

Title IX Update

Dear Members of the Lehigh Community,

Lehigh is committed to creating an environment in which all people can engage in and contribute to learning, scholarship and creative activity. Consistent with this commitment, we work toward the goal of creating a campus that is free from discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual misconduct. Making progress towards this goal depends on the work of people in many roles, including staff who provide support for those who have been subject to discrimination or harassment and people who investigate and evaluate reports of violations of our policy. The work of the Equal Opportunity Compliance Coordinator (EOCC) and Title IX office is vital for supporting our campus and ensuring that we meet our obligations as an educational institution.

This summer we initiated two reviews of our Title IX process, one involving an internal committee of Lehigh faculty and staff and one engaging an external firm that specializes in Title IX compliance. These reviews evaluated our Title IX compliance activities as to the responsiveness and tone of communications and also assessed the current organizational structure in which the Title IX office reports to the Office of General Counsel. Executive summaries of these reports are available [HERE](#).

In summary, these reports concluded that our response to reports of sexual misconduct should be improved by enhancing responsiveness, improving support for reporters and survivors, and increasing education and communication among all members of the university community. We are writing today to inform the campus about some immediate actions that we are taking, including, adding staff to the EOCC/Title IX office, shifting the organizational position of the EOCC/Title IX office and creating a new advisory committee to the Provost on sexual misconduct. While these are the immediate steps, we are still evaluating a more comprehensive approach to improving our Title IX response, including the timeliness of communications, and for working to reduce sexual harassment and misconduct on campus. Over the next six months we will be assessing the impact of these initial changes in order to determine what additional steps we will take. We plan to describe these additional steps, possibly including additional staffing and changes in process, by no later than the start of next fall semester (August of 2023).

Additional details of these actions include:

EOCC/Title IX staffing: We are committed to hiring additional permanent staff for the EOCC/Title IX office, including a Deputy Title IX coordinator. As that search process progresses, we are providing immediate support to the office by engaging an outside firm to provide temporary case management and investigation support. This temporary support is in place and we believe that we will soon begin to see the effects in faster responses to complaints, reports and questions.

Change of organizational structure of the EOCC/Title IX office: The EOCC/Title IX office currently reports to the Office of the General Counsel. While this is not uncommon in higher education and reflects the fact that EOCC and Title IX compliance functions have important legal dimensions, this structure has created a perception on campus that Title IX concerns are primarily being considered as legal/compliance issues. At its core, Title IX is about equal access to education. Therefore beginning January 1, 2023, the EOCC/Title IX office will report to the Provost who will oversee the operations and support of the office. The Office of the General Counsel will still provide legal advice and support to the Title IX office as it does for many offices across campus.

Formation of Provost's Advisory Committee: The reviews identified important gaps in the broad understanding and awareness of the offices and mechanisms for supporting reporters and survivors of sexual harassment and assault. To improve understanding and awareness, we will create an advisory committee to the Provost charged with advising the Provost on how we can coordinate and expand activities to meet the goals of reducing sexual misconduct on campus and of improving our response when incidents are reported.

We believe that these steps are important immediate actions that we can take to advance our goals of reducing the incidence of sexual harassment and assault on campus. As we take these steps, we will be further evaluating additional actions to more fully meet our commitment to creating an environment in which all people can fully contribute to and benefit from Lehigh's mission to advance learning through teaching, research and service.