

Feb. 20, 2017

Dear Members of the UA Community --

The University of Alaska has entered into a Voluntary Resolution Agreement (VRA) with the United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR). This is the culmination of OCR's three-year compliance review of the university's handling of sexual harassment and sexual assault cases on our campuses.

OCR's review began in May 2014 with the university providing more than 20,000 documents, including 274 sexual harassment and sexual assault files from 2011 to mid-2015. The agreement details a wide array of compliance problems, including 23 specific harassment and assault cases that exemplify problems from across the system. The VRA outlines specific steps we will take to improve safety and campus climate throughout the University of Alaska system. OCR will release a separate findings letter in the coming days, which will be a longer document containing more detail about specific cases. You should know that the university has not yet received the formal findings from OCR and will need time to respond to its details.

The university enters into the VRA not grudgingly but with dedication to improving safety and climate on our campuses. Our efforts will extend beyond its technical requirements. We will hold ourselves to high standards not because we are compelled to, but because you, the Board of Regents and all Alaskans deserve it and because it is the right thing to do.

The issues cited in the VRA range from very serious failures to minor documentation issues. But OCR also notes that "the UA system has taken several significant actions to remedy noncompliance with Title IX." In January 2015 we commenced our own review of sexual assault cases at all three universities. That allowed us to self-identify serious problems and start our efforts to correct those problems. In October 2015, we became the only university in the country to publicly admit our shortcomings in this area. We have been, and continue to be, committed to leading in addressing sexual harassment and assault at the university.

From the start of the review we have cooperated with OCR and we have continually and proactively taken steps toward improving campus safety. We have a long way to go, but we continue to build capacity and improve our responses. You also need to know that keeping our campuses safe is our responsibility. It requires that we adjudicate serious, difficult issues, while carefully protecting the rights of each party involved. We must make decisions based on facts, not all of which can be made public. So even when we do the appropriate things, one or the other party, perhaps both, may be unhappy with the result. Recognizing that dynamic will allow us to better work together toward the ultimate goal, reducing incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault on our campuses.

I applaud the vigilance of the UA community and encourage you to be outspoken about areas needing improvement. Progress depends on individuals working together to change attitudes and expectations. While much remains to be done, this is an important day for the university community. We again acknowledge our serious deficits, but today we commit to specific steps to address this problem head on. Please take a moment to read the agreement, which is posted at www.alaska.edu/titleIXcompliance.

Sincerely,

Jim Johnsen