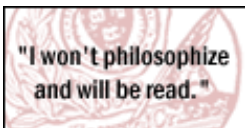




To submit a case to FIRE, click [here](#).

To contact FIRE, click [here](#).



SEARCH

[Advanced Search](#)

[Today's Issue](#)

- In This Archive:
- [Front Page](#)
  - [News](#)
  - [Opinion](#)**
  - [Sports](#)
  - [Arts](#)
  - [Magazine](#)
  - [Photo Gallery](#)
  - [Comics](#)

- [Archives](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
- [E-Digest](#)
- [Weather](#)

- [About THC](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Corrections](#)
- [Subscriptions](#)

[Alumni Website](#)

## Opinion

Published on Wednesday, September 18, 2002

Title IX Complaint Questionable

Moral, not legal arguments needed against University's new sexual assault policy

By THE CRIMSON STAFF

Last spring, Harvard altered its disciplinary policy governing peer disputes to require corroborating evidence before the Administrative Board will launch a full review of a case. This will greatly reduce the number of sexual assault cases the University actually investigates; obviously, in many of these cases, corroborating evidence is difficult to obtain before an investigation even begins. For this reason among others, Harvard's new policy is a tragedy for sexual assault victims. However, one anonymous student's recent appeal of the decision on Title IX grounds—which prohibits discrimination in education on the basis of sex—is not an effective way of pressing the administration to remedy its error.

The relevance of Title IX in this case is questionable. According to the Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Education, which oversees Title IX compliance, its guidelines only cover sexual harassment, not sexual assault. The complaint alleges that under Title IX, sexual harassment cases must be handled in a "prompt and equitable" way, and that this change prevents the University from doing so. Assistant Dean of the College Karen E. Avery '87, however, says the University is committed to providing fair and expeditious procedures to sexual assault victims.

Harvard would do well to respond to the complaint on its own rather than continuing to fight its own students. The complaint is correct that sexual violence affects women much more than men and that the school's failure to address sexual assault cases promptly can poison the educational environment for female students. Regardless of its Title IX grounding, this complaint ought spur Harvard to cease its legal squabbling and instead revamp its entire system of dealing with sexual assault allegations.

Harvard was correct that its old system was failing—a failure that took years of lobbying for Harvard to recognize. The new policy, however, takes a step backward and instead reduces the responsibilities of the school in responding to sexual assault by making it more difficult to bring cases before the Ad Board. Rather than making the disciplinary process harder for victims, Harvard should enable itself to deal with all sexual assault cases. Instead of throwing up its hands when victims of sexual assault

### Article Options

- [Email this article to a friend](#)
- [Send a letter to the editor](#)
- [Print this article](#)

### MOST READ THIS WEEK

- [A Challenge to House Master Hanson](#)
- [Summers Stifles Israel Debate](#)
- [Summers Takes a Stand, and a Day Off](#)
- [Equal Under the Law](#)
- [Let's Argue](#)

### RELATED LINKS

- [Letter to the Editors: Specialized Assault Board Idea 'Myopic'](#)

seek help, Harvard should establish a separate board to hear these painful and complex complaints.

It is no secret that the Ad Board is ill-equipped to handle sexual violence cases. But it is still Harvard's responsibility to provide a prompt and equitable avenue for students to bring grievances. A board specially trained in issues surrounding sexual assault would be able to respond appropriately to students seeking its help. The committee formed this summer to consider Harvard's sexual assault resources should push for such a board. This new body could be trained to recognize symptoms of having survived sexual violence and would be better able to conduct an investigation, sensitive to forms of evidence that might otherwise escape the untrained Ad Board.

For Harvard, improving its ability to respond to complaints of sexual assault is crucial to fostering a safe atmosphere on its campus. If Harvard considers rape an issue it can sideline, choosing to squabble over legal technicalities rather than improve survivor services, the imperative within the university community to take rape seriously is lessened. Harvard should prioritize meeting the needs of its students rather than the specifications of the federal government. Those needs have been articulated quite clearly: Harvard must hear sexual assault cases in a professional and timely manner. Without doing so, the university gives the impression that the comfort and safety of its female students is not worthy of the school's resources. Whether Harvard can lose federal funding for Title IX violations should be less important to the school than whether its female students can feel comfortable living and studying here.

Copyright © 2002, The Harvard Crimson Inc. | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#)