



# GARRETT COLLEGE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VAWA) BROCHURE

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## INTRODUCTION

If you've tried to read Garrett College's procedures for addressing sexual offenses ([link](#)), it can be a challenge to understand some of their complexity. This guide is intended to help explain the College's responsibility under Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Additionally, this guide will:

- provide you with specific resources available both on and off campus
- provide you with details on available supportive measures
- educate you on your right to an Advisor and how they can assist you throughout the process
- inform you of policy definitions that describe prohibited conduct
- inform you of possible sanctions for policy violations
- provide you with common questions and answers asked by parties (Complainants and Respondents)

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## IF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

If you are experiencing an emergency, you can contact local police by dialing 9-1-1 or if on-campus, call 24-hour Campus Security at 240-321-5799.

You may also contact local police by using the non-emergency line: For Maryland State Police: 301-387-1011 or for Garrett County Sheriff's Office: 301-334-1911

1. Go to a safe place and speak with someone you trust. Tell this person what happened.
  2. Seek immediate medical attention if you are injured, believe you have been exposed to the risk of an STI/STD, or pregnancy.
  3. For your safety and well-being, immediate medical attention is encouraged. Further, being examined as soon as possible, ideally within 120 hours, is important in the case of rape or sexual assault. Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners are available at the Garrett Regional Medical Center, located at 251 N 4th St, Oakland, MD and they will ensure you receive proper care. The hospital will arrange for a specific medical examination at no charge or can work with you to arrange state reimbursement.
- To preserve evidence, it is recommended that you do not bathe, shower, douche, eat, drink, smoke, brush your teeth, urinate, defecate, or change clothes before receiving medical attention. Even if you have already taken any of these actions, you are still encouraged to have prompt medical care, and evidence may still be recoverable.
  - Typically, if police are involved or will be involved, they will obtain evidence from the scene, and it is best to leave things undisturbed until their arrival. They will gather bedding, linens or unlaundered clothing, and any other pertinent items that may be used for evidence. It is best to allow police to secure items in evidence containers, but if you are involved in transmission of items of evidence, such as to the hospital, secure them in a clean **paper** bag or clean bedsheet to avoid contamination.
  - If you have physical injuries, photograph or have them photographed, with a date stamp on the photo.
  - Record the names of any witnesses and their contact information. This information may be helpful as proof of a crime, to obtain an order of protection, or to offer proof of a campus



- policy violation.
- Try to memorize details (e.g., physical description, names, license plate number, car description, etc.), or even better, write notes to remind you of details, if you have time and the ability to do so.
  - If you obtain external orders of protection (e.g., restraining orders, injunctions, protection from abuse), please notify Campus Safety and Security or the campus Title IX Coordinator so that those orders can be observed on campus.
4. On campus counseling services can be arranged by contacting Susie Molek at [susie.molek@garrettcollege.edu](mailto:susie.molek@garrettcollege.edu). The Dove Center, the local victim advocate resource center, provides office hours on campus by contacting 1-800-656-4673, or emailing [dovecenter@gcdovecenter.org](mailto:dovecenter@gcdovecenter.org). These are both confidential resources. After regular business hours, or in any situation where an individual wishes, the Dove Center is also available and may be able to provide confidential assistance.
5. Contact the Title IX Coordinator, Shelley Menear, at 301-387-3037 or [shelley.menear@garrettcollege.edu](mailto:shelley.menear@garrettcollege.edu) (regular business hours M-F 8:30am-4:30pm). The Title IX Coordinator oversees compliance with college and federal policy, which includes: reporting, obtaining protective or restraining orders from local authorities, offer reasonable academic supports, changes to living arrangements, transportation resources or modifications, safety escorts, no contact orders, counseling services access, and other supports and resources as needed by a victim.
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## **CHOOSE HOW TO PROCEED**

You have options. You can: (1) do nothing until you are ready, (2) pursue resolution by the College, and/or (3) initiate criminal proceedings, and/or 4) initiate a civil process against the perpetrator. You may pursue whichever combination of options is best for you. If you pursue resolution by the College, your options can include a formal response or informal resolution. Supportive measures are available through the college whether you choose to pursue a resolution process or not. If you wish to have an incident investigated and resolved by the College, students should contact the Title IX Coordinator. Employees should contact either Human Resources or the Title IX Coordinator. Garrett College procedures will be explained and are summarized below.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

To make informed choices, all parties should be aware of confidentiality and privacy considerations, as well as institutional mandatory reporting requirements.

### ***Reporting to Law Enforcement***

Garrett College will not notify local/campus law enforcement when sex or gender-based discrimination, harassment, or violence occurs, unless a Complainant wishes or there is an emergency threat to health or safety or mandatory requirement. Complainants have the option to notify law enforcement directly, or to be assisted in doing so by campus authorities. If requested, campus officials can facilitate reporting to Campus Security or local law enforcement but may also respect a Complainant's request not to do so.

### ***Confidential Reporting***

If a Complainant wishes to keep the details of an incident confidential, they should speak with one of the resources outlined below. Information shared with these resources will remain confidential and will not be shared with the College or anyone else without express, written permission of the individual seeking services unless required by law or court order.



- On-campus Mental Health Counselor, Susie Molek, [susie.molek@garrettcollege.edu](mailto:susie.molek@garrettcollege.edu)
- On-campus Garrett Regional Medical Center health clinic providers and staff
- On-campus Victim Advocates from the Dove Center at 1-800-656-4673, or emailing [dovecenter@gcdovecenter.org](mailto:dovecenter@gcdovecenter.org).
- Off-campus (non-employees):
  - Licensed professional counselors and other medical providers
  - Local rape crisis counselors
  - Domestic violence resources
  - Local or state assistance agencies
  - Clergy/Chaplains
  - Attorneys

### ***Mandated Reporting***

All employees not designated as confidential above are mandated reporters. This means they are required to share information that you have disclosed to them with the Title IX Coordinator, though that does not obligate you to any formal involvement. The Title IX Coordinator will simply reach out to you to offer support and the opportunity to file a formal complaint.

If a Complainant has requested that a Mandated Reporter maintain the Complainant's anonymity, the Mandated Reporter may do so unless it is reasonable to believe that a compelling threat to health or safety may exist. The Mandated Reporter can consult with the Title IX Coordinator on that assessment without revealing personally identifiable information.

Anonymous notice will be investigated by the College to the extent possible, both to assess the underlying allegation(s) and to determine if supportive measures or remedies can be provided. However, depending on what information is shared, anonymous notice typically limits the College's ability to investigate, respond, and provide remedies.

When a Complainant has made a request for anonymity, the Complainant's personally identifiable information may be withheld by a Mandated Reporter, but all other details must be shared with the Title IX Coordinator. Mandated reporters may not be able to maintain requests for anonymity for Complainants who are minors, elderly, and/or disabled, depending on state reporting of abuse requirements.

### ***Officials with Authority or OWAs***

The President, all Deans, the Director of Human Resources, Director of Student Development, and Campus Safety and Security staff have been designated as Officials with Authority to institute supportive measures and provide notice to the Title IX Coordinator. Giving an OWA notice of an incident will result in the offering of supportive measures and options for formal and informal resolution. If a formal complaint is filed with an OWA or the Title IX Coordinator, such incidents will be investigated and resolved in a prompt and equitable manner under the College's resolution procedures, which are discussed later within this brochure.

You may request that the Title IX Coordinator provide you with supportive measures and resources without initiating a formal resolution process. If you wish to pursue a formal resolution process, the Title



IX Coordinator will be unable to honor any request for confidentiality. The Respondent must be provided sufficient information, including the identity of the Complainant, to allow them to appropriately respond.

If the College decides it is obligated to pursue formal resolution based on the notice you have given, the Title IX Coordinator can initiate a complaint. You are not obligated to participate in the resolution process as Complainant, or you could participate as a witness, instead. Regardless of whether you participate, you will have all the rights to which a Complainant is entitled, if you want them. The ability of the College to enforce its policies may be limited if you decide not to participate at all.

Duties with respect to minors (those under age 18) may require reporting to state agencies and/or local law enforcement. As a result, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

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## **SEXUAL MISCONDUCT: RISK REDUCTION FOR INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, STALKING, SEXUAL HARASSMENT, AND SEXUAL ASSAULT**

While victim-blaming is never appropriate and Garrett College fully recognizes that only those who commit sexual offenses are responsible for their actions, the College provides the suggestions that follow to help members of the campus community reduce their risk of being victimized and their risk of committing sexual offenses.

### ***Reducing the Risk of Victimization***

- ✓ Make any limits and/or boundaries you may have known as early as possible.
- ✓ Tell a sexual aggressor “no,” as clearly and firmly as possible.
- ✓ Remove yourself, if possible, from an aggressor’s physical presence.
- ✓ Reach out for help, either from someone who is physically nearby or by calling someone. Bystanders around you may be waiting for a signal that you need help.
- ✓ Take affirmative responsibility for your alcohol and/or drug consumption, understanding that alcohol and drugs can increase your vulnerability to sexual victimization.
- ✓ Look out for your friends and ask them to look out for you. Respect them, and ask them to respect you, but be willing to challenge each other about high-risk choices.

### ***Reduce the Risk of Being Accused of A Sex Offense***

- ✓ Show your potential partner respect if you are in a position of initiating sexual behavior.
- ✓ If they say “no,” accept it and don’t push. If you want a yes, ask for it, and don’t proceed without clear permission.
- ✓ Communicate your intentions to your potential sexual partner clearly and give that person a chance to share their intentions and/or boundaries with you.
- ✓ Respect personal boundaries. If you are unsure what’s okay in any interaction, ask.
- ✓ Avoid ambiguity. Just ask. Don’t make assumptions about consent, about whether someone is attracted to you, how far you can go with that person, or if the individual is physically and mentally able to consent. If you have questions or are unclear, you *don’t* have consent.
- ✓ Don’t take advantage of the fact that someone may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, even if that person chose to become that way. Their loss of control does not put you in control.
- ✓ Be on the lookout for mixed messages. That should be a clear indication to stop and talk about what your potential partner wants or doesn’t want to happen. They may be undecided about how far to go with you, or you may have misread a previous signal.
- ✓ Respect the timeline for sexual behaviors with which others are comfortable and understand



that everyone is entitled to change their minds.

- ✓ Recognize that even if you don't think you are intimidating in any way, your potential partner may be intimidated by or fearful of you, perhaps because of your sex, physical size, or a position of power or authority you may hold.
- ✓ Do not assume that someone's silence or passivity is an indication of consent. Pay attention to both verbal and non-verbal signals to avoid misreading intentions.
- ✓ Understand that consent to one type of sexual behavior does not automatically grant you consent to other types of sexual behaviors. If you are unsure, stop and ask.
- ✓ If your partner indicates a need to stop, or withdraws consent, respect them. Immediately.
- ✓ If you've had consent with your partner previously, still check in with them. Just because something was okay with them before doesn't mean it will be okay in the future.

### **A BRIEF SUMMARY OF TITLE IX**

- Title IX protects students and employees who are impacted by sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. When these behaviors occur, and a formal complaint is made, the College is obligated to address and remedy the complaint to ensure that no one is denied effective access to the educational program or activities of Garrett College.
- Colleges have jurisdiction requirements that they must follow to determine whether a complaint falls within Title IX or is to be addressed within other College policies and procedures.
- Complainants are well-protected by the regulations in terms of supportive measures that are offered by institutions to try to address the impact of sex offenses.
- Complainants and Respondents are each entitled to an Advisor of their choosing (who can be an attorney) throughout the resolution process, and the College can provide a non-attorney Advisor to each party, if needed.
- The regulations have created options for informal resolution that were not available before 2020.
- To protect Respondents' due process rights, institutions are required to use a formal grievance process for certain types of allegations. That formal process includes an investigation, a live hearing, questioning of the parties through their Advisors, a determination by an objective Decision-maker, and an appeal.

### ***When Does Title IX Apply?***

Title IX only applies when the College has jurisdiction over the complaint. This happens when the Complainant is participating in (or attempting to participate) in Garrett College's educational program or activities, AND the Respondent is a student or employee of Garrett College, AND the behavior occurred within the College's control in the United States (meaning not on private property, outside the scope of the educational program, etc.).

If it is unclear whether Title IX applies to your situation, contact the Title IX Coordinator for additional assistance. If Title IX does not apply to your situation, the conduct may still be addressable under other College policies. For such complaints involving students, contact Rich Schofield, Director of Student Development, at 301-387-3119. For such complaints involving employees, contact Janis Bush, Director of Human Resources, at 301-387-3049.

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### **A BRIEF SUMMARY OF VAWA**



The Violence Against Women Act §304 (VAWA) was originally enacted in 1994 to address concerns with violent crimes and violence against women. T

The major relevant provisions of VAWA are:

- A requirement for institutions to maintain statistics about the number of incidents of dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking that meet the specific definition of those terms
- Requirement for institutions to provide primary prevention programs to incoming students and new employees that must include: a statement that the institution prohibits the crimes of dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking; the definition of consent in reference to sexual activity; a description of safe and positive options for bystander intervention; information on risk reduction; and information on the institution's policies and procedures after a sex offense occurs; and an obligation to describe all of these within the College's [Annual Security Report](#)
- A requirement to provide ongoing prevention and awareness campaigns for students and employees and to describe these in the annual security report
- A requirement to describe each type of disciplinary proceeding used by the institution; the steps, anticipated timelines, and decision-making process for each type of disciplinary proceeding that includes how to file a disciplinary complaint, and how the institution determines which type of proceeding to use based on the circumstances of an allegation of dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking
- A requirement for institutions to describe the range of protective (supportive) measures that the institution may offer
- A requirement for institutions to provide a prompt, fair, and impartial disciplinary proceeding in which: officials are appropriately trained and do not have a conflict of interest or bias for or against any party; the Complainant and Respondent have equal opportunities to have others present, including an Advisor of their choice; the Complainant and Respondent receive simultaneous notification, in writing, of the results of the hearing and any available appeal procedures; the procedures completed in a reasonable prompt timeframe; the Complainant and Respondent are given timely notice of meetings at which one or the other or both may be present; and the Complainant and the Respondent and their Advisors are given timely and equal access to information that will be used during formal and informal disciplinary meetings and hearings

There are a lot of similarities between Title IX and VAWA compliance. Ultimately, both ensure Complainants and Respondents have a full understanding of their rights, the institution's responsibilities, and transparency with navigating the institution's process for resolving reported sex offenses.

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## **POLICY TERMINOLOGY AND SEX OFFENSE DEFINITIONS**

There is certain terminology used in both the policy and procedures that are important for you to know. Additionally, members of the Title IX team will use these terms in their written and verbal communication. Below is a chart of the most common terminology used and its definition:

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
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<b><i>Actual Knowledge</i></b>	Notice of sexual harassment or allegations of sexual harassment to the Title IX Coordinator or any College official who has the authority to institute corrective measure on behalf of Garrett College
<b><i>Complainant</i></b>	An individual who is alleged to be the victim of conduct that could constitute sexual harassment
<b><i>Formal Complaint</i></b>	A document filed by a Complainant or signed by the Title IX Coordinator alleging sexual harassment against a Respondent and requesting that the College investigate the allegations of sexual harassment
<b><i>Respondent</i></b>	An individual who has been reported to be the perpetrator of conduct that could constitute sexual harassment
<b><i>Supportive Measures</i></b>	Non-disciplinary, non-punitive individualized services offered as appropriate, as reasonably available, and without fee or charge to the Complainant or the Respondent before or after the filing of a formal complaint or where no formal complaint has been filed
<b><i>Advisor</i></b>	A person chosen by a party or appointed by the institution to accompany the party to meetings related to the resolution process, to advise the party on that process, and to conduct questioning for the party at the hearing, if any
<b><i>Confidential Resource</i></b>	An employee who is not a Mandated Reporter of notice of harassment, discrimination, and/or retaliation
<b><i>Decision-Maker</i></b>	The person, panel, and/or Chair who hears evidence, determines relevance, and makes the final determination of whether the policy has been violated and/or assigns sanctions
<b><i>Investigator</i></b>	The person or persons designated by the College to gather facts about an alleged violation of the policy, assess relevance and credibility, synthesize the evidence, and compile this information into an investigation report of relevant evidence and a file of directly related evidence





<b>Mandated Reporter</b>	An employee of the College who is obligated by policy to share knowledge, notice, and/or reports of harassment, discrimination, and/or retaliation with the Title IX Coordinator
<b>Notice</b>	When an employee, student, or third-party informs the Title IX Coordinator or other Official with Authority of the alleged occurrence of harassing, discriminatory, and/or retaliatory conduct
<b>Official with Authority (OWA)</b>	An employee of the College explicitly vested with the responsibility to implement corrective measures for harassment discrimination, and/or retaliation on behalf of the College
<b>Parties</b>	The Complainant(s) and Respondent(s), collectively

Garrett College’s Sexual Harassment policy is intended to define expectations for appropriate conduct and outline resolution processes to address conduct that does not meet these expectations. You can review the College’s full policy on the [Policies and Procedures](#) page.

Sex offenses, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and/or stalking are violations of the College’s Student Conduct Code and its sexual harassment policy. A number of federal laws and regulations, including Title IX, VAWA, and the Clery Act, mandate how institutions of higher education must respond to sex offenses. Many types of sex offenses also constitute violations of Maryland law.

Members of the campus community, guests, and visitors have a right to be free from sexual offenses and to be protected by College policy regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. All members of the campus community must conduct themselves in a way that does not infringe upon the rights of others. When individuals are found to have violated policy, the College will impose serious sanctions, as noted in the Sanctions section of this document.

## **SEX OFFENSE DEFINITIONS**

### **Sexual Harassment**

Garrett College has adopted the following definition of Sexual Harassment in order to address the unique environment of an academic community, which consists not only of employer and employees, but of students as well.

Acts of sexual harassment may be committed by any person upon any other person, regardless of the sex, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity of those involved.

Sexual Harassment, as an umbrella category, includes the offenses of sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking, and is defined as:





Conduct on the basis of sex that satisfies one or more of the following:

Quid Pro Quo:

- an employee of the Garrett College,
- conditions the provision of an aid, benefit, or service of the Garrett College,
- on an individual's participation in unwelcome sexual conduct.

Sexual Harassment:

- unwelcome conduct,
- determined by a reasonable person,
- to be so severe, and
- pervasive, and,
- objectively offensive,
- that it effectively denies a person equal access to Garrett College's education program or activity.<sup>1</sup>

Sexual Assault:

- any sexual act directed against another person
- without the consent of the Complainant
- including instances in which the Complainant is incapable of giving consent.

Dating Violence:

- violence,
- on the basis of sex,
- committed by a person,
- who is in or has been in a social relationship of romantic or intimate nature with the Complainant.
- The existence of such a relationship shall be determined based on the Complainant's statement and with consideration of the length of the relationship, they type of relationship, and the frequency of interaction between the person involved in the relationship. For the purposes of this definition-
- Dating violence includes, but is not limited to, sexual or physical abuse or the threat of such abuse.
- Dating violence does not include acts covered under the definition of domestic violence.

Domestic Violence:

- Violence,
- On the basis of sex,
- Committed by a current or former spouse or intimate partner of the Complainant,
- By a person with whom the Complainant shares a child in common, or
- By a person who is cohabitating with, or has cohabitated with, the Complainant as a

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<sup>1</sup> Unwelcomeness is subjective and determined by the Complainant (except when the Complainant is below the age of consent). Severity, pervasiveness, and objective offensiveness are evaluated based on the totality of the circumstances from the perspective of a reasonable person in the same or similar circumstances ("in the shoes of the Complainant"), including the context in which the alleged incident occurred and any similar, previous patterns that may be evidenced.



- spouse or intimate partner, or
- By a person similarly situated to a spouse of the Complainant under the domestic or family violence laws of your state, or
- By any other person against an adult or youth Complainant who is protected from that person's acts under the domestic or family violence laws of your state.

#### Stalking:

- Engaging in a course of conduct,
- On the basis of sex,
- Directed at a specific person, that would
  - Cause a reasonable person to fear for the person's safety, or the safety of others; or
  - Suffer substantial emotional distress.

#### Sexual Exploitation:

- One person taking non-consensual or abusive sexual advantage of another for their own advantage or benefit, or to benefit or advantage anyone other than the one being exploited, and that behavior does not otherwise constitute one of the other sexual misconduct offenses.

## CONSENT

**knowing, voluntary, and clear permission by word or action to engage in sexual activity**

In all sexual encounters, it is important that you obtain consent. Each of us is responsible for obtaining consent and has a right to choose to give consent or not give consent. Consent is:

- Informed, knowing, and voluntary (freely given)
- Active (not passive)
- Affirmative, clear words or actions that create mutually understandable permission regarding the conditions of sexual or intimate activity
- Not something that can be given by someone who is known to be, or who should be known to be, mentally or physically incapacitated
- Not something that can be obtained by use of physical force, compelling threats, intimidating behavior, or coercion

If consent is withdrawn, sexual activity must stop reasonably immediately. Any party can place conditions on their willingness to consent, and those conditions must be respected.

People may experience the same interactions differently, therefore each party is responsible for making sure that their potential partner has provided ongoing, clear consent to engage in any sexual activity or contact.

Consent to some forms of sexual activity (e.g., kissing, fondling, etc.) should not be construed as consent for other kinds of sexual activities (e.g., intercourse).



In Maryland, Consent is not specifically defined. However, Maryland law provides that a person commits a sex crime if that person engages in “vaginal intercourse” or “sexual act” with another:

- (1) by force, or the threat of force, without the consent of the other;
- (2) if the victim is a substantially cognitively impaired individual, a mentally incapacitated individual, or a physically helpless individual, and the person performing the act knows or reasonably should know that the victim is a substantially cognitively impaired individual, a mentally incapacitated individual, or a physically helpless individual;
- (3) if the victim is under the age of 14 years, and the person performing the act is at least 4 years older than the victim;
- (4) if the victim is 14 or 15 years old, and the person performing the act is at least 21 years old;

or

(5) if the victim is 14 or 15 years old, and the person performing the act is at least 4 years older than the victim.

**Force** is the use of physical violence and/or physical imposition to gain sexual access. Force also includes threats, intimidation (implied threats), and coercion that is intended to overcome resistance or produce consent (e.g., “Have sex with me or I’ll hit you,” which elicits the response, “Okay, don’t hit me, I’ll do what you want.”).

Sexual activity that is forced is, by definition, non-consensual, but non-consensual sexual activity is not necessarily forced. Silence or the absence of resistance alone is not consent. Consent is not demonstrated by the absence of resistance. While resistance is not required or necessary, it is a clear demonstration of non-consent.

**Coercion** is unreasonable pressure for sexual activity. Coercive conduct differs from seductive conduct based on factors such as the type and/or extent of the pressure used to obtain consent. When someone makes clear that they do not want to engage in certain sexual activity, that they want to stop, or that they do not want to go past a certain point of sexual interaction, continued pressure beyond that point can be coercive.

**Incapacitation** is defined as a state in which individuals are unable to make rational, reasonable decisions because they lack the capacity to understand the “who, what, when, where, why, or how” of a situation or interaction. Individuals cannot sexually consent if they are unable to understand what is happening, or if they are disoriented, helpless, asleep, or unconscious for any reason. That applies even if it is because they voluntarily consumed alcohol or drugs. Unless consent is “knowing,” it is not valid. Individuals engaging in sexual activity who know or should have known that the other party is incapacitated are engaging in sexual misconduct.

The fact that a Respondent was intoxicated and therefore did not realize that the Complainant was incapacitated does not excuse sexual assault.



## CAMPUS PROCEDURES FOR ADDRESSING SEX OR GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT, AND VIOLENCE

Garrett College's full grievance process for sexual harassment defined above and in accordance with the regulations can be accessed on the College's [Policies and Procedures](#) page.

The College treats Complainants and Respondents equitably by providing remedies to a Complainant when a determination of responsibility for sexual harassment has been made against the Respondent and by following a grievance process that complies with the Title IX regulations and VAWA.

Here is an overview of the major steps in the process:

### ***Step One: INTAKE***

The Title IX Coordinator may assist the Complainant with understanding the policy and procedures, their options, and accessing resources. Assuming the Complainant chooses to file a complaint and move forward with a formal or informal resolution process, the next step is an Initial Assessment. If there is an anonymous report, third-party report, or an unidentified Complainant, the Title IX Coordinator will attempt to: (1) take appropriate action to determine who was impacted and/or involved in the reported behavior to offer them supportive measures and resources and explain their process options, and (2) take reasonable action to stop the behavior, remedy its effects on individuals and the campus community, and prevent it from recurring in the future.

All resolutions will be conducted by officials who receive annual training on issues related to sexual harassment, which includes domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The Title IX Coordinator, Investigators, Decision-makers, and any person who facilitates an informal resolution process are required to be trained on: the definitions of sexual harassment; the scope of the College's education program or activity; how to conduct an investigation and grievance process that includes hearings, appeals, and informal resolution processes, as applicable; and serving impartially, including by avoiding prejudgment of the facts at issue, identifying conflicts of interest, and bias.

Additionally, Decision-makers must receive training on any technology used at a live hearing and on issues of relevance of questions and evidence, including when questions and evidence about the Complainant's sexual predisposition or prior sexual behavior are not relevant. Any materials used for training the Title IX team will not rely on sex stereotypes and will promote impartial investigations and adjudications of formal Complainants of sexual harassment. You can view the training materials provided to the Title IX team at: [Equity And Compliance - Garrett College](#).

The College resolution process is confidential. The institution will protect the confidentiality of parties throughout the resolution process, consistent with the provisions of state and federal law. Any required release of information about a resolution will be accomplished without the inclusion of identifying information about the Complainant. Information about the Respondent will only be released to the extent permitted by law.



### **Step Two: INITIAL ASSESSMENT**

An initial assessment of the allegations is made by the Title IX Coordinator to determine appropriate jurisdiction and applicable policies/procedures. Under the federal Title IX regulations, the Title IX Coordinator is required to dismiss any formal complaint if one or more of the following is true:

- The alleged conduct would not constitute sexual harassment as defined within the Sexual Harassment policy, even if proved;
- The alleged conduct did not occur in Garrett College's education program or activity;
- The alleged conduct did not occur against a person in the United States; or
- The Complainant is not participating or attempting to participate in Garrett College's education program or activities at the time of filing the formal complaint.

Additionally, the Title IX Coordinator *may* dismiss any formal complaint if one or more of the following is true:

- At any time during the investigation or hearing a Complainant notifies the Title IX Coordinator in writing that the Complainant would like to withdraw the formal complaint or any allegations therein;
- The Respondent is no longer enrolled or employed by the College; or
- Specific circumstances prevent the College from gathering evidence sufficient to reach a determination as to the formal complaint or allegations therein.

Upon a dismissal required or permitted under the federal Title IX regulations, the Title IX Coordinator will promptly send written notice of the dismissal and the rationale to the parties simultaneously. The parties (meaning the Complainant and Respondent) will have an opportunity to appeal this decision by following the appeal procedures located in the ["Appeals"](#) section of the policy.

If a dismissal occurs, the Title IX Coordinator may refer or reinstate the allegations for resolution under an alternative campus process, if appropriate.

The College recognizes that incidents which fall outside of the narrow scope of the Title IX regulations may also negatively impact access to the institution's education programs and activities and are counter to the mission and values of the institution. Therefore, the College has also adopted ["Process B"](#) of the policy and its implementing procedures to address other sex offenses that may fall outside the protections of Title IX.

### **Step Three: CHOOSE AN ADVISOR (if you have not already)**

The parties are each entitled to an Advisor of their choice to accompany them to any and all meetings pertaining to the complaint. An Advisor can be anyone, including but not limited to an attorney, friend, roommate, or parent. Advisors can be extremely helpful in assisting parties with navigating the Title IX resolution process, especially when it comes to the hearing. The College is required to have a live hearing as part of its formal grievance process. At the live hearing, the Decision-maker(s) must permit each party's Advisor to ask the other party and any witnesses all relevant questions and follow-up questions, including those challenging credibility. If a party does not have an Advisor, the College will provide an Advisor, without fee or charge, from a pool of trained Advisors. College-appointed Advisors are not attorneys.



For representation, Respondents may wish to contact organizations such as:

- FACE (<http://www.facecampusequality.org>)
- SAVE (<http://www.saveservices.org>).

Complainants may wish to contact organizations such as:

- The Victim Rights Law Center (<http://www.victimrights.org>),
- The National Center for Victims of Crime (<http://www.victimsofcrime.org>), which maintains the Crime Victim's Bar Association.]
- The Time's Up Legal Defense Fund: <https://nwlc.org/times-up-legal-defense-fund/> ]

The Maryland Higher Education Commission also maintains a list of attorneys willing to represent students in Title IX Campus Sexual Assault Proceedings pro bono or at reduced fees. The list and additional information can be found at <https://mhec.maryland.gov/Pages/Title-IX-Campus-Sexual-Assault-Proceedings.aspx>.

### ***Victim Advocates***

Complainants may want to choose an advocate as their Advisor, or to have access to an advocate for support. Advocates are individuals who may or may not be employed by an institution for the purpose of providing confidential support and resources independent of or in conjunction with a sex- or gender-based discrimination or misconduct resolution process. Advocates are typically trained to provide crisis response services and connection to law enforcement, legal, health, and other emergency services. Advocates are often involved in assisting with the provision of supportive measures for Complainants such as academic adjustments, employment adjustments, housing relocation, and coordination of medical or mental health services.

Below is a list of on-campus, community-based, and national advocacy services available:

[The Garrett County Dove Center](#)- on-campus and community based  
301-334-6255, or toll-free at 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)  
[dovecenter@gcdovecenter.org](mailto:dovecenter@gcdovecenter.org)

National Organizations Supporting Crime Victims

- [National Center for Injury Prevention and Control](#)
- [National Organization for Victim Assistance \(NOVA\)](#)
- [National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs \(NCAVP\)](#)

### ***Step Four: INVESTIGATION***

Trained campus, or external as needed, Investigators will conduct an investigation that is prompt, thorough, reliable, equitable, fair, and impartial. They will interview the parties and witnesses and prepare a report. Your Advisor can accompany you to all interviews. As part of the investigation, parties and their Advisors will be provided access to all relevant and directly related evidence collected and will be given an opportunity to review and comment upon it.



### **Step Five: HEARING**

The College resolution process provides for a neutral and independent Decision-maker. The Decision-maker(s) will have the opportunity to question Investigators, parties, and witnesses during a hearing. Hearings are held in person, though any party may request to participate through videoconference. The Title IX Coordinator may also decide that the entire hearing should take place through videoconference. The parties may make opening and closing statements. During the hearing, parties' Advisors will have the opportunity to question the other party and witnesses. If a party or witness chooses not to submit to questioning during the hearing, any prior statements made by that party or witness cannot be considered by the Decision-maker(s).

Standard of Evidence: The College uses a preponderance of evidence standard of evidence. This means that Decision-makers consider whether, given the available relevant, credible evidence, it is more likely than not that a violation of policy occurred.

Past History: Questions and evidence about the Complainant's sexual predisposition cannot be asked. Questions about a Complainant's prior sexual behavior cannot be asked unless:

- Such questions and evidence are offered to prove that someone other than the Respondent committed the conduct alleged by the Complainant, OR
- The questions and evidence concern specific incidents of the Complainant's prior sexual behavior with respect to the Respondent and are offered to prove consent.

### **Step Six: FINAL DETERMINATION**

The parties will be informed of the outcome of the College's resolution of a complaint in writing, without significant delay between the notifications to each party. This notice will include the final determination, any sanctions imposed, a rationale for the final determination and any sanctions, the institution's procedures for the parties to appeal, any change to the results that occurs prior to the time that such results become final, and when the College considers those results to be final.

### **Step Seven: APPEAL**

All parties involved in sexual harassment proceedings may appeal a decision within three (3) business days on the basis of grounds permitted by College policy. All parties are included in any appeal reconsideration and have equal rights of participation. All appeals are conducted by written exchange of materials. There is only one level of appeal. That decision is final. See the "[Appeals](#)" section of the policy for further details on appeal procedures.

### **TIMELINES FOR RESOLUTION**

Garrett College is committed to resolving complaints within a reasonably prompt timeframe. The College's policy and procedures detail this timeline more specifically. The College's process allows for the temporary delay of the grievance process or limited extensions of time frames for good cause with written notice to the Complainant and the Respondent. This notification will include specifics of the delay or extension with a detailed reason for the action. Contact the Title IX Coordinator if you need a delay in the process, or an extension for an aspect of the process.





## **INFORMAL RESOLUTION PROCESS**

To initiate an informal resolution process, a Complainant must submit a formal complaint first. After submission of the formal complaint, the Title IX Coordinator will provide additional information if an informal resolution is an option. Parties who wish to initiate an informal resolution process should contact the Title IX Coordinator.

All parties must agree, in writing, to initiate an informal resolution process. The parties may agree as a condition of engaging in informal resolution that statements made or evidence shared during the informal resolution process will not be considered in the formal grievance process unless all parties consent.

It is not necessary to pursue informal resolution first to pursue a formal grievance process, and any party participating in informal resolution can stop the process at any time and begin or resume the formal grievance process.

There are three main types of informal resolution:

- Supportive Resolution. When the Title IX Coordinator can resolve the matter informally by providing supportive measures (only) to remedy the situation.
- Alternative Resolution. When the parties agree to resolve the matter through an alternative resolution mechanism as described below, including mediation, facilitated dialogue, etc., usually before a formal investigation takes place; see discussion below.
- Accepted Responsibility. When the Respondent accepts responsibility for violating policy, and desires to accept the sanction(s) and end the resolution process.

### ***Alternative Resolution Approaches***

Alternative Resolution is an informal approach, including mediation, facilitated dialogue, etc., by which the parties reach a mutually agreed upon resolution of an allegation. All parties must consent to the use of an Alternative Resolution approach.

The Title IX Coordinator may look to the following factors to assess whether Alternative Resolution is appropriate, or which form of Alternative Resolution may be most successful for the parties:

- The parties' amenability to Alternative Resolution
- Likelihood of potential resolution, taking into account any power dynamics between the parties
- The parties' motivation to participate
- Civility of the parties
- Results of a violence risk assessment/ongoing risk analysis
- Disciplinary history
- Whether an emergency removal is needed
- Skill of the Alternative Resolution facilitator with this type of allegation
- Complaint complexity
- Emotional investment/capability of the parties
- Rationality of the parties
- Goals of the parties
- Adequate resources to invest in Alternative Resolution (time, staff, etc.)



The ultimate determination of whether Alternative Resolution is available or successful is to be made by the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator is authorized to negotiate a resolution that is acceptable to all parties, and/or to accept a resolution that is proposed by the parties, usually through their Advisors. Alternative Resolution agreements are not subject to appeal once agreed upon by all parties.

***Respondent Accepts Responsibility for Alleged Violations***

The Respondent may accept responsibility for all or part of the alleged policy violations at any point during the resolution process. If the Respondent indicates an intent to accept responsibility for all of the alleged misconduct, the formal process will be paused, and the Title IX Coordinator will determine whether Informal Resolution can be used according to the criteria above.

If Informal Resolution is applicable, the Title IX Coordinator will determine whether all parties and the Recipient are able to agree on responsibility, sanctions, and/or remedies. If so, the Title IX Coordinator implements the accepted finding that the Respondent is in violation of Recipient policy and implements agreed-upon sanctions and/or remedies, in coordination with other appropriate administrator(s), as necessary.

This result is not subject to appeal once all parties indicate their written assent to all agreed upon terms of resolution. When the parties cannot agree on all terms of resolution, the Formal Grievance Process will resume at the same point where it was paused.

When a resolution is accomplished, the appropriate sanction or responsive actions are promptly implemented to effectively stop the harassment or discrimination, prevent its recurrence, and remedy the effects of the discriminatory conduct, both on the Complainant and the community.



## **RIGHTS OF COMPLAINANTS AND RESPONDENTS**

- The right to an equitable investigation and resolution of all credible allegations of prohibited harassment, discrimination, and/or retaliation made in good faith to Recipient officials.
- The right to timely written notice of all alleged violations, including the identity of the parties involved (if known), the precise misconduct being alleged, the date and location of the alleged misconduct (if known), the implicated policies and procedures, and possible sanctions.
- The right to timely written notice of any material adjustments to the allegations (e.g., additional incidents or allegations, additional Complainants, unsubstantiated allegations) and any attendant adjustments needed to clarify potentially implicated policy violations.
- The right to be informed in advance of any public release of information by the Recipient regarding the allegation(s) or underlying incident(s), whenever possible.
- The right not to have any personally identifiable information released by the Recipient to the public without consent provided, except to the extent permitted by law.
- The right to be treated with respect by Recipient officials.
- The right to have Recipient policy and procedures followed without material deviation.
- The right not to be pressured to mediate or otherwise informally resolve any reported misconduct involving violence, including sexual violence.
- The right not to be discouraged by Recipient officials from reporting sexual harassment, discrimination, and/or retaliation to both on-campus and off-campus authorities.
- The right to be informed by Recipient officials of options to notify proper law enforcement authorities, including on-campus and local police, and the option(s) to be assisted by the Recipient in notifying such authorities, if the party so chooses. This also includes the right not to be pressured to report.
- The right to have allegations of violations of this Policy responded to promptly and with sensitivity by Recipient law enforcement and/or other Recipient officials.
- The right to be informed of available supportive measures, such as counseling; advocacy; health care; legal, student financial aid, visa, and immigration assistance; and/or other services, both on campus and in the community.
- The right to a Recipient-implemented no-contact order [or a no-trespass order against a non-affiliated third party] when a person has engaged in or threatens to engage in stalking, threatening, harassing, or other improper conduct.
- The right to be informed of available assistance in changing academic, living, and/or working situations after an alleged incident of discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation, if such changes are reasonably available. No formal report, or investigation, either campus or criminal, needs to occur before this option is available. Such actions may include, but are not limited to:
  - Changing an employee's work environment (e.g., reporting structure, office/workspace relocation)
  - Transportation assistance
  - Visa/immigration assistance
  - Arranging to dissolve a housing contract and provide a pro-rated refund
  - Exam, paper, and/or assignment rescheduling or adjustment
  - Receiving an incomplete in, or a withdrawal from, a class (may be retroactive)
  - Transferring class sections
  - Temporary withdrawal/leave of absence (may be retroactive)
  - Alternative course completion options
  - Referral to counseling, medical, and/or other healthcare services



- Referral to the Employee Assistance Program
  - Referral to community-based service providers
  - Student financial aid counseling
  - Education to the institutional community or community subgroup(s)
  - Altering campus housing assignment(s) and assistance from Recipient staff in completing the relocation
  - Safety planning
  - Providing campus safety escorts
  - Implementing contact limitations (no contact orders) between the parties
  - Trespass, Persona Non Grata (PNG), or Be-On-the-Lookout (BOLO) orders
  - [Timely warnings](#)
  - Increased security and monitoring of certain areas of the campus
  - Any other actions deemed appropriate by the Title IX Coordinator
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- The right to have the Recipient maintain such actions for as long as necessary and for supportive measures to remain confidential, provided confidentiality does not impair the Recipient's ability to provide the supportive measures.
  - The right to receive sufficiently advanced, written notice of any meeting or interview involving the other party, when possible.
  - The right to have the Investigator(s), Advisors, and/or Decision-maker(s) identify and question relevant available witnesses, including expert witnesses.
  - The right to provide the Investigator(s)/Decision-maker(s) with a list of questions that, if deemed relevant, may be asked of any party or witness.
  - The right to have inadmissible prior sexual predisposition/history or irrelevant character evidence excluded by the Decision-maker.
  - The right to know the relevant and directly related evidence obtained and to respond to that evidence.
  - The right to a fair opportunity to provide the Investigator(s) with their account of the alleged misconduct and have that account be on the record.
  - The right to receive a copy of all relevant and directly related evidence obtained by the investigation, subject to privacy limitations imposed by state and federal law, and a ten (10) business day period to review and comment on the evidence.
  - The right to receive a copy of the final investigation report, including all factual, policy, and/or credibility analyses performed, and to have at least ten (10) business days to review and comment on the report prior to the hearing.
  - The right to be informed of the names of all witnesses whose information will be used to make a finding, in advance of that finding, when relevant.
  - The right to regular updates on the status of the investigation and/or resolution.
  - The right to have complaints addressed by Investigator(s), Title IX Coordinator(s), and Decision-maker(s) who have received [at least eight hours of] relevant annual training.
  - The right to a [Hearing Panel] that is not single-sex in its composition, if a panel is used.
  - The right to preservation of confidentiality/privacy, as permitted by law.
  - The right to meetings, interviews, and/or hearings that are closed to the public.
  - The right to petition that any Recipient representative in the process be recused on the basis of disqualifying bias and/or conflict of interest.



- The right to have an Advisor of their choice to accompany and assist the party in all meetings and/or interviews associated with the resolution process.
- The right to the use of the appropriate standard of evidence, [preponderance of the evidence; clear and convincing evidence], to make a finding after an objective evaluation of all relevant evidence.
- The right to be present, including presence via remote technology, during all testimony given and evidence presented during any formal grievance hearing.
- The right to have an impact statement considered by the Decision-maker(s) following a determination of responsibility for any allegation, but prior to sanctioning.
- The right to be promptly informed in a written Notice of Outcome letter of the finding(s) and sanction(s) of the resolution process (if any) and a detailed rationale of the decision including an explanation of how credibility was assessed, delivered simultaneously (without undue delay) to the parties.
- The right to be informed in writing of when a decision by the institution is considered final and any changes to the final determination or sanction(s) that occur post Notification of Outcome.
- The right to be informed of the opportunity to appeal the finding(s) and sanction(s) of the resolution process, and the procedures for doing so in accordance with the standards for appeal.
- The right to a fundamentally fair resolution as defined in these procedures.

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## **SANCTIONS AND REMEDIES**

There are several factors considered when determining a sanction. Sanctions are imposed and enforced when the Respondent has been found in violation of the College's sexual harassment policy. Some considerations for sanctioning include:

- The nature, severity of, and circumstances surrounding the violation(s)
- The Respondent's disciplinary history
- The need for sanctions to bring an end to the discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation
- The need for sanctions to prevent future recurrence of discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation
- The need to remedy the effects of the discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation on the Complainant and the community
- The impact on the parties
- Any other information deemed relevant by the Decision-maker(s)

Sanctions are typically implemented as soon as feasible, either upon the outcome of any appeal or the expiration of the window to appeal without an appeal being requested.

### **Examples of student sanctions are:**

- *Warning:* A formal statement that the conduct was unacceptable and a warning that further violation of any Recipient policy, procedure, or directive will result in more severe sanctions/responsive actions.
- *Required Counseling:* A mandate to meet with and engage in either Recipient-sponsored or external counseling to better comprehend the misconduct and its effects.
- *Probation:* A written reprimand for violation of institutional policy, providing for more severe disciplinary sanctions in the event that the student or organization is found in violation of any institutional policy, procedure, or directive within a specified period of time. Terms of the



probation will be articulated and may include denial of specified social privileges, exclusion from co-curricular activities, exclusion from designated areas of campus, no-contact orders, and/or other measures deemed appropriate.

- *Suspension*: Termination of student status for a definite period of time not to exceed two years and/or until specific criteria are met. Students who return from suspension are automatically placed on probation through the remainder of their tenure as a student at Recipient. [insert transcript notation here if applicable].
- *Expulsion*: Permanent termination of student status and revocation of rights to be on campus for any reason or to attend Recipient-sponsored events. This sanction will be noted permanently as a Conduct Expulsion on the student's official transcript, subject to any applicable expungement policies.
- *Withholding Diploma*: The Recipient may withhold a student's diploma for a specified period of time and/or deny a student participation in commencement activities as a sanction if the student is found responsible for an alleged violation.
- *Revocation of Degree*: The Recipient reserves the right to revoke a degree previously awarded from the Recipient for fraud, misrepresentation, and/or other violation of Recipient policies, procedures, or directives in obtaining the degree, or for other serious violations committed by a student prior to graduation.
- *Organizational Sanctions*: Deactivation, loss of recognition, loss of some or all privileges (including registration) for a specified period of time.
- *Other Actions*: In addition to or in place of the above sanctions, the Recipient may assign any other sanctions as deemed appropriate.

**Examples of employee sanctions are:**

- *Warning – Verbal or Written*
- *Performance Improvement Plan/Management Process*
- *Enhanced supervision, observation, or review*
- *Required Counseling*
- *Required Training or Education*
- *Probation*
- *Denial of Pay Increase/Pay Grade*
- *Loss of Oversight or Supervisory Responsibility*
- *Demotion*
- *Transfer*
- *Reassignment*
- *Delay of tenure track progress*
- *Assignment to new supervisor*
- *Restriction of stipends, research, and/or professional development resources*
- *Suspension with pay*
- *Suspension without pay*
- *Termination*
- *Other Actions: In addition to or in place of the above sanctions/responsive actions, the Recipient may assign any other responsive actions as deemed appropriate.*



### **Long-term Remedies/Other actions**

Following the conclusion of the resolution process, and in addition to any sanctions implemented, the Title IX Coordinator may implement additional long-term remedies or actions with respect to the parties and/or the campus community that are intended to stop the harassment, discrimination, and/or retaliation, remedy the effects, and prevent reoccurrence.

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### **PREVENTION AND AWARENESS PROGRAMS**

**Bystander Intervention:** The College offers bystander intervention programming to all new students in an effort to ensure that each member of the campus community is invested in creating a safe campus environment. Program participants are instructed on safe options for preventing harm and intervening when a risk of sexual misconduct exists.

**VAWA Training:** Incoming students and new employees are provided with education and training on awareness and risk reduction of sexual violence, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking and consent in compliance with the Violence Against Women Act.

**Ongoing Campaigns:** Ongoing awareness and prevention campaigns are provided throughout the school year to students, faculty and staff. All campus activities and programs are communicated through campus email accounts, on the College website, through the Regroup communication app, or checking the various social media pages for the College.

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### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)**

#### **Can an attorney be my Advisor?**

Yes. You have the right to an Advisor of your choice, which can include an attorney.

#### **Will my parents/guardians find out about this incident?**

It depends. If you are a minor, members of the Title IX team have certain mandatory reporting obligations, which may include notifying your parents/guardians of the incident.

If you are not a minor, this incident is a part of your education record, which is protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This means that your education record cannot be shared with anyone with whom you have not given Garrett College permission to share.

#### **Do I have to resolve this through a formal grievance process?**

No. You have options. If you are a Complainant and wish to resolve informally, you must first make a formal complaint. Upon receipt of this formal complaint, the Title IX Coordinator will provide you with additional information. Any party who wishes to resolve the matter informally should contact the Title IX Coordinator. All parties must agree, in writing, to informally resolve for this to be an option.

#### **Is there a time limit on when I can report?**

There is no statute of limitations on when a complaint can be filed however there are certain jurisdictional requirements that must be met to pursue a formal grievance process under Title IX.

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**Will I get in more trouble if I was drinking underage during the incident?**

The College maintains a policy of offering parties and witnesses amnesty from minor policy violations such as underage consumption of alcohol or the use of illicit drugs related to the incident.

**What happens if the Respondent fails to comply with the sanctions?**

Respondents are expected to comply with the assigned sanctions, responsive actions, and/or corrective actions within the timeframe specified by the final Decision-maker(s). Failure to abide by the sanction(s)/action(s) imposed by the date specified, whether by refusal, neglect, or any other reason, may result in additional sanction(s)/action(s), including suspension, expulsion, and/or termination.

**What happens if the Respondent transfers, leaves, or resigns prior to the conclusion of the formal resolution process?**

If a Respondent permanently withdraws or resigns, the resolution process ends with a dismissal, as the College no longer has disciplinary jurisdiction over the withdrawn student or former employee. However, the College will continue to address and remedy any systemic issues or concerns that may have contributed to the alleged violation(s), and any ongoing effects of the alleged harassment, discrimination, and/or retaliation.

**What if law enforcement is involved?**

College action(s) or processes are not typically altered or precluded on the grounds that civil or criminal charges involving the underlying incident(s) have been filed or that criminal charges have been dismissed or reduced. The College may undertake a short delay in its investigation if circumstances require. Communication will be sent to the parties explaining the reason(s) for the delay and the anticipated duration of the delay.

**Do I have to be cross-examined during the hearing?**

If you want the Decision-Maker(s) to consider any prior statements made or evidence submitted by you, then yes, you must submit to cross-examination during the hearing. You have a choice not to, but your statements and evidence will not be considered by the Decision-maker(s).