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Supporting Students in Your Classroom

As a faculty member, you are responsible for being familiar and complying with Title IX requirements. Here are your key responsibilities under the law, followed by examples of best practices related to each.

Promote a Harassment-free Classroom

Pregnant and parenting students may face harassment and bias (conscious or not) from faculty or classmates. Title IX prohibits the harassment of students based on sex, which includes pregnancy, childbirth, and related conditions. Faculty must not harass or discriminate, and must not permit either to occur in their classrooms.

Best practices:

- Include a non-discrimination and accommodation policy in your syllabi. (See [proposed syllabi insert](#) for an example)
- Maintain a “zero tolerance” policy for discriminatory or disparaging comments and behaviors. Make it clear that such hostility is unacceptable and constitutes harassment based on sex.
- In advising students, communicate that the student’s educational choices are her own. Don’t make assumptions about a student based on her family status, health, gender, pregnancy, or marital or parental status.
- Communicate clearly that a student will not be penalized for taking medically necessary leave related to pregnancy, childbirth, or a related condition (or for taking leave pursuant to your university’s maternity or disability leave policy, if it has one).

Excuse Absences Related to Pregnancy and Childbirth

Title IX requires that students’ absences relating to pregnancy, childbirth, related conditions, and recovery therefrom be excused when such absences are medically necessary (or covered under your school’s maternity or disability leave policy, if it has one). This law applies regardless of your own typical attendance policy. You may not penalize a student for taking this leave; the student must be allowed to return to her studies in the same status as when she went out on leave. To that end, students must be given an opportunity to make up any credits missed because of qualifying pregnancy- or childbirth-related absences. Finally, you cannot ask for a physician’s note unless you do so for students who need absences for medical reasons unrelated to pregnancy.



Best practices:

- Inform students anticipating absences or leave related to pregnancy and childbirth that they will not be penalized for exercising their right to take medically necessary leave or leave under your institution's disability or maternity leave policies.
- Discuss deadlines for make-up work with students. Returning students should have *at least* as much time to complete each assignment as other students had. Consider that returning students typically must catch up with the material while also negotiating new family responsibilities and ongoing health concerns.
- Remember that leave means that the student is on leave—not doing school work. Do not assume that a student on leave will be able to complete academic work during her time away. As a best practice, any communication with the student during her leave term regarding make-up work or supplementary materials should make clear that the first priority is the student's health.
- Use flexible scheduling options. A student returning from leave or managing regular medical appointments may be less able to stop by for office hours or attend hastily scheduled meetings. Consider meeting over the phone or video chat, and scheduling standing meetings so that students may plan for them in advance.

Provide academic accommodations for students with impairments related to pregnancy or childbirth

Title IX requires your institution to provide pregnant students with at least the same special services as it provides to students with temporary disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other federal law requires your institution to provide reasonable accommodations to qualifying students with disabilities, including disabilities related to pregnancy and childbirth. Some students may request accommodations through your institution's ADA office, and others may come to you directly. Follow your college's procedures, and when in doubt, contact the Title IX and/or ADA offices.

Examples of pregnancy-related conditions and accommodations are available at: <http://www.thepregnantscholar.org/wp-content/uploads/Conditions-Accommodations.pdf>

Best practices:

- Treat pregnancy accommodation requests as you would any ADA request, and refer the student to resources for additional help. Pregnant students often do not realize their condition may be covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act, and may not know the formal channels for asking for help.
- Don't request medical information. If a student is struggling, ask to discuss their work and academic needs, but not their medical status. If information is disclosed to you by the student or another official at your institution, treat the information as confidential.
- Include an accommodation statement in your syllabi so that students with difficulties will be more likely to seek help early (see our [syllabi insert](#) for an example).

Respect student/postdoc employees' workplace rights

In addition to Title IX, any student employees that you supervise are also protected by various employment laws. Such laws guarantee non-discrimination in the workplace, provide job-protected leave for pregnancy and childbirth, and require accommodation of pregnancy-related conditions.

For more information, see <http://www.thepregnantscholar.org/for-students/working-at-school-while-pregnant-parenting/>

Best practices:

- Consult with your institution's human resources department about student employees' workplace rights.
- Seek temporary assistance to cover for student employees on leave. Funding is often available from your institution or from your grantor.
- Communicate clearly that employees taking leave will be welcomed back following their absence. Remember that discouraging employees/students from taking their legally guaranteed leave may be considered discrimination.
- Meet with employees who are taking over the work of the employee while they are on leave. Use positive language that reiterates the importance of respecting an employee's legal right to take leave for family responsibilities and health needs.
- Review your department's hiring and employment policies to see if they comply with Title IX and employment law standards, including those for recruitment. Consult with HR or your school's general counsel if questions arise.

Report Discriminatory Behavior

Title IX provides several mechanisms for ensuring that institutions follow the law. Report and/or reform departmental and institutional policies that discriminate on the basis of sex, pregnancy, related medical conditions (including abortion), or based on parental, family or marital status. Reports can be made to your campus Title IX coordinator.

Best practices:

- Make sure employees you supervise are aware of their obligation to report discrimination on the basis of sex, including pregnancy, childbirth, related conditions, or family status. Publicly listing reporting information serves as another reminder that discrimination is serious and will not be tolerated.
- Encourage your department to enact policies that do not treat students differently on the basis of sex.