



Background Information on the Office of Civil Rights Site Visit to Knox

What is OCR?

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is a part of the U.S. Department of Education, charged with enforcing certain federal civil rights in educational settings, including Title IX. It investigates complaints of discrimination, provides technical assistance to institutions to help achieve compliance with civil rights laws, and addresses problems with compliance.

Why is OCR coming to the campus?

Over the past few years, the OCR has conducted similar site visits at many colleges and universities. At Knox, the OCR is reviewing the College's overall policy and the procedures we utilize in responding to student allegations of sexual misconduct. OCR staff will also meet with select College staff and students.

Is this connected to a particular incident?

Yes. The College was contacted by the OCR in January in connection with its response to an incident during the fall term of 2013. Out of respect for the privacy of all the parties involved in incidents of this nature and the integrity of College procedures, the College does not discuss or comment publicly on particular allegations, complaints, or incidents of misconduct.

What did OCR ask for?

In addition to reviewing College records, the OCR has asked the College to arrange meetings with specific administrators, faculty, and staff involved in the College's response to sexual misconduct and also to arrange focus group meetings with selected students.

Why do they want to meet with focus groups?

It is typical for the OCR to seek to hear directly from students about a college's efforts to address sexual misconduct or discrimination.

With whom are they meeting?

In order to protect the privacy of students, faculty, and staff, and guarantee the integrity of the OCR inquiry, the College is not disclosing the identities of Knox community members who have been invited to meet with OCR representatives. It wouldn't be appropriate for the College to speculate on the content of these conversations, which are opportunities for OCR staff to have private and unfiltered contact with members of the College community.

What else did they ask for?

In response to the OCR's request, the College has provided a number of documents pertaining to our policies and procedures and to the incident in question. The College quickly made every effort to comply with the spirit and letter of OCR requests and work collaboratively with OCR staff to ensure an effective site visit.

What will we learn from this investigation?

The campus has been working to adopt best practices in addressing Title IX for some time, and we have confidence that we are making substantial progress. We welcome the OCR input and will utilize the findings to help us respond more effectively, promptly, and equitably to alleged violations and to make the campus a respectful, safe, and secure environment for all students, faculty, and staff.

Is this inquiry prompted by the fall 2013 announcement of changes to the Grievance Process?

No. The College has periodically reviewed its policy and procedures and began the review that led to the most recent changes in the summer of 2013. The OCR began their investigation of Knox in January 2014 in conjunction with a complaint filed in December 2013. The request for a site visit came in March 2014, and the College has been in communication with the OCR since then to finalize the details.

What is the College's stance on issues of sexual misconduct?

As outlined in the College's anti-discrimination policy, Knox is deeply committed to an inclusive campus environment in which all members of the community are respected and have equal access to educational opportunity. We see sexual misconduct as fundamentally incompatible with the College's mission and are committed to preventing and responding promptly and fairly to all violations.

What steps has the College taken to address these challenges?

Starting this past summer, the College undertook a significant review of its policies addressing discrimination under Title IX and, in particular, identified ways that we could strengthen our response to acts of sexual misconduct. To that end, we have trained a number of individuals to join our Title IX team and charged them with working to keep our campus free from discrimination and harassment. The College also formed a Task Force on Sexual Assault Prevention and Response that meets weekly under the leadership of Title IX Coordinator and Associate Dean of the College Lori Schroeder. The Task Force, in conjunction with the Title IX team, has developed a number of new initiatives: new print and web materials, campus-wide educational events, bystander intervention training, a confidential support group for survivors, and a new position for a counselor for violence prevention and educational outreach. In early May, students will be invited to participate in two anonymous surveys: the National Collegiate Health Assessment and a Knox campus climate survey, both aimed at understanding the extent and nature of sexual misconduct on the Knox campus.