

## **University to officially designate staff and faculty as responsible employees**

In February 2015, University of Alaska employees will receive letters designating them as responsible employees under Title IX, a federal law aimed at removing sexual inequity from the college environment, including addressing, including “sexual misconduct” such as sexual harassment and sexual violence.

As of May 2014, Title IX creates a duty for the university’s “responsible employees” to report sexual misconduct they become aware of to their campus Title IX coordinator or contact. Until now, the university has not formally designated “responsible employees.” At the University of Alaska “responsible employees” include all staff, all faculty, and Residence Life student employees, with the limited exception of counselors, clergy, or other persons with a professional license requiring confidentiality who are working within that license.

Student employees, with the exception of those working in Residence Life, are not designated responsible employees at the University of Alaska. However, all members of the university community are encouraged to report any suspected instances of sexual misconduct.

Official designation is particularly important right now as the university prepares to launch a federally-mandated climate survey to get a sense of views on sexual misconduct on campus. The climate survey is not generalizable research about assault and harassment in Alaska. This survey is intended to assess the current climate at UA, how well Title IX programs are working, and evaluate where improvements are needed. The nature of the survey may trigger a reaction, particularly in victims of sexual violence, and such individuals often need to talk to someone. Before that happens, it is important that employees understand their duties to report, and that the community understands that disclosing to a responsible employee will result in a report being made to the Title IX coordinator on their campus.

The university must ensure that employees understand what the “responsible employee” designation means and provide them with the resources to carry out their duty should it become necessary. In an effort to fulfill that obligation, the University educated the vast majority of its faculty and staff regarding their Title IX responsibilities over the past nine months. In the future, the responsible employee designation and Title IX awareness training will be incorporated into hiring and onboarding processes across the university system.

A responsible employee must report all relevant details of sexual misconduct to the Title IX coordinator or other university designee within 24 hours. The university is obligated to address sexual misconduct that a responsible employee knew or should have known about, and has this obligation regardless of whether the student, student’s parent or a third party decided to file a formal complaint. Importantly, the university must also provide the victim interim services, such as counseling, medical attention, housing options, class change options and reimbursements.

It is important to understand, however, that reporting information to a Title IX coordinator does not mean that there will necessarily be an investigation or that the police will be involved. Title IX is a highly confidential process. Students accessing the Title IX process can request that their name not be disclosed to the accused or that no investigation or disciplinary action be pursued. This request is taken seriously and will be honored unless there is indication of imminent threat to the community. Consistent reporting of sexual misconduct is necessary because it allows the university to offer victims interim services and allows the university to track predatory behavior, understand risky areas of campus, prevent future misconduct and ensure the safety of students.

Reporting sexual misconduct to a responsible employee is just one of a victim’s many options. Confidential, anonymous and Title IX disclosure options exist on all UA campuses.

CONFIDENTIAL Resources, e.g. counselors, medical personnel, anonymous hotlines:  
<http://www.alaska.edu/swbir/ir/publications/confidentialalaskaresources.pdf>

NON-CONFIDENTIAL Title IX Resources on Campus:  
<http://www.alaska.edu/swbir/ir/publications/nonconfidentialcampusresources.pdf>