohol = can exacerbate drug side effects, reduce energy
- Narcotic Pain Medication + Alcohol = enhances sedative effect of both substances, increases risk of overdose
- Non-Narcotic Pain Medication + Alcohol = can heighten the effects of alcohol
- Antidepressants + Alcohol = can worsen depression symptoms, feel more intoxicated, impair judgment and coordination, exacerbate drug side effects
- Marijuana + Alcohol = can heighten the effects of alcohol or marijuana or both
- Marijuana + Antidepressants = can exacerbate drug side effects, cognitive problems, can heighten the effects of marijuana

SOURCE: <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/harmful-interactions-mixing-alcohol-with-medicines>,
<https://alcohol.org/mixing-with/marijuana/>



Short-Term Effects of Commonly Abused Drugs

- Cocaine – stimulant; energy, alertness, restlessness, anxiety, violent behavior
- GHB – euphoria, drowsiness, decreased anxiety, confusion, memory loss, hallucinations, excited and aggressive behavior
- Hallucinogens (e.g., ketamine, LSD, PCP) – problems with attention, learning and memory; hallucinations; sedation; confusion and problems speaking (including immobility); rapid emotional swings
- Opiates (e.g., heroin) – depressant; euphoria, heavy feeling, clouded thinking, alternate wakeful and drowsy states
- Marijuana – depressant; enhanced sensory perception and euphoria followed by drowsiness/relaxation, slowed reaction time, problems with balance and coordination
- MDMA (Ecstasy/Molly) – stimulant and hallucinogen; lowered inhibition, enhanced sensory perception, confusion, depression, sleep problems, anxiety, blurred vision
- Methamphetamine – increased wakefulness and physical activity

SOURCE: www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/commonly-abused-drugs-charts



Concerns About Underage Drinking

“The University encourages the reporting of all concerns regarding sexual harassment. Sometimes individuals are hesitant to report instances of sexual harassment because they fear they may be charged with other policy violations, such as underage alcohol consumption. Because the University has a paramount interest in protecting the well-being of its community and remedying sexual harassment, other policy violations will be considered, if necessary, separately from allegations under this Policy.”



Academic Freedom and Principles of Free Speech



ITIXSHP and IOSMP: Academic Freedom and Free Speech

From the ITIXSHP and the IOSMP: “Nothing in this Policy shall be construed to abridge academic freedom and inquiry, principles of free speech, or the University’s educational mission.”



FAQs Concerning Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

FAQ #14: Does Harvard prohibit all offensive speech regarding sex and gender?

No. For harassing speech to create a hostile environment, it must be so severe, pervasive, or persistent that it will deny or limit a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the University's educational or employment programs or opportunities. While Harvard is committed to non-discrimination and condemns derogatory speech, it is also committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression and encourages members of the University community to engage in open and spirited debate, to contribute to intellectual exchanges, and to participate fully in the life of the University. The University expects its students, faculty, and other community members to recognize the importance to others of expressing their views in an uninhibited manner. The University also recognizes the interest in free speech in private settings, such as private conversations and residential spaces, and the Policy would apply in such settings only if the harassing effect of the speech were so severe, persistent, or pervasive as to create a hostile environment.



FAQs Concerning Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression, cont.

FAQ #15: *Does the University Policy apply to comments made in the classroom or other statements made in coursework, such as in papers or exams?*

The Policy specifically states it shall not be construed to apply “to abridge academic freedom and inquiry, principles of free speech, or the University’s educational mission.” The University encourages freedom of inquiry and construes the Policy to give ample room for the exchange of ideas in the educational setting, even if those ideas might be controversial or even offensive to some. Speech that is germane to coursework is not prohibited by the Policy. In the classroom or coursework setting, speech that does not have a legitimate educational purpose could fall within the Policy.



FAQs Concerning Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression, cont.

FAQ #16: How does Harvard determine whether offensive speech creates a hostile environment?

The University assesses the effect of the speech on the environment from the perspective of an objective, reasonable person, bearing in mind that the University encourages free and uninhibited speech and inquiry. The appropriateness of the speech may vary depending on the circumstances. For example, where academically relevant, a professor or a student may discuss sexually provocative or offensive material in class. By contrast, discussion of such material might not be appropriate where it has no relevance to the particular setting or is inappropriately directed at a particular individual.



FAQs Concerning Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression, cont.

FAQ #17: *Does Harvard's commitment to free speech extend to all of its activities?*

Yes. Free speech interests are particularly heightened in the classroom, and in other education programs and activities, including public meetings and talks, cultural and artistic events, and newspapers and publications that are integral to the University's educational mission.



OCR Dear Colleague Letter: First Amendment

OCR, in a Dear Colleague Letter dated July 28, 2003 ([First Amendment: Dear Colleague | U.S. Department of Education](#)), provided in relevant part: Some colleges and universities have interpreted OCR's prohibition of “harassment” as encompassing all offensive speech regarding sex, disability, race or other classifications. Harassment, however, to be prohibited by the statutes within OCR's jurisdiction, must include something beyond the mere expression of views, words, symbols or thoughts that some person finds offensive. Under OCR's standard, the conduct must also be considered sufficiently serious to deny or limit a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the educational program. Thus, OCR's standards require that the conduct be evaluated from the perspective of a reasonable person in the alleged victim’s position, considering all the circumstances, including the alleged victim’s age.



OCR Dear Colleague Letter: First Amendment, cont.

OCR, in a Dear Colleague Letter dated July 28, 2003, provided in relevant part, cont.:
There has been some confusion arising from the fact that OCR's regulations are enforced against private institutions that receive federal-funds. Because the First Amendment normally does not bind private institutions, some have erroneously assumed that OCR's regulations apply to private federal-funds recipients without the constitutional limitations imposed on public institutions. OCR's regulations should not be interpreted in ways that would lead to the suppression of protected speech on public or private campuses. Any private post-secondary institution that chooses to limit free speech in ways that are more restrictive than at public educational institutions does so on its own accord and not based on requirements imposed by OCR.

See also: OCR's [Dear Colleague Letter on Protecting Students from Discrimination, such as Harassment, based on Race, Color, or National Origin, including Shared Ancestry or Ethnic Characteristics](#), May 7, 2024



Title IX Regulations (2020): First Amendment

§ 106.6(d)(1): “*Constitutional protections*. Nothing in this [regulation] requires a recipient to [. . . r]estrict any rights that would otherwise be protected from government action by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution[.]”

§ 106.44(a): “*General response to sexual harassment*. [. . .] The Department may not deem a recipient to have satisfied the recipient’s duty to not be deliberately indifferent under this part based on the recipient’s restriction of rights protected under the U.S. Constitution, including the First Amendment[.]”

§ 106.71(b)(1) [Retaliation]: *Specific circumstances*. [. . .] The exercise of rights protected under the First Amendment does not constitute retaliation prohibited under paragraph (a) of this section.”



Title IX Regulations (2020): Freedom of Expression and Actionable Harassment

- Refer to prior discussion of the “*Davis* formulation”

Preamble, p. 30144: “[W]e have revised §106.30 defining ‘sexual harassment’ to expressly state that the *Davis* elements of severity, pervasiveness, objective offensiveness, and effective denial of equal access, are evaluated from the perspective of a ‘reasonable person,’ so that the complainant’s individualized reaction to sexual harassment is not the focus when a recipient is identifying and responding to Title IX sexual harassment incidents or allegations.”

Preamble, p. 30150: “In the higher education context [. . .] students and faculty must be able to discuss sexual issues even if that offends some people who hear the discussion.”



Title IX Regulations (2020): Freedom of Expression and Actionable Harassment, cont.

Preamble, p. 30152: “The other elements in § 106.30 (severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive) provide a standard of evaluation [. . .] ensuring that conduct addressed as a Title IX civil rights issue represents serious conduct unprotected by the First Amendment or principles of free speech and academic freedom.”

Preamble, p. 30154: “The Department believes, however, that severity and pervasiveness are needed elements to ensure that Title IX’s non-discrimination mandate does not punish verbal conduct in a manner that chills and restricts speech and academic freedom, and that recipients are not held responsible for controlling every stray, offensive remark that passes between members of the recipient’s community.”



Title IX Regulations (2020): Freedom of Expression and Actionable Harassment, cont.

Preamble, p. 30154: “A course of unwelcome conduct directed at a victim to keep the victim fearful or silenced likely crosses over into ‘severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive’ conduct actionable under Title IX.”

Preamble, p. 30155, fn. 680: “[T]he principles of free speech, and of academic freedom, are crucial in the context of both public and private institutions.”

Preamble, pp. 30159-30161: “The Department further believes that § 106.30 appropriately recognizes certain forms of harassment as *per se* sex discrimination (i.e., *quid pro quo* and [sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking]), while adopting the *Davis* definition for other types of harassment such that free speech and academic freedom are not chilled or curtailed by an overly broad definition of sexual harassment” (footnotes omitted); p. 30160: “[T]he Supreme Court has cautioned that while [. . .] Title IX [. . .] prohibit[s] sex discrimination, [. . .] it is [not] designed to become a general civility code” (footnote omitted).



Considering Complaints Involving Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

Complaints on teaching methods

- Is there a relationship between the teaching method and a valid educational objective?
- Is the speech relevant to the course content?
- Does the speech have an educational purpose?
- Consider context of speech and manner of presentation—appropriate as part of a university lecture?

The Investigative Team and the Hearing Panel, as applicable, would rely on, e.g., expert input from relevant (i.e., similarly situated) faculty member witnesses with no involvement in the matter at issue.



Prompt and Equitable Investigations and, as Applicable, Hearings



The Policies: Prompt and Equitable

ITIXSHP: “It is the policy of the University to provide . . . prompt and equitable methods of resolution.”

IOSMP: “It is the policy of the University to respond promptly and equitably to allegations of other sexual misconduct.”



Flowcharts of the Processes

The following flowcharts provide an overview of the formal complaint processes. Their color-coding reflect the different roles of CSNDR's Compliance Team, ODR, and the School/unit at each phase:

- [Flowchart for the Interim Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy](#)
- [Flowchart for the Interim Other Sexual Misconduct Policy](#)



Prompt and Equitable: Avoiding Conflict of Interest or Bias

The *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary defines “equitable” as “having or exhibiting equity: dealing fairly and equally with all concerned[.]” In ensuring an equitable process, the procedures for the ITIXSHP, consistent with the Title IX regulations (2020), include two provisions regarding “conflict of interest or bias,” with these terms having the ordinary meaning, respectively, of “a conflict between the private interests and the official responsibilities of a person in a position of trust” and “a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>, accessed September 2, 2025).

The two provisions are as follows:

- “Any individual designated as a University Title IX Coordinator or a School or unit Title IX Resource Coordinator, investigator, School designee, hearing panelist, appellate panelist, or any person designated to facilitate an informal resolution process will not have a conflict of interest or bias for or against complainants or respondents generally or an individual Complainant or Respondent in a case to which they are assigned.”
- Failing to adhere to the provision above is one of four grounds for appeal.



Prompt and Equitable: Avoiding Conflict of Interest or Bias, cont.

Preamble, p. 30050: “In the words of the [late] Honorable Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Associate Justice, discussing [. . .] the search for balance between sex equality and due process, ‘It’s not one or the other. It’s both. We have a system of justice where people who are accused get due process, so it’s just applying to this field what we have applied generally’” (footnote omitted).

Preamble, p. 30103: “Section 106.45 [Grievance process for formal complaints of sexual harassment] is premised on the principle that an accurate resolution of each allegation of sexual harassment requires objective evaluation of all relevant evidence without bias and without prejudice of the facts. Under § 106.45, neither complainants nor respondents are automatically or prematurely believed or disbelieved, until and unless credibility determinations are made as part of the grievance process.”



Prompt and Equitable: Avoiding Conflict of Interest or Bias, cont.

Preamble, p. 30121, fn. 540: “*Doe v. Brandeis Univ.*, 177 F. Supp. 3d 561, 573 (D. Mass. 2016) (“Whether someone is a “victim” is a conclusion to be reached at the end of a fair process, not an assumption to be made at the beginning.’).”

Preamble, p. 30247: “A process that permitted credibility inferences or conclusions to be based on party status would inevitably prejudice the facts at issue rather than determine facts based on the objective evaluation of evidence, and this would decrease the likelihood that the outcome reached would be accurate.”



Prompt and Equitable: Avoiding Conflict of Interest or Bias, cont.

Preamble, p. 30252: “Whether bias exists requires examination of the particular facts of a situation and the Department encourages recipients to apply an objective (whether a reasonable person would believe bias exists), common sense approach to evaluating whether a particular person serving in a Title IX role is biased, exercising caution not to apply generalizations that might unreasonably conclude that bias exists (for example, assuming that all self-professed feminists, or self-described survivors, are biased against men, or that a male is incapable of being sensitive to women, or that prior work as a victim advocate, or as a defense attorney, renders the person biased for or against complainants or respondents), bearing in mind that the very training required by § 106.45(b)(1)(iii) is intended to provide Title IX personnel with the tools needed to serve impartially and without bias such that the prior professional experience of a person whom a recipient would like to have in a Title IX role need not disqualify the person from obtaining the requisite training to serve impartially in a Title IX role.”



Prompt and Equitable: Avoiding Conflict of Interest or Bias, cont.

Preamble, p. 30254: “[T]he Department declines to require recipients to adopt the ‘Start by Believing’ approach [. . .] and cautions that a training approach that encourages Title IX personnel to ‘believe’ one party or the other would fail to comply with the requirement that Title IX personnel be trained to serve impartially [. . .] violat[ing] § 106.45(b)(1)(ii) precluding credibility determinations based on a party’s status as a complainant or respondent. The Department takes no position on whether ‘start by believing’ should be an approach adopted by non-Title IX personnel affiliated with a recipient, such as counselors[. . .]. The Department wishes to emphasize that parties should be treated with equal dignity and respect by Title IX personnel, but doing so does not mean that either party is automatically ‘believed.’ The credibility of any party, as well as ultimate conclusions about responsibility for sexual harassment, must not be prejudged and must be based on objective evaluation of the relevant evidence in a particular case; for this reason, the Department cautions against training materials that promote the application of ‘profiles’ or ‘predictive behaviors’ to particular cases.”



Prompt and Equitable: Avoiding Conflict of Interest or Bias, cont.

Preamble, p. 30276: “[W]e believe that both respondents and complainants face potentially life-altering consequences from the outcomes of Title IX proceedings. Both parties have a strong interest in accurate determinations regarding responsibility[.]”

Preamble, p. 30292: “Title IX proceedings [. . .] are inherently adversarial, often involving competing plausible narratives and high stakes for both parties, and recipients are obligated to identify and address sexual harassment that occurs in the recipient’s education program or activity. The final regulations do not require a recipient to take an adversarial posture with respect to either party, and in fact require impartiality.”

Preamble, p. 30432: “A Title IX Coordinator should not encourage or discourage a party from submitting evidence[.]”



Prompt and Equitable: Avoiding Conflict of Interest or Bias, cont.

- The burden is on the school—not on the parties—to gather sufficient evidence to reach a fair, impartial determination
- An equitable investigation of a Title IX **complaint requires a trained investigator** to analyze and document the available evidence to support reliable decisions, objectively evaluate the credibility of parties and witnesses, synthesize all available evidence—including both **inculpatory** [e.g., tending to support that the Respondent engaged in the alleged conduct] **and exculpatory** [e.g., not tending to support that the Respondent engaged in the alleged conduct] **evidence**—and take into account the unique and complex circumstances of each case



Prompt and Equitable: First Notice Letter (ITIXSHP)

When ODR receives a formal complaint that alleges sexual harassment as defined by the ITIXSHP, ODR issues a first notice letter to the parties, informing them in writing of the allegations and providing a copy of the relevant policy(ies) and procedures.

First notice letters generally occur *before* initial review, i.e., before ODR determines whether to open the allegation(s) for investigation or dismiss them.

Note: When complaints allege other sexual misconduct as defined by the IOSMP, ODR does not issue a first notice letter.



Prompt and Equitable: Initial Review

- Reference the appropriate procedures for the Policies, based on the University affiliation of the Respondent, including for information on personal advisors
- Outreach to Complainant or to Reporter and potential Complainant (IOSMP)
- Outreach to Complainant after ODR issues the first notice letter to the parties, notifying them in writing of the allegation(s) (ITIXSHP)
- Efforts to gather a more complete understanding of the allegation(s), as well as any related conduct that may implicate the relevant policy, and consideration of grounds for dismissal of the complaint



Prompt and Equitable: Initial Review (ITIXSHP and IOSMP): Grounds for Mandatory or Discretionary Dismissal

- Consideration of grounds for dismissal, both mandatory (even if true, not a policy violation) or discretionary (Complainant request to withdraw, Respondent no longer a student/employee of University, circumstances preventing gathering sufficient evidence) in consultation with School or unit (ITIXSHP, IOSMP); Preamble, p. 30472: “These final regulations do not recognize a response specifically for an ‘informal complaint’ of sexual harassment.”
- ODR will not investigate a new formal complaint already adjudicated or informally resolved based on the same circumstances (IOSMP), or may dismiss on this basis (ITIXSHP); Preamble, p. 30214, fn. 939: “When a formal complaint contains allegations that are precisely the same as allegations the recipient has already investigated and adjudicated, that circumstance could justify the recipient exercising discretion to dismiss those allegations, under § 106.45(b)(3)(ii).”



Prompt and Equitable:

Initial Review: Consolidation, Anonymity, Timing

- May consolidate allegations under the IOSMP with those under the ITIXSHP, as appropriate. In such cases, the Investigative Team will make recommended findings under **both** policies, in the alternative as appropriate, for the Hearing Panel's consideration.
- “***Request for Anonymity***[:] Complainants who want to file a formal complaint cannot remain anonymous or prevent their identity from being disclosed to the Respondent (via the written notice of allegations).” (ITIXSHP, IOSMP.)
- Ordinarily, initial review concludes within one week of the date the complaint was received



Prompt and Equitable: Notification of Investigation and Respondent's Response

Following the decision to begin an investigation, the Investigative Team will notify the parties in writing of the allegations opened for investigation and will provide a copy of the Policy and these procedures. The Respondent will have one week in which to submit a written statement in response to the allegations. Reference the relevant procedures for details.

The Investigative Team coordinates with the relevant School or unit on how to best provide notice to the Respondent (or in the case of the ITIXSHP, the second notice letter).



Prompt and Equitable: Interviews and Collection of Information

- “The Investigative Team will request individual interviews with the Complainant and the Respondent, and, as appropriate, with other witnesses . . .” (under the procedures implementing the IOSMP, as appropriate, the “Reporter serving as a party to the complaint” may be interviewed).
- “When identifying potential witnesses, the parties should understand that the purpose of interviews is to gather and assess information about the incident(s) at issue in the [‘formal’] complaint, not to solicit general information about a party’s character” (IOSMP; minimal weight is given to character evidence provided under the ITIXSHP).
- “If, in the course of an investigation, the Investigative Team decides to investigate allegations not included in the written notice to the parties described herein, the Investigative Team will provide notice of the additional allegations to the parties whose identities are known” (ITIXSHP, IOSMP).



Prompt and Equitable: Interviews and Collection of Information, No Reliance without Notice

Preamble, p. 30287, fn. 1142: The Department notes that a recipient's questioning of a respondent (whether a student or employee) about a reported sexual harassment incident, in the absence of a formal complaint, may not be used as part of an investigation or adjudication if a formal complaint is later filed by the complainant or signed by the Title IX Coordinator, because § 106.45(b)(5)(v) requires that a party be given written notice of any interview or meeting relating to the allegations under investigation, and a recipient is precluded from imposing disciplinary sanctions on a respondent without following the § 106.45 grievance process.



Prompt and Equitable: Requests for Extensions

Extensions of time: ODR will consider requests for extensions of time for good cause, but only where the extension request is made by a party (not, e.g., a personal advisor and/or an attorney), a specific timeframe is requested that is as short as possible based on the circumstances, and a specific reason is given that ODR can verify.

ODR notifies each party of extensions granted for the other, and ensures parity, i.e., granting the extension as to both where applicable.



Prompt and Equitable: Requests for Extensions, cont.

Preamble, p. 30269: “[E]ven where good cause exists, the final regulations make clear that recipients may only delay the grievance process on a temporary basis for a limited time.”

Preamble, p. 30271: “Prescribing that any delay or extension must be for good cause, and must be temporary and limited in duration, ensures that no grievance process is open-ended and that parties receive a reasonably prompt resolution of each formal complaint.”

Preamble, p. 30280: “The Department notes that § 106.45(b)(1)(v) addressing the recipient’s designated, reasonably prompt time frames contemplates good cause temporary delays and limited extensions of time frames only *after* the parties have received the initial written notice of allegations under § 106.45(b)(2), such that[, for example,] concurrent law enforcement activity is not good cause to delay sending the written notice itself” (emphasis in the original).



Prompt and Equitable: Party Involvement and Information Sharing, FAQs # 24 and #25

FAQ #24: *“Will both parties be involved in each stage of the ODR process once an investigation has been opened?”*

“Yes. Under the University Policy and University Procedures, both parties are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in the investigation and appeal. Both parties are likewise afforded an equal opportunity to participate in the disciplinary processes of the individual Schools or Units.”

FAQ #25: *“Will both parties have access to the materials that ODR uses in reaching its conclusions?”*

“Yes. During the course of the investigation, both the complainant and the respondent will have the opportunity to respond to all information used by the Investigative Team in reaching its conclusions. They will also have the opportunity to provide the Investigative Team with any additional information that they have. This information, like other information received from the complainant and respondent during the investigatory process, will be shared with the other. In addition, each party will have the opportunity to review and comment on the draft investigative report, and the Investigative Team will evaluate the comments before issuing a final report.”



Prompt and Equitable (IOSMP): Follow-up Interviews

“After the collection of additional information is complete but prior to the conclusion of the investigation, the Investigative Team will request individual follow-up interviews with the Complainant (or the Reporter, if applicable [under the IOSMP]) and the Respondent to give each the opportunity to respond to the additional information.”

Note: ODR may request individual follow-up interviews with the parties in ITIXSHP cases to ask questions based on information gathered during the investigation.



Procedures for the ITIXSHP: Relevance

- When identifying potential witnesses, the parties should understand that the purpose of interviews is to gather and assess **relevant*** information about the incident(s) at issue in the formal complaint.
- The Investigative Team will provide the Complainant and the Respondent, and their advisors, if any, with the investigative report, in an electronic format or hard copy, which will include recommended findings of fact on a preponderance of the evidence[.] [(Per § 106.45(b)(5)(vii) of the Title IX regulations (2020), the Investigative Team will “[c]reate an investigative report that fairly summarizes **relevant** evidence[.]”)]

***Emphasis** added.



Procedures for the ITIXSHP: Relevance, cont.

- At the live hearing, the Hearing Panel will permit each party’s personal advisor, to ask the other party and any witnesses **relevant** questions and follow-up questions, including those challenging credibility. [Per § 106.45(b)(6)(i), “Only **relevant** cross- examination and other questions may be asked of a party or witness. Before a complainant, respondent, or witness answers a cross-examination or other question, the [Hearing Panel] must first determine whether the question is **relevant** and explain any decision to exclude a question as **not relevant.**”]
- Questions and evidence about the Complainant’s sexual predisposition or prior sexual behavior are **not relevant**, unless such questions and evidence about the Complainant’s prior sexual behavior are offered to prove that someone other than the Respondent committed the conduct alleged by the Complainant, or if the questions and evidence concern specific incidents of the Complainant’s prior sexual behavior with respect to the Respondent and are offered to prove consent. [See also § 106.45(b)(6)(i) of the Title IX regulations (2020).]



Procedures for the ITIXSHP: Relevance, cont.

OCR on August 24, 2021, issued a [Letter to Students, Educators, and Other Stakeholders Victims Rights Law Center et al. v. Cardona \(PDF\)](#) in response to the decision of the federal district court in *Victim Rights Law Center et al. v. Cardona*, No. 1:20-cv-11104, 2021 WL 3185743 (D. Mass. July 28, 2021), in which OCR noted in relevant part:

The court upheld most of the provisions of the 2020 [Title IX regulations] that the plaintiffs challenged, but it found one part of 34 C.F.R. § 106.45(b)(6)(i) (live hearing requirement for the Title IX grievance process at postsecondary institutions only) to be arbitrary and capricious, vacated that part of the provision, and remanded it to the Department for further consideration. In a subsequent order issued on August 10, 2021, the court clarified that its decision applied nationwide. The court vacated the part of 34 C.F.R. § 106.45(b)(6)(i) that prohibits a decision-maker from relying on statements that are not subject to cross-examination during the hearing: “If a party or witness does not submit to cross-examination at the live hearing, the decision-maker(s) must not rely on any statement of that party or witness in reaching a determination regarding responsibility....” Please note that all other provisions in the 2020 [Title IX regulations], including all other parts of 34 C.F.R. § 106.45(b)(6)(i), remain in effect.

OCR further indicated:

In accordance with the court’s order, the Department will immediately cease enforcement of the part of § 106.45(b)(6)(i) regarding the prohibition against statements not subject to cross-examination. Postsecondary institutions are no longer subject to this portion of the provision. [(Continued on next slide.)]



Procedures for the ITIXSHP: Relevance, cont.

[(Continued from previous slide:)] In practical terms, a decision-maker at a postsecondary institution may now consider statements made by parties or witnesses that are otherwise permitted under the regulations, even if those parties or witnesses do not participate in cross-examination at the live hearing, in reaching a determination regarding responsibility in a Title IX grievance process.

For example, a decision-maker at a postsecondary institution may now consider statements made by the parties and witnesses during the investigation, emails or text exchanges between the parties leading up to the alleged sexual harassment, and statements about the alleged sexual harassment that satisfy the regulation's relevance rules, regardless of whether the parties or witnesses submit to cross-examination at the live hearing. A decision-maker at a postsecondary institution may also consider police reports, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner documents, medical reports, and other documents even if those documents contain statements of a party or witness who is not cross-examined at the live hearing.

The Office for Civil Rights is in the process of identifying all documents on our website that discuss this vacated provision and will make updates to those documents as appropriate in the coming weeks. Any statements in an OCR document about the vacated part of § 106.45(b)(6)(i) should not be relied upon. [(“OCR’s 08-24-21 Letter”)]

Accordingly, the procedures for the ITIXSHP were updated to remove the following language: “If a party or witness does not submit to cross-examination at the live hearing, the Hearing Panel must not rely on any statement of that party or witness, in reaching a determination regarding responsibility.”



Procedures for the ITIXSHP: Relevance, cont.

Preamble, p. 30343: “Requiring the [Hearing Panel] to explain **relevance** decisions during the hearing only reinforces the [Hearing Panel’s] responsibility to accurately determine relevance, including the irrelevance of information barred under the rape shield language.”

Preamble, p. 30349: “[E]ven where a respondent fails to appear for a hearing, the [Hearing Panel] may still consider the **relevant** evidence [. . .] and reach a determination regarding responsibility[.]” See procedures for the ITIXSHP: “The Hearing Panel cannot draw an inference about the determination regarding responsibility based solely on a party’s or witness’s absence from the live hearing or refusal to answer cross-examination or other questions.”



Procedures for the ITIXSHP: Relevance, cont.

Preamble, p. 30321: “The Department does not believe that determinations about whether certain questions or evidence are **relevant** or directly related to the allegations at issue requires legal training and that such factual determinations reasonably can be made by layperson recipient officials impartially applying logic and common sense. The Department believes that recipients are capable of, and committed to, controlling a hearing environment to keep the proceeding focused on relevant evidence and ensuring that participants are treated respectfully[.]”



Procedures for the ITIXSHP: Relevance, cont.

- The Hearing Panel will issue a determination regarding responsibility, applying a preponderance of the evidence standard and making a decision by majority vote.

Preamble, p. 30308: “The Department does not wish to prohibit the [Investigative Team] from including recommended findings or conclusions in the investigative report. However, the [Hearing Panel] is under an independent obligation to objectively evaluate **relevant** evidence, and thus cannot simply defer to recommendations made by the [Investigative Team] in the investigative report.”



ITIXSHP: Evidence: Relevance

Preamble, p. 30247, fn. 1018: “The final regulations do not define **relevance**, and the ordinary meaning of the word should be understood and applied.”

As for “ordinary meaning,” the *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary, for example, defines “relevant” as “having significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand” and “affording evidence tending to prove or disprove the matter at issue or under discussion” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/relevant>, accessed September 2, 2025).



ITIXSHP: Evidence: Relevance, cont.

Preamble, p. 30248: “**Relevance** is the standard that these final regulations require, and any evidentiary rules that a recipient chooses must respect this standard of **relevance**. For example, a recipient may not adopt a rule excluding **relevant** evidence because such **relevant** evidence may be unduly prejudicial, concern prior bad acts, or constitute character evidence. A recipient may adopt rules of order or decorum [for hearings] to forbid [a party’s personal advisor] badgering a witness, and may fairly deem repetition of the same question to be **irrelevant**.”



ITIXSHP: Evidence: Relevance, cont.

Preamble, p. 30294: “[The Title IX regulations (2020) do] not prescribe rules governing how admissible, **relevant** evidence must be evaluated for weight or credibility by a recipient’s [Hearing Panel], and recipients thus have discretion to adopt and apply rules in that regard, so long as such rules do not conflict with § 106.45 and apply equally to both parties. [. . .] A recipient may, for example, adopt a rule regarding the weight or credibility (but not the admissibility) that a [Hearing Panel] should assign to evidence of a party’s prior bad acts, so long as such a rule applied equally to the prior bad acts of complainants and the prior bad acts of respondents. Because a recipient’s [Investigative Team] and [Hearing Panel] must be trained specifically with respect to ‘issues of **relevance**,’ any rules adopted by a recipient in this regard should be reflected in the recipient’s training materials, which must be publicly available” (emphasis added) (internal footnotes omitted).



ITIXSHP: Evidence: Relevance, cont.

Preamble, p. 30294: “For example, a recipient may not adopt a rule excluding **relevant** evidence whose probative value is substantially outweighed by the danger of unfair prejudice[. . .] Similarly, a recipient may not adopt rules excluding certain types of **relevant** evidence (e.g., lie detector test results, or rape kits) where the type of evidence is not either deemed ‘not **relevant**’ (as is, for instance, evidence concerning a complainant’s prior sexual history) or otherwise barred from use under § 106.45 (as is, for instance, information protected by a legally recognized privilege). However [. . .] **relevant** evidence must be evaluated for weight or credibility by a recipient’s [Hearing Panel], and recipients [. . .] have discretion [. . .] in that regard[.]”



Regarding the ITIXSHP: Evidence: Relevance: Assigning Minimal Weight to Certain Evidence

- Information regarding prior misconduct by either party, or a witness, that is otherwise **relevant**, but that was not supported by a finding resulting from a formal, impartial investigative process, will be given minimal (i.e., the least possible) weight by the Investigative Team (in its recommended findings of fact) and the Hearing Panel
- Information regarding the character of either party, or a witness, that is otherwise **relevant**, will be given minimal weight by the Investigative Team (in its recommended findings of fact) and the Hearing Panel; sexual history evidence that is being offered to show an individual's character is not relevant and will not be considered as evidence
- Information from lie detector tests or similar taken by either party, or any witness, that is otherwise **relevant**, will be given minimal weight by the Investigative Team (in its recommended findings of fact) and the Hearing Panel



ITIXSHP: Evidence: Relevance, cont.

Preamble, p. 30247: “[§ 106.45(b)(ii), which ‘[r]equire[s] an objective evaluation of all relevant evidence] does not require ‘objective’ evidence (as in, corroborating evidence); this provision requires that the recipient objectively evaluate the relevant evidence that is available in a particular case.”

Preamble, p. 30371: “[T]he [Investigative Team] must impartially gather all **relevant** evidence including party and witness statements, and the [Hearing Panel] must assess the **relevant** evidence, including party and witness credibility, to decide if the recipient has met a burden of proof showing the respondent to be responsible for the alleged sexual harassment.”

Preamble, p. 30384: “[T]he outcome [(i.e., the ‘determination regarding responsibility’ by the Hearing Panel)] reflects the weight and persuasiveness of the available, **relevant** evidence in the case.”



ITIXSHP: Evidence: Not Relevant: Privilege

Consistent with § 106.45(b)(1)(x) of the Title IX regulations (2020), the Investigative Team and the Hearing Panel must “[n]ot require, allow, rely upon, or otherwise use questions or evidence that constitute, or seek disclosure of, information protected under a legally recognized privilege, unless the person holding such privilege has waived the privilege.”

*Note: ODR applies the same requirements regarding information protected under a legally recognized privilege in cases under the IOSMP.



ITIXSHP: Evidence: Not Relevant: Privilege, cont.

Consistent with § 106.45(b)(5)(i) of the Title IX regulations (2020), the Investigative Team and the Hearing Panel “cannot access, consider, disclose, or otherwise use a party’s records that are made or maintained by a physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, or other recognized professional or paraprofessional acting in the professional’s or paraprofessional’s capacity, or assisting in that capacity, and which are made and maintained in connection with the provision of treatment to the party, unless the recipient obtains that party’s voluntary, written consent to do so[.]”



Privileged Information (ITIXSHP and IOSMP)

FAQ #50: “**How does ODR treat information that may be privileged, including medical records?** ODR does not require, allow, rely upon, or otherwise use questions or evidence that constitute, or seek disclosure of, information protected under a legally recognized privilege (for example, attorney-client privilege, doctor-patient privilege, spousal communications, religious privilege, etc.), unless the person holding such privilege has waived the privilege.”

FAQ #53: “**How does ODR obtain privileged information, including medical records?** ODR receives privileged information when it is voluntarily submitted by a party or witness. ODR considers information that may reasonably be considered privileged only after the party or witness provides ODR with a waiver[.]”



Privileged Information (ITIXSHP and IOSMP), cont'd

FAQ # 51: **“May parties and witnesses submit privileged information for ODR’s consideration? Yes.** Party and witness participation in the ODR process is voluntary, including whether or not they may wish to submit any information – privileged or otherwise. If a party or witness wishes to submit information to ODR that may reasonably be considered privileged (e.g., records or potential witnesses), ODR will only consider that submission if the participant provides to ODR a written waiver stating that: (1) they have waived any applicable privilege; and (2) they understand that the submitted information may be shared by ODR with the parties and other relevant persons, as applicable, in the same manner that non-privileged information would be. If the participant elects not to submit a written waiver, ODR will not consider the submission. If information that may reasonably be considered privileged is submitted without a written waiver, ODR will not rely upon the information, ask any questions about it, or share it with the parties or others in the course of the investigation. If a party identifies as a witness an individual with whom the party has had privileged communications, ODR will consider conducting an interview with that individual only if the party provides a written waiver permitting ODR to speak with that person. If ODR determines to interview the witness, the Investigator will also request that the witness submit a similar written waiver before collecting any substantive information from them. If either the party or the witness elects not to submit a written waiver, ODR will not conduct an interview with them.”



Privileged Information (ITIXSHP and IOSMP), cont'd

FAQ #52: “What should a party or witness consider when deciding whether or not to submit a waiver permitting ODR’s consideration of privileged information? Parties may wish to obtain legal advice about how their participation in the ODR process could affect any criminal or civil case in which they may become involved. In addition, individuals involved in privileged communications with parties/witnesses are encouraged to consult their applicable professional rules regarding confidentiality and/or privilege before providing any such information to ODR. With respect to the ODR process itself, it may be helpful to consider that once a waiver is provided to ODR and privileged information is submitted or accessed, ODR will treat that information in the same manner that non-privileged information would be treated under the applicable procedures, including, e.g., by sharing it with the parties and other relevant persons in the process; asking parties and/or witnesses about it to the extent it may be relevant; and by including it in the investigative report, as appropriate. No further waiver will be sought or required before ODR shares the information under the applicable procedures.”



Procedures for the ITIXSHP: Directly Related

Prior to the conclusion of the investigation, the Investigative Team will provide both parties an equal opportunity to inspect and review any evidence obtained as part of the investigation that is **directly related*** to the allegations raised in a formal complaint, including evidence upon which the Investigative Team does not intend to rely in reaching a determination regarding responsibility, and inculpatory or exculpatory evidence whether obtained from a party or other source, so that each party has the opportunity to respond to the evidence prior to conclusion of the investigation. Prior to completion of the investigative report, the Investigative Team will send to each party and the party's advisor (i.e., personal advisor), if any, the evidence subject to inspection and review in an electronic format or a hard copy, and the parties will have up to 10 business days to submit a written response, which the Investigative Team will consider prior to completion of the investigative report. [. . .] The Hearing Panel must make all evidence gathered by the Investigative Team [. . .] available at the hearing to give each party equal opportunity to refer to such evidence during the hearing, including for purposes of cross-examination.

***Emphasis** added.



Procedures for the ITIXSHP: Directly Related, cont.

Preamble, p. 30248, fn. 1021: “The Department notes that the universe of evidence given to the parties for inspection and review under § 106.45(b)(5)(vi) must consist of all evidence **directly related** to the allegations; determinations as to whether evidence is ‘relevant’ are made when finalizing the investigative report, pursuant to § 106.45(b)(5)(vii) (requiring creation of an investigative report that ‘fairly summarizes all relevant evidence’). Only ‘relevant’ evidence can be subject to the [Hearing Panel’s] objective evaluation in reaching a determination[.]”

Preamble, p. 30248: “The [Investigative Team] is obligated to gather evidence **directly related** to the allegations whether or not the recipient intends to rely on such evidence (for instance, where evidence is **directly related** to the allegations but the [Investigative Team] does not believe the evidence to be credible and thus does not intend to rely on it)”; p. 30432: “[The Investigative Team] will need to review all the evidence obtained as part of the investigation and determine what evidence is **directly related** to the allegations raised in a formal complaint.”



Procedures for the ITIXSHP: Directly Related, cont.

Preamble, p. 30304: “With regard to the sharing of confidential information, a recipient may permit or require the [Investigative Team] to redact information that is not **directly related** to the allegations (or that is otherwise barred from use under § 106.45, such as information protected by a legally recognized privilege, or a party’s treatment records if the party has not given written consent) contained within documents or other evidence that are **directly related** to the allegations, before sending the evidence to the parties for inspection and review”; p. 30428: “If some of the information in [provided] medical records is not **directly related** to the allegations raised in a formal complaint, then these final regulations do not require a recipient to share the information that is not **directly related** to the allegations raised in the formal complaint.”

Preamble, p. 30432: “The *only* evidence that a recipient should be providing [for inspection and review by the parties] is evidence that is **directly related** to the allegations raised in a formal complaint” (emphasis added).



ITIXSHP: Evidence: Directly Related: Weighing

The parties must have an equal opportunity to inspect, review, and respond to evidence **directly related** to the allegations (see § 106.45(b)(5)(vi)), and an equal opportunity to review and respond to the recipient's investigative report (see § 106.45(b)(5)(vii)), allows each party the opportunity to provide input and make arguments about the relevance of evidence and how a [Hearing Panel] should weigh the evidence.



ITIXSHP: Evidence: Directly Related: Weighing, cont.

In the Preamble at p. 30303, the Department states that the [Title IX regulations (2020)]:

... balance[] the recipient’s obligation to impartially gather and objectively evaluate all relevant evidence, including inculpatory and exculpatory evidence, with the parties’ equal right to participate in furthering each party’s own interests by identifying evidence overlooked by the [Investigative Team] and evidence the [Investigative Team] erroneously deemed relevant or irrelevant and making arguments to the [Hearing Panel] regarding the relevance of evidence and the weight or credibility of relevant evidence.

Note that Sections 106.45(b)(5)(vi) and (vii) require the recipient to “send to each party and the party’s advisor, if any” the evidence and the investigative report, so that a party’s advisor can advise the party in exercising the party’s right to review and respond to the evidence and to the investigative report.



ITIXSHP: Evidence: Directly Related

Preamble, p. 30304: “The Department declines to define certain terms in this provision such as [. . .] ‘evidence **directly related** to the allegations,’ as these terms should be interpreted using their plain and ordinary meaning.”

As for “ordinary meaning,” the *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary, for example, defines “direct” as “characterized by [a] close logical, causal, or consequential relationship” and “related” as “connected by reason of an established or discoverable relation,” with “relation” defined as “an aspect or quality (such as resemblance) that connects two or more things or parts as being or belonging or working together or as being of the same kind” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>, accessed September 2, 2025).



ITIXSHP: Evidence: Directly Related, cont.

Preamble, p. 30311: “[W]e acknowledge that ‘**directly related** to the allegations’ *may* encompass a broader universe of evidence than evidence that is ‘relevant,’ and believe that it is most beneficial for the parties’ access to evidence to be limited by what is **directly related** to the allegations, but for the [Investigative Team] to determine what is relevant after the parties have reviewed that evidence” (emphasis added).

Preamble, p. 30434: “The Department [. . .] acknowledges that recipients have discretion to determine what constitutes evidence **directly related** to the allegations in a formal complaint”; p. 30437: “[T]hese final regulations do not require a recipient to share any information in records obtained as part of an investigation that is not **directly related** to the allegations in a formal complaint[.]”



ITIXSHP: Evidence: Directly Related, cont.: Rape Shield Protections

Preamble, p. 30353 – 30354: “The final regulations clarify the rape shield language to state that questions and evidence subject to the rape shield protections are ‘not relevant,’ and therefore the rape shield protections apply wherever the issue is whether evidence is relevant or not. As noted above, this means that where § 106.45(b)(5)(vi) requires review and inspection of evidence ‘**directly related** to the allegations’ that universe of evidence is not screened for relevance, but rather is measured by whether it is ‘**directly related** to the allegations.’ However, the investigative report must summarize “relevant” evidence, and thus at that point the rape shield protections would apply to preclude inclusion in the investigative report of irrelevant evidence”; p. 30428: “If a recipient obtains evidence about a party’s sexual predisposition or prior sexual behavior that is **directly related** to the allegations raised in a formal complaint, the recipient should allow both parties an equal opportunity to inspect and review such evidence to be able to prepare to respond to it or object to its introduction in the investigative report or at the hearing.”



Prompt and Equitable (ITIXSHP): Written Response to Evidence

“Prior to the conclusion of the investigation, the Investigative Team will provide both parties an equal opportunity to inspect and review any evidence obtained as part of the investigation that is directly related [see discussion above] to the allegations raised in a formal complaint, including evidence upon which the Investigative Team does not intend to rely in reaching a determination regarding responsibility, and inculpatory or exculpatory evidence whether obtained from a party or other source, so that each party has the opportunity to respond to the evidence prior to conclusion of the investigation. Prior to completion of the investigative report, the Investigative Team will send to each party and the party’s advisor (i.e., personal advisor), if any, the evidence subject to inspection and review in an electronic format or a hard copy, and the parties will have up to 10 business days to submit a written response, which the Investigative Team will consider prior to completion of the investigative report” (ITIXSHP).



Prompt and Equitable (IOSMP): Draft and Final Report

“At the conclusion of the investigation, the Investigative Team will make findings of fact, applying a preponderance of the evidence standard, and determine based on those findings of fact whether there was a violation of the Policy. The Investigative Team will provide the Complainant (or the Reporter, if applicable) and the Respondent with a written draft of the findings of fact and analysis and will give both parties five business days to submit a written response to the draft. The appropriate School or unit Title IX Resource Coordinator and the University Title IX Coordinator will be provided with the draft investigative report for informational purposes. The Investigative Team will consider any written responses from the parties before finalizing the report.”



Prompt and Equitable (IOSMP): Draft and Final Report, cont.

“The investigation will be completed and the final report provided to the Complainant (or the Reporter, if applicable), the Respondent, the School Title IX Coordinator, and the appropriate officer in the School or unit, ordinarily within 75 business days of receipt of the formal complaint. The administration of discipline in cases involving students is subject to the authority of the faculty; thus, as appropriate, having received the report, the School separately will consider the imposition of discipline through its own processes and notify the parties as appropriate. Schools may impose a range of sanctions on students found to have violated the Policy, ranging from an admonition or warning up to and including dismissal or expulsion.” (See relevant procedures for information on discipline of non-students.)



Prompt and Equitable (IOSMP): Draft and Final Report, cont.

“The Investigative Team may impose reasonable timeframes to enable the timely completion of a proceeding. Timeframes for all phases of a proceeding apply to all parties equally. There may be circumstances requiring longer timeframes. Timeframes may be extended, for example, in the interest of the integrity and completeness of the initial review and investigation, to accommodate witness availability, or to comply with requests by or not to prejudice investigations or processes of external law enforcement, or for other legitimate reasons, including the complexity of the investigation and the severity or extent of alleged misconduct. The Investigative Team will notify the parties of any extensions of timeframes.”



Prompt and Equitable (ITIXSHP): Investigative Report

“At least 10 business days prior to a hearing [. . .]:

“* the Investigative Team will provide the Complainant and the Respondent, and their advisors, if any, with the investigative report, in an electronic format or hard copy, which will include recommended findings of fact on a preponderance of the evidence, and will give both parties five business days to submit a written response; and

“* the appropriate School or unit Title IX Resource Coordinator and the University Title IX Coordinator will be provided with the investigative report for informational purposes.”



Prompt and Equitable (ITIXSHP): Hearing Panel Written Determination

“The Hearing Panel will issue a determination regarding responsibility, applying a preponderance of the evidence standard and making a decision by majority vote. The determination regarding responsibility will include a description of the procedural steps taken; findings of fact supporting the determination regarding responsibility; conclusions regarding the application of the Policy to the facts, as well as application of the Interim Other Sexual Misconduct Policy to the facts, as appropriate, such as for allegations consolidated as described in Section II.D above; a statement of, and rationale for, the result as to each allegation, including any disciplinary sanctions the School may impose on the Respondent if applicable, and whether remedies designed to restore or preserve equal access to the University’s education program or activity will be provided to the Complainant; and the procedures and permissible bases for the parties to appeal. The School Title IX Resource Coordinator is responsible for effective implementation of any remedies.”



Prompt and Equitable (ITIXSHP): Timeframes

- “The initial review, investigation, hearing, and determination regarding responsibility, including the outcome of any remedies process, will be completed and the final determination regarding responsibility provided to the Complainant, the Respondent, the University Title IX Coordinator, the School Title IX Resource Coordinator, and the appropriate officer in the School or unit, ordinarily within 90 business days of receipt of the formal complaint. The Investigative Team or the Hearing Panel, as applicable, may impose reasonable timeframes to enable the timely completion of a proceeding. Timeframes for all phases of a proceeding apply to all parties equally. There may be circumstances requiring longer timeframes. Timeframes may be extended, for example, in the interest of the integrity and completeness of the initial review, investigation, hearing, and any remedies process, to accommodate witness availability, or to comply with requests by or not to prejudice investigations or processes of external law enforcement, or for other legitimate reasons, including the complexity of the investigation and the severity or extent of alleged misconduct.”
- “The Investigative Team or the Hearing Panel, as applicable, will notify the parties of any extensions of timeframes.”



Prompt and Equitable (ITIXSHP): Investigative Timeframes, The Title IX Regulations (2020)

§ 106.45(b)(1)(v), Basic requirements for grievance process: “Include reasonably prompt time frames for conclusion of the grievance process, including reasonably prompt time frames for filing and resolving appeals and informal resolution processes if the recipient offers informal resolution processes, and a process that allows for the temporary delay of the grievance process or the limited extension of time frames for good cause with written notice to the complainant and the respondent of the delay or extension and the reasons for the action. Good cause may include considerations such as the absence of a party, a party’s advisor, or a witness; concurrent law enforcement activity; or the need for language assistance or accommodation of disabilities[.]”



Prompt and Equitable (ITIXSHP): Investigative Timeframes, The Title IX Regulations (2020), cont.

Preamble, p. 30247: “The Department disagrees that [the regulations] could permit endlessly delayed proceedings while parties or the recipient search for ‘all’ relevant evidence; § 106.45(b)(1)(v) requires recipients to conclude the grievance process within designated reasonable time frames and thus ‘all’ the evidence is tempered by what a thorough investigation effort can gather within a reasonably prompt time frame.”

Preamble, p. 30292: “The Department believes that the [regulations] appropriately obligate[] a recipient to undertake a thorough search for relevant facts and evidence pertaining to a particular case, while operating under the constraints of conducting and concluding the investigation under designated, reasonably prompt time frames and without powers of subpoena. Such conditions limit the extensiveness or comprehensiveness of a recipient’s efforts to gather evidence while reasonably expecting the recipient to gather evidence that is available.”



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP

Review the procedures for the ITIXSHP, which set forth the hearing process in detail. Some highlights:

- Hearing Panel (or the “Panel”) composition: two persons from a list of trained administrators and faculty, one from a list of external attorneys
- Panel determines the conduct of the live hearing, e.g., rules of decorum, reasonable time limitations; formal rules of evidence will not apply
- Each party’s advisor permitted to ask other party and witnesses relevant questions (“cross-examination” or “cross”); if no party advisor present, Panel must provide (but chosen by relevant School or the Compliance Team within the Office for Community Support, Non-Discrimination, Rights and Responsibilities (“CSNDR”))
- Rely only on documents submitted during the investigation (and again made available at the hearing to the parties), except at Panel discretion if new information not reasonably available at time of investigation and deemed highly relevant to determination



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP, cont.

Review the procedures for the ITIXSHP, which set forth the hearing process in detail. Some highlights, cont.:

- Certain questions and evidence are not relevant except in specific circumstances
- Panel cannot draw negative inference based solely on party or witness exercising agency not to submit to cross-examination (see also discussion on slides 120-121 above)
- Flexibility as to whether hearings, and attendees, all in same geographic location, virtual, or a combination thereof; if in person, parties by request entitled to be located in separate rooms with technology allowing full participation; hearing will be recorded or transcribed and made available for party inspection and review



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP, cont.

Review the “Questions and Answers on the Title IX Regulations on Sexual Harassment (July 2021)” (the “July 2021 OCR Q&As”); items 38-55 are of particular relevance to the hearing process (except see slides 120-121 above). Some highlights:

Item 39: At a live hearing, “each party’s advisor [must be permitted to] to ask the other party and any witnesses all relevant questions and follow-up questions, including those challenging credibility.”

Item 46: During cross-examination [. . .], “only relevant cross-examination questions and other questions may be asked of a party or witness” and the [Panel] must determine the relevance of a question before a party or a witness answers.



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP, cont.

Review the July 2021 OCR Q & As; items 38-55 are of particular relevance to the hearing process (except see slides 120-121 above). Some highlights, cont.:

Item 50: The [Title IX regulations (2020)] do not require that answers to cross-examination questions “be in linear or sequential formats” or that any party “must recall details with certain levels of specificity.”

Item 51: The [Panel] also may not draw any inference from a decision of a party or witness not to participate at the hearing, including not to submit to cross-examination [(citing to 34 C.F.R. § 106.45(b)(6)(i) of the regulations)]. This means, for example, that the [Panel] may not make any decisions about a party’s credibility based on their decision not to participate in a hearing or submit to cross-examination.



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP, cont.

The [September 2020 OCR Q&As](#) indicated the following regarding sanctioning:

Question 15: “The [regulation] does not preclude a recipient from using [the Panel] to reach the determination regarding responsibility, and having another decision-maker determine appropriate remedies [f]or a complainant or appropriate disciplinary sanctions for the respondent. However, the end result must be that the written determination regarding responsibility includes the remedies and disciplinary sanctions decided upon in the written determination [. . .] The issuance of a written determination cannot be a piecemeal process that is broken down into chronologically occurring sub-parts. [. . .] Recipients should also remain aware of their obligation to conclude the grievance process within the reasonably prompt time frames designated in the recipient’s grievance process[.]”



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP, cont.

Preamble, p. 30316: “[R]ecipients retain discretion under the final regulations to educate a recipient’s community about what cross- examination during a Title IX grievance process will look like, including developing rules and practices (that apply equally to both parties) to oversee cross-examination to ensure that questioning is relevant, respectful, and non-abusive” (footnote omitted).

Preamble, p. 30319: “The Department purposefully designed these final regulations to allow recipients to retain flexibility to adopt rules of decorum that prohibit any party advisor or [Hearing Panel] from questioning witnesses in an abusive, intimidating, or disrespectful manner.”



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP, cont.

Preamble, p. 30332: “The Department disagrees that cross-examination at a live hearing means that a complainant’s case will be contingent on the effectiveness of the complainant’s advisor. Because cross-examination questions and answers, as well all relevant evidence, is evaluated by a [Hearing Panel] trained to be impartial, the professional qualifications of a party’s advisor do not determine the outcome.”

Preamble, p. 30341: “Claims by a party, for instance, that a recipient failed to provide ‘effective assistance of counsel’ would not be entertained by the Department because this provision does not require that advisors be lawyers providing legal counsel nor does this provision impose an expectation of skill, qualifications, or competence. An advisor’s cross-examination ‘on behalf of that party’ is satisfied where the advisor poses questions on a party’s behalf, which means that an assigned advisor could relay a party’s own questions to the other party or witness, and no particular skill or qualification is needed to perform that role.”



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP, cont.

Preamble, p. 30342: “The Department declines to require training for assigned advisors because the goal of this provision is not to make parties ‘feel adequately represented’ but rather to ensure that the parties have the opportunity for their own view of the case to be probed in front of the [Panel]. Whether a party views an advisor of choice as ‘representing’ the party during a live hearing or not, this provision only requires recipients to permit advisor participation on the party’s behalf *to conduct cross-examination*; not to ‘represent’ the party at the live hearing” (emphasis in the original).

Preamble, p. 30343: “[A]n explanation [from the Hearing Panel, in real time] of how or why the question was irrelevant to the allegations at issue, or is deemed irrelevant by these final regulations (for example, in the case of sexual predisposition or prior sexual behavior information) provides transparency for the parties to understand a [Panel’s] relevance determinations.”



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP, cont.

Preamble, p. 30343: “The final regulations do not preclude a recipient from adopting a rule (applied equally to both parties) that does, or does not, give parties or advisors the right to discuss the relevance determination with the [Panel] during the hearing. If a recipient believes that arguments about a relevance determination during a hearing would unnecessarily protract the hearing or become uncomfortable for parties, the recipient may adopt a rule that prevents parties and advisors from challenging the relevance determination (after receiving the [Panel’s] explanation) during the hearing.”

Preamble, p. 30343: “Th[e regulations] do[] not require [the Panel] to give a lengthy or complicated explanation; it is sufficient, for example, for [the Panel] to explain that a question is irrelevant because the question calls for prior sexual behavior information without meeting one of the two exceptions, or because the question asks about a detail that is not probative of any material fact concerning the allegations. No lengthy or complicated exposition is required to satisfy this provision. Accordingly, the Department does not believe this requirement will ‘bog down’ the hearing.”



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP, cont.

Preamble, p. 30346: “[A] party’s advisor may appear and conduct cross-examination even when the party whom they are advising does not appear. Similarly, where one party does not appear and that party’s advisor of choice does not appear, a recipient-provided advisor must still cross-examine the other, appearing party ‘on behalf of’ the non-appearing party[.]”

Preamble, p. 30349: “If a party or witness disagrees with a [Panel’s] determination that a question is relevant, during the hearing, the party or witness’s choice is to abide by the [Panel’s] determination and answer, or refuse to answer the question[.]”

(see also discussion in slides 120-121 above)



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP, cont.

Preamble, p. 30354: “The Department notes that the rape shield language does not limit the ‘if offered to prove consent’ exception to when the question or evidence is offered *by the respondent*. Rather, such questions or evidence could be offered by either party, or by the investigator, or solicited on the [Panel’s] own initiative” (emphasis in the original).



The Hearing Process for the ITIXSHP, cont.

Preamble, p. 30393: “[The regulations] state[] that the [Panel] ‘must issue a written determination regarding responsibility’ but does not require that written determination to be issued *at the hearing*. The Department notes that the time frame for when the [Panel] should issue the written determination will be governed by the recipient’s designated, reasonably prompt time frames” (emphasis in the original).



Informal Resolution



Requests for Informal Resolution

Under the procedures for the IOSMP, an “Initiating Party” may make a request for informal resolution either without filing a formal complaint or after a formal complaint has been opened for investigation and before the final report has been provided to the parties.

Under the procedures for the ITIXSHP, informal resolution, consistent with § 106.45(b)(9) of the Title IX regulations (2020), can be requested *only* after a formal complaint has been opened for investigation and before the determination regarding responsibility has been provided to the parties.

Preamble, p. 30098, fn. 463: “Informal resolution may only be offered after a formal complaint has been filed, so that the parties understand what the grievance process entails and can decide whether to voluntarily attempt informal resolution as an alternative” (emphasis in the original).



Requests for Informal Resolution, cont.

Under the procedures for the ITIXSHP, consistent with § 106.45(b)(9)(iii) of the Title IX regulations (2020), an informal resolution process cannot be used to resolve allegations that an employee (e.g., staff or faculty) sexually harassed a student.

Preamble, p. 30401: “[T]he Department is persuaded [. . .] that it may be too difficult to ensure that mediation or other informal resolution is truly voluntary on the part of students who report being sexually harassed by a recipient’s employee, due to the power differential and potential for undue influence or pressure exerted by an employee over a student.”



Requests for Informal Resolution, cont.

The approval process for requests for informal resolution, as well as for draft agreements by the parties if applicable, and the way the process will be facilitated and by whom, are set forth in plain language in the applicable procedures for each of the policies. Timelines are also specified.

A request for informal resolution will not, in any event, be considered for approval unless the alleged conduct, if true, would violate the applicable policy.



Requests for Informal Resolution: Notice

- Consistent with the Title IX regulations (2020), the procedures for the ITIXSHP are prescriptive as to notice to the parties:

“The Investigator [the ‘Facilitating Investigator’], or other University officer facilitating the informal resolution process, will: (1) provide the parties with a written notice disclosing the allegations, the requirements of the informal resolution process including the circumstances under which it precludes the parties from resuming a formal complaint arising from the same allegations, provided, however, that at any time prior to agreeing to a resolution, any party has the right to withdraw from the informal resolution process and resume the investigative or hearing process with respect to the formal complaint, and any consequences resulting from participating in the informal resolution process, including the records that will be maintained or could be shared; and (2) obtain the parties’ voluntary, written consent to the informal resolution process.”



Requests for Informal Resolution: Practices and Expectations

ODR's routine practices and expectations regarding Informal Resolution include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The Facilitator serves as an impartial facilitator between the parties.
- The Facilitator describes the informal resolution process to the parties.
- The Facilitator establishes a constructive tone and encourages the parties to work expeditiously and in good faith toward a mutually acceptable resolution, within procedural timeframes.
- The parties are never expected to communicate directly with each other during informal resolution, unless both choose to do so (to date, this has been quite rare).



Requests for Informal Resolution: Practices and Expectations, cont.

ODR's routine practices and expectations regarding Informal Resolution include, but are not limited to, the following, cont.:

- As needed, the Facilitator can answer questions from the parties about the pertinent Policy standards and related procedures.
- The Facilitator can provide information to the parties regarding possible actions they may consider in working toward a resolution, including, e.g., describing approaches used in previous successful informal resolution processes addressing similar facts.
- The parties are expected to participate in the informal resolution process in good faith, consider offers or suggestions with an open mind, work constructively toward a mutually acceptable resolution, and, if the process is successful, implement any agreement in good faith.



Requests for Informal Resolution: Agreement Terms

ODR's routine practices and expectations regarding Informal Resolution include, but are not limited to, the following, cont.:

- Final agreement terms must be of a nature readily monitored (i.e., should a dispute as to compliance arise) by the relevant School or unit Title IX Resource Coordinator(s) without investigation.
- Final agreement terms must have a reasonable time limit, because the University's ability to monitor terms may be limited when a party has either graduated from or is no longer employed by the University.



Requests for Informal Resolution: Agreement Terms, cont.

ODR's routine practices and expectations regarding Informal Resolution include, but are not limited to, the following, cont.:

- Final agreement terms cannot refer to legal, policy, or similar concepts and procedures outside of the scope of the relevant policy and procedures.
- Final agreement terms cannot include an actual or de facto “admission” of a policy violation; that is not the purpose of the *informal* resolution process.
- The Facilitator will assist, as appropriate, in reducing any resolution to writing.
- A successful agreement resolves the matter at issue, and the parties agree that neither party can file or refile (as applicable) a complaint based on the same circumstances.



Requests for Informal Resolution: Practices and Expectations, cont.

ODR's routine practices and expectations regarding Informal Resolution include, but are not limited to, the following, cont.:

- A failure by one party to honor the terms of the agreement as determined by, e.g., the relevant Title IX Resource Coordinator in consultation with the Director of ODR, would allow for filing of a complaint by the other party, if otherwise consistent with the relevant policy and procedures; there is no other remedy for such a breach.
- In order to maintain the integrity of the informal resolution process apart from ODR's investigation or the Hearing Panel's hearing, as applicable, any information from the informal resolution process, other than regarding its commencement and outcome, will not be shared by the Facilitator with the Investigative Team or the Hearing Panel.



Requests for Informal Resolution: Practices and Expectations, cont.

ODR's routine practices and expectations regarding Informal Resolution include, but are not limited to, the following, cont.:

- The parties will be informed by the Facilitator that if informal resolution is unsuccessful and (as applicable) a matter returns to the Investigative Team for further investigation or the Hearing Panel for hearing, the parties may not offer, nor will the Investigative Team or Hearing Panel rely on, any information regarding the informal resolution process.
- The parties are subject to the confidentiality and retaliation provisions of the applicable policy.



Confidentiality in Investigations and Hearings



Title IX Regulations (2020): Retaliation and Confidentiality

§ 106.71 Retaliation (in relevant part)

The recipient must keep confidential the identity of any individual who has made a report or complaint of sex discrimination, including any individual who has made a report or filed a formal complaint of sexual harassment, any complainant, any individual who has been reported to be the perpetrator of sex discrimination, any respondent, and any witness, except as may be permitted by the FERPA statute [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act . . .] or as required by law, or to carry out the purposes of [the Title IX regulations], including the conduct of any investigation, hearing, or judicial proceeding arising thereunder.



Procedures: ITIXSHP and IOSMP

The “Confidentiality” language in the procedures for each policy is substantially similar. Example from the staff procedures for the ITIXSHP:

The ODR, the Hearing Panel, the Appellate Panel, personal advisors, and others at the University involved in or aware of the complaint will take reasonable steps to protect the privacy of all involved. Once a complaint is filed, the Complainant or Reporter, the Respondent, and any witnesses will be notified of the potential for compromising the integrity of the investigation by disclosing information about the case and the expectation that they therefore keep such information – including any documents they may receive or review – confidential. They also will be notified that sharing such information might compromise the investigation or may be construed as retaliatory. Retaliation of any kind is a separate violation of the Policy and may lead to an additional complaint and consequences.

The parties remain free to share their own experiences, though to avoid the possibility of compromising the investigation, it is generally advisable to limit the number of people in whom they confide.



Title IX Regulations (2020): Confidentiality and the Nature of Limits on the Parties

§ 106.45(b)(5)(iii): “*Investigation of a formal complaint*. When investigating a formal complaint and throughout the grievance process, a recipient must [. . . n]ot restrict the ability of either party to discuss the allegations under investigation or to gather and present relevant evidence[.]”

The Preamble to the Title IX regulations (2020)

pp. 30295-30296: “The Department further notes that § 106.45(b)(5)(iii) is not unlimited in scope [. . . It] does not [. . .] apply to discussion of information that does not consist of ‘the allegations under investigation’ (for example, evidence related to the allegations that has been collected and exchanged between the parties and their advisors during the investigation under § 106.45(b)(5)(vi), or the investigative report summarizing relevant evidence sent to the parties and their advisors under § 106.45(b)(5)(vii)).”



Title IX Regulations (2020): Confidentiality and the Nature of Limits on the Parties, cont.

Preamble, p. 30296: “The Department appreciates the opportunity to clarify that [§ 106.45(b)(5)(iii)] in no way immunizes a party from abusing the right to ‘discuss the allegations under investigation’ by, for example, discussing those allegations in a manner that exposes the party to liability for defamation or related privacy torts, or in a manner that constitutes [. . .] retaliation [under § 106.71].”



Reasonable Steps to Protect Privacy: Caution and Vigilance

- Share information with others only on a “need to know” basis.
 - FAQ #38: Once a formal complaint is filed, ODR takes care to protect the privacy of those involved and share information only on a “**need-to-know**” basis.
- Tell interviewees that we will try to ensure that all aspects of the process will be kept as private as possible.
- Discuss with the Complainant and Respondent the kind of information likely to be disclosed for investigative purposes, to whom, and why.
 - FAQ #41: Information about the complaint, including the names of the people involved, is shared with witnesses **only to the extent necessary to gather information.**



Party Access to Case Materials

FAQ #25: *“Will both parties have access to the materials that ODR uses in reaching its conclusions? Yes. During the course of the investigation, both the complainant and the respondent will have the opportunity to respond to all information used by the Investigative Team in reaching its conclusions. They will also have the opportunity to provide the Investigative Team with any additional information that they have. This information, like other information received from the complainant and respondent during the investigatory process, will be shared with the other. In addition, each party will have the opportunity to review and comment on the draft investigative report, and the Investigative Team will evaluate the comments before issuing a final report.”*

FAQ #43: *“Can ODR’s records be subpoenaed or obtained in lawsuits? Yes. If a lawsuit is brought, ODR’s records may have to be given to courts, lawyers, expert witnesses or others involved with the legal proceedings. ODR also may be required to release records to government agencies that are investigating the University’s compliance with state and/or federal law.”*



Party Access to Case Materials, cont.

Preamble, p. 30304: “With regard to the sharing of confidential information, a recipient may permit or require the investigator to redact information that is not directly related to the allegations (or that is otherwise barred from use under § 106.45, such as information protected by a legally recognized privilege, or a party’s treatment records if the party has not given written consent) contained within documents or other evidence that are directly related to the allegations, before sending the evidence to the parties for inspection and review.”



Title IX Regulations (2020): Recordkeeping

§ 106.45(b)(10)

(i) A recipient must maintain for a period of seven years records of – (A) Each sexual harassment investigation including any determination regarding responsibility and any audio or audiovisual recording or transcript required under paragraph (b)(6)(i) of this section, any disciplinary sanctions imposed on the respondent, and any remedies provided to the complainant designed to restore or preserve equal access to the recipient’s education program or activity; (B) Any appeal and the result therefrom; (C) Any informal resolution and the result therefrom; and (D) All materials used to train Title IX Coordinators, investigators, decision-makers, and any person who facilitates an informal resolution process. A recipient must make these training materials publicly available on its website, or if the recipient does not maintain a website the recipient must make these materials available upon request for inspection by members of the public.



Privacy for Interviews and Hearings

Some privacy-related goals:

- Interview in a location that ensures privacy, both visual and auditory.
- Schedule interviews so that interviewees do not cross paths.
- Only have in plain view documents that may be necessary to show the interviewee for investigative purposes.

Preamble, p. 30316: “[T]he Department notes that the live hearing is not a ‘public’ hearing, and the final regulations add §106.71 that requires recipients to keep party and witness identities confidential except as permitted by law and as needed to conduct an investigation or hearing.”



Initial Review



Initial review: sexual harassment or other sexual misconduct

Encourage Complainant to be as specific as possible, understanding that narrative approaches may vary and may not be linear/chronological. Seek clarification about, for example:

- Who: names (School or unit, other affiliation)
- What: specific description of the conduct at issue for each incident; Complainant's response
- Where: specific location of each incident; on campus or off campus
- When: date/time of each incident, frequency, duration
- Whether the conduct was on the basis of sex
- Whether the conduct was unwelcome to Complainant at the time; if so, whether potential Respondent knew or reasonably should have known it was unwelcome
- Effect of harassment on Complainant, if any:
 - Academic or work performance?
 - Participating in University programs or activities?
 - Physical or emotional health?
 - Social impact?
 - Ongoing interaction with potential Respondent?



Initial review: retaliation

Encourage Complainant to be as specific as possible, understanding that narrative approaches may vary and may not be linear/chronological. Seek clarification about, for example:

- Who: names (School or unit, other affiliation)
- What: specific description of the protected activity and the adverse action, including why the action was materially adverse
- Where: specific location of each incident; on campus or off campus
- When: date/time of each incident of protected activity and adverse action
- Whether potential Respondent learned of the protected activity, if so how and when
- Whether there is a causal connection between the protected activity and adverse action



Initial Review: Other Preliminary Information

Check internal records:

- Prior findings against the parties? (But remember: “These Procedures presume that the Respondent is not responsible for an alleged Policy violation until a final determination regarding responsibility is made.” Explicit in ITIXSHP and IOSMP.)
- Prior adjudication of a formal complaint based on the same circumstances?
- Prior informal resolution based on the same circumstances?



Initial Review: Questions to Consider

- How does the information provided fit within the definitions of sexual harassment, other sexual misconduct, and/or retaliation that applied at the time of the conduct?
- If true as alleged, would it be a violation of the applicable policy(ies)?
- Any indication that the scope of the possible harassment (ITIXSHP and IOSMP)/hostile environment (IOSMP) may be broader than what was originally written in the complaint, or broader than the policies under ODR's purview?
- Does the School or unit request that ODR also investigate under local rule(s) that may also apply to certain conduct? (check with School or unit)



Conducting Interviews



Interviewing the Parties

- Remind parties of the right to a personal advisor and the right to consult an attorney at any time during the investigation.
- Outline briefly how the interview will be conducted with some indication of the procedural objective.
- Schedule interviews between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. (ET) on weekdays, excluding University holidays and similar closures. (ODR primarily operates remotely, but we are pleased to schedule in-person meetings in ODR's office upon request.)
- Review voluntary participation, ODR's information sharing protocols, the procedural provision on confidentiality, the prohibition against retaliation, and the ability to take breaks.
- Offer to address any procedural inquiries before asking substantive questions.



Interviewing the Parties

- Elicit each party's version of events, suggestions for witnesses, and other evidence, in same level of detail. (Parity/neutrality/impartiality)
- Explain process, which policy standards are alleged to have been violated, and what to anticipate in the investigative process.
- Explain that confidentiality/retaliation provisions apply to and protect both parties and witnesses.
- In ODR's experience, interviews can vary greatly in length, from less than an hour to numerous interview sessions lasting one to three hours each.



Responsiveness to Interviewees

- Offer breaks for party or witness, as appropriate.
- Reassure party/witness that ODR's role is to ask questions that seek relevant information about the allegations, but it is up to the party/witness to decide what to provide, if anything.
- Remind party/witness that participation is voluntary, including whether they wish to decline to answer a question or end an interview early. ODR respects a participant's agency to participate in the process as they see fit.
- Inform party/witness of Title IX Resource Coordinators for supportive measures.



Interviewing Witnesses

- Share as little information as possible with witnesses to gather the evidence that is needed
- Explain that confidentiality and retaliation provisions apply
- Explain that information directly related to the allegations under investigation contained ODR's witness interview notes will be shared with the parties (ITIXSHP) or that information upon which ODR may rely will be shared with the parties (IOSMP)
- At conclusion, ask if anything else the witness wishes to share with ODR



During the Interview

Listen with purpose:

- Keep in mind the information that you reasonably expect the party or witness to be able to offer that is relevant to the allegations opened for investigation
- Consider the evidentiary standard
- Review the alleged policy violation(s) you are investigating
- Allow for a wide variety of narrative approaches, maintaining neutrality and trauma-informed practices
- Note if the party or witness raises concerns outside the scope of the investigation, and be sure to inform them of relevant policy and/or procedural provision(s) along with Title IX Resource Coordinator information for discussion of supports and options.



Attending: to pay attention to

Attending is when the interviewer indicates, through both words and body language, including posture, that she or he is paying close attention to the interviewee and wants to hear what the interviewee has to say. **If you are feeling fatigued, it is okay to schedule a break.**



General Interviewing Strategies

- Ask questions that are relevant and within the scope of the investigation

Ordinarily:

- Ask open-ended, general questions calling for narrative answers before focusing on narrower, specific questions
- Avoid leading questions; ask questions in a manner that discloses the minimum amount of information
- Avoid compound questions
- Elicit facts rather than conclusions
- Do not ask questions that assume information that hasn't been established yet



General Interviewing Strategies: Probing

Q. What is probing?

A. Asking follow-up questions about a given interview response to identify and obtain more specific information that the initial response may have behind it.



General Interviewing Strategies: Probing, cont.

- Be silent – sometimes an effective probe.
- If it appears you may have provoked a negative emotion from an interviewee, e.g., anger, hostility, indignation, or fear, one way of letting the emotion defuse is not to persist but to circle back to the subject again later once the interviewee has regained composure, and/or offer to take a break.



General Interviewing Strategies, cont.

As applicable:

Must be willing to ask difficult or sensitive questions in order to understand the intimate details of the incident; reassure the interviewee that this is ODR's role, and we do so without any, e.g., value judgment

- Ask in a neutral, receptive manner



General Interviewing Strategies, cont.

- Clarify conflicting statements, information behind opinions, contemporaneous documentation
- Avoid premature conclusions or assumptions about the facts (neutral/impartial)
- Ask and order questions in ways to encourage parties and witness to provide information that will help the investigator to, sooner or later, relate events chronologically, emphasizing that the ultimate burden to eventually relate events chronologically is, like the burden of gathering evidence itself, always on the investigator, not the parties.



General Interviewing Strategies, cont.

- Ask for firsthand knowledge from witnesses, including, e.g., the witness explaining what Complainant and/or Respondent told them relevant to the matters at issue
- Ask witnesses to identify all individuals who may have relevant information and the nature of that information
- Ask witnesses to identify any relevant documents



Putting the Interviewee at Ease

- NEUTRAL/IMPARTIAL
- Professional
- Polite
- Attentive



Interviewing Challenges

Dealing with Negative Feelings

Interviewee is responding negatively to something interviewer is doing

- Listen closely and watch non-verbal cues, when available to gauge total message
- Try to identify the source of the problem
- Reflect your understanding of the problem in simple terms
- Concentrate on the response
- Acknowledge the problem again, alter any behavior on your part that is contributing to a negative response, and continue the interview



Investigative Planning and Identifying and Evaluating Evidence



Witnesses

After collecting information from the Complaint, the initial review, the Response, and the individual post-Response interviews with the parties, as applicable, you should have information about the allegations:

- Others who saw or heard any aspect of the incident(s)?
- Anyone either party may have told or texted following the incident(s)?
- Anyone who observed any relevant interactions between the parties before or after the incident(s)?
- Anyone who noticed or learned of impacts, if any, on the Complainant following the incident(s)?



Witnesses, cont.

- Potential witnesses identified by each of the parties
- Potential witnesses identified by other witnesses
- Those Investigative Team identifies as witnesses whom ODR will contact
- ODR supplements witness list during investigation as new leads become known



Witnesses, cont.

Witness questions

- Sketch out areas of evidence you expect to gather from them
- Focus on disputed facts
- Focus on what is needed to prove/disprove policy(ies) violation and understand the breadth
- If possible, review written/physical evidence first
- List of questions, but be prepared to follow up on new avenues/adjust to different narrative approaches

Witness order

- Relationship to parties and other witnesses may impact interview order
- Availability – work schedule/upcoming vacation
- Ordering to reduce need to circle back



Other Evidence

- Based on allegations, where would you likely find evidence?
- Site visit(s): are there any relevant locations that would be helpful to view?
- Always remember responsibility to conduct a prompt and equitable investigation and hearing for *both* parties



Assessing Witness Credibility and Relevance

- Was the witness able to see, hear, or know the things about which they reported?
- How well could the witness remember and describe the things about which they reported?
- When did the witness learn the things about which they reported relative to the formal complaint process?
- Did the witness have any interest in the outcome of the complaint or any other motive that might go to the weight of the information provided? Any indication the witness was coached?



Assessing Witness Credibility and Relevance, cont.

- Uncertain, confused, or self-contradictory during the interview?
Possible legitimate reasons for this?
- Make sense considering the totality of the information gathered to date, including, e.g., the evolving timeline of the case, site visits (if applicable), other party and witness information, and other documentary, etc., evidence?
- Make sense considering the known relationships in the case?



Investigative Reports



Drafting the Report

Be objective, neutral, and precise in your summary of the evidence and findings of fact (IOSMP) or recommended findings of fact (ITIXSHP).



Findings of Fact and Determination: IOSMP

The Investigative Team will make findings of fact, applying a preponderance of evidence standard, and determine based on those findings of fact whether there was a violation of the Policy.

Factual findings on each issue investigated:

The Report should summarize the key facts supporting each finding, including information obtained through party and witness interviews and documents.

Material conflicting information should typically be identified. If the Investigative Team was able to resolve the conflict, the report should indicate how (for example, by corroborating documents or witnesses, if applicable).

Analysis and Determination: Based on the findings of fact on the preponderance of the evidence, was the Policy violated?



Recommended Findings: ITIXSHP

- The Investigative Team makes recommended findings of fact in the investigative report, applying a preponderance of the evidence standard, relevant to the elements of the ITIXSHP and IOSMP, as applicable.
- The Hearing Panel independently makes the determination regarding responsibility, applying a preponderance of the evidence standard.



Recommended Findings: ITIXSHP, cont.

Recommended factual findings on each issue investigated

- The investigative report should summarize the key facts supporting each recommended finding under the relevant Policy provision, including information obtained through party and witness interviews and documents.
- Material conflicting information should typically be identified. If the Investigative Team was able to resolve the conflict, the report should indicate, in the recommended finding, how (for example, by corroborating documents or witnesses, if applicable).



Recommended Findings (ITIXSHP): Evidence

In gathering and weighing evidence, the Investigative Team will note that whether conduct is unwelcome is subjective, that is, based on whether the person subject to the conduct viewed it as unwelcome. However, in making recommended findings of fact as to whether consent was communicated by the person subject to the conduct, and as to the elements of severity, pervasiveness, objective offensiveness, and denial of equal access, consideration should be given not only to the subjective perspective of the person subject to the conduct, but also to the objective view of a reasonable person, based on the totality of the circumstances.



Recommended Findings (ITIXSHP): Evidence, cont.

The following types of information may be helpful in making recommended findings of fact, while avoiding prejudice of the facts at issue:

- an objective evaluation of all relevant evidence – including both inculpatory (tending to support that the alleged conduct occurred) and exculpatory (not tending to support that the alleged conduct occurred) evidence;
- statements by any witnesses to the alleged incident;
- information about the relative credibility of the parties and witnesses, so long as credibility determinations are not based on a person’s status as a complainant, respondent, or witness;
- the detail, consistency, and plausibility of each person’s account;
- the absence of corroborating information where it should logically exist;



Recommended Findings (ITIXSHP): Evidence, cont.

The following types of information may be helpful in making recommended findings of fact, while avoiding prejudgment of the facts at issue, cont.:

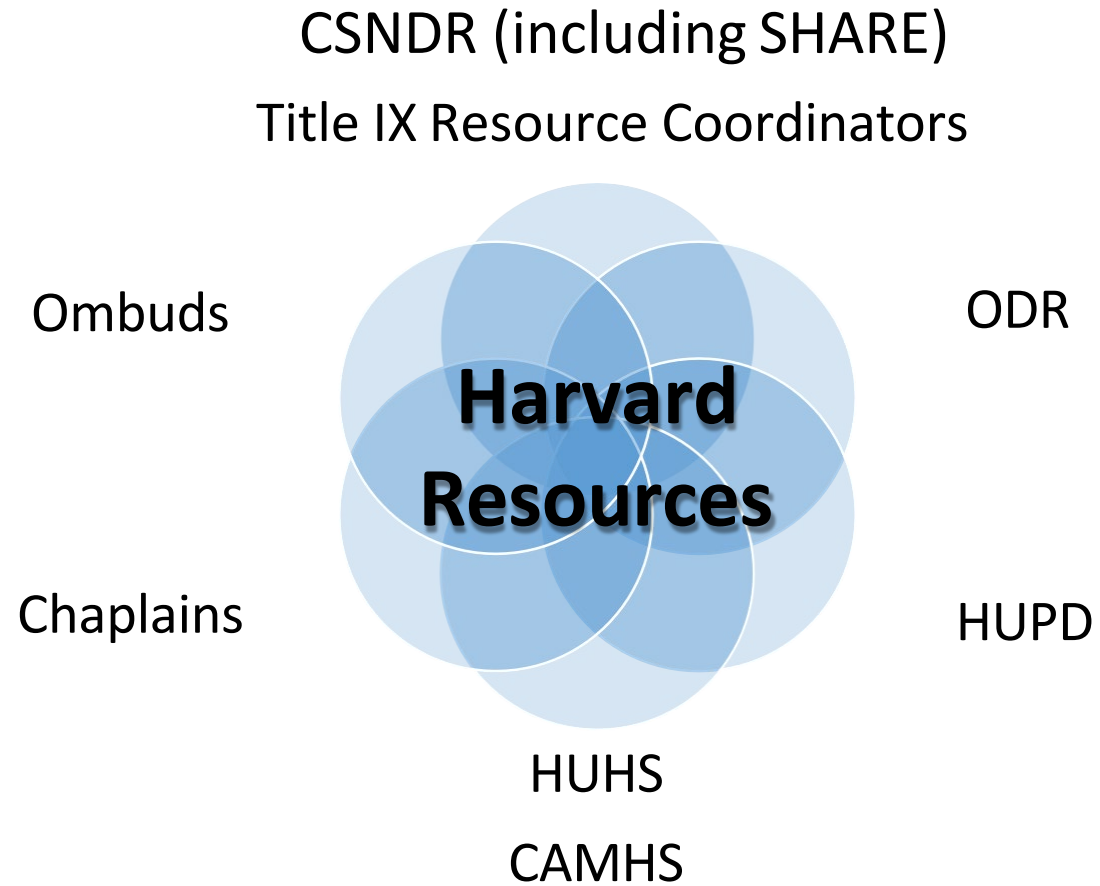
- information that the Respondent has been found to have committed sexual misconduct or harassment;
- information that the Complainant has been found to have made false allegations against others;
- information about the parties' reaction or behavior after the alleged incident; and
- information about any actions the parties took immediately following the incident, including reporting the matter to others.



Community Relationships in Investigations



Harvard Resources



Examples of Resources

- Administrative/Review/Conduct/Disciplinary Boards; HR, Resident or Assistant Deans
- Title IX Resource Coordinators, Designees, Liaisons
- [Community Support, Non-Discrimination, Rights and Responsibilities](#) (CSNDR), including [Sexual Harassment/Assault Resources & Education](#) (SHARE) Counselors
- Harvard University Police Department (HUPD)
- Harvard University Health Services (HUHS)



Title IX Resource Coordinator Role vs. Designee Role

	Title IX Resource Coordinator	Designee
Notice of Incident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to notice 	
Informal Resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implements supportive measures • Might handle informal resolution following the filing of a formal complaint (Interim Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy) 	
Formal Complaint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed of complaint by University Title IX Coordinator • Updated throughout process by ODR • Implement supportive measures • Monitor supportive measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated throughout process by ODR • Fulfills Liaison role (available for School/unit-specific questions, ODR contact for School/unit-specific consultations, etc.) • May be involved in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial Review of Complaint • Interviews • Site visits • Review of other evidence • Participate in drafting Notice and/or Dismissal Letters, and Investigative Report
Investigation Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receives Investigative Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receives Investigative Report



Sexual Harassment/Assault Resources & Education (SHARE)*

SHARE counselors provide:

- confidential/ privileged crisis counseling
- confidential/privileged support for individuals who engage in causing harm
- a confidential/privileged space to process one's experiences
- support group participation
- information about restorative practices
- **24/7 crisis hotline at +1 (617) 495-9100**



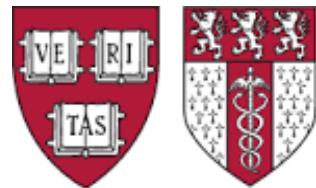
OFFICE FOR
Community Support,
Non-Discrimination,
Rights and Responsibilities

*The SHARE Team within CSNDR provides confidential/privileged counseling to the Harvard community.



HUHS

- Services/resources for parties
- ODR has interviewed expert witnesses (see FAQ #49) about, for example:
 - Intoxication and incapacitation
 - Sexually transmitted infections
 - Bruising and other manifestations of physical injury
 - Sleep disorders



HARVARD UNIVERSITY
Health Services

huhs.harvard.edu



HUPD



- Procedures for ITIXSHP and IOSMP: “Timeframes may be extended . . . to comply with requests by or not to prejudice investigations or processes of external law enforcement . . .”
- ODR Investigators communicate with HUPD regularly in cases involving concurrent law enforcement activity. After completing initial review, ODR, in consultation with the School or unit, may temporarily defer an investigation to comply with requests by or not to prejudice investigations or processes of external law enforcement.

All communications with HUPD about an ODR investigation should be made by ODR staff only, per HUPD-ODR protocols.

hupd.harvard.edu



University Title IX Coordinator Contact Information

Nicole Merhill, J.D.

University Title IX Coordinator

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The Neurobiology of Trauma



U.S. DOJ, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, Dr. Rebecca Campbell, Michigan State University: Take Home Lessons

Neurobiological changes resulting from a traumatic experience can lead to flat affect or “strange” emotions or emotional swings

- Wide range of emotions are in fact normal
- Story may come out fragmented or “sketchy”; does not necessarily mean evasiveness or lying ([The Neurobiology of Sexual Assault: Implications for Law Enforcement, Prosecution, and Victim Advocacy | National Institute of Justice \(ojp.gov\)](#), December 2012)

Source: Campbell & Patterson, 2011



Neurobiology of Trauma: Ongoing Scholarly Inquiry

- “Given that autobiographical memory does not operate like a videotape machine that infallibly records the story of our lives (e.g., Loftus & Loftus, [1980](#)), it is unclear why Campbell asserts that the scattered fragments of a memory of a sexual assault are each unfailingly accurate. Autobiographical memory is reconstructive, not reproductive. Nevertheless, *ceteris paribus* [(i.e., all other things being equal)], intense fear will likely foster the encoding and storage of the most salient, central features of the trauma, sometimes at the expense of peripheral details (Loftus et al., [1987](#)), but not necessarily at the expense of a coherent narrative of what happened. (Langer, [1991](#)).” – **Professor Richard McNally, Harvard Department of Psychology, Richard J. McNally (2021): “Are memories of sexual trauma fragmented?”, *Memory*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658211.2020.1871023>.**
- “Our memories are not perfect reconstructions of the past. Instead, remembering a past event is a combination of processes, piecing together many separate details, and making inferences to fill in the gaps to create a coherent whole. . . . Our current drives, biases, stereotypes, and expectations can all affect that inferential process [C]onverging evidence demonstrates that experiences of trauma . . . are also vulnerable to memory distortion.” – **Professor Deryn Strange, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, *Psychology Today*, May 23, 2016**



Neurobiology of Trauma: Ongoing Scholarly Inquiry, cont.

“In a comprehensive study, [Rubin, Deffler, et al. \(2016\)](#) assessed 60 trauma-exposed adults, half of whom had PTSD. The authors matched the groups in terms of trauma type (e.g., combat, childhood sexual abuse, accidents) and other variables. Participants recounted three traumatic, three very positive, and three very important memories. Each narrative was audiotaped, transcribed, and subjected to 28 measures of coherence. Most measures indicated that trauma memories were as coherent as very positive and very important memories, and participants with PTSD had no less coherent memories than did trauma-exposed participants without PTSD. Trauma memories were slightly less coherent than other memories on some measures but slightly more coherent on other measures. Taken together, these data counter the claim that trauma memories are characterized by a lack of narrative coherence, especially in individuals with PTSD. Although [Brewin \(2016\)](#) challenged this conclusion, [Rubin, Berntsen, Ogle, Deffler, and Beckham \(2016\)](#) convincingly rebutted Brewin’s critique.” – [Retrieving and Modifying Traumatic Memories: Recent Research Relevant to Three Controversies - Iris M. Engelhard, Richard J. McNally, Kevin van Schie, 2019 \(sagepub.com\)](#)



Neurobiology of Trauma: Ongoing Scholarly Inquiry, cont.

- “We know of no scientific studies that support th[e] contention of neurobiological response differences between perpetrators and victims.”
- “[I]t is clear that the influence of stress and emotion on the brain are complex and multifaceted, leading at times to the enhancement of memory and at other times to the disruption of encoding and retrieval processes.”

Source: Meissner, C.A. & Lyles, A.M. [Title IX Investigations: The Importance of Training Investigators in Evidence-Based Approaches to Interviewing – ScienceDirect](#), *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition* (December 2019).



Neurobiology of Trauma, cont.

- “Much of what people think they know about trauma is far more conjectural than empirical.”
- “Put succinctly, the presence of trauma is not a substitute for the absence of evidence.”
- “Missing information should not be held against someone, if it is missing as the result of trauma, but trauma itself does not provide a rationale for bolstering credibility in the absence of evidence.”

Source: Association of Title IX Administrators Position Statement, Trauma-Informed Training and the Neurobiology of Trauma, August 16, 2019, [2019-ATIXA-Trauma-Position-Statement-Final-Version.pdf](#). (Harvard is not a member of this Association.)



Neurobiology of Trauma: From the Preamble to the 2020 Title IX Regulations

Preamble, p. 30069: “The Department is aware that the neurobiology of trauma and the impact of trauma on a survivor’s neurobiological functioning is a developing field of study with application to the way in which investigators of sexual violence offenses interact with victims in criminal justice systems and campus sexual misconduct proceedings.

The final regulations require impartiality on the part of Title IX personnel (i.e., Title IX Coordinators, investigators, decision-makers, and persons who facilitate informal resolutions) to reinforce the truth-seeking purpose of a grievance process. The Department wishes to emphasize that treating all parties with dignity, respect, and sensitivity without bias, prejudice, or stereotypes infecting interactions with parties fosters impartiality and truth-seeking.”



Neurobiology of Trauma: From the Preamble to the 2020 Title IX Regulations, cont.

Preamble, p. 30187: “While the final regulations do not use the term ‘trauma-informed,’ nothing in the final regulations precludes a recipient from applying trauma-informed techniques, practices, or approaches so long as such practices are consistent with the requirements of § 106.45(b)(1)(iii) [(prohibiting ‘a conflict of interest or bias for or against complainants or respondents generally or an individual complainant or respondent’)] and other requirements in § 106.45 [(‘Grievance process for formal complaints of sexual harassment’)].”



Neurobiology of Trauma: From the Preamble to the 2020 Title IX Regulations, cont.

Preamble, p. 30187, fn. 817: “[Citing] Jeffrey J. Nolan, *Fair, Equitable Trauma-Informed Investigation Training* (Holland & Knight updated July 19, 2019) (white paper summarizing trauma-informed approaches to sexual misconduct investigations, identifying scientific and media support and opposition to such approaches, and cautioning institutions to apply trauma-informed approaches carefully to ensure impartial investigations).”

Source: www.hklaw.com/-/media/files/insights/publications/2019/07/fairequitabletraumainformed-investigationtraining.pdf?la=en



Neurobiology of Trauma: From the Preamble to the 2020 Title IX Regulations, cont.

Preamble:

- p. 30245: “Being sensitive to the trauma a complainant may have experienced does not violate § 106.45(b)(1)(i) [(a grievance process must ‘[t]reat complainants and respondents equitably’)] or any other provision of the grievance process, so long as [. . .] ‘being sensitive’ does not lead a Title IX Coordinator, investigator, or decision-maker [(e.g., a hearing or appellate panelist)] to lose impartiality, prejudge the facts at issue, or demonstrate bias for or against any party.”
- p. 30323: “As attorneys and consultants with expertise in Title IX grievance proceedings have noted, trauma-informed practices can be implemented as part of an impartial, unbiased system that does not rely on sex stereotypes, but doing so requires taking care not to permit general information about the neurobiology of trauma to lead Title IX personnel to apply generalizations to allegations in specific cases.”

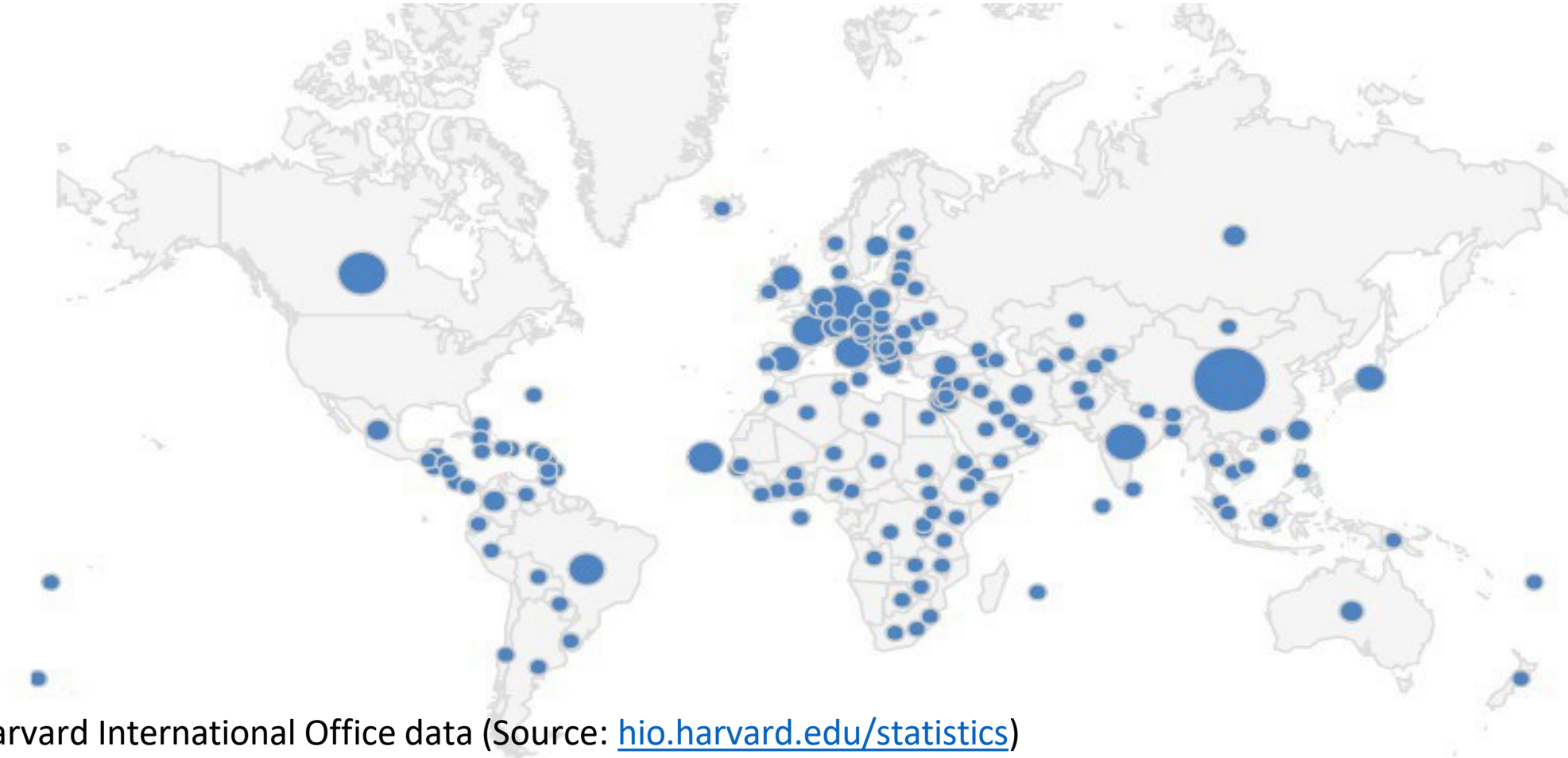


Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural Factors in Investigations



Harvard's Diverse Geographic Representation



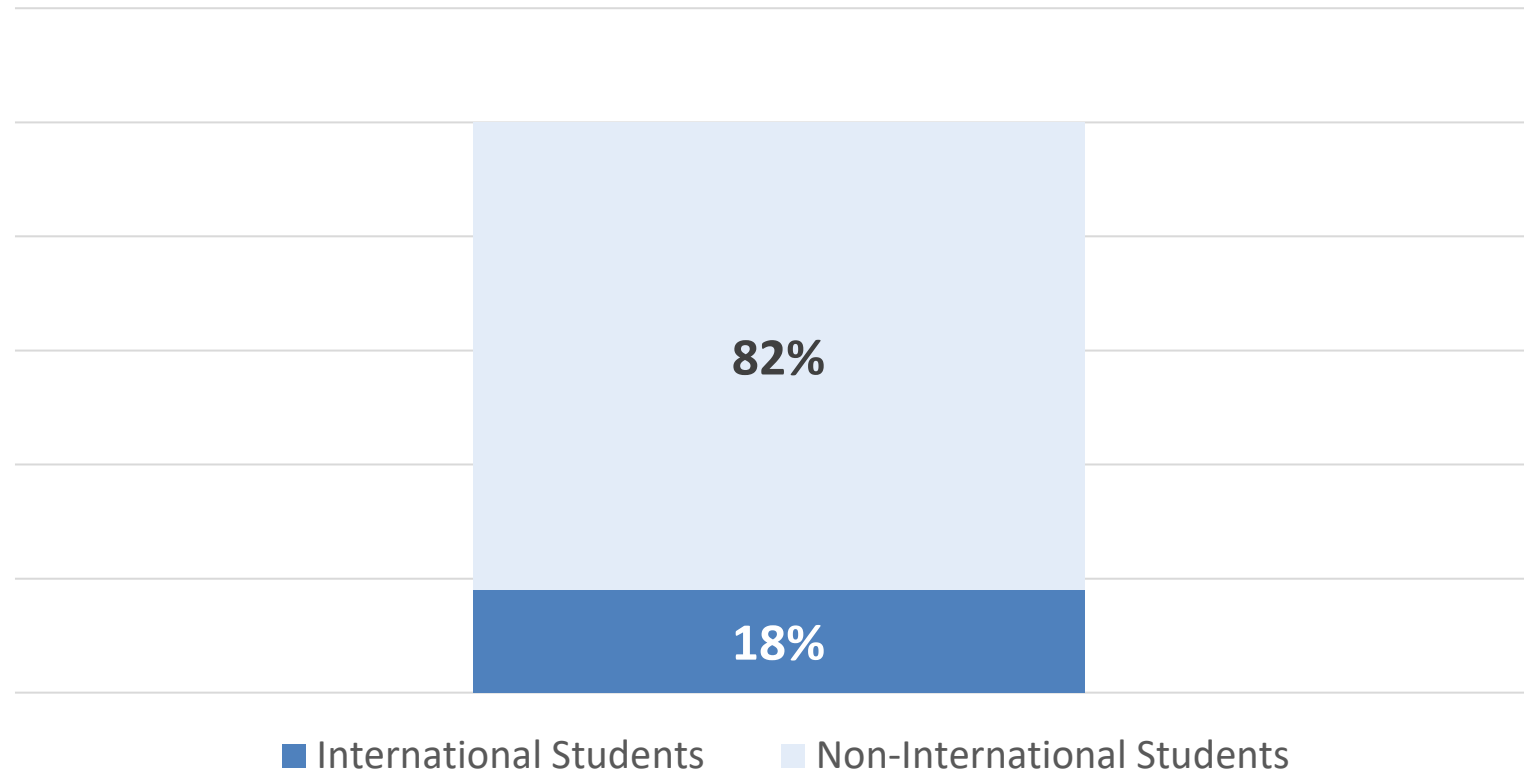
Harvard International Office data (Source: hio.harvard.edu/statistics)

*approximately 10,158 students and scholars; 150 countries represented



Harvard College Class of 2028 Statistics

Geographical breakdown



Source: college.harvard.edu/admissions/admissions-statistics



International Representation in ODR Cases

Since 2014, Complainants and Respondents in ODR cases have been from the following countries (other than the U.S., including first-generation immigrants):

- Argentina
- Australia
- Brazil
- Bulgaria
- Canada
- China
- Costa Rica
- El Salvador
- England
- France
- Haiti
- Ireland
- Jamaica
- Jordan
- Kenya
- Mexico
- Nepal
- New Zealand
- Peru
- Poland
- Russia
- Scotland
- Somalia
- South Africa
- South Korea
- Switzerland
- Turkey
- Ukraine
- Zimbabwe



Translation and Interpretation

- Might be requested based on objectively demonstrable need by, e.g., a **staff member** (i.e., because for Harvard students a certain level of English fluency is typically required as a condition of admission) participant in an investigation
 - translation of written documentation
 - verbal interpretation during interview
- **The party or witness must request a translator or interpreter; ODR as a neutral cannot suggest that the party or witness may need either**



Translation and Interpretation, cont.

ODR may secure a neutral English translation if the English translations provided by the respective parties are in what ODR deems to be material conflict. ODR also sometimes secures a neutral English translation of a non-English communication translated into English by only one party, for ODR's reasons such as sampling for accuracy. Moreover, ODR will not seek a neutral English translation of a non-English communication that both parties have translated into English, if ODR has not deemed the difference between the parties' English translations to be material, even if a party nevertheless asserts that the difference is, in their own view, material.



Translation and Interpretation, cont.

Also note that ODR will generally not credit any bracketed commentary inserted by parties into their own English translations of non-English documents. Each party is, on the other hand, always free to seek neutral English translations of their own, by a qualified professional translator (with documentation thereof), at the party's own expense. ODR may independently reach out to a translator secured by a party, in order to verify both the professional qualifications of the translator and the neutrality of the translation process. ODR will inform both the party and the party's translator that the party's translator's response to ODR's questions is voluntary, but if the party's translator does not choose to respond to ODR, ODR will not rely on the translation.



Variance in Cultural Norms

Cultural norms ODR has encountered:

- Propriety of hugging a co-worker, peer, or subordinate
- Propriety of kissing a co-worker, peer, or subordinate on one or both cheeks (as a greeting)
- Cultural stigma surrounding infidelity
- Proper amount of physical space between individuals in the workplace/eye contact
- Pursuit of romantic relationships
- Drinking behavior
- Discussion of feelings
- Interpretation and use of certain words, messages, symbols, including “jokes”
- Gender roles, e.g., “appropriate” careers
- Asserted norms re use of emojis and the like

This is why it is so important that ODR looks at both objective and subjective factors with regard to unwelcome conduct.



Additional Considerations for International Students

What issues arise with respect to international students and undocumented students who experience sexual violence?

- Title IX protects all students located in the United States, regardless of their country of origin
 - Must ensure all students are aware of their rights
- Student visas may require full course load; prior approval required for reduced course load
- Invoking immigration status or threatening deportation may be seen as retaliatory



Questions?

Contact ODR:

Office for Dispute Resolution

Smith Campus Center, Suite 901

1350 Massachusetts Avenue

Cambridge, MA 02138

Phone: (617) 495-3786

odr@harvard.edu

Office Hours: Monday - Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Request an informational meeting on ODR policies and procedures:

<https://odr.harvard.edu/request-information>

