

August 12, 2020

Dear Linfield Community:

In previous messages, the Executive Committee of the Board pledged it would report on the outcome of independent investigations into allegations made by a faculty member against two trustees of inappropriate conduct. We are writing today to disclose those results.

Linfield University does not tolerate any form of harassment. We are committed to maintaining an academic and workplace environment free of discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment. We promptly investigate any and all complaints or allegations of harassment. Linfield follows all applicable laws to protect the privacy and confidentiality of both complainants and respondents.

However, we are addressing this issue today because of unauthorized and inaccurate statements made in recent months – including claims made by the Faculty Trustee in February and May reports to the Board of Trustees. The May 2020 report described a “crisis” at Linfield related to the safety of our students and revealed that “four different members of the board have been credibly accused of sexual misconduct since last February.” Those claims were false, as we have stated previously.

After reviewing the findings from the independent investigator and our Title IX and HR professionals, the Executive Committee is confident that claims of a sexual misconduct crisis at Linfield are erroneous.

As we explained in our July 30 letter to the Linfield community, the truth is that there were no reported allegations of sexual misconduct against any current trustee at the time of the February 2020 report. Shortly thereafter, a Linfield faculty member filed separate complaints against two trustees.

The university’s human resources department retained an outside employment attorney with extensive experience in sexual harassment cases to conduct independent investigations into the claims of sexual harassment. The outside investigator determined that there was no harassment in either case.

In the first instance, the faculty member reported being touched inappropriately on the arms by a trustee after a campus event in September 2018. The trustee denied the incident happened. More than a dozen persons were interviewed as part of the investigation into the incident, which took more than four months to complete. The investigator determined, based on the preponderance of evidence, that the arm touching likely occurred, but found that the behavior did not violate Linfield’s Anti-Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy and/or its Title IX Policy. The faculty member and the trustee have been notified of the finding.

In the second instance, the faculty member reported being touched inappropriately on the leg, back and, possibly, the hand by a different trustee in a public setting. The trustee denied the incident happened. After interviews with seven people at the event (none of whom said they witnessed the alleged actions), the investigator determined based on the preponderance of evidence that the behavior, if it did occur, did not violate Linfield’s Anti-Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy and/or its Title IX Policy. The faculty member and the trustee have been notified of that finding, as well.

As we disclosed previously, Linfield’s Title IX office was made aware of an anonymous letter in February 2020 claiming that a third trustee allegedly invaded a complainant’s privacy by inquiring

about the extent of student loan debt at a campus gathering. The anonymous letter also stated that a fourth trustee allegedly made an insensitive remark to a group of students (referring to them collectively as attractive) and later hugged a student at the end of the same event. No complainant ever came forward. Linfield's Title IX Coordinator determined that the anonymous allegations did not rise to the level of violating any Linfield policy and did not warrant further action, particularly since there was no information about who wrote the letter.

These four matters represent the total number of complaints made against current trustees. None was found to constitute sexual misconduct. None was found to have violated any Linfield policy.

Regardless, the Executive Committee of the Board is deeply troubled that any member of the Linfield community would be made to feel uncomfortable by the behavior of others. As trustees, we believe this is a teachable moment for everyone: The Board, administration, faculty, staff and students. We must all do better to teach each other how to respond to the often subtle and complex discussion around sexual misconduct. We are obligated to adhere to the requirements dictated by law, but that isn't enough. For our part, the Board worked hard this spring and summer to reflect on the facts raised in the ongoing discussion, and to investigate and review our own policies and practices.

The Committee remains distressed that people with no first-hand knowledge repeatedly mischaracterized the recent claims as sexual assault or sexual misconduct in a manner that led our students to fear for their safety.

Linfield is, by all measures, an extremely safe campus. The university also has in place – and continually updates – best practices involving student safety and Title IX policies. This fall, the university will announce updated Title IX protocols including recommendations from a presidential task force. In addition, the Board of Trustees along with all faculty and staff have received and will continue to undergo harassment and boundary training. To date, every member of the Board of Trustees has completed that training.

Lastly, and most important, the Board wants to remind the university community that any and all complaints about sexual harassment or assault should be promptly reported. Linfield has an excellent team in place, with an experienced Title IX Coordinator, four Title IX Deputies and a Director of Human Resources to investigate and address allegations of misconduct.

We do not want the fear of disclosure – or efforts to politicize sexual misconduct – to interfere with someone's desire to report inappropriate behavior. We must all strive to foster an environment that supports complainants and protects their privacy at all times.

Humbly,

The Executive Committee of the Linfield University Board of Trustees