



Title IX Higher Education Workshops

Level 2 - Title IX Investigator Training

Bricker 
Graydon

Disclaimers

We can't help ourselves. We're lawyers.

- We are not giving you legal advice
- Consult with your legal counsel regarding how best to address a specific situation
- Feel free to ask general questions and hypotheticals
- If you did not receive your slides by email, we will post a link in the chat box. Please download and save them!

Presentation Rules

- Seriously – questions are encouraged!
- “For the sake of argument...”
- Be aware of your own responses and experiences
- Follow-up with someone if you have questions and concerns
- Take breaks as needed

Posting These Training Materials?

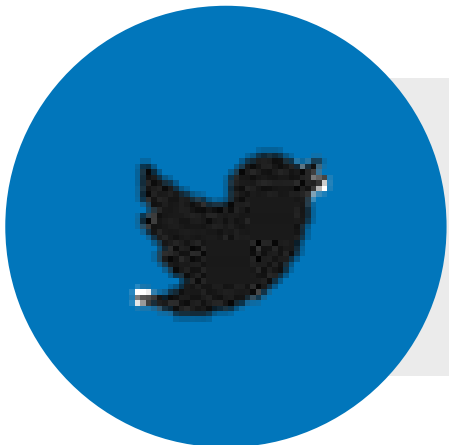
- Yes!
- Your Title IX Coordinator is required by 34 C.F.R. §106.45(b)(10)(i)(D) to post materials to train Title IX personnel on its website
- We know this and will make this packet available to your institution electronically to post



Additional information available at:



Title IX Resource Center at
www.bricker.com/titleix



Find us on **Twitter** at
@BrickerHigherEd

Required Training for Investigators

Definition of Sexual Harassment (Level 1)

Scope of Institution's Education Program or Activity (Level 1)

How to conduct an Investigation

Steps of the Grievance Process (Level 1)

Serving Impartially and without Bias

Issues of Relevance

Topics for This Training

- The role of investigators
 - Bias and conflicts of interest
 - Relevancy
- Investigative Techniques
 - Mock Interview
 - Writing a report
 - Takeaways

Aspirational Agenda

All times EST/EDT

Day 1

- 2:00-2:30 Introduction, Investigator's Role
- 2:30-3:15 Relevance
- 3:15-3:30 Break
- 3:30-5:00 Relevance continued and Relevancy Hypotheticals

Day 2

- 2:00-3:15 Investigative Techniques
- 3:15-3:30 Break
- 3:30-3:45 Live Interview Scenario
- 3:45-5:00 Writing the Report/ Impartiality and Bias



The Investigator's Role

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No Single-Investigator Model for Title IX

- The roles of investigator and decision-maker **MUST** be separate.
- The investigator does not make decisions.



The Investigation and Report

- The investigator has the burden of asking the parties for and collecting all relevant evidence.
- Relevant may be institution-determined, but we will discuss it further later today.
- Parties have the right to present fact and expert witnesses.
- Issues of relevancy will often not be made until the decision-maker is involved (after your involvement).

The Investigator's Roles



The **GATHERER** of all relevant evidence.



The **ORGANIZER** of all relevant evidence.



Issues of Relevance

What is Relevant? 1 of 3

The regulations don't really tell us directly.
But, it may include evidence that is:

**“ probative of any material fact
concerning the allegations ”**

- Preamble, 30343

What is Relevant? 2 of 3

The preamble also tells us:

“ evidence pertinent to proving whether **facts material to the allegations** under investigation are **more or less likely to be true** (i.e., on what is relevant)

”

- Preamble, 30294

What is Relevant? 3 of 3

Does this question, topic, evidence help **move the dial** under the standard of evidence?



**Preponderance
of the evidence:**

A fact is more likely than not to be true
(30373 fn. 1409)



**Clear and
convincing:**

a fact is highly probable to be true
(30373 fn. 1409)

FACT: _____



LESS LIKELY

MORE LIKELY

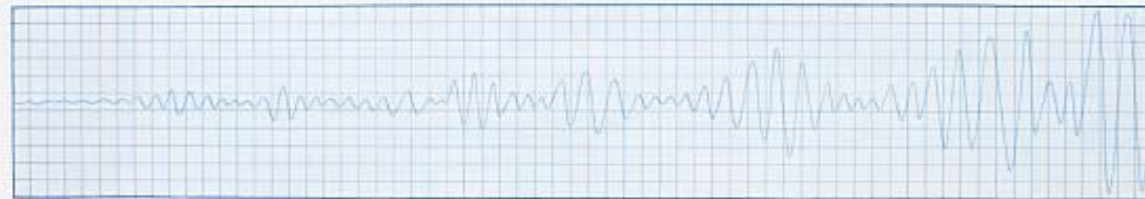
Issues of Relevancy (NOT Rules of Evidence) 1 of 2

- The Rules of Evidence do **NOT** apply and **CANNOT** apply



Issues of Relevancy (NOT Rules of Evidence) 2 of 2

“[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 for use under 106.45 (as is, for instance, information protected by a legally recognized privilege).”



This means: 1 of 2



Cannot exclude redundant evidence



Cannot exclude character evidence



Cannot exclude hearsay



Cannot exclude evidence where the probative value is substantially outweighed by the danger of unfair prejudice (30294)



Issues of Relevancy: What isn't relevant?



Party's medical, psychological, and similar records (unless voluntary written consent)



Information protected by a legally recognized privilege

Relevancy: Medical treatment and Investigation



Section 106.45(b)(5)(i): when *investigating* a formal complaint, recipient:

- “[C]annot 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 for a grievance process under this section.**”

Relevancy: Legally Privileged Information



Section 106.45(b)(1)(x):

- A **recipient's** grievance process **must...not 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.

Relevancy: Legally Privileged Info – What does this include?



- Preamble identifies medical and treatment records.
- Jurisdiction-dependent
 - Attorney-client communications
 - Implicating oneself in a crime
 - Confessions to a clergy member or other religious figures
 - Spousal testimony in criminal matters
 - Some confidentiality/trade secrets

Issues of Relevancy: What isn't relevant? – Rape Shield Provision



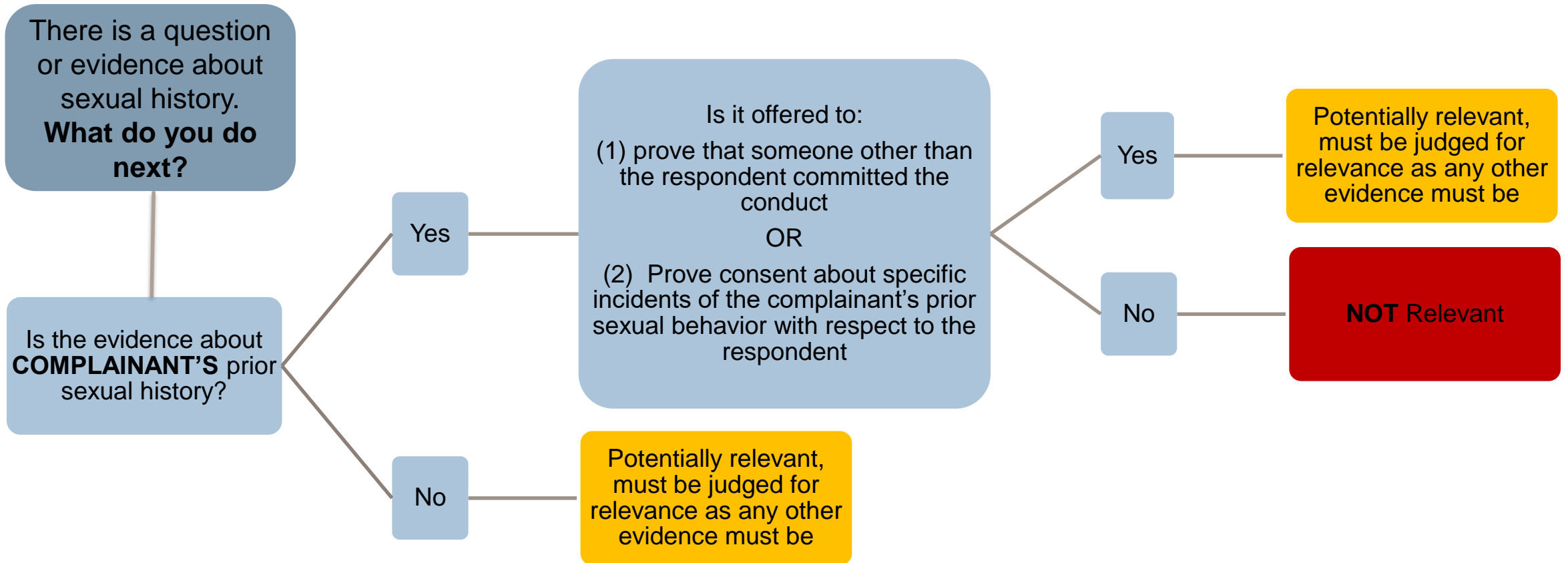
- Evidence about complainant's prior sexual history (must exclude) unless such questions/ evidence:
 - are offered to prove that someone other than the respondent committed the conduct, or
 - if the questions/evidence concern specific incidents of the complainant's prior sexual behavior with respect to the respondent and are offered to prove consent.

Issues of Relevancy: What isn't relevant? – Rape Shield Provision



- Rape shield protections do not apply to Respondents
- “The Department reiterates that the rape shield language . . . does not pertain to the sexual predisposition or sexual behavior of respondents, so **evidence of a pattern of inappropriate behavior by an alleged harasser must be judged for relevance as any other evidence must be.**”
- Guidance from Sept. 2021 Q&A: no party’s sexual history is usually relevant

Rape Shield Provision Flowchart



Retaliation

- When parties elect not to participate, a recipient cannot retaliate against them (30322)
- It is the right of any party or witness not to participate in the investigation

Relevancy and the Investigator

The gatherer of all relevant evidence



Recipient must ensure that “all *relevant* questions and evidence are admitted and considered (though varying weight or credibility may of course be given to particular evidence by the decision-maker).”



- Preamble, 30331

Relevancy and the Investigation and Report 1 of 2



Summarize



Evaluate



The requirement for **recipients** to **summarize** and evaluate **relevant evidence**, and specification of certain types of evidence that must be deemed not relevant or are otherwise inadmissible in a grievance process pursuant to section 106.45, appropriately direct **recipients** to **focus investigations** and adjudications **on evidence pertinent to proving whether facts material to the allegations under investigation are more or less likely to be true** (i.e., on that is relevant.)



- Preamble, 30294

Relevancy and the Investigation and Report 2 of 2



The **GATHERER** of all relevant evidence.



The **ORGANIZER** of all relevant evidence.

practice...
practice...
practice...

Relevancy Hypotheticals for the Investigator

Relevancy Hypotheticals

Disclaimer: The following hypotheticals are not based on any actual cases we have handled or of which we are aware. Any similarities to actual cases are coincidental.

Relevancy Hypotheticals: Scenario Review

- The following hypotheticals are all based upon the scenario we provided in advance of today. We will go through it together now before we go through the hypotheticals.
- You are the investigator who has been handed this information from the Title IX Coordinator.

Hypothetical Report

Reporter Name: Charlie Chun
Received: January 10, 2023 at 9:12 A.M.
Intake Format: Compliance System Report
Parties Identified: Charlie Chun and Rook Ryan

Narrative: Rook sexually assaulted me early in the morning of January 5, 2023. Rook STALKED me too, they contacted me after I told them to STOP. I even blocked them, and they showed up outside of my dorm and aggressively approached me. So, I had to act in self-defense to get away from them. I retreated to my room and hid in there for several days, which made me miss class. Here is a screenshot of a Snapchat conversation with my roommate Wendy and Rook. Rook is a PREDATOR!!!!



Notices of Allegations

January 10, 2023

Title IX Office sent Notices of Allegations to the parties that Charlie had filed a formal complaint that Rook engaged in prohibited conduct that could violate Title IX for sexual harassment and stalking and that the Title IX Office was initiating an investigation



Hypothetical Report #2

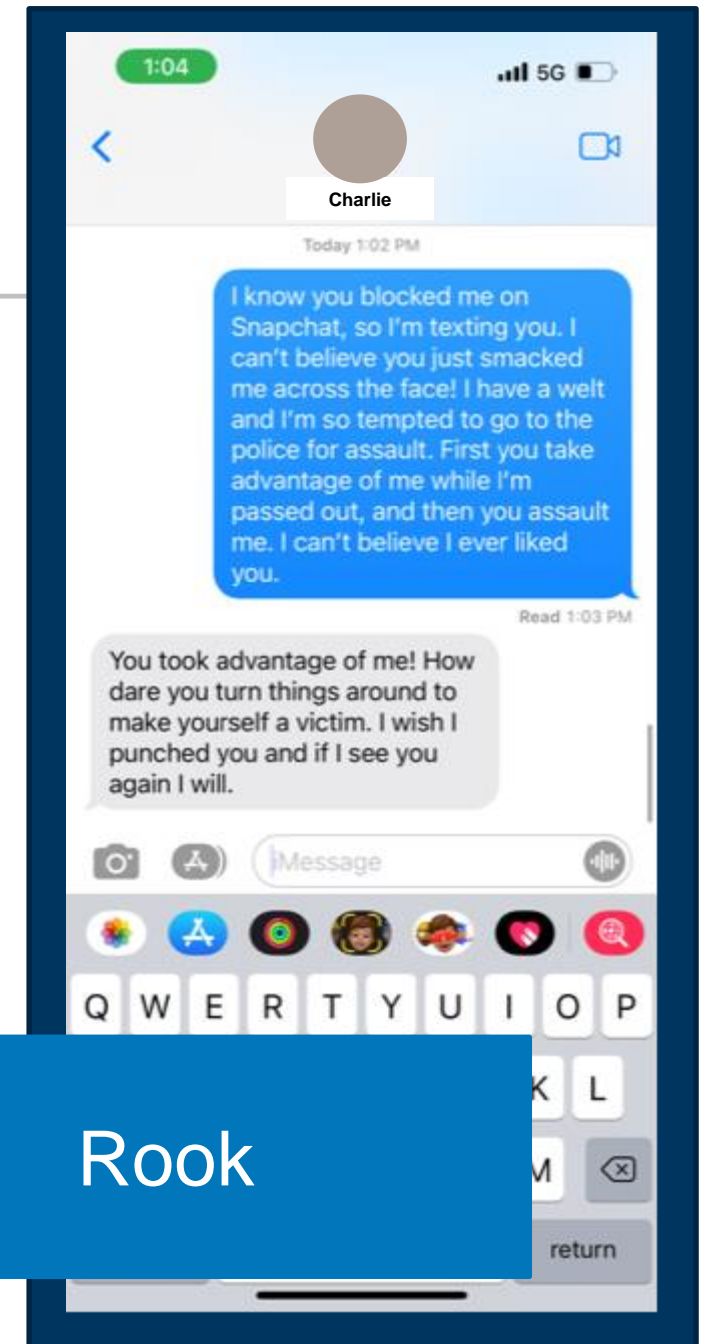
January 11, 2023

After receiving the Notice of Allegations, Rook came to the Title IX Office and filed a formal complaint against Charlie alleging that she engaged in prohibited conduct under Title IX for sexual harassment and dating violence

Charlie

1. Sexual Harassment
2. Dating Violence

Rook



Summary of Allegations



Hypothetical One

You sit down to interview Charlie. Charlie tells you that they heard that after she broke up with Rook, Rook sexually assaulted several other people. Charlie identified a couple of these other people for you to interview about Rook's sexual history.

FACT: _____

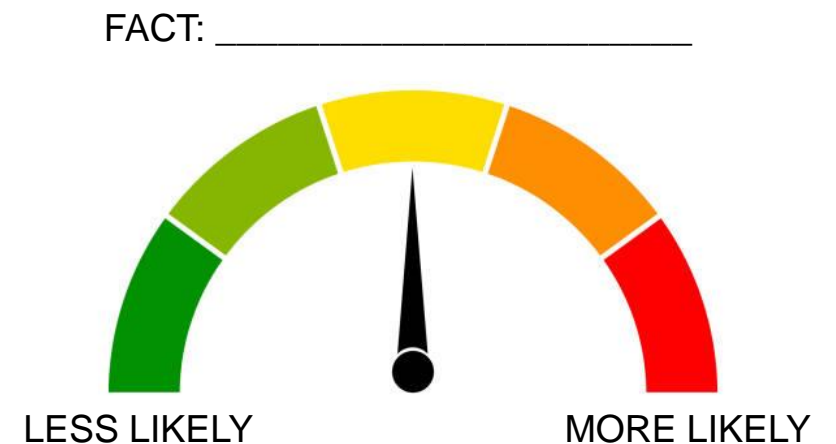
Is this relevant?



Hypothetical Two

In your interview with Rook, Rook tells you that they have hired an expert witness who will provide a report stating that there is no way that Rook could have sexually assaulted Charlie.

Is this relevant?



Hypothetical Three

In your interview with Charlie, Charlie disclosed to you that they have proof that they have post-traumatic stress disorder from Rook's actions. Charlie states that they have medical treatment records to prove this, but does not want to provide them to you.

FACT: _____

Is this relevant?



Hypothetical Four

In your interview with Rook, Rook mentions that before they started dating Charlie, they heard that Charlie was nearly expelled from high school for threatening a teacher with physical violence.

Is this relevant?

FACT: _____



Hypothetical Five

Rook states that Charlie cheated on them and may have sexually assaulted two other witnesses who Rook identifies.

Is the information from those witnesses relevant?

FACT: _____



Hypothetical Six

In your interview with Charlie, Charlie tells you that they have consulted with a psychic who is willing to state that they were sexually assaulted by Rook.

Is this relevant?

FACT: _____



Hypothetical Seven

In your interview with Rook, Rook tells you that they have been unable to sleep since Charlie filed the report and would like to provide treatment records to support the effects of Charlie's report on Rook. Rook is willing to sign a waiver.

FACT: _____

Is this relevant?



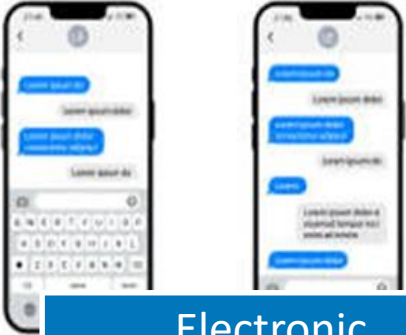


Introduction to Investigative Techniques

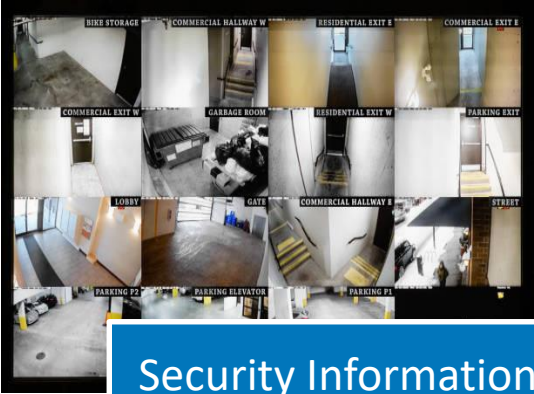
Initial Review

- Review notes and information collected by the Title IX Coordinator
- Review Notices to Complainant and Respondent
- Review Policy/Code of Conduct
- Define Scope of Investigation
 - What elements do you think will be disputed?
 - Agreed upon?

Begin Evidence List



Electronic Communications



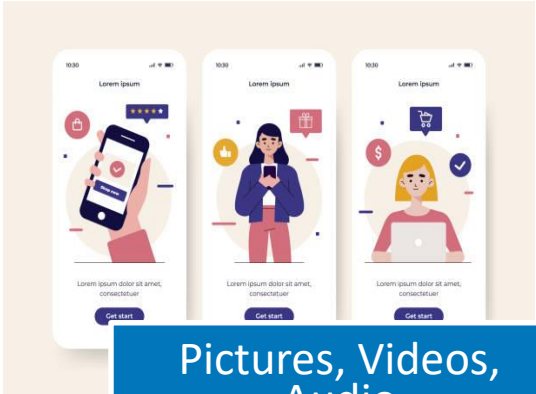
Security Information



Police Reports



Personnel Files, Student Records



Pictures, Videos, Audio



If there is a criminal investigation, work with law enforcement to collect and preserve evidence

Begin Witness List

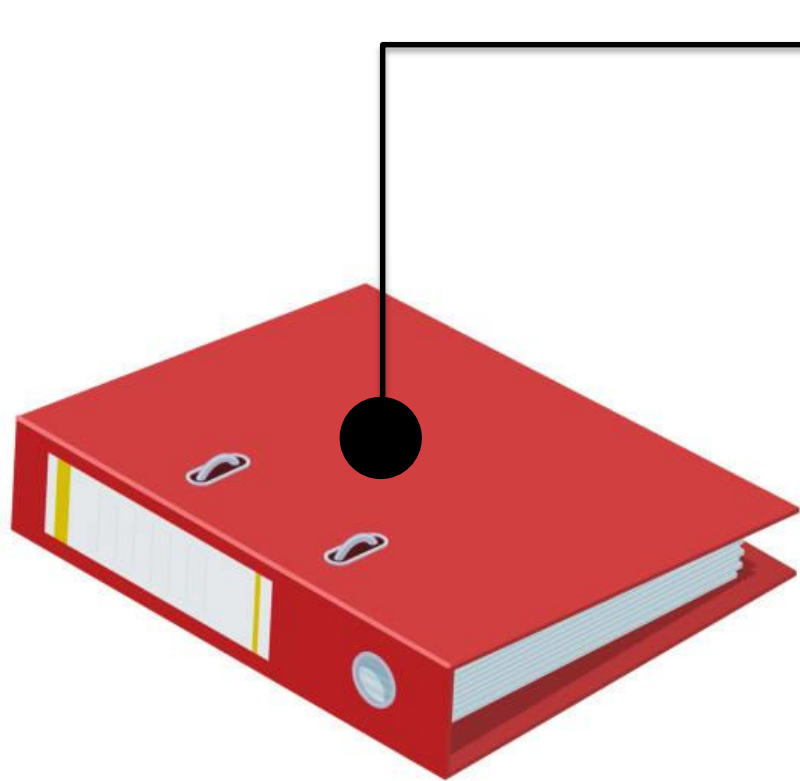
- If there is a criminal investigation, work with law enforcement to ensure permission to question witnesses
- Who should be included?
- Who should NOT be included?
- In what order should the witnesses be interviewed?
- Be flexible

Craft Questions for Each Witness

- Refer to the policy
- Consider what information they are likely to have related to each element
- Consider what information they are likely to have that may assist the decision-maker in determining credibility
- Be flexible



Organizing for the Interview



What should you have with you?

- Intake Report
- Written notice with allegations
- Investigation log
- Investigation notes cover sheet
- Pre-prepared questions
- Evidence you may need to reference or show witness
- Policy or Handbook

Note-taking Tips

- Use predictable symbols in the margin to easily skim during the interview:
 - **?** ← Follow-up questions
 - ***** ← Potential evidence
 - **W** ← Potential witness
- Try to record exact quotes when possible
- Interview notes are now required to be produced as part of the record

Simultaneous Criminal Matter

- Is it okay to proceed with the investigation?
- **If not, could be interfering with a police investigation**
- Communicate with your Title IX Coordinator
- May require calling the local police department and/or detective



Remember: The gatherer of relevant evidence

- To ensure burden of proof and burden of gathering evidence is not on the parties (106.45(b)(5)(i))
- To provide an equal opportunity for the parties to present witnesses, including fact and expert witnesses, and other inculpatory or exculpatory evidence (106.45(b)(5)(ii))
- Not restrict the ability of either party to discuss the allegations under investigation or to gather or present relevant evidence (106.45(b)(5)(iii))

Setting Up the Interview 1 of 2

- Identify yourself, your role, and a general outline of what you're investigating
- Consider requesting the TIX Coordinator check in with those who fail to respond or refuse to participate
- Don't give up on the interview till you've tried at least 3 times, in at least 2 different methods (if available)

Setting Up the Interview 2 of 2

You must now provide any party whose participation you seek, with written notice (email) with “sufficient” time to prepare:



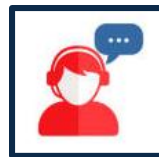
Date



Time



Location



Participants



Purpose of
interview/meeting

(106.45(b)(5)(v))

Set the Stage

- Make introductions
- Be hospitable
- Give overview of why they are being interviewed
- Explain retaliation policy
- Invite questions

Begin Broadly

Elicit a monologue about the incident

What happened earlier that day before the incident?

What happened with regard to the incident?

What happened next?

Open-ended follow-up questions

Specific questions

Ask Follow-Up Questions

- Re-review your notes
- Re-review the elements of each charge
 - Have you elicited all of the information this witness might have about each element?
 - Do you have an understanding of how the witness obtained the information they shared?

Freeze Frames



- Ask the witness to “freeze” on the moment and describe details
 - What could they see? Feel? Smell? Taste? Hear?
 - Where was the other person? How were they positioned?
 - Where were you? How positioned?
 - What did you say to the other person? Them to you?
 - Describe other person’s tone, demeanor, body language

When Consent is at Issue

- **Common concern of Title IX Coordinator: investigators not asking the questions to get details needed for incapacitation analysis**
- Consider the wording and tone of your questions
- Utilize “freeze frame” strategy
- Ask questions about what happened to determine whether there was unspoken consent
- Ask questions to identify whether alcohol/drugs may have played a role regarding consent
- See Level 1 slides for a list of questions to get you started

Credibility

- Gather facts to assist **decision-maker**
- Your job: Ask questions to test memory
- Identify where the witness may corroborate or contradict their testimony, or other witnesses, and physical evidence
- Be sensitive to potential trauma experienced by witnesses

Questions about Credibility - Bias

- Bias: (a) lay witnesses and (b) experts.
- Relationships (friendship and romantic)
- Experts: getting paid for testimony
 - You charge fees based on an hourly rate?
 - You were paid to produce a written report?
 - Based on this report, you're testifying today?
 - You're charging money for each hour you're here?

Questions about Credibility – Perception and Recall

- What is the witness's perception of the facts?
 - Has **time** impacted recall or ability to remember clearly?
 - How many times has the **witnesses talked to the other party** about this case?
 - Was there **anything** that impacts the person's physical or mental ability to perceive or recall facts accurately?
- Does the witness form a conclusion without knowing certain information?

Questions about Credibility – Inconsistency in Statements

Only happens if you interview the parties or witnesses multiple times

- If a fact was very important, why is the hearing the first time it has come up?
- What possible reasons might the witness have for changing their testimony?
- Did a witness receive coaching from the party or others between making one statement and another?
- Has the witness's perspective or motive changed between statements?
- Does changing this fact help the other party's case?

Questions about Credibility – Example

- **Example: Intoxication level information from witness.**
 - You did not see the consumption, or keep track of how long the party was consuming alcohol?
 - You did not measure the alcohol poured by _____ or the party?
 - Your statements are based on information provided by others? the other party?
 - Party's statements were made after they had been drinking alcohol (consuming other drugs, etc.)?

Remember: The person is not speaking from personal knowledge.

Closing the Interview

- Closing questions
- Request copies of all evidence potentially available to the witness
- Discuss confidentiality - but do not prohibit a party from discussing allegations
- Inform the witness of next steps and how to reach you

After the Witness Leaves (1 of 2)

- Update investigation log
- Review notes, make corrections/clarification
- Update witness list
- Update list of evidence to be obtained
- Write down questions to ask other witnesses
- Consider whether appropriate to send email

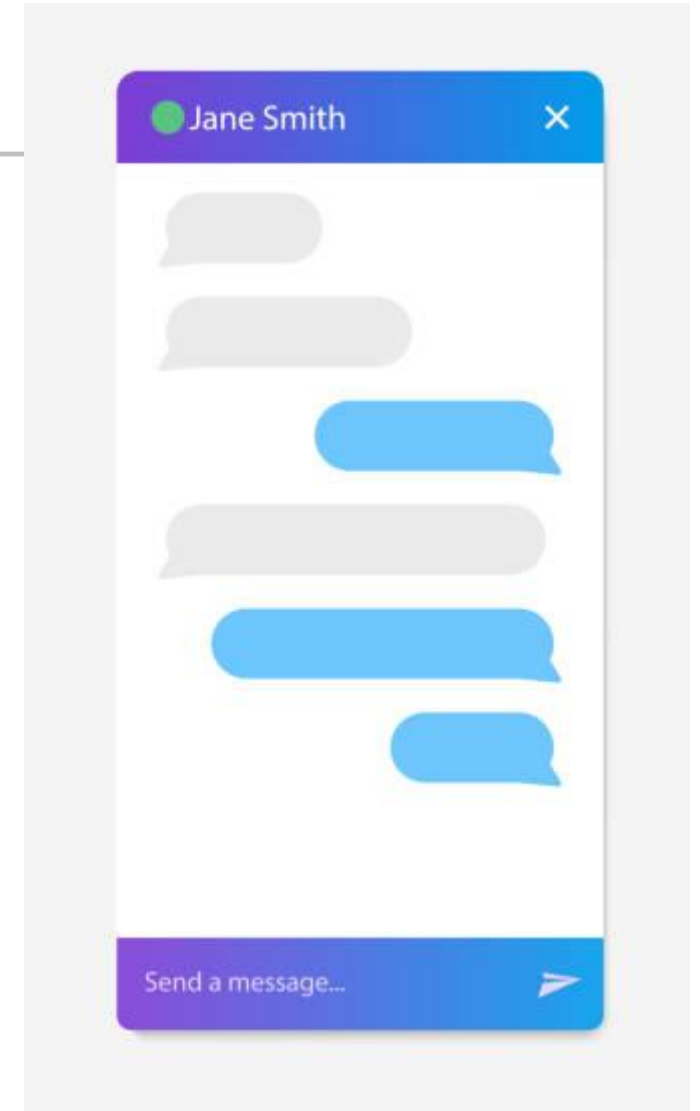


After the Witness Leaves (2 of 2)

- Consider whether there are additional allegations that you need to bring to the Title IX Coordinator
 - Remember: notice of allegations must be sent out before you can ask questions of a respondent.
- Ensure you are not leaving the burden of proof on any party or witness alone (106.45(b)(5)(i))

Physical Evidence

- Follow up on anything identified during interviews
- Is law enforcement involved? Could they be?
- Ensure physical evidence is in a secure location and documented in the investigation log. Chain of custody is important!



What about advisors or support persons in interviews?

Must provide parties the same opportunity to be accompanied by the advisor of their choice

- Nothing in the preamble prohibits support persons in the interview process (this is different at the hearing)
- Allowed to limit participation of advisor in process
- Whatever rules your institution selects, apply them equally to both parties

(106.45(b)(5)(iv))

Inspection and Review of Evidence

Provide ALL Evidence to both parties and advisors

- Include everything related to allegations, even if you don't expect decision-maker to rely on it
- Allow 10 days to review
- Allow written response
- Follow up where necessary
- Consider responses when preparing report (106.45(b)(5)(vi))

Preliminary Investigation Report



Create Investigative Report

- Summarize **facts**
- No determination
- Provide to parties and advisors
- Allow 10 days to review prior to hearing
- We will discuss report writing later today

Final Investigation Report





Mock Interviews

Hypothetical Report.

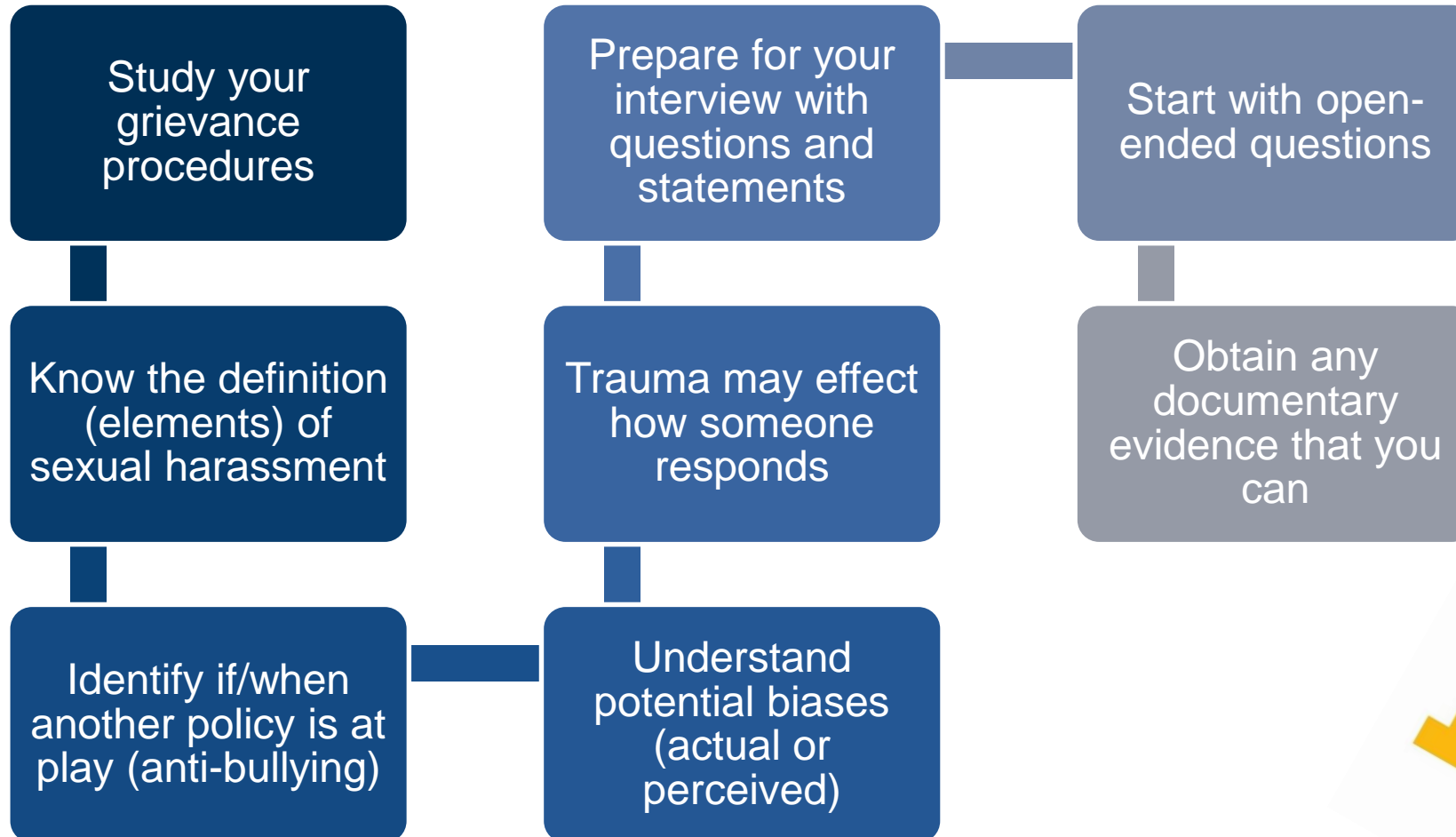
Same as previous.

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Key Takeaways





Writing the Report

Remember: The organizer of all relevant evidence.

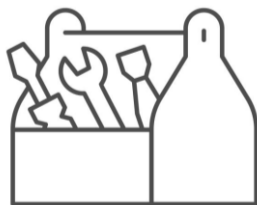
1 of 2



The **GATHERER** of all relevant evidence.



The **ORGANIZER** of all relevant evidence.



Here are some tools for how to best organize all the relevant evidence.

Remember: The organizer of all relevant evidence.

2 of 2

The Regulations provide that the investigator must create a report that:

- Fairly summarizes relevant evidence

(106.45(b)(5)(vii))

What does this mean?

Start with the basic information

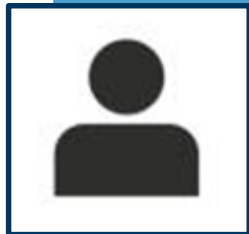
Identify factual information:



Complainant



Respondent



Investigator



Witnesses

- Perhaps organize by fact v. expert witnesses or by party whom requested the witness

Consider general organization

Natural and neutral organization suggestions:

- Chronological order
- By topic or allegation
 - Perhaps by chronology within each topic or allegation
- By chronology of how the information came in to the investigation
- By witness summary

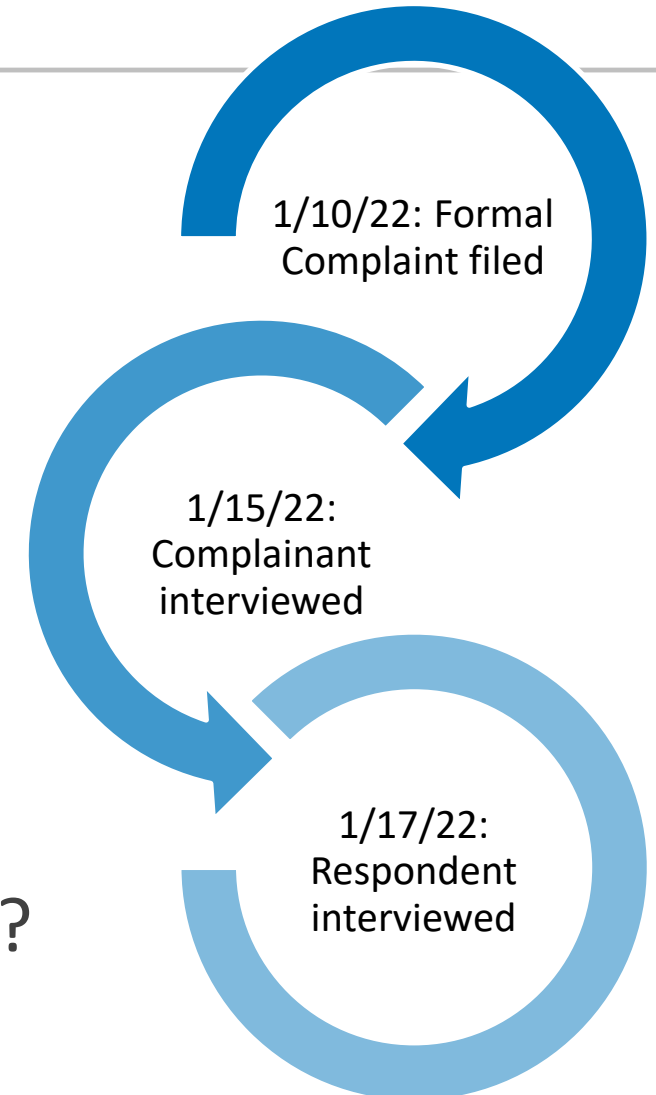
Explain how organized

Explain your structure. Example:

“The information in this report is a summary of the facts as agreed upon by the parties and the witnesses. Where there is a difference in the accounts, it is noted in the report. For the sake of clarity, the report is organized chronologically and by subject matter when appropriate.”

Other basic information to include

- Basic description of charges
- How did the complaint make its way to an investigation?
- Witnesses Interviewed
- Witnesses Not Interviewed (and why)
- The procedure followed, step-by-step
- Any procedural anomalies that need explained?



Identification of witness sign-off

If this is your practice:

“Each person interviewed was provided with a written copy of a summary of their interview, and was given an opportunity to provide feedback and approve the accuracy of the summary.”

- Did everyone do so?

A statement regarding relevant evidence

“All relevant information gathered during the course of the investigation has been included in this report.”

- Identify if you thought something was not relevant and why – consider still including in attachment for decision-maker
- Provide a table or list of all relevant evidence gathered and attach that evidence



Identify and include all alleged policy violations

- Definition of prohibited conduct alleged from applicable policy
- Related definitions as appropriate (e.g. consent, incapacitation) or any code of conduct included if done together
- Include verbatim, in entirety



What to do with evidence



Give an overview of evidence collected

AND



Attach as appendices any statements and important evidence

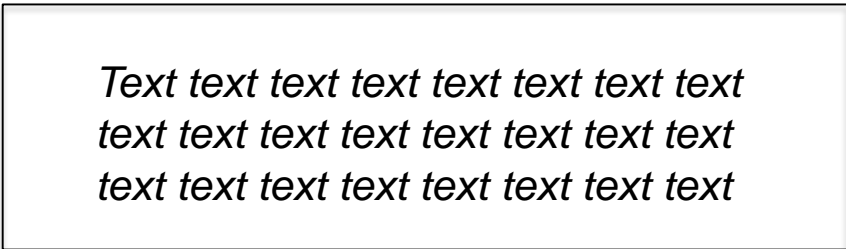
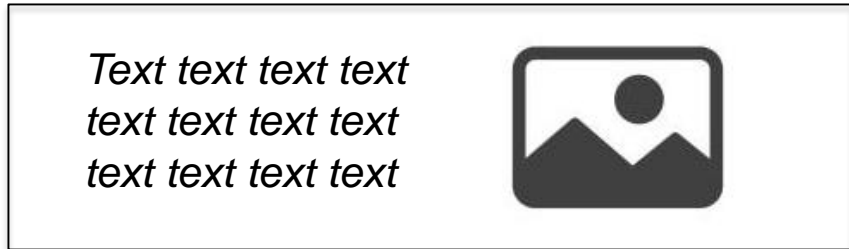
Be helpful to reviewers – keep it transparent!

Citations to the record – always

- Be helpful for your fact-finders!

Hearing packet or exhibits – helpful to number the pages sequentially for easy citation

Include screenshots/pictures in the report?



YES (and also in appendix)

Pros: can be illustrative and forefront; reviewer doesn't have to flip to the appendix

Cons: can make the report bulky

NO (just include in appendix)

Pros: can keep the report neat and concise

Cons: may lose impact if the viewer doesn't jump back and forth between the appendix and text, which can also be annoying for reviewers

What not to include in report (but note requested and why not included) 1 of 3

The specific type of evidence deemed not relevant in the Regulations:



Information protected by a legally recognized privilege



Party's medical, psychological, and similar records unless voluntary written consent



Rape Shield protection for Complainant

What not to include in report (but note requested and why not included) 2 of 3

If evidence is requested by a party and/or you determine it is not relevant, always explain that it was requested and why you determined it was not relevant.

What not to include in report (but note requested and why not included) 3 of 3

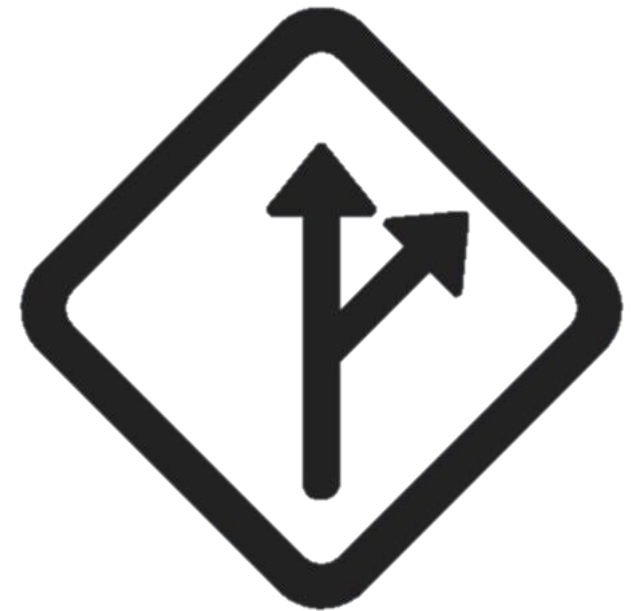
If you determined evidence was not relevant because of matters outside of the specific reasons identified in the regulations—i.e. because you did not think it was probative of material fact—explain and consider attaching in an Appendix

Helpful synthesis

If you can, synthesize the information from multiple parties and witnesses

Where the stories diverge:

- “Information from [Complainant]”
- “Information from [Respondent]”



Summary of Information 1 of 2

Don't forget to summarize impact on complainant if the charges require consideration as an element

- *“The investigator notes that this incident and the process may have had an impact on [Respondent]. However, to determine whether sexual harassment occurred, the hearing panel will be required to review the impact of the reported behavior on [Complainant]. This is the reason that the information here focuses solely on [Complainant].”*

Summary of Information 2 of 2

Undisputed Facts

- Series of numbered sentences

Disputed Facts

- Series of numbered sentences

Make sure you have facts for each element of each charge.

Do not make credibility determinations.



Bad vs. neutral and clear writing examples

Writing examples

Disclaimer: The following hypotheticals are not based on any actual cases we have handled or of which we are aware. Any similarities to actual cases are coincidental.

Example 1



Bad example: Rook was very believable when they said they had been attacked by Charlie.



Neutral and clear correction: Rook stated they were attacked by Charlie outside of North Hall. Rook provided the names of witnesses and contact information for those witnesses.

Example 2



Bad example: Charlie stated that they didn't think she had witnessed anything, but that I should check with her.



Neutral and clear correction: Charlie stated that Charlie did not believe that her roommate, Wendy, had witnessed anything. Charlie asked the investigator to follow up with Rebecca to verify what, if anything, Rebecca witnessed.

Example 3



Bad example: Rook seemed nervous at the interview and wasn't consistent with the information.



Neutral and clear correction: Rook provided the following information at the interview: that Rook had 3 whiskey sours, that Rook had at least 2 whiskey sours, and that Rook may not have had any whiskey sours.

Example 4



Bad example: Charlie requested that I follow up with their roommate, but I did not because the evidence seemed redundant.



Neutral and clear correction: Charlie requested the investigator follow up with her roommate, Wendy. The investigator scheduled an interview with the roommate to follow up on any additional information the roommate may have. The roommate's account of events at the interview, provided in Exhibit C, is consistent with Charlie's statement regarding the time period between 8 and 9am on January 6, 2023. The roommate was not present outside of that time frame and had no additional information.



Being Impartial and Avoiding Bias, Conflict of Interest, and Prejudgment of Facts

Impartiality and Avoiding Bias, Conflict of Interest and Prejudgment of Facts 1 of 2

Section 106.45 **requires** that investigators (and Title IX Coordinators, decision-makers, informal resolution officers and appeals officers)

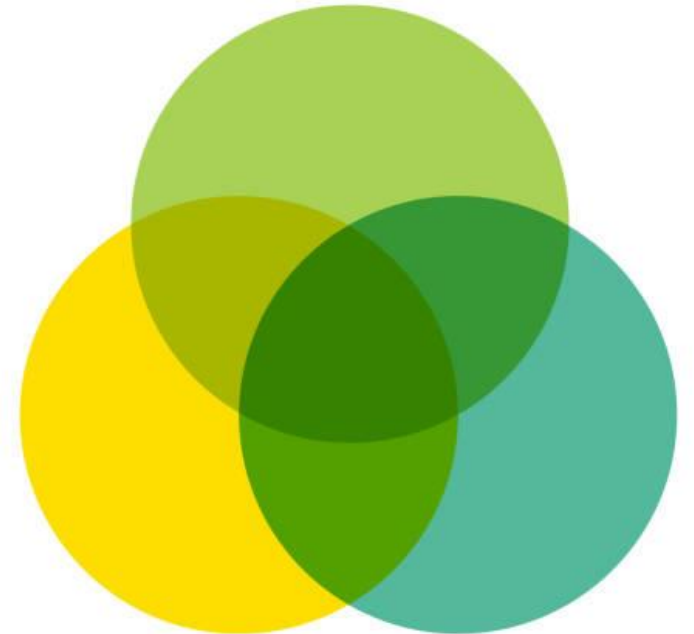
- be free from **conflict of interest, bias,** and
- be trained **to serve impartially** and **without prejudging facts.**

(30053)

Impartiality and Avoiding Bias, Conflict of Interest and Prejudgment of Facts 2 of 2

- We will discuss each of these individually and provide examples, but some of the factors for each overlap.
- For example, being impartial is greatly aided by not pre-judging facts.

(30249-30257; 30496)



Impartiality

- Be neutral
- Do not be partial to a complainant or a respondent, or complainants and respondents generally
- Do not judge: memory is fallible [and it's contrary to your neutral role] (30323)

Bias: Concerns raised in comments in preamble

- Neutrality of paid staff in Title IX positions
- Institutional history and “cover ups”
- Tweets and public comments
- Identifying as a feminist



Perceived v. Actual Bias

- Both can lead to the same perception (30252)
- On appeal of decisions, the Department requires the bias “that could affect the outcome of the matter”

How the Department tried to prevent bias

No single-investigator model (34 C.F.R. 106.45(b)(7)(i)):

- Decision-maker (or makers if a panel) must not have been the same person who served as the Title IX Coordinator or investigator (30367)
- Separating the roles protects both parties because the decision-maker may not have improperly gleaned information from the investigation that isn't relevant that an investigator might (30370)
- The institution may consider external or internal investigator or decision-maker (30370)

Bias: Objective Rules and Discretion 1 of 2

“[R]ecipients *should* have objective rules for determining when an adjudicator (or Title IX Coordinator, investigator, or person who facilitates an informal resolution) is biased, and the Department leaves recipients discretion to decide how best to implement the prohibition on conflicts of interest and bias...” (30250)

Bias: Objective Rules and Discretion 2 of 2

- **Discretionary**: Recipients have the discretion to have a process to raise bias during the investigation.
- **Mandatory**: Basis for appeal of decision-maker's determination per 34 C.F.R. 106.45(b)(8)(i)(C).

Conflict of Interest: Concerns raised in comments in preamble

- Financial and reputational interests of Title IX employee aligns with institution
- Past advocacy for a survivor's group
- Past advocacy for a respondent's group

Preamble Discussion on Bias and Conflict of Interest

1 of 3

- Final regulations “leave recipients flexibility to use their own employees, or to outsource Title IX investigation and adjudication functions, and the Department encourages recipients to pursue alternatives to the inherent difficulties that arise when a recipient’s own employees are expected to perform functions free from conflicts of interest and bias.”
(30251)

Preamble Discussion on Bias and Conflict of Interest

2 of 3

- No *per se* prohibited conflicts of interest in using employees or administrative staff
 - including supervisory hierarchies (but see portion about decision-makers and Title IX Coordinator as supervisor)
- No *per se* violations for conflict of interest or bias for professional experiences or affiliations of decision-makers and other roles in the grievance process

(30252-30253)

Preamble Discussion on Bias and Conflict of Interest

3 of 3

- Example: it is **not** a *per se* bias or conflict of interest to hire professionals with histories of working in the field of sexual violence (30252)
- Cautions against using generalizations to identify bias and conflict of interest and instead **recommends** using a **reasonable-person test** to determine whether bias exists.

Example of Unreasonable Conclusion that Bias Exists

- “[F]or 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” is **unreasonable** (30252)

Training, Bias, and Past Professional Experience

This required training (that you are sitting in right now) can help protect against disqualifying someone with prior professional experience

(30252)



Department: Review of Outcomes Alone Does Not Show Bias

- Cautioned parties and recipients from concluding bias or possible bias “based solely on the outcomes of grievance processes decided under the final regulations.”
- Explained: the “mere fact that a certain number of outcomes result in determinations of responsibility, or non-responsibility, does not necessarily indicate bias.”
(30252)

Examples of Bias

- An investigator used to supervise one of the parties;
- Information “gleaned” by the investigator is shared with the decision-maker outside the investigation report (in meetings to discuss pending cases, in passing while at work, etc.)



Avoiding Prejudgment of Facts at Issue

A good way to ensure impartiality and avoid bias:

- Keep an open mind and actively listen
- Each case is unique and different

Hypotheticals 1 of 2

Thinking about how to move forward with some issues of impartiality, conflict of interest and bias (perceived or actual).

Hypotheticals 2 of 2

Scenario for the next several hypotheticals:

You are an investigator for your Title IX Office. You have just been handed a formal complaint to investigate. An initial review did not identify you as having any conflict of interest or bias. But you will need to assess the following situations based on additional information you have.

Hypothetical 1

You review the report and realize that the name of one of the parties seems familiar to you from a past and unrelated investigation. You don't have any real memory of the case or any thoughts you have of that party, but you realize that could change when you meet the party.

What should you do?

Hypothetical 2

Your institution's student conduct office, Title IX office, and Greek life office meet weekly to discuss student issues and potential issues. In these meetings, you discuss specific students by name for continuity of care for students and to ensure everyone is on the same page. As a result, you have heard other employees discuss the parties in the case handed to you and some of it seemed to indicate that the Complainant may be dramatic.

What should you do?

Hypothetical 3

The formal complaint you are handed includes a former coworker from the Title IX Office who now works in a different office at the institution. You do not like this former coworker. You do not know the other party involved.

What should you do?

Hypothetical 4

During your investigation, the Respondent's attorney accuses you of bias because of your former work as a victim advocate.

What should you do?

The Bottom Line

Be Human & Be a Blank Slate



Questions?

Thank you for attending!



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