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## Title IX Administrators: Interpreting a Rapidly Expanding Profession

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### Abstract

This bounded case study of a multi-campus public university system in the Rocky Mountain Region explored the emergence of a new profession within the work of Title IX administrators. Key findings identify evidence associated with professional vacancy, controlling knowledge, and cultural shifts in society. Experiences of Title IX administrators, and their views of their own emerging profession, contributed to research findings, and supported implications for practice and policy.

**Key words:** Title IX; Professions; Higher education; System of professions

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### INTRODUCTION

It is uncommon for an administrative function to emerge largely from whole cloth and within a few short years becomes a formalized profession. Yet in rapid fashion, many colleges and universities moved from employing a single Title IX coordinator focused on athletics, to

have specialized departments often led by executive level administrators. The impetus for this change can be attributed to April 4, 2011 “Dear Colleague Letter” (DCL) issued by the U.S. Department of Education, highlighting the responsibilities required of all colleges and universities related to sexual violence response (Ali, 2011). The 2011 DCL only required “at least one employee to coordinate its [each institutions] efforts to comply with and carry out its responsibilities under Title IX” (Ibid., p.6). Yet with significant pressure from regulating bodies, institutions responded by creating numerous staff lines and rushed to fill these positions to meet the new requirements. Individuals were needed to specifically address campus issues related to sexual assault, discrimination, domestic violence, and nonconsensual contact.

For many institutions, compliance created staffing challenges (Jones, 2014) that included allocating financial resources, ensuring employees are prepared for the emotionally demanding role of working with victims of sexual assault and rape, confirming impartiality is maintained for both victim and respondent, and creating a career path for these positions for permanency within the organization (Flaherty, 2014). As institutions comply with the DCL requirements, a new and distinct profession is evolving with its own norms, values, knowledge base, credentialing requirements, professional association, and autonomy. This study explored the research questions:

- How does the current expansion of Title IX departments align with emerging profession criteria defined by System of Professions (SOP) theory?
- Do Title IX administrators view their work as an emerging profession?

The role of a Title IX administrator, a title we use to include coordinators, deputy coordinators, and investigators, comes with a wide range of responsibilities such as policy development and implementation, educational programming, case management, sexual assault prevention, and investigation (Brown, 2015; Sokolow, Lewis, Schuster,

Swinton, & Van Brunt, 2015). A recent survey conducted by the Association of Title IX Administrators (ATIXA), a professional organization, revealed that 39% of the coordinators interviewed had been in their position less than one year and another 23% for fewer than two years. Additionally, 70% indicated their Title IX responsibilities were in addition to other institutional roles (Sokolow et al., 2015). The findings reinforce the emergence of a new profession, given recent federal mandates.

Our study investigated the emergence of the Title IX profession through the experience of Title IX administrators. To research the emergence of a new profession, we used case study methodology as “specificity of focus makes [case study] an especially good design for practical problems—for questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences rising from everyday practice” (Merriam, 1998, p.193). We bounded our case study within a multi-campus public university system, and organized our research using the lens of Abbott’s (1988) System of Professions.

Our research supports the higher education community in understanding this emerging profession and the individuals within it. Gaining an improved understanding of Title IX administrators’ roles and how the administrators perceive the emerging profession has significance for employees and institutions, assisting them to understand and support professionals in this growing field.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since Title IX’s introduction over four decades ago, it has primarily been associated with women’s equal access to post-secondary athletic opportunities. Following four Supreme Court rulings in the 1990’s, the attention gradually shifted to Title IX’s relationship to student sexual harassment and sexual discrimination. Table 1 lists the progression of Title IX regulations from its roots in civil rights, to a focus on athletics, and the most recent regulations.

**Table 1**  
**Historical Review of Title IX Regulations**

1972	1975	1997	1997-2007	2011
Title IX initiated as a separate amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, passed into law by President Nixon	Title IX regulations signed into law by President Ford	Shift in focus from athletics to the negative impacts of increasing incidents of sexual assault	Four landmark Supreme Court cases* resulted in: • Institutional accountability and liability • Monetary damages	Dear Colleague Letter • Tied compliance to federal funding • On and off campus incidents are reportable • Coordinator position mandated

*Note.* \*Gebser v. Lago Vista Independent School District, Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education, Williams v. Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, and Simpson v. University of Colorado.  
Source: Ali, 2010; US Department of Education, 1997; Walker, 2010.

Compliance with Title IX is altering the climate of education with the implementation of new policies and the heightened awareness of the issues surrounding sexual violence on the part of students, faculty, and staff (Lipka, 2015; Roper, 2015). To quote one administrator, “longtime leaders can’t recall another issue that so consumed colleges” (Lipka, 2015, p.2). Carroll et al. (2013) reviewed compliance levels and implementation of Title IX and DCL policies and found partially implemented requirements in all areas including proactive efforts, victim support services, and educational programming. However, their participants had fully implemented the work of investigating, indicating a focus on the adjudication process and legal components of the regulations (Carroll et al., 2013). With evolving interpretations of the Title IX law and expanded compliance requirements, universities increasingly rely on their Title IX administrators.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Professions are part of an interrelated system of occupations and are created from struggles for control of knowledge areas or clientele (Abbott, 1988; Brint, 1993).

The emergence of a new profession is affected by internal organization factors; external social influences; and aspects related to values, culture, and competition (Abbott, 1988; Brint, 1998; Gardner & Shulman, 2005; Wiliensky, 1964). Researchers have used SOP theory (Abbott, 1988) throughout the social sciences to demonstrate the interrelatedness of all professions, and how they emerge, sustain themselves, and sometimes die out (Adams, 2007; Hashem, 2007; Levin & Hernandez, 2014; Lounsbury, 2002). We employed SOP theory (Abbott, 1988) to determine if Title IX administrators view their work as an emerging profession in this time of expansion of Title IX departments.

New professions emerge when a knowledge or skill vacuum is created, referred to as a vacancy in SOP theory (Abbott, 1988). Organizations create vacuums through either internal or external disturbances. These disturbances may include development of a new task, integration of a technology, the end of an existing task, or a change in a natural or cultural fact (Ibid.). For example, the profession of social media consultants is now in demand because of consumers’ shift away from print toward online marketing.

In addition to the creation of a vacuum, a new profession can develop from the process of “enclosure.” Enclosure results when a segment of an organization has such a unique set of tasks that they ‘enclose’ and become their own profession (Ibid.). The field of special education, for example, emerged from the recognition that teaching students with special needs calls for different skills that the general teaching profession not does require. Changing values also affect professions, and like other external factors, may help or hinder some professions. For example, if society values science, then professions use scientific evidence to appear legitimate (Brint, 1993). Social shifts in society are common triggers for the emergence of a new profession, “[i]n particular, social movements often identify social problems, which later become potential expert work” (Abbott, 1988, p.149). The social shift on sexual assault awareness seems to have contributed to a focus on Title IX compliance on college campuses and provides another example of how a change in a societal value affects a profession.

### 3. METHODS

We used case study methodology to investigate our research questions. Case studies require the identification of a bounded system to investigate a particular interest in an individual, a group, an organization, or an event (Merriam, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2000). An advantage of working with this methodology is the rich detail provided through vivid description, which allows the researchers and the reader to see a situation unfold while helping them to understand a phenomenon in its context. We bounded this case study within a multi-campus public university system in the Rocky Mountain Region. Each institution had a designated Title IX administrator, usually a coordinator or investigator, ensuring that our unit of analysis had a finite number of possible observations, meeting the criteria for case study research (Merriam, 2009). As researchers, none of us have held positions in a Title IX capacity. Each of us, however, has worked in higher education for several years and has dealt with a variety of conduct issues. We came to the study topic to better understand our Title IX colleagues and because it is a rare opportunity to witness the possible emergence of a new profession.

#### 3.1 Data Collection

We conducted semi-structured interviews to collect data. Semi-structured interviews offer a flexibility that allows for a broader collection of data and provides opportunities to clarify points, a style that aligns with the interpretivist epistemology of this research (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013). The focus of the semi-structured interview is to gain an understanding of individuals’ beliefs, reactions, and perspectives on the emergence of Title IX administrators

as a new profession in higher education. Critical questions included asking, “Where and to whom do you turn for professional resources/support, both on campus and off?” “How do you see the profession of Title IX administrators changing over the next 5-10 years?” “What do you view as critical skills or education for a Title IX administrator?” We recorded our interviews and took notes for use in later data analysis.

#### 3.2 Participants

We conducted seven semi-structured interviews with eight participants, representing multiple campuses within our bounded system and ranging in function and years of experience. In order to find participants, we identified candidates from college websites and directories and sent them an introductory email with an overview of the research project. We then selected the participants based on their availability, willingness to engage in an hour-long semi-structured interview, and tenure in their current positions. If more than two individuals from each institution were willing and available, we made selections based on their availability and tenure in their current positions to maximize diversity of institutions, experience, and demographics.

Our eight participants represented three different institutions, including two research universities and one urban medical campus. Two of them had responsibilities at more than one institution. Table 2 identifies each participant and his/her respective institution, role within the Title IX profession, and tenure in his/her current position. Three of our participants identified as male and five as female. They held different positions on their campuses (two investigators, two deputy coordinators, and four coordinators), and came to their current profession from several fields, including criminal justice, law, student conduct, forensic psychology, and public administration. Our participants had a range of experience both in their had been in his position for less than six months, while

**Table 2**  
**Study Participants\***

Name	Institution	Role	Tenure in position
Jordan	Urban medical	Coordinator	2 years
Maria	Urban	Deputy coordinator	6 months
Gabriel	Flagship	Deputy coordinator and investigator	10 years
Kim	Urban and urban medical	Investigator	2 years
Isaiah	Flagship	Coordinator	2 years
Nicky	Urban	Coordinator	2 years
Shawn	Urban and urban medical	Coordinator	6 months
Myron	Flagship	Investigator	7 years

*Note.* \*We changed some identifiers to protect our participants’ identities.

position and in the field as a whole—one participant had been in his position for less than six months, while another had been in a similar position for ten years. Two of our participants were new to higher education, with one to two years of experience, while the other six all had spent more than ten years working in higher education. In reviewing the tenure of each participant, the flagship institution demonstrated its leadership role in this profession with individuals who have some longevity in the field versus other institutions that had more recently hired coordinators, deputy coordinators, and investigators.

### 3.3 Analysis

To understand our data, we coded transcripts with a predetermined set of codes developed from our theoretical framework. Gibbs (2007) classified this process as concept-driven coding and recommends building a key list of thematic ideas based on the literature, previous research, and theoretical frameworks identified by researchers. Table 3 identifies the key thematic ideas drawn from our SOP framework and the work and interviews of Title IX administrators.

**Table 3**  
**Interview Themes and Sub-Themes**

Themes	Sub-themes
Professional vacuum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How position was filled</li> <li>• Reason for this vacancy</li> <li>• Why we need Title IX coordinators</li> <li>• Enclosure used to initiate vacancy</li> </ul>
Shift in society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campus responsibility in enforcement</li> <li>• Cultural shifts related to this work</li> <li>• How we view rape as a culture</li> </ul>
Controlling knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bureaucracy/Structure</li> <li>• Investigatory Knowledge and Experience</li> <li>• Legal Knowledge and Experience</li> <li>• Legitimacy</li> <li>• Ongoing Training</li> <li>• Transparency</li> </ul>
Professional vacancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How position was filled</li> <li>• Reason for this vacancy</li> <li>• Why we need Title IX coordinators</li> <li>• Enclosure used to initiate vacancy</li> </ul>
Shift in society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campus responsibility in enforcement</li> <li>• Cultural shifts related to this work</li> <li>• How we view rape as a culture</li> </ul>

We coded with DeDoose®, and used the software to aggregate excerpts corresponding to each sub-theme. We then analyzed the sets of excerpts for patterns, themes, and relationships that related back to our research question. Next, we incorporated a data reduction process where we summarized each set of excerpts into common themes and generalizations, and found broad statements

that made meaning out of the data (Hatch, 2002). We also tracked the frequency of each code as well as the number of subjects who included the theme in his/her interview.

We used data and investigator triangulation to substantiate our interpretive schemes as rigorous, to ensure the trustworthiness of our research, and to confirm the congruency of the study (Denzin, 1970). We also triangulated interviewers and transcript analysis. Each of us conducted two interviews, and then we read and re-read each other’s transcriptions. Additionally, during the data coding process, we coded a set of transcripts and then examined a second set so that two of us reviewed each series of transcripts.

## 4. FINDINGS

Our analysis found that Title IX administration has emerged as a new profession, and that our participants viewed themselves as professionals in the field. In this section we contextualize our data within SOP’s criteria and consider how participants identify themselves with the profession. As outlined by SOP, their narratives also described shifts in society that precipitated the creation of their positions.

### 4.1 Professional Vacuum

Abbott’s (1988) first criterion for validating an emerging profession was the concept of a professional vacuum, often created by internal and external forces that demand a new task or implementation of a new technology. Individuals who believe they have unique expert knowledge fill the vacuum. As experts form groups and agree on criteria for membership, this expertise becomes a means to resources and recognition. In the case of Title IX administrators, federal regulations created a vacuum that required colleges create a new task—the task of regulating and adjudicating sexual assault incidents. Evidence from our interviews demonstrated our participants shared an awareness of a professional vacuum. Shawn felt that “the [reason] we exist...is because the criminal justice system does such a bad job of adjudicating these cases...if we don’t answer to that problem, then who will?” Looking back at how slow the justice system has responded in the past to remediate cases of sexual harassment and sexual assault, Shawn, Jordan, and Maria all thought that their offices were more capable of handling and resolving investigations than the courts. Three of our participants noted a professional vacuum, defined as a gap in knowledge or skills created by internal or external disturbances.

All our participants worked in offices reporting directly to the Chancellor/President or Provost, which they felt emphasized the importance of their work and was necessary to do their jobs effectively. This reporting structure validated not only the existence of this new task, but also its importance. Myron described the organization structure at the flagship institution:

Our office reports directly to the Chancellor... to eliminate any conflict of interest. Previously, there were quite a few individuals in between us and the Chancellor, and inherently politics always seem to come up in any organization. And I think it also just demonstrates just how seriously we're taking these issues.

An external consultant advised the institution to place the Title IX administrator position below the Chancellor. Isaiah, from the same institution, added that:

One of the big things they talked about was the importance of having one director, one central Title IX coordinator with some deputies and having all those people report directly up to the chancellor rather than through the individual units.

Other institutions received similar advice. Kim noted, "We moved away from [multiple offices] under the advice of a consulting firm and also just best practices, so we now have one Title IX coordinator, and when that took effect I moved under the Title IX coordinator." In our participants' opinions, merging the offices emphasized the importance of the professional vacuum that existed and drove the need to formalize the current work of Title IX administrators.

#### 4.2 Enclosure

A subcomponent of professional vacuum is the concept of enclosure. Abbott (1988) noted that there is enclosure where "there emerge specialties in several professions, performing similar sorts of work but retaining their original allegiance" (p.95). Each of our participants accepted their current positions having previously served in another role at their institution, and participated in additional specialized Title IX trainings. Their position required a unique skill set, distinct from any others in the organization. However, as employees of the institution, they were still associated with their college or university. Our participants suggested they are creating a new profession within institutions as a result of their ability to implement the knowledge, skills, and methods to maintain compliance. As Maria commented, the specialized skills needed allow Title IX administrators to "control our little universe of the university."

The newly implemented skill set was distinguished from others within the higher education profession and, in our participants' minds, suggests the need for a new profession. Myron noted,

I think that the national attention to these issues and the regulations, and the advice, and guidance that are being put in place by OCR are really requiring it to be an emerging profession. [Y]ou know people are not allowed to just let this go or kind of have it be somebody's side job... there's so many things, requirements, that are being put in place, that really I... that every university is really going to have to grow their Title IX positions to meet those needs and those requirements.

The required actions outlined by the DCL (Ali, 2011) defined a new task within higher education institutions emphasizing a clear professional vacuum institutions were forced to address.

#### 4.3 Shift in Society

The second criterion outlined by Abbott (1988) was a shift in a societal or cultural value. As a society's view on a specific topic shifts, so often goes the professions related to it. Our literature review and participant feedback provided evidence that a new societal emphasis on ending violence against women in the form of sexual assault contributed to the rapidly changing demands for compliance placed on institutions in the 2011 DCL. As Maria stated, "Title IX today is certainly not what Title IX was a year ago or 10 years or 30 years ago." We appear to have witnessed what SOP (Abbott, 1988) described as a social factor that creates professional work "in particular, social movements often identify social problems, which later become potential expert work" (Abbott, 1988, p.149). We interpreted some of our participants' responses to reflect shifts in society, including sub-themes of a campus responsibility for enforcement, cultural shifts, and how we view sexual violence as a culture.

One visible change all participants noted was the campus's responsibility in enforcement and how this has expanded from a limited view of Title IX, to a broader view of civil rights issues. Gabriel described this shift:

I do think that the model that we have around including not just sexual misconduct under Title IX, but also under you know Title VI, and the other federal statutes that cover the other protected classes. I do think we're going to see an expansion both coming down from OCR as well as other campuses in broadening their model. I think it's a real mistake for campuses that have a very robust Title IX program, but are not including the other gamut of protected classes, because that's really not in line with our sort of civil rights framework, legally. So I think a good model incorporates both and we're going to see a push towards lots of campuses doing just that.

The emphasis on protecting all individuals against misconduct and violence was evidence of the cultural shift related to end violence toward women and other protected classes. Myron and Maria suggested we were also witnessing a significant shift in institutional responsibility. Maria stated, "we're changing paradigms, we're changing frameworks, we're really trying to help people understand what the directives are." Most of our participants responded positively to the change, "I'm glad that the evolution has been in such a way to hold universities accountable." As Myron stated:

The issues that we're looking into have always existed. Right? And over time there become more and more attention to these issues in a good way. Where colleges and universities are now finding that we need to put more attention and put more money behind addressing these issues. And so while there was always people on campus trying to assist when these sorts of incidents...it's much more formalized and a clear process.

Myron viewed this shift as an evolution: while the mandates have always existed, the attention has shifted. What was formerly a component of student conduct was identi-

fied as a higher priority with its own devoted resources as a direct result of shifts in society.

#### 4.4 Media Attention

Our participants believed a heightened state of sexual assault awareness existed and this change represented a cultural shift to which institutions had to respond. Kim, Gabriel, Maria, and Isaiah discussed the changes in how we viewed assault, complainants, and respondents as a culture. The associated media attention has buoyed these shifts in society. Kim mentioned the oft-cited prevalence of sexual assault:

...the 1994 rape in America study came out with 1 in 4. And 1 in 4 females are victims of some form of sexual assault and again, you have to define what sexual assault is, but I don't think those numbers have changed. I really don't. We're seeing more, but because of media, we're seeing more because of the social media.

In addition to the media focus, Gabriel commented, "... there has been this tremendous grass-roots effort among students in particular" in how we are viewing assault and campus responsibilities. Maria indicated, "It's a pretty heavily covered topic in the media and so I think most folks are aware of the climate." Concurrent with the increased awareness of sexual assault is the understanding of how to work with the complainants and create safe spaces. Isaiah highlighted an emerging trend around victim's agency:

That's a really big topic right now... meaning whether a victim wants to go forward with an investigation or not, to report to police or not. Honor his or her agency, but also do what we need to do make sure that an alleged perpetrator doesn't continue to perpetrate on this person or someone else.

Maria provided a succinct summary describing this shift and why campuses had taken up these issues, "even if it [a sexual assault] is happening off campus, it's likely to impact campus, either their academics or a work situation, or if somebody is dealing with domestic violence and they're an employee, it's likely to impact their work." This acknowledgement that even an off campus assault affects the university community represented a clear shift in campus responsibility for enforcement, and how we view rape as a culture.

#### 4.5 Controlling Knowledge

The ability to control knowledge, specifically 'abstract' or unique knowledge, was the third criterion SOP suggested could contribute to an emerging profession (Abbott, 1988)<sup>7</sup>. In the case of our participants, the abstract knowledge appeared to fall within the categories of (a) knowledge of the regulations, (b) the knowledge needed to conduct effective investigations, and (c) knowledge of legal systems and access to legal information.

An industry marks a new profession as legitimate when it demonstrates control over its own specialized knowledge. Maria referred to work with staff and faculty

across the campus and stated, Title IX professionals need to let "folks know that it really is outside the scope of their responsibility." Isaiah reinforced the need to control and manage this expertise because "these are big jobs, you want to make sure you have someone with the right experience and motivation to make sure we're doing what we need to be doing." These professionals identified an area of expertise that requires specialized training and knowledge. Participants reinforced the complexity of the profession when they described how they explained their job to outsiders; as Nicky said, "it's a complicated, you know, thing to describe to the commoner." Nicky suggested the role of Title IX administrators is difficult to explain to individuals who do not have expertise in higher education. Participants typically did not discuss the work outside of this realm. Maria added, "It moved from a hobby to need expertise and professionalism." All of our participants demonstrated a sense of pride and responsibility in their profession as well as a sense of 'ownership' over the knowledge and the work. This sense of ownership tied directly to SOP theory in that "owning" a body of knowledge in essence defines Abbott's (1988) ideas around jurisdiction and knowledge control.

Participants defended the specialized knowledge within the emerging profession and often connected it to the amount of regulatory information. Maria's visual was helpful,

[Our coordinator] had put together this document that we used for one of the presentations and it was 29 pages and it was essentially a bibliography of all of the guidance that has come out from Title IX, and you know many of those documents are multiple pages, if not 20, 30, 50 pages long.

Extensive regulations and mandates associated with the work of Title IX administrators indicated a body of knowledge was necessary for individuals working in this profession. Myron added,

Right now, everything is in such flux, and I think that in 5-10 years there's going to be more set guidance and kind of rules for us to follow. Right now, it feels like every day there is new guidance and people are constantly having to review, and make sure, we are doing everything correctly.

Our participants noted the need for regulation and self-regulation through national associations, such as ATIXA, to develop specific requirements and professional guidelines. Additionally, not only was the body of knowledge extensive, it was constantly in flux requiring ongoing mastery.

#### 4.6 Jurisdiction

Another way professions emerge according to SOP, is the use of jurisdiction: when professionals identify an emerging area of expertise, the profession claims it for its own (Abbott, 1988). Our participants frequently indicated investigatory experience as a significant need for Title IX professionals to possess and demonstrate how they

claimed this area of responsibility as theirs alone. Kim had only been an investigator with her college for two years; she described her extensive experience,

I can manage cases and I can interview this person and I can do that, but that's because I've been doing this for 20 some years. Investigating is more than just asking questions. Just like analyzing is more than trying to get the answers.

Kim's assertion of the need for expertise in the area of investigatory processes demonstrated how this skill set was now part of the Title IX domain. Kim continued, "I worked hearings, admin hearings, these types of things, for about 10 years." For those professionals who did not have former experience, they were required to receive training in investigatory processes. Gabriel supported the importance of this area of knowledge, "The interviewing skills, the ability to develop rapport with people from an investigative standpoint is certainly important." Because adjudication was the purview of the institutions at the time of our study, Title IX professionals were required to have investigatory knowledge, a fact that clearly surfaced in our interviews.

In addition to the investigatory expertise, our participants emphasized their legal prowess. The profession appeared to be commandeering the legal expertise needed within higher education and was staking it as its own jurisdiction. In each of our participants' offices, someone had a law degree or at least experience working within a legal environment. Isaiah was a civil rights lawyer for 17 years, and Shawn came to the position with a law degree. Shawn stated, "I don't think you need a law degree, I really don't in this space, but I think it certainly helps if you have that kind of background." This participant indicated the need for legal knowledge, or at least access to legal advice. Many of the offices pull expertise, as Kim shared, from "within our team, within our Title IX coordinator, deputy coordinator, and the investigator, that we have these different skill sets." Sometimes they had to look to other experts on campus; as Nicky commented, "everybody interprets things differently. I mean even when a legal team, a lawyer, one of our legal counsel may interpret something that I may not see it that same way, but I'm going to have to depend on them." Our participants recognized the need for a diverse skill set and had formed complete teams claiming jurisdiction over these areas of knowledge.

#### **4.7 Training**

A key component of SOP theory is how professional training emerges as a tenant of the control of knowledge. The participants described the importance of specialized training and how it was ongoing in their jobs, including formal events through ATIXA, webinars, conferences, and informal sharing of information between internal and external colleagues. Gabriel reinforced the need for a variety of training methods: "We make a tremendous

effort on an ongoing basis to do a ton of professional development for our team. In any given year, we're doing dozens of webinars, but also in-person live conferences for our whole team." All of the participants commented on the variety of ways in which they received training. Myron shared some of his training topics, "we learned about interviewing techniques, theories of psychotherapy, risk assessment, for suicide, homicide, interpersonal violence, child abuse, we learned of course about the clinical disorders, the DSM [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders]." Shawn stated, "you know we've done a lot of webinars, there's just a lot of stuff going on. It seems like every time I turn around I'm doing something like that. But, it never hurts to kind of keep on top of things." Isaiah noted the ongoing nature of the training, "certainly you know you have to have training every year, best practices." Because there is not yet a dedicated program of study for these professionals, there appeared to be a patchwork of resources used to stay current in the field where guidance from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) was changing frequently. Our findings demonstrated this attribute of training as well as the specialization of knowledge and jurisdiction over the body of knowledge.

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#### **LIMITATIONS**

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In reviewing this study, there are several limitations to consider. Three institutions in the Rocky Mountain West region bounded our case study; other institutions in different states, and the individuals who work at those institutions, may have alternative experiences. The individuals whom we interviewed worked in institutions in various stages of implementing their Title IX structures and processes, and are likely further along than other institutions nationally. Although the majority of participants indicated the existence of a growing and emerging profession, there was not consensus among all participants. As is true with all interpretivist studies, we are the instruments of data collection and data analysis and other researchers may arrive at different findings. As researchers, we feel confident that we applied our methodology in a trustworthy manner.

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#### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

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Title IX administration, as it existed on many college and universities campuses during our study, marked the establishment of a new, and still young, profession. Like other professions that established themselves as integral to campuses, the Title IX profession must mature. The 2011 DCL was issued under the Obama administration. The repeal or replacement of guidelines by other administrations may threaten the profession. The Trump administration has already revoked protections

for transgender students in public schools, indicating a preference to defer to states and localities when interpreting anti-discrimination laws (Somashekhar, Brown, & Balingit, 2017). Media attention garnered by stories of sexual violence, sexual harassment, and hostile work environments in higher education suggest a broad social concern for addressing systemic campus problems. If SOP is correct, however, Title IX administrators and professional associations will have a central role in ensuring institutions are obligated to commit the resources necessary to employ these professionals.

If the Title IX profession is to survive and mature, ATIXA, the current professional organization, will likely take steps to elevate its perceived professionalism. This might be done with the creation of a peer reviewed journal or significant data collection and analysis with the resulting reports, and regional and national conferences. With the significant training that is associated with Title IX professions, we anticipate the creation of multiple certification programs connected through national organizations. As a result, it seems likely that Title IX administrators could soon be required to have specific training-based credentials for hiring and continued employment. The initial legitimacy of the new Title IX profession is founded primarily on the directives in a DCL. National elections and the appointment of new DOE leadership could result in further DCLs that remove these directives.

The maturation of Title IX as a profession could also spur the creation of new, related degree programs within higher education. We anticipate new degree tracks in higher education programs, or specializations within law programs. These programs would provide learners with information on legal, investigatory, policy, and regulations as our research confirms the need to hire individuals with at least some background in all of these areas. Associated with the high-level of education and training required for these positions, Abbott (1988) would suggest that as the profession matures, we would see a more defined career path as “the general career line itself is an important differentiator within professions” (p.129). As individuals invest in education and certification, they will want to stay within their field, and advancement within the profession will be necessary.

We must also consider the competition for knowledge and expertise could shift the Title IX profession away from a mature profession and rather towards its death. As awareness grows around the need for colleges and universities to provide Title IX services, experts from competing fields such as law and criminal justice may seek to “take back” control of the expertise associated with adjudicating sexual assault cases. The 2011 DCL mandates are unfunded; however, non-compliance means risking the loss of Federal dollars. If the current administration changes Title IX guidelines and institutions reallocate resources to compete needs, this could result

in some Title IX administrators being hired by these competing professions.

In the presence of an emerging profession, universities may play several roles, and for Title IX administrators, there may be unique opportunities for institutions. Universities can provide legitimacy with exclusive expertise and programming. They can be the source of knowledge advancement and research to develop new practices. University programs may also serve as the training ground for young professionals. Finally, we may see the university as the playing field for the jousting of position between professions (Abbott, 1988). Regardless of how professionals are prepared, our research indicates colleges and universities will need to ensure Title IX professionals have the legal and investigatory training necessary for the position.

Our research is the first step in exploring the emerging profession of Title IX administrators; there are a number of potential areas for future and continuing research. This emerging profession demonstrates the ways in which institutions have risen to meet the needs of students while complying with federal mandates. Future areas for research may include continuing to explore the best practices for training these professionals and studying the ways in which they work and interact with the campus environment. Additionally, how institutions respond to training and educating this new profession is a potential area for future study. While we focused on the emerging profession from the view of those in the roles, the campus community and their experiences with this new profession would provide additional narratives.

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## CONCLUSION

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This study considered the emergence of a new profession, one that deals with deeply troubling and persistent social issues that exist on our campuses. Lost in our consideration of the topic was an acknowledgment of the vital work done by Title IX professionals to make our campuses safer and more equitable for all members of our community. The work of Title IX administrators requires they regularly experience our campuses as places of assault, violence, and hostility. On one level it may seem insincere to consider the difficult work done by these individuals as a “profession” that exists because it filled a vacuum. On the other hand, we observed that the issues Title IX professionals address daily have existed since the founding of the first U.S. Colleges but it took a Federal mandate to create the vacuum before many institutional leaders were forced to recognize the persistent problems on their campuses.

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