

Rebuilding Trust and Community Working Group

In March 2021, the Rebuilding Trust and Community Working Group was formed when university leadership acknowledged that hurt and mistrust existed among the USF community following the release of the [Hulst and Handler Investigation Report](#) (January 2021). The stated goal of university leadership was to engage students, faculty and staff to work together to rebuild trust and commit to creating a culture and community at USF that stands in firm and demonstrable opposition to any and all instances of sexual misconduct and acts of discrimination. This small working group was comprised of four USF students (two undergraduate and two graduate), two full-time staff members and one full-time faculty member. The group met biweekly between April and June 2021 to read the Hulst and Handler Investigation Report and develop recommendations to be presented to Julie Orio and Joan McDermott on what additional steps can be taken to rebuild trust within the community. Jess Varga, Title IX Coordinator and Shannon Gary, Associate Vice President/Dean of Students met with the group to present information about Title IX, and made themselves available for questions throughout the process.

Our recommendations focus on addressing what we believe to be the key pain points leading to the loss of trust following the release of the Hulst and Handler Investigation Report. Student input also suggests that gaps exist in our mission at USF. Students learn one thing in the classroom, but observe what they perceive to be conflicting behavior from university leadership. We have attempted to frame all recommendations as action items to foster healing at USF, instead of simply identifying what went wrong in the past. We see promise in the many steps the university has made over the past six months, including the hiring of a Deputy Title IX Coordinator and Sexual Violence Resource Advocate. We also appreciate and support the commitment of University leadership to host community-wide listening sessions in order to maintain ongoing dialogue with students, faculty, staff and other stakeholders surrounding the topic of sexual violence education and prevention. In order for these efforts to be meaningful and effective, we trust that leadership will ensure adequate resources and support to build for success.

1. ***Communications from University Leadership:*** Although the current intent appears to be to provide comprehensive messaging related to Title IX incidents at USF, the actual impact is to overwhelm the student audience with lengthy emails resulting in missed messaging and a lack of trust. Communications need to be student-centered, proactive, ongoing and ideally use a variety of communication channels including social media. In order for students to listen and begin the process of rebuilding trust, University leadership needs to acknowledge that a problem exists, create accountability and show progress.
2. ***Title IX Education and Training:*** A need exists to create consistency and continuity across sexual violence education efforts, and to increase the focus on prevention and bystander intervention methods. Title IX education needs to be comprehensive, providing students with a clear vision of how resources can be effectively used as a tool to support their success. Students need to have a better idea of what to expect during

the Title IX process to avoid the perception that the system failed when there is a gap between expectations and reality.

3. **Title IX Office Location and Accessibility:** The Title IX office location should be visible, accessible and welcoming to all members of the university community. The Title IX office location should be a private space, nonadjacent to the Department of Public Safety and OSCRR, in order to reduce fear, intimidation and lack of privacy that may inhibit students from engaging in the Title IX process.
4. **Title IX Policies, Procedures and Processes:** Opportunities exist to implement more trauma-informed practices within the Title IX office. Trauma-informed services realize the impact of trauma and potential paths for recovery, recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma, respond by integrating knowledge about trauma into their approach, and resist re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014).
5. **Athletics:** Athletics Department leadership needs to address the culture in the department. Although the summary of findings in the Hulst and Handler Report was tethered by the limited scope of the report, the document should not be considered an endorsement of department culture. There was a significant amount of information in the report to document inappropriate behavior (by coaches and student-athletes), inconsistent policy enforcement by leadership, failures in communication at all levels, and a significant lack of training and preparation for staff who work directly with student-athletes. Athletics Department leadership needs to move beyond “we were not here” and develop more effective communication strategies within the department, and across the campus community, to address the past, present and future. Build trust by engaging in conversations, your silence is being perceived as dismissive, disengaged and lacking transparency.

The following are suggested action items related to the recommendations listed above.

Communications from University Leadership

- Create proactive, ongoing, student-centered messaging instead of relying on reactive messaging in response to problematic incidents and events.
- Utilize smarter communication channels to reach the student audience, including a vibrant social media presence.
- Develop a theme or social media campaign to capture the attention of the student audience, and to raise awareness about Title IX education and programming within the campus community.
- Host a focus group/listening session and invite representatives from key student groups to help identify ideas for more effectively communicating Title IX programming to students. Make sure to include the voices of student groups who are successful at effectively reaching the USF student audience (students repeatedly named ASUSF and BSU as examples).
- Create consistent and managed communications and engage in ongoing communications throughout the year.
- Effectively utilize the subject line in email communications to capture the attention of the intended audience.

- Think impact over intent with strategic communications. Avoid text heavy messages that are overwhelming and likely to remain unread.
- Consider more targeted communications to increase engagement (ie. 'HH 4th Floor Residents' vs. 'All Students').

Title IX Education & Training

- Perform a needs assessment to determine how to design Title IX trainings to best meet the needs of each audience.
- Consider including a pre-assessment and post-assessment to track attendee comprehension of Title IX trainings.
- Maximize the effectiveness of in-person Title IX trainings by creating an online pre-training module to cover terms, definitions and the history of Title IX.
- Consider adjusting the timing of in-person training sessions so that Title IX resources do not get lost in the numerous events that make up New Student Orientation. Students report being overwhelmed with too much new information at the beginning of the academic year, especially fall semester. Students also report that large group trainings, especially related to Title IX subject matter, can be awkward and information may be less likely to be retained if presented when the audience is already saturated from other orientation events.
- During in-person Title IX trainings, allow for small group work before large group presentations. Give people an opportunity to connect and build their comfort level so they are more receptive and able to retain information.
- Work with Human Resources to ensure that Title IX training is part of the onboarding process for all new faculty and staff members who work with students, or who fall under the category of 'mandatory reporter'.
- Perform outreach to identify existing faculty and staff who work with students, or who fall under the category of 'mandatory reporter', but have not completed Title IX training at USF. Offer robust and ongoing training and outreach to ensure all faculty and staff have the resources necessary to support a student who reports a potential Title IX incident.
- Utilize online Title IX trainings to reach students, faculty and staff with Title IX resources prior to coming to campus.
- Implement a card swipe system in order to accurately track attendance at in-person Title IX trainings.
- Perform audits to track compliance across campus related to Title IX training for mandatory reporters (students, faculty and staff).
- Identify funding to support paid peer educators in the Title IX office.
- Identify student leaders on campus and engage them as paid peer educators.
- Perform outreach to professors and coaches asking them to nominate students who may excel as paid peer educators for the Title IX office.
- Perform outreach to student leaders (RAs, Ambassadors, Go Team, Club Officers, etc.) to identify students who may excel as paid peer educators for the Title IX office.

Title IX Office Location and Accessibility

- Create a central, welcoming and accessible location for Title IX staff and programming (not adjacent to Public Safety or OSCRR).
- Secure a private office location (not open workspace/cubicle) for Title IX staff to ensure the confidentiality of complainants, respondents, witnesses, hearing committee members, and others involved in the Title IX process.
- Create satellite offices/locations to make Title IX staff more visible and accessible across campus (residence halls, gyms, libraries, etc.).
- Identify key staff members on campus to expand the visibility and reach of Title IX education and programming (consider outreach to club advisors, major advisors, academic program staff, CASA coaches, etc.).
- Create and promote online Title IX resources to the USF community to ensure that all faculty and staff understand how to identify support resources in the event of a return to remote instruction/campus closure (due to fires, COVID, etc.).
- Identify institutions who have successful Title IX programming. Invite colleagues from these institutions to provide feedback during future external reviews of the Title IX office.

Title IX Policies/Processes/Procedures

- Minimize/eliminate gaps between expectations and actual support provided by the Title IX process.
- Create a more effective follow-up protocol for students who decide not to proceed with an official Title IX process. Develop a clearly defined and formal referral process to engage other campus partners (CAPS, CASA, SDS, etc.) to support these students. Consider including a follow-up or check-in as part of the referral process to minimize the perception that 'the system failed'.
- Identify opportunities to make the Title IX process less daunting. Is there a way for students, faculty and staff members to engage with Title IX staff without fear of the process being 'all in'? We believe the Sexual Resource Advocate Position housed in CAPS is a significant step in the right direction, but an effort must be made to promote this new position to the campus community in order to realize the true benefits.
- Actively seek student feedback on the Title IX process.
- Host ongoing listening sessions with members of the campus community in order to stay abreast of problematic behaviors on campus (or the perception of problematic behaviors on campus). It should be noted that this was already identified as a goal in a [February 2021 announcement](#) to the USF community.
- Work with SHARE leadership to determine if there is a tool that would allow for tracking of housing assignments to ensure that a complainant is notified if a respondent is housed within a certain proximity to the complainant (on-campus housing).
- Incorporate training for Title IX investigators and hearing committee members that includes best practices for proper documentation throughout the Title IX process, and a commitment to trauma-informed support of complainants and respondents.

Athletics

- Athletics Department leadership, coaches, assistant coaches and support staff should participate in a group mandatory reporter training facilitated by the Deputy Title IX

Coordinator in order to eliminate gaps in understanding/communication surrounding Title IX processes, reporting, etc.

- Mandatory reporter training for Athletics Department leadership, coaches, assistant coaches and support staff should be completed prior to working with students in the fall semester. The Deputy Title IX Coordinator should maintain ongoing communications with coaches and teams throughout the academic year (regular check-ins, on-call access, team meetings, etc.) in order to ensure that student-athletes are effectively supported throughout the year.
- Invite the Deputy Title IX Coordinator to serve as Co-Chair on the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC).
- Title IX training for student-athletes should include in-person training by the Deputy Title IX Coordinator and ongoing check-ins.
- Title IX Training for student-athletes should begin as team-specific, but should eventually allow student athletes of all genders to participate in discussions, scenario-based training and other larger group work facilitated by Deputy Title IX Coordinator. Eventually, there should be opportunities for all student-athletes to participate in large group work together (men's and women's teams).
- Consider utilizing the athletic performance facility or a private office in the Sobrato Center as a confidential space for Title IX matters.
- Address the isolation of student athletes from the larger student population to reduce 'othering' that occurs between student-athletes and the general student population.
- Ensure that all coaches and players who participate in coach run youth camps held on the USF campus are vetted by the Title IX office to create an additional layer of accountability. Incentivize appropriate behavior by creating a connection to revenue-generating programs.
- The Athletic Director should commit to a policy of notifying a Head Coach of any disciplinary action related to an assistant coach or team-specific support staff member.

Conclusion

This working group would like to acknowledge that rebuilding trust will require a commitment from all members of the USF community. It is encouraging that University Leadership, including the Board of Trustees, has vowed to create a culture and community at USF that stands in firm and demonstrable opposition to any and all instances of sexual misconduct and acts of discrimination. We trust resources will be allocated to support the realization of this vision. We firmly believe that effective communications that engage students will also be vital to reaching this ambitious goal. This conclusion aligns with the new [Guiding Values and Strategic Priorities](#) being developed at USF related to student experience and success, "Students are a legacy of the university and essential to the realization of its mission and vision. A USF educational experience is co-created with students, resulting in their holistic development, wellbeing and academic success." It is clear from the [February 2021 announcement](#) that there is positive change taking place at USF related to Title IX programming, staffing and resources to support students. We hope that these recommendations support, complement and strengthen the ongoing and complex work that is already underway across campus.