

The Battalion

Title IX fails students

A&M office understaffed, facing record complaints as three Aggie women come forward with reports of inaction, months-long delays

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Editor's note: This story contains descriptions of sexual violence and harassment. Victims' names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect their identities.

"Texas A&M University will promptly address all complaints of sex-based discrimination, harassment and related retaliation made by or against faculty, staff, students, guests and vendors," the A&M Title IX website reads.

However, as reports of sexual violence increase, some students said they aren't receiving the assistance they need. Three Aggie women said Title IX inaction and months-long delays led to alleged offenders receiving no consequences or disciplinary action.

A&M Title IX Coordinator Jennifer Smith said the office is understaffed and facing record complaints, and one former case manager said while the staff enjoyed working with students, they lacked the infrastructure to properly help victims.

Delays, delays, delays

"Abby," a freshman in 2020, said she lived in the White Creek Apartments. She met a man on a dating app, and when he asked to come over, she said yes.

"We started to have sex, and I got really uncomfortable with it," Abby said. "He was five years older than me, and I thought that I was going to be OK with that, but I wasn't. When I started saying, 'Hey, I'm not really comfortable with this,' he told me I wasn't allowed to say no. I tried a couple of times to kind of get away from that, but he physically restrained me ... [he] was a foot and a half taller than me [and] had 75 pounds on me. It really was a bad situation."

She said after he left, she was left bruised and her room was ruined. The tapestries and pictures on her wall had fallen off, and she didn't know what to do, Abby said.

At the time, she said she didn't realize it was sexual assault, as she had originally consented before she revoked it. First, she contacted RAINN, the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, who told her to contact the Title IX office at A&M.

The Title IX office is the result of a law prohibiting sexual discrimination in programs that receive federal funding — such as universities and student organizations. The office also handles sexual assault, harassment and discrimination cases on campus, with case managers assigned to each victim's case.

Abby reached out to Title IX soon after her assault, but she said they weren't available for months.

"It took three months to actually set up an appointment," Abby said.

Abby said the man graduated that May, leaving Title IX's jurisdiction altogether. By the time the meeting took place, Abby said she was only given two options: mediation and investigation.

Mediation would have the two sitting in a room, each with counsel, talking with each other to work things out, she said. An investigation would require a full testimony in front of a board of professors and students, which would then give a guilty or innocent verdict.

"Both options actually depended on him agreeing to those happening in the first place because he had graduated," Abby said. "If he had said no to either of those things, that was just the end of the road."

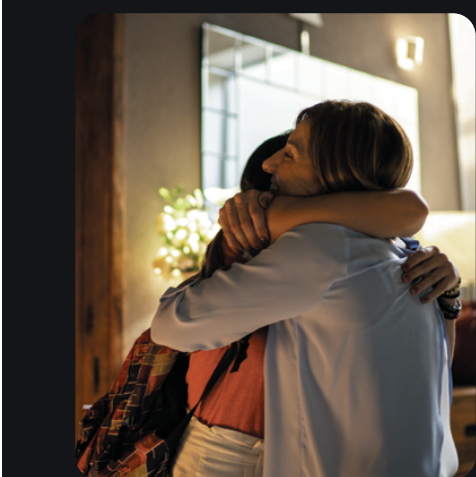
Even if he agreed to an investigation and was found guilty, Abby said the only punishment would be a mark on his official transcript noting a Title IX violation.

She also said her case manager told her going to the police was an option but dissuaded her from doing so, saying it would be easier to get a guilty verdict from a Title IX investigation.

She told her case manager she needed time to think about her next steps. Her case manager reached out a few days later, but Abby said she still needed more time. Then, she said she never heard from Title IX again.

"He works at this tech startup now, making mid-six figures right out of college," Abby said. "The worst [Title IX] could do was put an asterisk next to his name, and they didn't even get to do that. So he gets to live his life, and I have to think about it all the time."

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