

Presidential Advisory Committee on Sexual Assault Annual Report (2025-2026)

The Presidential Advisory Committee on Sexual Assault (PACSA) is one of several Columbia University initiatives to address gender-based misconduct and is charged with advising the president on issues related to the prevention of and response to gender-based misconduct, including sexual assault. The Committee was created in 2006 through a Senate resolution and works with partners and experts across the University to evaluate policies and procedures and solicit feedback from the Columbia community with the goal of eliminating sexual assault and other forms of gender-based misconduct from our community.

Membership

The President appoints all members of the committee. The 2025-2026 Committee comprises faculty, staff, and students from across Columbia's campuses. Committee members are appointed to two-year terms, which may be extended by the President. Ex-officio members have no term limits.

Committee Members:

Chairs

- Claude Ann Mellins (Professor of Medical Psychology (in Psychiatry and Sociomedical Sciences) at CUIMC)
- Melanie Bernitz (Executive Vice President, University Life and Well-Being, Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine (in the Center for Family and Community Medicine))

Term-limited Members

- Jeanine D'Armiento (Chair, University Senate; Professor of Medicine (in Anesthesiology and Physiology and Cellular Biophysics))
- Richard J. Eichler (Associate Vice President, Counseling and Psychological Services, Columbia Health)
- Marcy Ferdschneider (Assistant Vice President, Student Health on Haven; Assistant Professor of Medicine at CUIMC)
- Helen Han Wei Luo (Student, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences)
- Mahlon Mathieson (Student, School of Nursing)
- Huda Paracha (Student, Barnard College)
- Susan Witte (Professor of Social Work, School of Social Work)

Ex-officio Members

- Donna Fenn (Deputy General Counsel)
- Marjory D. Fisher (Associate Vice President & Title IX Coordinator, Office of Institutional Equity)
- Laura Kirschstein (Vice Provost, Office of Institutional Equity)
- La'Shawn Rivera (Senior Executive Director, Sexual Violence Response, Columbia Health)
- Colleen Walsh (Senior Director of Title IX Investigations, Office of Institutional Equity)

Discussions:

During the 2025-2026 academic year, the Committee met twice — on January 26, 2026 and March 30, 2026. At the January meeting, partners across the University briefed the Committee on the status of Title IX and the Office of Institutional Equity, the University's revised Title IX and Related Misconduct Policy that took effect on September 30, 2025, trends in reported cases of gender-based misconduct, and ongoing programming supporting prevention of and response to gender-based misconduct. The Committee was also informed of the presidential transition, with President-Designate Jennifer Mnookin set to begin in July 2026.

At the March meeting, the Committee followed up on questions raised at the January meeting regarding the 49% rate of unresponsive complainants identified in Title IX case data, reviewing longer-term data and contextual factors — including findings from the Sexual Health Initiative to Foster Transformation (SHIFT) — that suggest patterns of non-reporting and non-responsiveness predate recent data collection and are consistent with trends observed at peer institutions. The Committee then engaged in an extended discussion of PACSA's history, structure, and evolution since its creation in 2006, including its shift over time from a deliverable-focused advisory model toward a greater emphasis on policy and programming updates. This discussion led to an open conversation about the Committee's current charge and scope, institutional trust, and community response in light of the Robert Hadden matter, including questions about the Committee's engagement with University leadership, the transparency of agenda-setting, the adequacy of current listening-session efforts, and the need to ensure student and community voices remain central to the Committee's work going forward.

Additionally, the Committee had presentations on the following topics during the 2025-2026 academic year:

- Office of Institutional Equity: Overview of the Revised Title IX and Related Misconduct Policy and Procedures
- Title IX and Gender-Based Misconduct Case Data and Trends, July 2020–June 2025
- The Lived Experiences and Needs of Students (LENS) Survey: History, 2024 Data, and 2026 Survey Administration
- Columbia Health Sexual Violence Response: Relationship Violence Awareness Month (RVAM) 2025 and Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) 2026

Recommendations:

The Committee recommends the following related to the discussions and work from the 2025-2026 academic year:

1. To review PACSA's charge and scope with incoming President Mnookin.
2. To revisit the Committee's meeting format and its engagement model with University leadership to allow for deeper, meaningful advisory engagement that is consistent with PACSA's charge.
3. To ensure greater transparency in agenda-setting so that significant, emerging institutional matters related to the application of the Title IX policy and the supportive resources available to our community members are appropriately and proactively incorporated into Committee discussions.

4. To further examine the institutional and environmental factors contributing to the sustained rate of unresponsive complainants, drawing on longer-term data such as SHIFT and comparisons with peer institutions.
5. To explore how PACSA can support individual schools and departments by sharing optional guidance, tools, and best practices, including approaches to listening sessions, developed in response to community concerns.
6. To ensure that student input remains central to determining Committee priorities and the future scope of PACSA's work.