

Mercyhurst University
Grievance Policy for Addressing Formal Complaints of Sexual Harassment
Under the Title IX Regulations
2023 - 2024

1. Introduction

What is the purpose of the Title IX Grievance Policy?

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 prohibits any person in the United States from being discriminated against on the basis of sex in seeking access to any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. The U.S. Department of Education, which enforces Title IX, has long defined the meaning of Title IX’s prohibition on sex discrimination broadly to include various forms of sexual harassment and sexual violence that interfere with a student’s ability to equally access our educational programs and opportunities.

On May 19, 2020, the U.S. Department of Education issued a Final Rule under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 that:

- Defines the meaning of “sexual harassment” (including forms of sex-based violence)
- Addresses how this institution **must** respond to reports of misconduct falling within that definition of sexual harassment, and
- Mandates a grievance process that this institution **must** follow to comply with the law in these specific covered cases before issuing a disciplinary sanction against a person accused of sexual harassment.

Based on the Final Rule, Mercyhurst University will implement the following Title IX Grievance Policy, effective August 14, 2020. Please review the [full text of the Final Rule and its extensive Preamble](#) for more information.

How does the Title IX Grievance Policy impact other campus disciplinary policies?

In recent years, “Title IX” cases have become a short-hand for any campus disciplinary process involving sex discrimination, including those arising from sexual harassment and sexual assault. But under the Final Rule, Mercyhurst must narrow both the geographic scope of its authority to act under Title IX and the types of “sexual harassment” that it must subject to its Title IX investigation and adjudication process. ***Only*** incidents falling within the Final Rule’s definition of sexual harassment will be investigated and, if appropriate, brought to a live hearing through the Title IX Grievance Policy defined below.

Mercyhurst remains committed to addressing any violations of its policies, even those not meeting the narrow standards defined under the Title IX Final Rule.

Specifically, our campus has a Code of Conduct that defines certain behavior as a violation of campus policy, and a separate Sexual and Gender Based Misconduct Policy that addresses the types of sex-based offenses constituting a violation of campus policy, and the procedures for investigating and adjudicating those sex-based offenses.

To the extent that alleged misconduct falls outside the Title IX Grievance Policy, or misconduct falling outside the Title IX Grievance Policy is discovered in the course of investigating covered Title IX misconduct, the institution retains authority to investigate and adjudicate the allegations

Revocation by Operation of Law

Should any portion of the Title IX Final Rule, 85 Fed. Reg. 30026 (May 19, 2020), be stayed or held invalid by a court of law, or should the Title IX Final Rule be withdrawn or modified to not require the elements of this policy, this policy, or the invalidated elements of this policy, will be deemed revoked as of the publication date of the opinion or order and for all reports after that date, as well as any elements of the process that occur after that date if a case is not complete by that date of opinion or order publication. Should the Title IX Grievance Policy be revoked in this manner, any conduct covered under the Title IX Grievance Policy shall be investigated and adjudicated under the existing Sexual and Gender Based Misconduct Policy.

Non-Discrimination in Application

The requirements and protections of this policy apply equally regardless of sex, sexual orientationCb3 188822 6100 0 6(gder)al

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Formal Complaint

For the purposes of this Title IX Grievance Policy, “formal complaint” means a document – including an electronic submission - filed by a complainant with a signature or other indication that the complainant is the person filing the formal complaint, or signed by the Title IX Coordinator, alleging sexual harassment against a respondent about conduct within Mercyhurst’s education program or activity and requesting initiation of the procedures consistent with the Title IX Grievance Policy to investigate the allegation of sexual harassment.

Complainant

For the purposes of this Title IX Grievance Policy, Complainant means any individual who has reported being or is alleged to be the victim of conduct that could constitute covered sexual harassment as defined under this policy.

Relevant evidence and questions

“Relevant” evidence and questions refer to any questions and evidence that tends to make an allegation of sexual harassment more or less likely to be true.

“Relevant” evidence and questions do not include the following types of evidence and questions, which are deemed “irrelevant” at all stages of the Title IX Grievance Process:

Evidence and questions about the complainant’s sexual predisposition or prior sexual behavior unless:

- They are offered to prove that someone other than the respondent committed the conduct alleged by the complainant, or
- They concern specific incidents of the complainant’s prior sexual behavior with respect to the respondent and are offered to prove consent.

Evidence and questions that constitute, or seek disclosure of, information protected under a legally recognized privilege.

Any party’s medical, psychological, and similar records unless the party has given voluntary, written consent.

Respondent

For the purposes of this Title IX Grievance policy, Respondent means any individual who has been reported to be the perpetrator of conduct that could constitute covered sexual harassment as defined under this policy.

Privacy vs. Confidentiality

Contact Information for the Title IX Coordinator:

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Emergency Removal

Mercyhurst retains the authority to

If a complainant does not wish to make a Formal Complaint, the Title IX Coordinator may determine a Formal Complaint is necessary. Mercyhurst will inform the complainant of this decision in writing, and the complainant need not participate in the process further but will receive all notices issued under this Policy and Process.

Nothing in the Title IX Grievance Policy or Sexual and Gender Based Misconduct Policy prevents a complainant from seeking the assistance of state or local law enforcement alongside the appropriate on-campus process.

Multi-Party Situations

The institution may consolidate Formal Complaints alleging covered sexual harassment against more than one respondent, or by more than one complainant against one or more respondents, or by one party against the other party, where the allegations of covered sexual harassment arise out of the same facts or circumstances.

Determining Jurisdiction

The Title IX Coordinator, or designee, will determine if the Title IX Grievance Process should apply to a Formal Complaint. The Process will apply when all the following elements are met, in the

Mandatory Dismissal

If any one of these elements are not met, the Title IX Coordinator, or designee, will notify the parties that the Formal Complaint is being dismissed for the purposes of the Title IX Grievance Policy. Each party may appeal this dismissal using the procedure outlined in “Appeals” below.

Discretionary Dismissal

The Title IX Coordinator, or designee, may dismiss a Formal Complaint brought under the Title IX Grievance Policy, or any specific allegations raised within that Formal Complaint, at any time during the investigation or hearing, if:

A complainant notifies the Title IX Coordinator in writing that they would like to withdraw the Formal Complaint, or any allegations raised in the Formal Complaint;

The respondent is no longer enrolled or employed by Mercyhurst; or,

If specific circumstances prevent Mercyhurst from gathering evidence sufficient to reach a determination regarding

Notice of Allegations

The Title IX Coordinator will draft and provide the Notice of Allegations to any party to the allegations of sexual harassment. Such notice will occur as soon as practicable, after the institution receives a Formal Complaint of the allegations, if there are no extenuating circumstances.

The parties will be notified by their institutional email accounts if they are a student or employee, and by other reasonable means if they are neither.

The institution will provide sufficient time for the parties to review the Notice of Allegations and prepare a response before any initial interview.

The Title IX Coordinator, or designee, may determine that the Formal Complaint must be dismissed on the mandatory grounds identified above, and will issue a Notice of Dismissal. If such a determination is made, any party to the allegations of sexual harassment identified in the Formal Complaint will receive the Notice of Dismissal in conjunction with, or in separate correspondence 4 0 610 612 792 reW*nBT/TT1 1 Tf12 0 0 12 312.32 549.9T Form12 792 rection withl WëW*nE

Notice of Meetings and Interviews

Mercyhurst will provide, to a party whose participation is invited or expected, written notice of the date, time, location, participants, and purpose of all hearings, investigative interviews, or other meetings with a party, with sufficient time for the party to prepare to participate.

Delays

Each party may request a one-time delay in the Grievance Process of up to five (5) days for good cause (granted or denied in the sole judgment of the Title IX Coordinator, Director of Student Conduct, or designee) provided that the requestor provides reasonable notice and the delay does not overly inconvenience other parties.

For example, a request to take a five day pause made an hour before a hearing for which multiple parties and their advisors have traveled to and prepared for shall generally not be granted, while a request for a five day pause in the middle of investigation interviews to allow a party to obtain certain documentary evidence shall generally be granted.

The Title IX Coordinator, Director of Student Conduct, or designee shall have sole judgment to grant further pauses in the Process.

Investigation

General Rules of Investigations

The Title IX Coordinator and/or an investigator designated by the Title IX Coordinator will perform an investigation under a reasonably prompt timeframe of the conduct alleged to constitute covered sexual harassment after issuing the Notice of Allegations.

Mercyhurst, not the parties, has the burden of proof and the burden of gathering evidence, i.e. the responsibility of showing a violation of this Policy has occurred. This burden does not rest with either party, and either party may decide not to share their account of what occurred or may decide not to participate in an investigation or hearing. This does not shift the burden of proof away from Mercyhurst and does not indicate responsibility.

Mercyhurst cannot access, consider, or disclose medical records without

including fact and expert witnesses, and other inculpatory and exculpatory evidence, (i.e. evidence that tends to prove and disprove the allegations) as described below.

Inspection and Review of Evidence

Prior to the completion of the investigation, the parties will have an equal opportunity to inspect and review the evidence obtained through the investigation. The purpose of the inspection and review process is to allow each party the equal opportunity to meaningfully respond to the evidence prior to conclusion of the investigation.

Evidence that will be available for inspection and review by the parties will be any evidence that is directly related to the allegations raised in the Formal Complaint. It will include any:

1. Evidence that is relevant, even if that evidence does not end up being relied upon by the institution in determining responsibility;
2. Inculpatory or exculpatory evidence (i.e. evidence that tends to prove or disprove the allegations) that is directly related to the allegations, whether obtained from a party or other source.

All parties must submit any evidence they would like the investigator to consider prior to when the parties' time to inspect and review evidence begins.

The institution will send the evidence made available for each party and each party's advisor, if any, to inspect and review. The institution is not under an obligation to use any specific process or technology to provide the evidence and shall have the sole discretion in terms of determining format and any restrictions or limitations on access.

The parties will have ten (10) business days to inspect and review the evidence and submit a written response by email to the investigator. The investigator will consider the parties' written responses before completing the Investigative Report. Parties may request a reasonable extension as their designated extension request.

The institution will provide copies of the parties' written responses to the investigator to all parties and their advisors, if any.

The institution may provide the parties five (5) business days after the initial inspection and review of evidence, and before the investigator completes their Investigative Report, to provide additional evidence in response to their inspection and review of the evidence, and then provide the parties five (5) business days to inspect, review, and respond to the party's additional evidence through a written response to the investigator. Those written responses will be disclosed to the parties.

see and hear each other. At its discretion, Mercyhurst may delay or adjourn a hearing based on technological errors not within a party's control.

All proceedings will be recorded through audio and/or video recording. That recording will be made available to the parties for inspection and review.

Prior to obtaining access to any evidence, the parties and their advisors must agree not to disseminate any of the testimony heard or evidence obtained in the hearing or use such testimony or evidence for any purpose unrelated to the Title IX Grievance Process.

Continuances or Granting Extensions

Mercyhurst may determine that multiple sessions or a continuance (i.e. a pause on the continuation of the hearing until a later date or time) is needed to complete a hearing. If so, Mercyhurst will notify all participants and endeavor to accommodate all participants' schedules and complete the hearing as promptly as practicable. ~~Encl. 10/12/04 p. 11 OR 2013-03-04 (BWS) 10/12/04 (JST) (6)~~

Newly-discovered Evidence

As a

Participants in the live hearing

Live hearings are not public, and the only individuals permitted to participate in the hearing are as follows:

Complainant and Respondent (The Parties)

The parties cannot waive the right to a live hearing.

The institution may still proceed with the live hearing in the absence of a party and may reach a determination of responsibility in their absence, including through any evidence gathered that does not constitute a “statement” by that party.

For example, a verbal or written statement constituting part or all of the sexual harassment itself is not a “prior statement” that must be excluded if the maker of the statement does not submit to cross-examination about that statement. In other words, a prior statement would not include a document, audio recording, audiovisual reading, or digital media, including but not limited to text messages, emails, and social media postings, that constitute the conduct alleged to have been the act of sexual harassment under the formal complaint.

Mercyhurst will not threaten, coerce, intimidate or discriminate against the party in an attempt to secure the party’s participation.

The decision-maker cannot draw an inference about the determination regarding responsibility based solely on a party’s absence from the live hearing or refusal to answer cross examination or other questions.

The parties shall

Advisor of choice

The parties have the right to select an advisor of their choice, who may be, but does not have to be, an attorney.

The advisor of choice may accompany the parties to any meeting or hearing they are permitted to attend, but may not speak for the party, except for the purpose of cross-examination.

The parties are not permitted to conduct cross-examination; it must be conducted by the advisor. As a result, if a party does not select an advisor, the institution will select an advisor to serve in this role for the limited purpose of conducting the cross-examination at no fee or charge to the party.

The advisor is not prohibited from having a conflict of interest or bias in favor of or against complainants or respondents generally, or in favor or against the parties to the particular case.

The advisor is not prohibited from being a witness in the matter.

If a party does not attend the live hearing, the party's advisor may appear and conduct cross-examination on their behalf.

If neither a party nor their advisor appear at the hearing, Mercyhurst will provide an advisor to appear on behalf of the non-appearing party.

Advisors shall be subject to the institution's Rules of Decorum and may be removed for a violation of those Rules.

Witnesses

Witnesses cannot be compelled to participate in the live

the purposes of asking their own follow up questions; and any time necessary in order to enforce the established rules of decorum.

Should a Party or the Rctv{øu Advisor choose not to cross-examine a Party or Witness, the Party shall affirmatively waive cross-examination through a written or oral statement to vj g"J gctkpi "Dqctf "Ej ct0C"Rctv{øu waiver of cross-examination does not eliminate the ability of the Hearing Board to use statements made by the Party.

Live Cross-Examination Procedure

Gcej 'r ctv{øu'cf xkuqt'y km'eqpf wv'hkg"etqu-examination of the other party or parties and witnesses. During this live-cross examination the advisor will ask the other party or parties and witnesses relevant questions and follow-up questions, including those challenging credibility directly, orally, and in real time.

Before any cross-examination question is answered, Hearing Board Chair will determine if the question is relevant. Cross-examination questions that are duplicative of those already asked, including by Hearing Board may be deemed irrelevant if they have been asked and answered.

Review of Recording

The recording of the hearing will be available for review by the parties within five (5) business days, unless there are any extenuating circumstances. The recording of the hearing will not be provided to parties or advisors of choice.

Determination Regarding Responsibility

Standard of Proof

Mercyhurst uses the preponderance of the evidence standard for investigations and determinations regarding responsibility of formal complaints covered under this Policy. This means that the investigation and hearing determine whether it is more likely than not that a violation of the Policy occurred.

General Considerations for Evaluating Testimony and Evidence

While the opportunity for cross-examination is required in all Title IX hearings, determinations

Decision-makers shall not draw inferences regarding a party or

Where a party or witness' conduct or statements demonstrate that the party or witness is engaging in retaliatory conduct, including but not limited to witness tampering and intimidation, the Hearing Board may draw an adverse inference as to that party or witness' credibility.

Components of the Determination Regarding Responsibility

The written Determination Regarding Responsibility will be issued simultaneously to all parties through their institutional email account, or other reasonable means as necessary. The Determination will include:

1. Identification of the allegations potentially constituting covered sexual harassment;
2. A description of the procedural steps taken from the receipt of the formal complaint through the determination, including any notifications to the parties, interviews with parties and witnesses, site visits, methods used to gather other evidence, and hearings held;
3. Findings of fact supporting the determination;
4. Conclusions regarding which section(s) of the Code of Conduct, if any, the respondent has or has not violated.
5. For each allegation:
 - a. A statement of, and rationale for, a determination regarding responsibility;
 - b. A statement of, and rationale for, any disciplinary sanctions the institution imposes on the respondent; and
 - c. A statement of, and rationale for, whether remedies designed to restore or preserve equal access to the university's education program or activity will be provided by the recipient to the complainant; and
6. The university's procedures and the permitted reasons for the complainant and respondent to appeal (described below in "Appeal").

Timeline of Determination Regarding Responsibility

If there are no extenuating circumstances,

Appeals

Each party may appeal (1) the dismissal of a formal complaint or any included allegations and/or (2) a determination

any Respondent, and any witness, except as permitted by the FERPA statute, 20 U.S.C. 1232g, or FERPA regulations, 34 CFR part 99, or as required by law, or to carry out the purposes of 34 CFR part 106, including the conduct of any investigation, hearing, or judicial proceeding under this Title IX Grievance Policy.

No person may intimidate, threaten, coerce, or discriminate against any individual for the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege secured by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 or its implementing regulations.