

Study tracks Title IX use across US colleges and universities

June 1 2018

Title IX—the U.S. civil rights law passed in 1972 that prohibits sex discrimination in federally funded education programs—has been widely recognized as a crucial step toward gender equality in America. A new Yale study tracks the changing use of Title IX over time in response to perceived gender disparities, and for the first time, systematically analyzes how the law has been mobilized at the federal level through complaints filed against four-year non-profit colleges and universities.

Published in the journal *Social Problems*, the study drew from a new data set that was constructed using information acquired through the Freedom of Information Act. The data include all resolved postsecondary Title IX complaints filed with the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) against allegedly noncompliant schools from 1994 to 2014.

"Since the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare first defined Title IX compliance requirements for intercollegiate athletics in 1975, this law has been under constant debate, which necessarily affects how it can be mobilized," says Celene Reynolds, graduate student in the Department of Sociology and author of the paper.

"Title IX has been at the forefront of national debates in part because there was an effort to further specify and clarify its requirements under President Barack Obama as well as a growing social movement around campus sexual assault. Now we are in the midst of another moment of change under Betsy DeVos, [the U.S. secretary of education appointed

by President Donald Trump]," says Reynolds.

"This study is important to the future of Title IX because there is an ongoing effort to change the way we put the law into action—with DeVos's withdrawal of Obama-era guidance—but we don't actually really know how it has been used," she says.

Reynolds traced the use of Title IX since 1994 and found that Title IX has been mobilized in response to different issues over time. She also discovered that Title IX complaints have increased substantially over the past 15 years. "Complaints citing discrimination in academics were the most common type filed for nearly all of the last 20 years, while athletics complaints were the least commonly filed. Complaints alleging schools violated the law by mishandling sexual harassment began to rise in 2006, skyrocketing in 2009, and nearly equaling athletic and academic filings by 2014," says Reynolds.

According to Reynolds, this new research fills an important gap in the sociological literature and illuminates a pressing social transformation affecting campus life across America. "This study shows how a powerful legal tool is employed in response to perceived gender inequality in higher education and illustrates the specific kinds of disparities that elicit legal mobilization.

The mobilization of Title IX is institutionally uneven relative to student enrollment, with the study's findings showing that more complaints are filed against private schools that are highly selective," says Reynolds.

"This article has significant policy implications in that it shows that certain types of schools tend to face higher numbers of specific kinds of complaints. The analysis suggests that the problem of [sex discrimination](#) in higher education may look different in different institutional settings," says Reynolds. "It is important that top-down efforts to modify Title IX

allow schools some autonomy to implement the law in ways that address the idiosyncrasies of local institutional cultures."

Reynolds says the paper also shows how important this legal tool is for those who experience discrimination. "More people are turning to Title IX and to the OCR complaint process as tools to address sex discrimination in education. It's important that this remains a viable and fair process."

More information: Celene Reynolds, The Mobilization of Title IX across U.S. Colleges and Universities, 1994-2014, *Social Problems* (2018). [DOI: 10.1093/socpro/spy005](https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spy005)

Provided by Yale University

Citation: Study tracks Title IX use across US colleges and universities (2018, June 1) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-06-tracks-title-ix-colleges-universities.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--