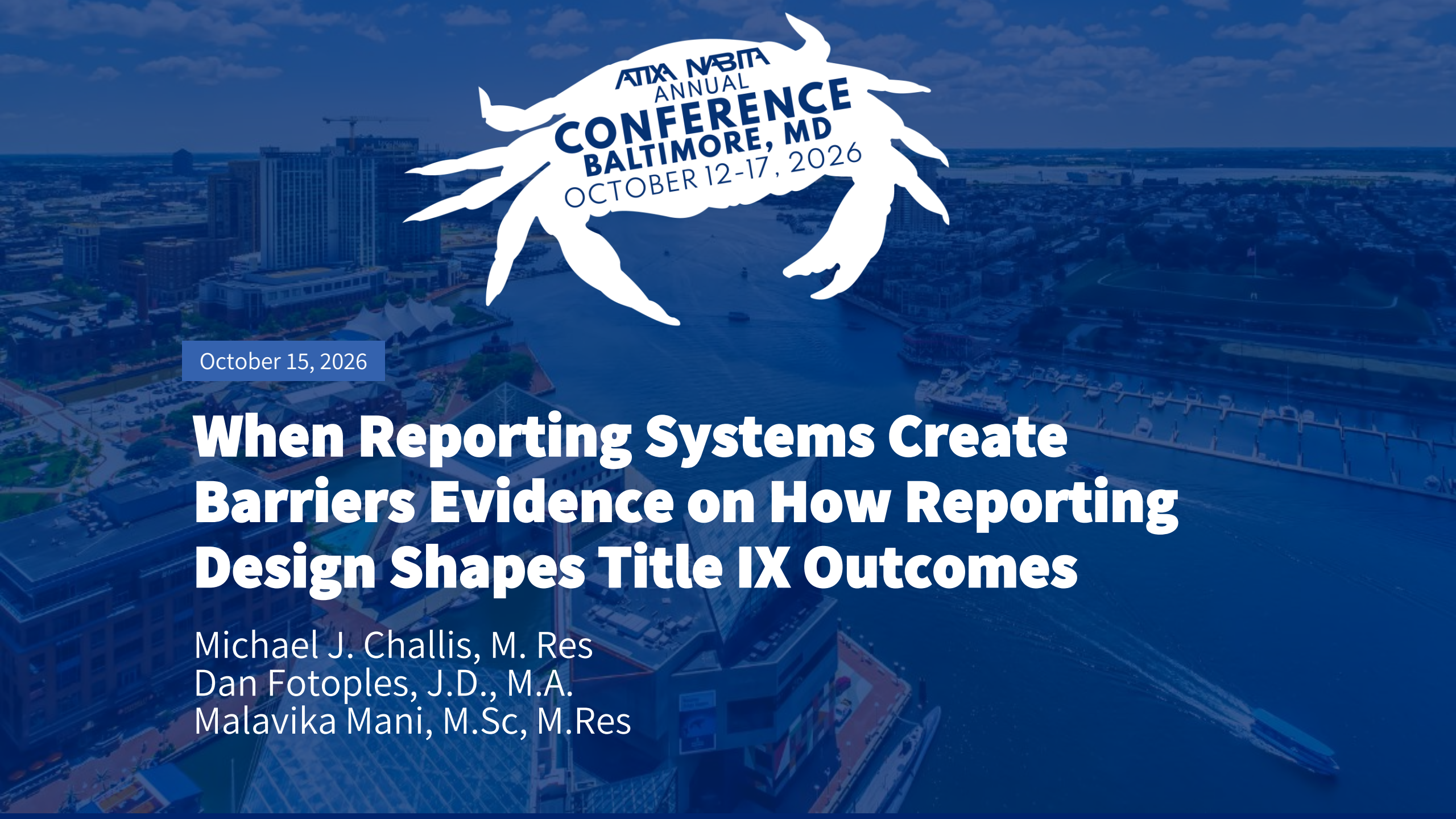


October 15, 2026

When Reporting Systems Create Barriers Evidence on How Reporting Design Shapes Title IX Outcomes

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More than

70%

of campus sexual violence incidents go unreported

We know fear and shame play a role. What about the design of the reporting process itself?

(Sokolow, 2023)

Our Study

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What Is Sludge?

Small administrative frictions that make reporting harder — often unintentionally

1 Too many steps

Multi-page processes before any information is submitted

2 Dense legal language

Walls of policy text before a reporter reaches a reporting link

3 Login barriers

Requiring institutional credentials just to start

4 Upfront narrative demands

Full written account required before basic details are captured

5 Deterrent warnings

False-report consequences displayed prominently at intake

6 Buried access

Multiple clicks needed to reach the actual reporting form

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Data from 392 Schools over Six Years

392 Schools

255 NY & 137 TX

2.5M

Enrolled students

6 Years

2018–2024

What We Examined

Web pages	1,506 snapshots of Title IX landing pages
Reporting forms	546 unique intake forms
Policy documents	497 institutional policy documents

What We Measured

Incident reports	Annual counts per 1,000 enrolled students
Formal complaints	Reports that advanced to a grievance process
Processed cases	Cases that reached full investigation

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Most Reports Never Reach a Formal Complaint

Average reporting pipeline in NY & TX schools, 2018–2024

Incident reports

100

initial reports
(baseline)

Formal complaints

27

per 100 reports

Processed cases

23

per 100 reports

Formalization is the main drop-off point.

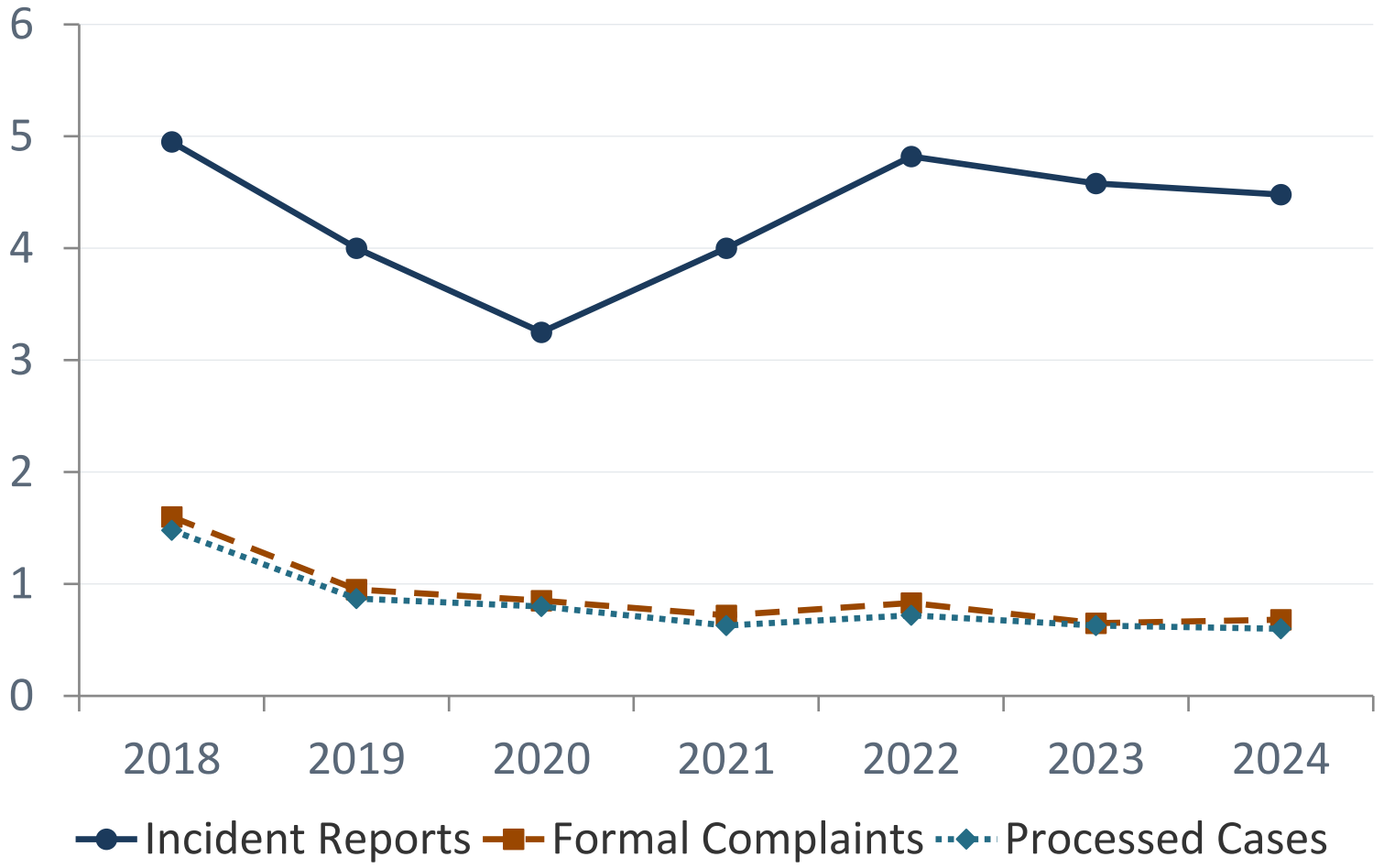
Not every report should become a formal case.

The policy question is whether attrition is avoidable.

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Reporting Outcomes, 2018–2024

Average outcomes per 1,000 enrolled students in NY & TX colleges, 2018–2024



≈1 in 7 reports becomes a formal complaint

The gap between reports and processed cases has widened since 2018

Design choices can affect where and why this drop-off happens

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Law Mandates Opportunity, Design Shapes Access

Legal Requirements

- A designated Title IX Coordinator
- A process to respond to reports
- Grievance procedures
- Non-discrimination in programs

Institutional Design Choices

- Form length or complexity
- Landing page design and tone
- When narrative is required
- How anonymity is explained and routed

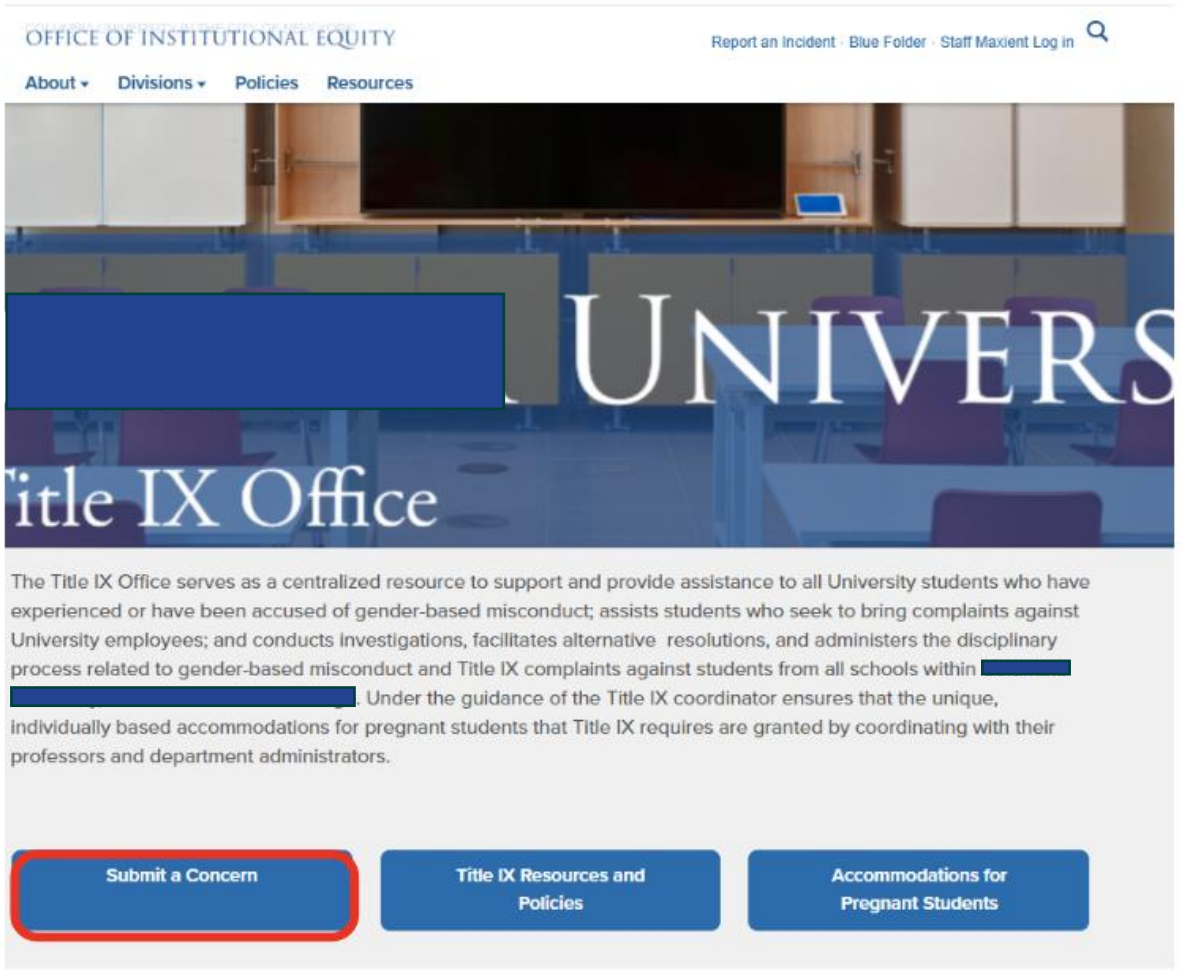
"No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

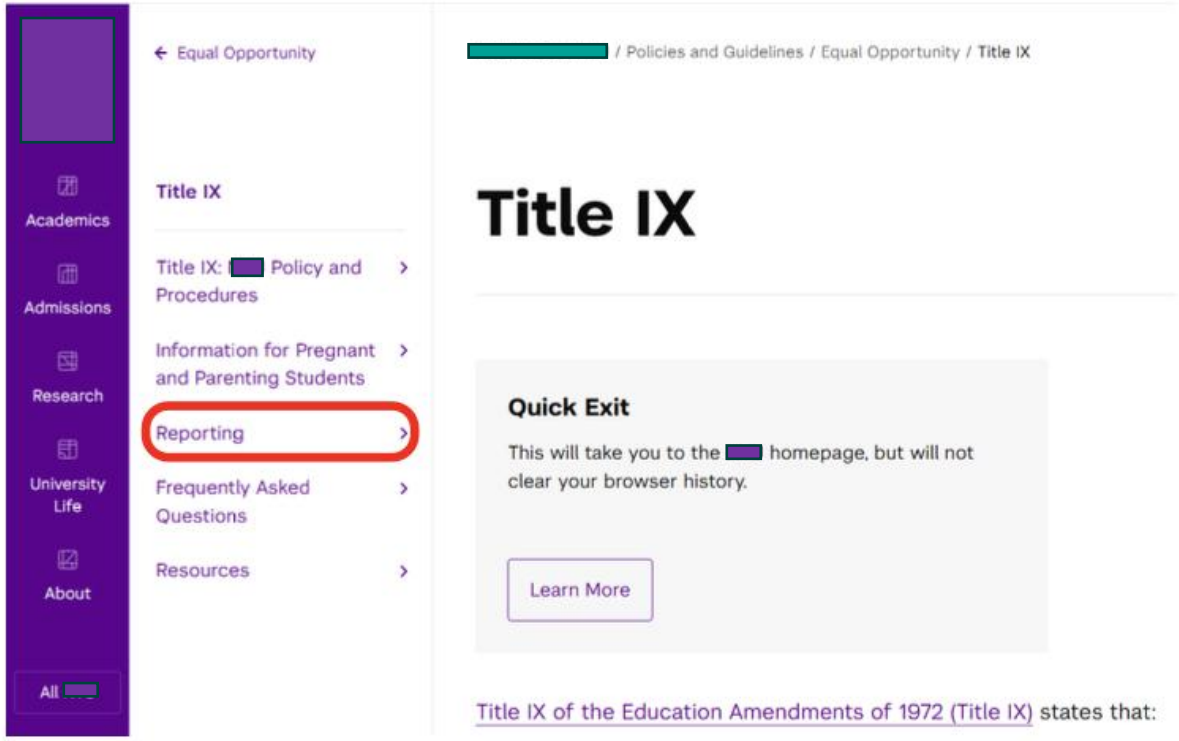
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Comparing Two Institutions

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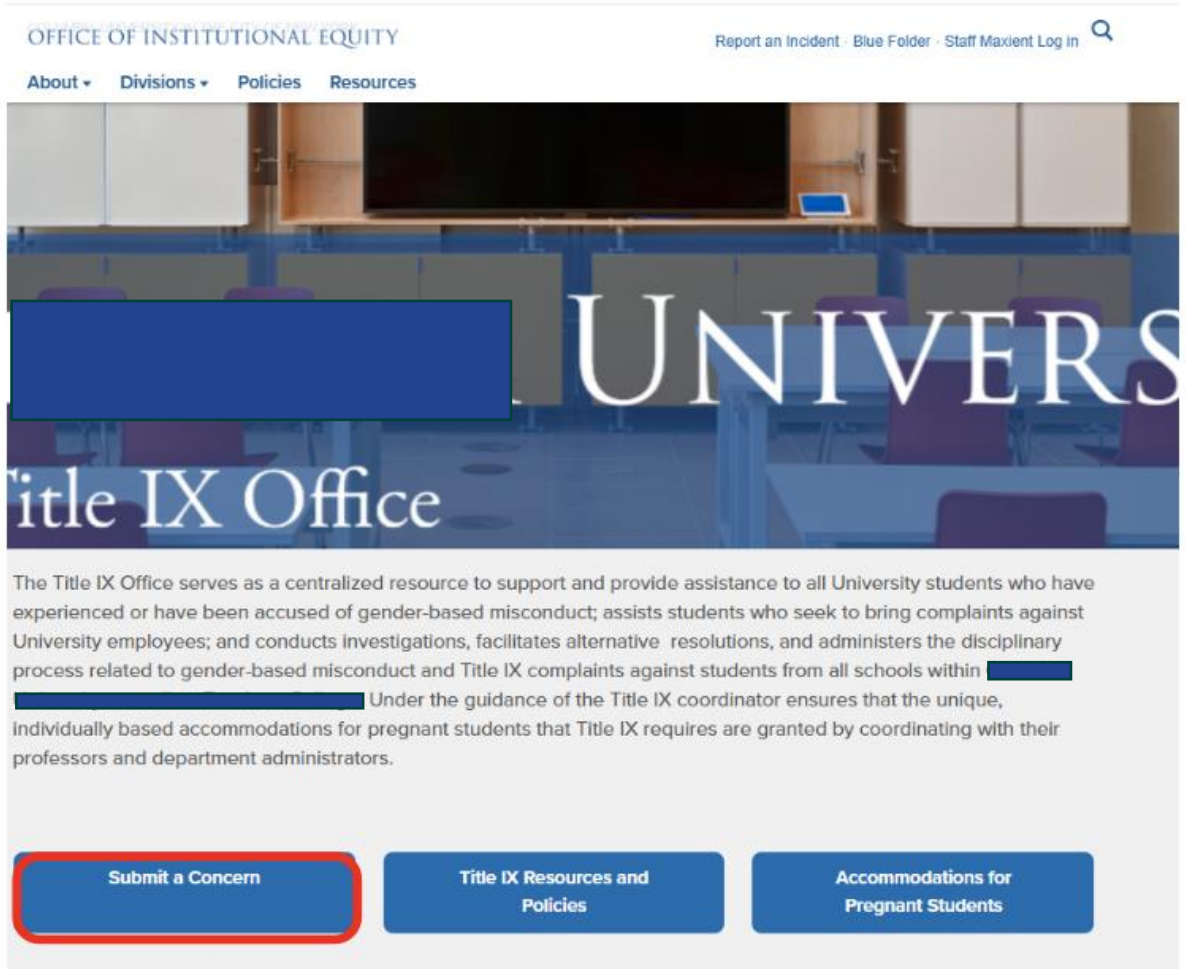
Two Institutions: Landing Pages

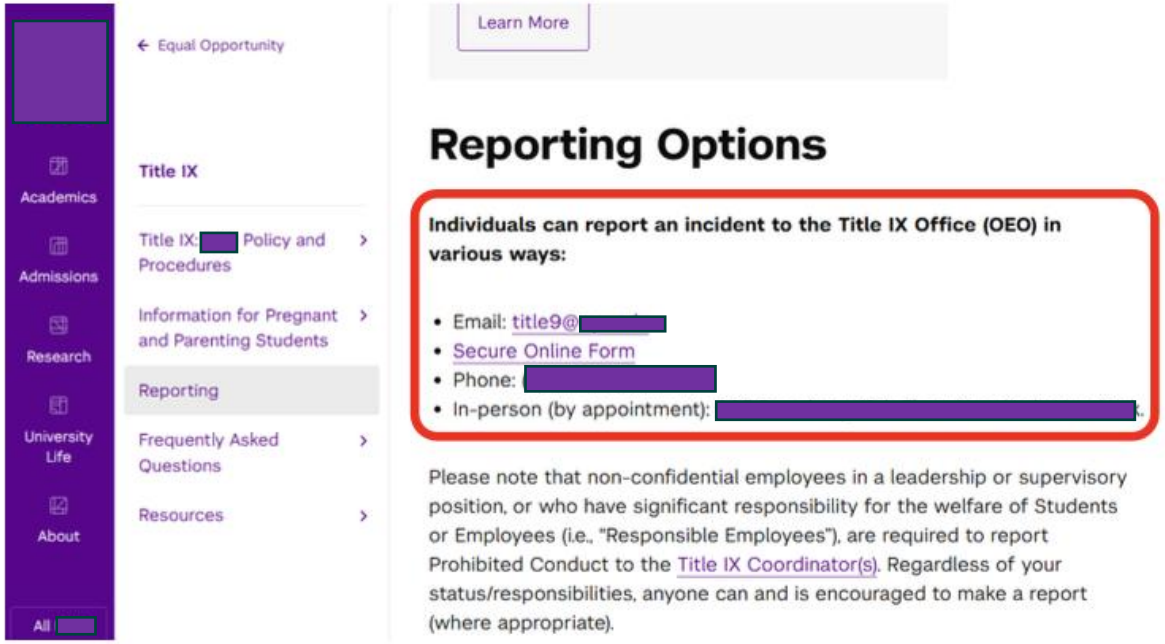




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Two Institutions: Reporting Options





Institution A: Background Information

Step 1 of 4

Background Information

Please include your email address if you would like a confirmation of receipt.

Enable additional features by logging in.

* Your full name:

Your phone number:

Your e-mail address:

Your physical address:

Type of allegation (Required): Please Choose...

Role of the submitter (Required): Please Choose...

Learn more

Form Elements
(running count)

6
Questions

3
Mandatory

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Institution A: Incident Details

Step 2 of 4

Date of occurrence (if known) (Required): mm/dd/yyyy

Learn more

Time of incident:

Location of Occurrence (Required): Please select a location...

Specific location:

Form Elements (running count)

10 Questions

5 Mandatory

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Institution A: Parties and Witnesses

Step 3 of 4

Involved Parties/Witnesses

General Instructions

- Please enter the individual(s) involved below, ***including yourself***.
- Be sure to include a UNI (if known).
- Complete as many listed fields as you can.

Role Definitions

- Respondent: Student(s), Student Group/Organization, or Employee(s) alleged to have engaged in conduct that violates the Title IX & Related Misconduct Policy and Procedures for Students and Anti-Discrimination or Discriminatory Harassment Policies & Procedures for Faculty and Staff .
- Complainant: Person who has been impacted by the alleged behaviors of the Respondent
- Bystander/Witness: Person who witnesses or learns of violence or impending violence, but is not directly impacted as a victim or survivor of this violence.

Name of individual or organization: | Select role: | UNI (all lowercase, no spaces): | Phone number:

E-mail address: | Hall/Address:

Add another party

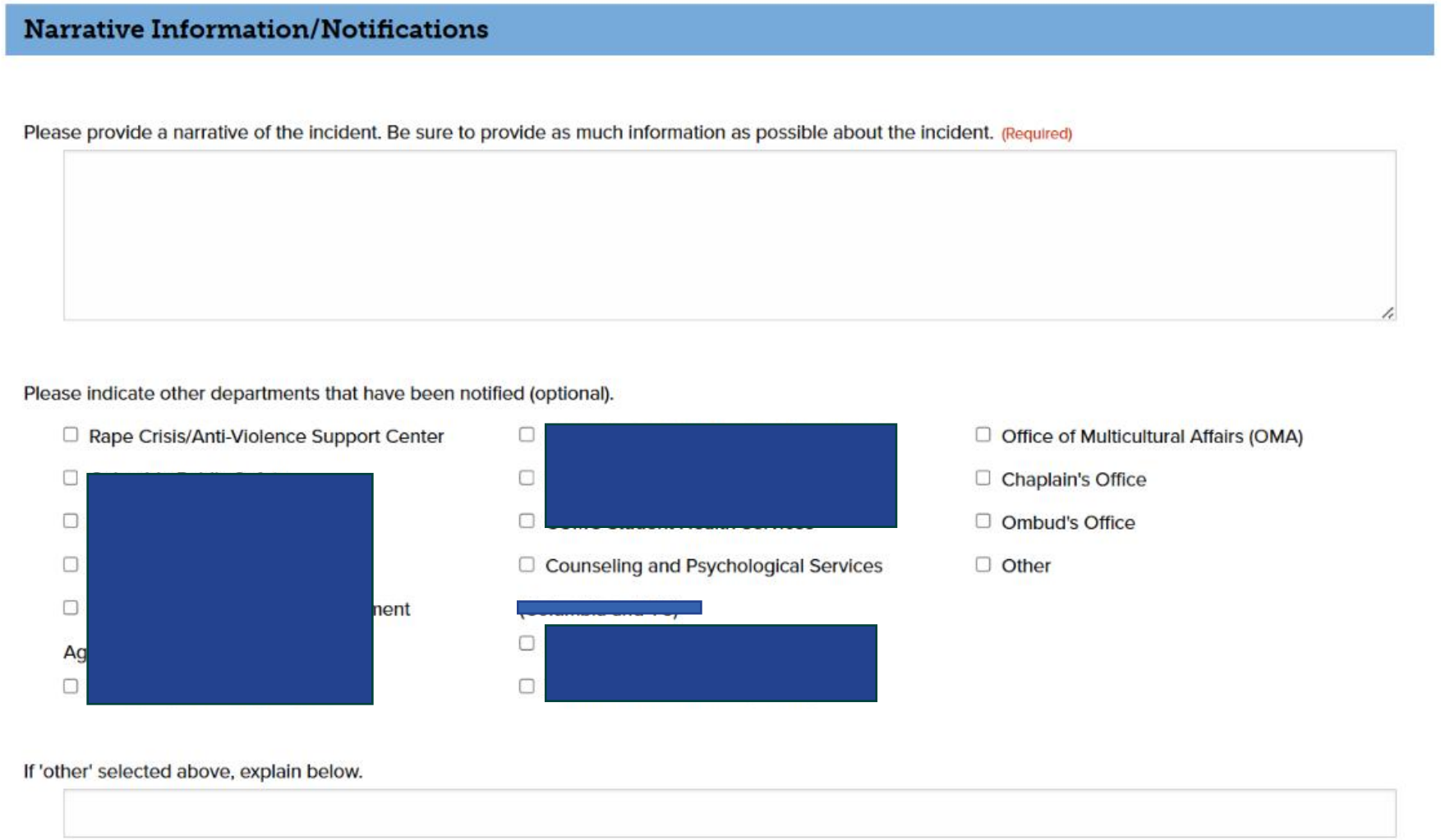
Form Elements
(running count)

16+
Questions

5
Mandatory

Institution A: Narrative and Notifications

Step 4 of 4



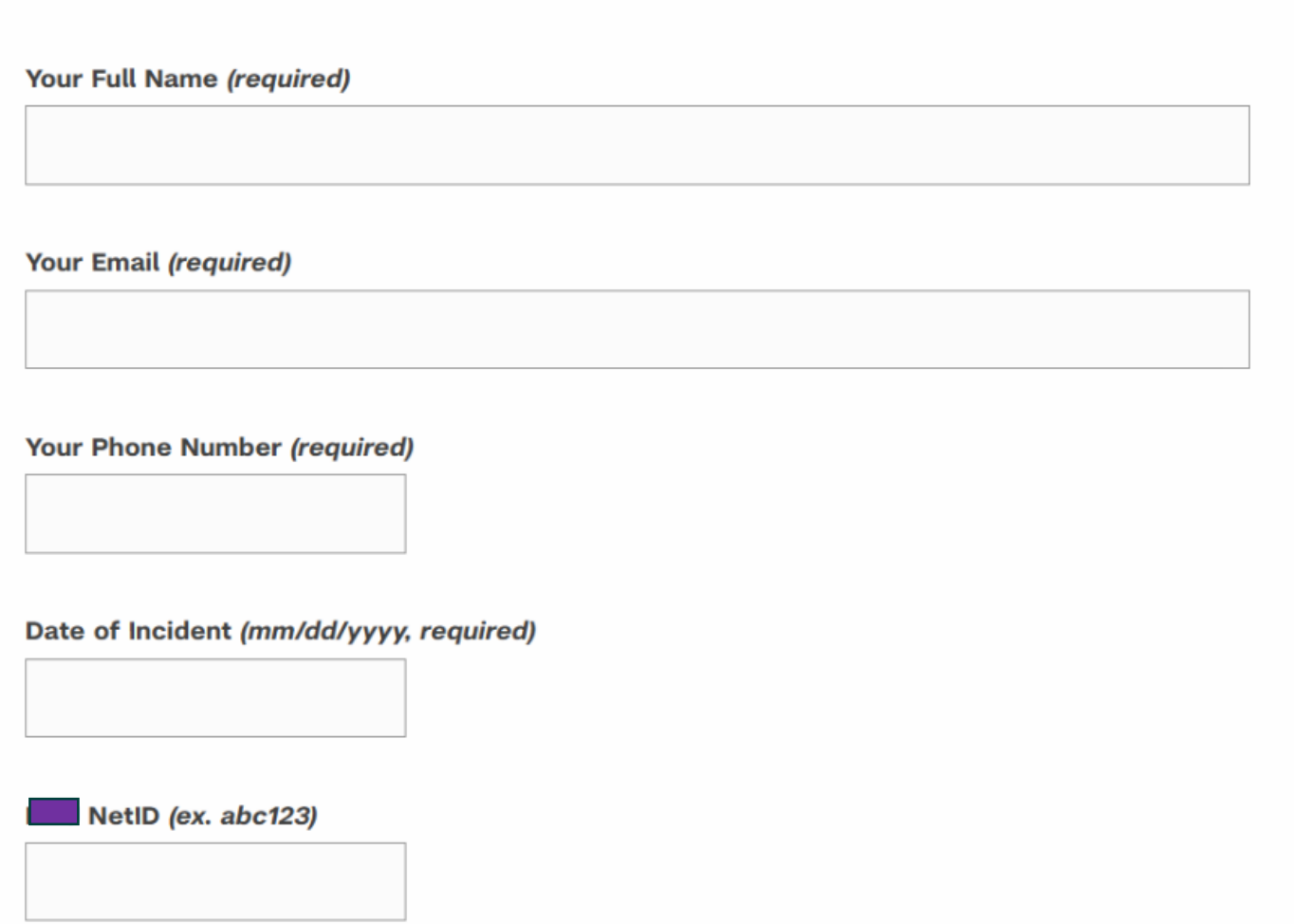
Form Elements
(final count)

19+
Questions

6
Mandatory

Including a long-form narrative question

Institution B: Intake Form



Form Elements

5
Questions

4
Mandatory

No long-form narrative question(s)

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Comparing Our Two Institutions

Institution A and Institution B share similar goals; a reporter's first contact can still feel very different.

Institution A: More Procedurally Dense

- Landing page: wall of legal text
- 19+ questions across 4 steps and 6 mandatory
- Additional features by logging in with university ID
- Written narrative required
- Time to complete: 20+ minutes

Institution B: Lower Initial Burden

- Landing page: reporting option immediately obvious
- 5 questions on a single page
- Anonymous option available
- No written narrative required
- Time to complete: 5+ minutes

Which system would you expect to produce more initial contact?

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Pause: How Does Your Institution Compare?

Open your Title IX landing page and intake form.

1. **How many total questions does your intake form have?**
2. **How many of those questions are required?**

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Our Findings

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FINDING 1

The Landing Page Is the First Design Point

Procedurally dense landing pages are associated with significantly fewer incident reports entering the system even after controlling for institution size and type

↓

Longer pages

Each additional 100 words of policy text before a reporting link is linked to fewer reports

↓

Enforcement-first tone

Pages leading with legal consequences and enforcement language see lower reporting volumes

↑

Support-first framing

Pages emphasizing resources, confidentiality, and access are linked to higher reporting rates

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What Makes a Landing Page a Barrier?

More likely to deter reporting

- 500+ words before a reporting link appears
- False-report warning displayed prominently
- Investigation procedure explained upfront
- No emergency or crisis contact visible
- PDF as the primary reporting method
- Legal language outweighs support language

Associated with higher reporting

- Prominent 'Report Now' button above the fold
- Confidentiality statement visible immediately
- Support resources and crisis contacts listed first
- Mandatory reporter roles explained clearly
- Brief, plain-language description of next steps
- More support language than enforcement language

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FINDING 2

When You Ask Matters As Much As What You Ask

Narrative requirements may not stop people from initiating contact. They are strongly associated with fewer reports becoming formal complaints.

Design implication: make narrative optional at first contact; collect detailed accounts later, with support.

–6.4%

cross-institution association

–11.4%

within-school changes over time

Outcome: formal complaints / incident reports

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Rethinking the Intake Form

Not all form elements are equal — collect the most demanding information at the right stage

Step 1

First Contact

KEEP IT SIMPLE

- Name (or anonymous option)
- Contact information
- Type of incident
- Approximate date
- Support preferences

Step 2

If They Continue

ADD CONTEXT

- Respondent information
- Location details
- Witness information
- Prior reporting
- Desired resolution

Step 3

Formal Complaint

FULL ACCOUNT

- Detailed narrative account
- Supporting documentation
- Signature

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FINDING 3

Not All Friction Has the Same Effect

Both types of sludge reduce total reports, but through different mechanisms. One consistently works against reporters with no offsetting benefit. The other may serve a filtering function but only if that function is intentional.

Narrative Burden at Intake

↓↓

Fewer reports
Lower formalization rate
Pure deterrent

Dense Landing Page

↓↑

Fewer reports
Higher formalization rate
Selection effect

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What This Means for Your Institution

Start with design and sequencing before rewriting policy.

1

Audit your landing page

Report link above the fold
Crisis/support resources first
Plain-language next steps

Low cost · high impact

2

Move narrative later

Basic contact first
Optional narrative at intake
Detailed account after outreach/support

Form redesign · moderate effort

3

Test the reporter journey

Open it on mobile
Count clicks and words
Ask what a distressed student sees first

Practice audit · ongoing

Implementation note: coordinate with policy owners and counsel before changing required reporting language or routing.

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The 10-Minute Sludge Audit

Open your Title IX landing page and intake form. Check what a reporter sees before first contact.

Landing page

- ☐ Clicks from campus homepage to report form
- ☐ Words before the first “Report” link/button
- ☐ “Report Now” visible above the fold
- ☐ Crisis/confidential resources visible first
- ☐ Privacy & mandatory reporting in plain language

Intake form

- ☐ Login required before first contact?
- ☐ Anonymous or third-party path explained accurately
- ☐ False-report warnings placed later in the form
- ☐ Narrative optional at first contact
- ☐ Basic submit possible without full account

Use the audit to identify design barriers. The goal is accessible compliance, not less compliance.

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Questions?

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