

## Training for College Title IX Investigators Webinar

December 16, 2020

**Matthew M. Swift**  
[mswift@robbins-schwartz.com](mailto:mswift@robbins-schwartz.com)

**Emily P. Bothfeld**  
[ebothfeld@robbins-schwartz.com](mailto:ebothfeld@robbins-schwartz.com)

**Chicago**  
55 West Monroe Street, Suite 800  
Chicago, IL 60603  
p 312.332.7760  
f 312.332.7768

**Champaign-Urbana**  
301 North Neil Street, Suite 400  
Champaign, IL 61820  
p 217.363.3040  
f 217.356.3548

**Collinsville**  
510 Regency Centre  
Collinsville, IL 62234  
p 618.343.3540  
f 618.343.3546

**Bolingbrook**  
631 East Boughton Road, Suite 200  
Bolingbrook, IL 60440  
p 630.929.3639  
f 630.783.3231

**Rockford**  
2990 North Perryville Road, Suite 4144B  
Rockford, IL 61107  
p 815.390.7090

The materials on this webpage are the property of Robbins Schwartz and may not be copied, adapted, shared, or displayed without the express written permission of Robbins Schwartz.


# Training for College Title IX Investigators

Presented by: Emily P. Bothfeld and Matthew M. Swift  
December 16, 2020

Robbins Schwartz

1

## Background on the Title IX Investigator Role



Robbins Schwartz

2

Although the information contained herein is considered accurate, it is not, nor should it be construed to be legal advice. If you have an individual problem or incident that involves a topic covered in this document, please seek a legal opinion that is based upon the facts of your particular case.  
© 2020 Robbins Schwartz

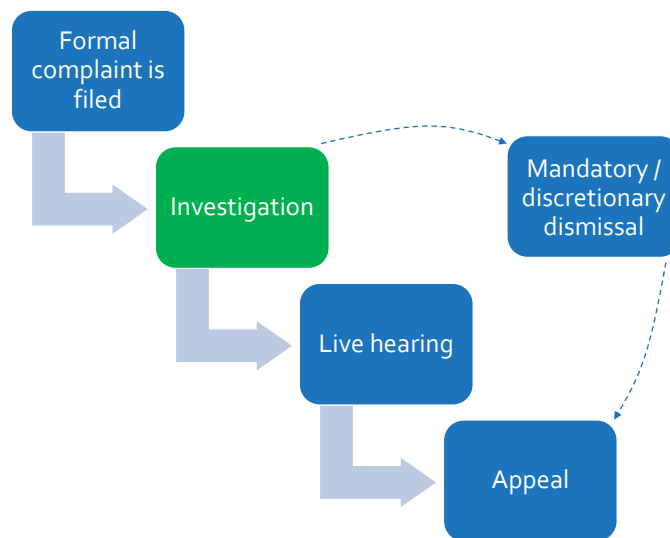
## Background: Changes to Investigations

- Colleges can no longer use a “single investigator” model
  - An investigator assigned to a formal complaint may not serve as a decision-maker for that complaint.
- Title IX Coordinator may serve as an investigator, but not as a decision-maker
- Colleges must provide the parties with equal access to inspect and review the evidence
- Investigator must submit an investigation report summarizing the relevant evidence

Robbins Schwartz

3

## Background: Overview of Grievance Process



Robbins Schwartz

4

## Background: Key Definitions

- Title IX sexual harassment
  - Quid pro quo harassment by a college employee
  - Unwelcome conduct that a reasonable person would find so severe, pervasive and objectively offensive that it denies a person equal access to the education program or activity
  - Sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence or stalking
- Education program or activity
  - locations, events, or circumstances over which the college exercised substantial control over both the Respondent and the context in which the sexual harassment occurred, and
  - any building owned or controlled by a student organization that is officially recognized by the college
- Complainant
  - An individual alleged to be the victim of conduct that could constitute sexual harassment

Robbins Schwartz

5

## Conflicts of Interest and Bias



Robbins Schwartz

6

## Conflict of Interest & Bias

- Any Title IX investigator must not have a conflict of interest or bias for or against:
  - Complainants or Respondents generally or
  - an individual Complainant or Respondent.
- Can be a basis for appeal if it affects the outcome

Robbins Schwartz

7

## Conflicts of Interest

- The PSVHEA requires that an institution have a sufficient number of individuals trained to resolve complaints so that:
  - A substitution can occur in the case of a conflict of interest; and
  - An individual with no prior involvement in the initial determination or finding hear any appeal brought by a party.

Robbins Schwartz

8

## Conflicts of Interest

### •Key question:

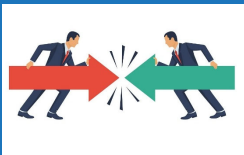
- Does the Investigator's prior or existing relationship with or knowledge of a party prevent the Investigator from serving impartially?



Robbins Schwartz

9

## Conflicts of Interest



- Where you self-identify a conflict of interest, notify the Title IX Coordinator that you will need to recuse yourself.
- Where a party believes that you have a prohibited conflict of interest, the party must contact the Title IX Coordinator to request a substitution.
  - The Title IX Coordinator may request information from you to help him/her evaluate the claim.

Robbins Schwartz

10

## Hypothetical: Conflicts of Interest

- You serve on the College's Behavioral Intervention Team. At a BIT meeting, you took part in a decision to remove a respondent from the College's educational program on an emergency basis. The College subsequently conducted a Title IX investigation with respect to that respondent, and you have just been appointed to serve as an Investigator for the case.
  - Do you have a conflict of interest?

Robbins Schwartz

11

## How to Address Implicit Bias

- More deliberate or conscious thinking
  - Allow time to fully think through a scenario before coming to a decision / conclusion
- Create and follow checklists
  - Procedural requirements
  - Allegations to be proven / disproven
- Document treatment of both parties and ensure it remains equitable
  - Opportunities to provide evidence
  - Details of the parties' interviews (time to prepare, breaks, advisors' roles, etc.)
  - Access to relevant evidence
  - Offering flexibility or granting requests for accommodations



Robbins Schwartz

12

## Spotting the Elements of Title IX Sexual Harassment



Robbins Schwartz

13

## Title IX Sexual Harassment: Quid Pro Quo

- When an employee of the college conditions aid, benefits, pay, a position, grades, discipline, or opportunities for advancement on unwelcome sexual conduct.
  - Example: Mr. Jones promises his student, Jane, that he will write a strong recommendation letter for her if she engages in sexual conduct after class.
  - Example: Ms. Smith tells her subordinate, Bob, that he should “just play along” with a vendor’s sexual advances and “take one for the team” since his performance review is coming up.

Robbins Schwartz

14



## Title IX Sexual Harassment: Quid Pro Quo

- When accepting or performing unwanted sexual conduct is required:
  - To access some benefit, or
  - To avoid some negative consequence
- Key elements:
  - Employee Respondent
  - Exchange of “this for that”
- Can be explicit or implicit

Robbins Schwartz

15

## Title IX Sexual Harassment: Hypothetical

- Jane alleges that her professor Mr. Jones started giving her lower grades on her assignments after she turned down his requests to take her on a date.
- What specific information and evidence would you want to gather?
- What steps would you take to investigate these allegations?

Robbins Schwartz

16

## Title IX Sexual Harassment: "Hostile Environment"

- Unwelcome conduct that a reasonable person would find so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it denies a person equal access to the education program or activity



Robbins Schwartz

17

## Title IX Sexual Harassment: "Hostile Environment"

- Key elements:
  - Unwelcome conduct
  - Severe and pervasive and offensive
    - Severity factors: age of Respondent, relationship of the parties, physical contact, etc.
    - Pervasiveness factors: affecting other school/work relationships, incidents in multiple contexts, conduct repeated over time, etc.
    - Offensiveness: humiliation, threats, physical safety, interference with work/learning, "hostile or abusive," etc.
  - Denial of equal access
    - Examples: falling grades, limiting enrollment in classes, student group participation, positions or assignments, job benefits, etc.

Robbins Schwartz

18

## Title IX Sexual Harassment: Hypothetical

- Mike, a custodian, alleges that his coworker Joe regularly slapped him on the butt with an “atta boy” at the end of his shifts. Mike says that he asked Joe to stop, but Joe responded, “You should enjoy it,” and that Joe now often comments on Mike’s sexuality and tries to slap Mike’s butt unexpectedly.
- What specific information and evidence would you want to gather?
- What steps would you take to investigate these allegations?

Robbins Schwartz

19

## Title IX Sexual Harassment: Other Categories

- Title IX’s definition of sexual harassment also includes:
  - Sexual Assault
  - Dating Violence
  - Domestic Violence
  - Stalking



*As defined under the Clery Act/Violence Against Women Act*

Robbins Schwartz

20

## Title IX Sexual Harassment: Sexual Assault

### • Sexual Assault

- An offense that meets the definition of rape, fondling, incest, or statutory rape as used in the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting program
- Generally, forcible sexual contact or sexual contact without consent due to incapacitation, intoxication, or age
- Incest: sexual contact between individuals with a familial relationship of a degree prohibiting marriage

Robbins Schwartz

21

## Title IX Sexual Harassment: Dating Violence & Stalking

### Dating Violence

- Violence committed by a person who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim.

### Stalking

- Engaging in a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to –
  - Fear for the person's safety or the safety of others; or
  - Suffer substantial emotional distress.

Robbins Schwartz

22

## Title IX Sexual Harassment: Domestic Violence

- A felony or misdemeanor crime of violence committed:
  - By a current or former spouse or intimate partner of the victim;
  - By a person with whom the victim shares a child in common;
  - By a person who is cohabitating with, or has cohabitated with, the victim as a spouse or intimate partner;
  - By a person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction in which the crime of violence occurred; or
  - By any other person against an adult or youth victim who is protected.

Robbins Schwartz



23

## Title IX Sexual Harassment: Hypothetical

- A student alleges that her boyfriend, who is also a student, physically abused her while they were on campus.
- What specific information and evidence would you want to gather?
- What steps would you take to investigate these allegations?

Robbins Schwartz

24

## Title IX Sexual Harassment: Hypothetical

- A student alleges that her coach has been telling her that she reminds him of his ex-wife. She also says her coach refers to her by his ex-wife's name when she makes a mistake, and calls her "Doll," his ex-wife's nickname, when she does something well.
- The student alleges that her coach's taunts have gotten raunchier and are distracting her, and he is keeping her on the bench more as her performance deteriorates.
- What kind(s) of sexual harassment are you investigating?
- What additional facts do you need to ask about?

Robbins Schwartz

25

## Other Relevant Laws

- The below laws also may be relevant to allegations of sexual harassment:
  - Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ("Title VII")
  - Illinois Human Rights Act ("IHRA")
  - Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act ("ANCRA")
  - Preventing Sexual Violence in Higher Education Act ("PSVHEA")

Robbins Schwartz

26

## Conducting Investigatory Interviews



Robbins Schwartz

27

## Investigatory Interviews: Title IX Requirements

- Send notice of any interview or meeting and give each party sufficient time to prepare.
- Give the parties an equal opportunity to select advisor of their choice.
- Provide equal opportunity to present fact and expert witnesses and other inculpatory and exculpatory evidence.
- Avoid “gag orders.”
  - The college must not restrict the ability of either party to discuss the allegations.

Robbins Schwartz

28

## Investigatory Interviews: Preparation

- Review:
  - The allegations
  - Relevant policies and procedures
  - Relevant student or employee records
  - Any documentary evidence received so far
- As applicable, check for employee notice or union representation requirements
- Decide whether to conduct the interview by videoconference, in person, or by phone
- Schedule meetings promptly
  - Notice Letter of Investigative Interview



Robbins Schwartz

29

## Investigatory Interviews: Hypothetical

- You are trying to schedule interviews with a student, a faculty member, and a community member. All three are either not responding to you or outright refusing to participate.
  - What can you do to try to convince them?
  - If they still will not participate, how do you proceed?

Robbins Schwartz

30



## Investigatory Interviews: Preparation

- Plan your questions, considering:
  - Specific parts of the relevant definition(s) of sexual harassment and other misconduct
  - How to ask about the specific allegations objectively and equitably
  - What additional facts might be helpful
  - “Point me in the right direction” questions
- Plan how to begin and end the interview

Robbins Schwartz

31

## Investigatory Interviews: Advisors

- Both parties may select an advisor of their choosing
  - May, but need not be, an attorney
- Advisor’s role is to provide support, guidance, advice
  - May not answer on behalf of the party
- Parameters for both parties’ advisors must be the same



Robbins Schwartz

32

## Investigatory Interviews: Hypothetical

- You are interviewing Jill, an employee who has been accused of sexual harassment. Jill brought her attorney Jack as her advisor, and Jack is making the interview difficult.
- What should you do if Jack:
  - repeatedly answers for Jill or “clarifies” her testimony?
  - objects to most of your questions and tells Jill she doesn’t have to answer?
  - demands to see evidence or have questions answered before Jill answers?

Robbins Schwartz

33

## Investigatory Interviews: Questioning

- Open-ended questions are best
  - Closed-ended:
    - Q: “Were you in Frank’s office when the phone rang?”
    - A: “No.”
  - Open-ended:
    - Q: “Where were you when the phone rang?”
    - A: “I was in the hallway outside Frank’s office.”

Robbins Schwartz

34

## Investigative Interviews: Questioning

- Avoid multiple choice questions
  - Bad Example: “Where were you when the phone rang—in Frank’s office, in the hallway, or in the stairwell?”
- Avoid compound questions
  - Bad Example: “Where were you and who were you with when the phone rang?”

Robbins Schwartz

35

## Investigative Interviews: Questioning

- The interviewee must fully understand the question to give a reliable answer
- If the interviewee asks you to repeat or rephrase a question, you should do so
- Give the interviewee time to think and respond before asking the next question



Robbins Schwartz

36

## Investigatory Interviews: Questioning

- Complete a line of questioning before moving on to questioning about a different issue
- When possible, clarify issues on which there is conflicting testimony before concluding the interview

Robbins Schwartz

37

## Investigations: Questioning

- Allow the interviewee to respond to each factual allegation
- Do not hesitate to ask follow-up questions
- Ask whether any witnesses can confirm the interviewee's testimony
- Obtain names and, if necessary, contact information for witnesses

Robbins Schwartz

38

## Investigative Interviews: Credibility



### • Factors for determining credibility of a witness:

- Does the witness have personal knowledge of the facts?
- Does the witness have any reason to be untruthful?
- Does the witness have a bias, hostility, or some attitude that affected the truthfulness of their testimony?
- Does the witness have a special relationship with a party?
- Was the witness's testimony consistent with other testimony or the evidence presented?
- Has the witness made inconsistent statements?
- Is there evidence of trauma that could impact the witness' testimony?

Robbins Schwartz

39

## Investigative Interviews: Credibility

- Quality over quantity: the testimony of a single, disinterested witness is more reliable than the testimony of multiple biased witnesses

### • Example:

- The college's baseball coach is the Respondent and is alleged to have sexually assaulted the Complainant in the athletic training room immediately after a game
- Which testimony is more reliable in an interview:
  - The testimony from 4 players stating that they were with the Respondent at a restaurant immediately after the game, or
  - The testimony from a waiter at the restaurant stating he served the Respondent at the restaurant immediately after the game

Robbins Schwartz

40

## Investigatory Interviews: Employee Respondents

- As applicable, include the right to union representation in the notice and check other CBA requirements
- Request that they document testimony by a written, signed statement or fact chronology
- Document union representation, any critical factual admissions, and the opportunity to respond to allegations

Robbins Schwartz

41

## Investigatory Interviews: PSVHEA Allegations



- Coordinate with law enforcement
- For cases involving sexual abuse of a minor, coordinate with DCFS and/or Children's Advocacy Center
- Use survivor-centered and trauma-informed response training on sexual violence, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking

Robbins Schwartz

42

## Investigatory Interviews: Other Best Practices

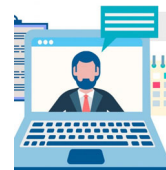
- Avoid volunteering information
- Never promise confidentiality
- Have a second investigator or administrator/non-union employee present to help with notetaking
  - Take your own notes at or immediately afterward
  - Give a basis for your credibility assessments
- Advise that retaliation is prohibited
  - “Gag orders” vs. prohibiting harassment, discrimination, or retaliation

Robbins Schwartz

43

## Investigatory Interviews: Hypothetical

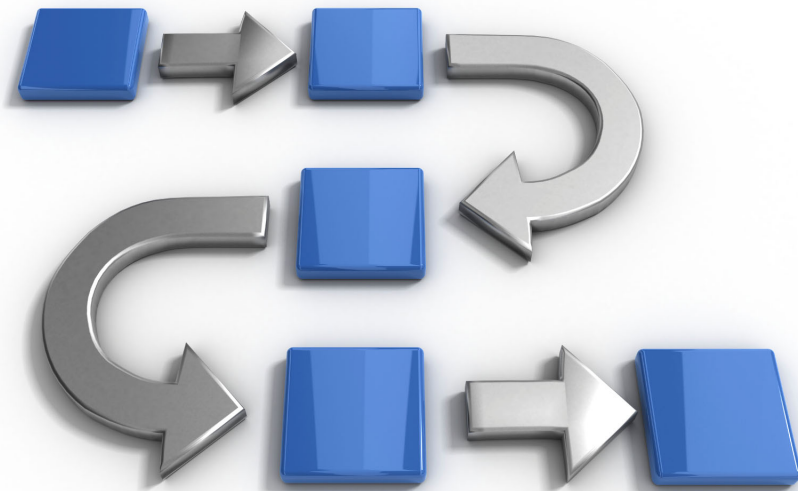
- Bonnie alleges that her coworker Clyde has been using his work laptop to cyberstalk her. Bonnie also reported the stalking to local law enforcement, with whom you have coordinated the timing of your interview of Clyde.
- Clyde comes to the interview but refuses to answer some questions, asserting his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.
  - How do you respond?



Robbins Schwartz

44

## Evidence and Investigatory Report Procedures



Robbins Schwartz

45

## Investigation: Relevant Evidence

- “Relevant” includes relevant to determining:
  - The truth or falsity of specific factual allegations
    - Evidence about nature and circumstances of misconduct
    - Evidence affecting credibility
  - Whether the facts establish an element of the relevant type(s) of sexual harassment
    - Evidence about intent or consent
    - Evidence about impacts of any misconduct
    - Other evidence that would inform a reasonable person’s perception of the conduct
  - What potential sanctions/discipline or remedies are appropriate

Robbins Schwartz

46



## Investigation: Relevant Evidence

- Generally irrelevant:
  - Information protected by a legally recognized privilege
  - A party's medical, psychological, or other similar treatment records (without written consent)
  - Prior disciplinary history (except to determine potential sanctions/discipline)
  - A Complainant's sexual predisposition or sexual history

Robbins Schwartz

47

## Investigation: Rape Shield Protections



- During the live hearing, certain questions are irrelevant and not permitted. As a result, investigators also should consider evidence about the following topics irrelevant:
  - the Complainant's sexual pre-disposition, and
  - the Complainant's prior sexual behavior, unless:
    - the evidence is offered to prove that someone other than the Respondent committed the alleged conduct; or
    - the evidence concerns specific incidents of the Complainant's prior sexual behavior with respect to the Respondent and is offered to prove consent

Robbins Schwartz

48

## Investigation: Access to Evidence

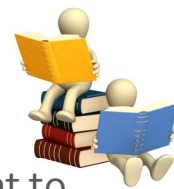
- Both parties must have equal access to inspect and review all evidence that is directly related to the complaint allegations.
  - Be mindful of FERPA and other privacy considerations
  - Consider whether redactions are necessary
  - Notify parties of parameters/limitations on re-disclosure of records and evidence

Robbins Schwartz

49

## Investigation: Access to Evidence

- At the end of the investigation and before completing the investigator's report, the investigator must send both parties a copy of all relevant evidence.
  - Notice Letter to Complainant/Respondent of Investigation Evidence and Right to File Response



Robbins Schwartz

50

## Investigation: Hypothetical

- You are investigating allegations that Jane's professor Mr. Jones started giving her lower grades on her assignments after she turned down his requests to take her on a date.
- Are either of the following relevant?
  - Jane's sexual orientation?
  - Jane's relationship with a teacher two years ago?
- When sharing evidence, should you redact:
  - Jane's grades in Mr. Jones' class or other classes?
  - Testimony from Jane's social worker?
  - The name of Katy, another student witness?
  - Mr. Jones' disciplinary history?

Robbins Schwartz

51

## Investigation: Preparation of Investigation Report

- The parties will have 10 school business days to submit a written response to the evidence, which the investigator must consider prior to completing the investigative report.
- The investigator must create an investigative report that fairly summarizes the relevant evidence and forward the report to the decision-maker.
  - Investigation Report Template

Robbins Schwartz

52

## Investigation: Preparation of Investigation Report

- Parts of an investigation report:
  - Summary of complaint allegations
  - Definition(s) of sexual harassment and any other misconduct at issue
  - Description of steps in the investigation process
  - Summary of supportive measures, emergency removal, and/or administrative leave
  - Summaries of relevant evidence from:
    - Interviews
    - Documents
    - Written responses



Robbins Schwartz

53

## Key Takeaways and Recommendations for Investigators



# Prepare for Success

Robbins Schwartz

54

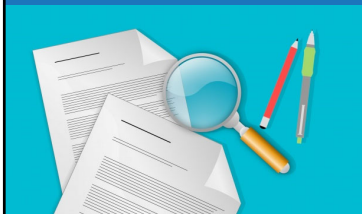
## Takeaways and Recommendations

- 1) "Begin with the end in mind"
  - Think about what the decision-maker will need
  - Prepare outlines for interviews
- 2) Break it down
  - Consider what facts are most important for each part of an alleged policy violation

Robbins Schwartz

55

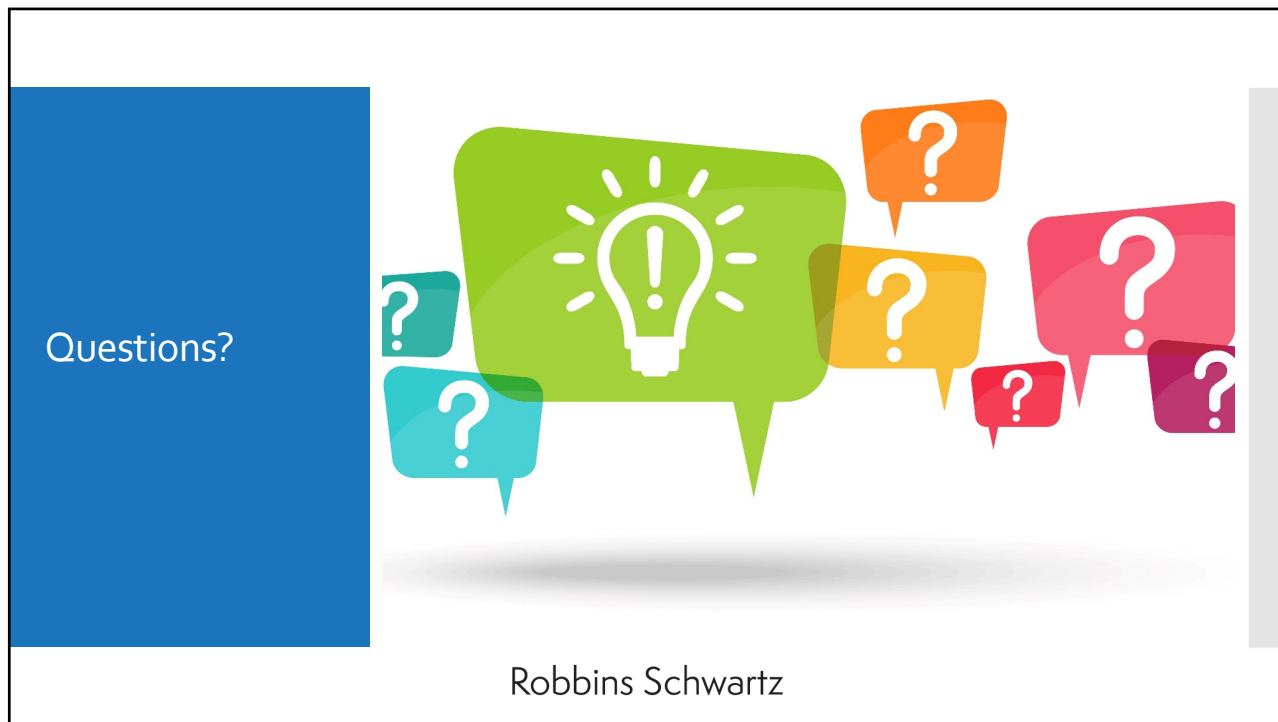
## Takeaways and Recommendations



- 3) Show your work...
  - Document the steps you take
  - Take interview notes, including about your credibility determinations
  - Keep copies of or notes on communications with the parties
- 4) ...but not confidential records.
  - Don't share irrelevant evidence.
  - Redact when necessary.
- 5) Treat the parties equitably.

Robbins Schwartz

56



# Robbins Schwartz

## **EMILY P. BOTHFELD**

**ASSOCIATE, CHICAGO**

312.332.7760

ebothfeld@robbins-schwartz.com

Emily practices in the area of education law with a focus on student and higher education matters. She counsels school districts and higher education institutions on a variety of issues, including matters related to student discipline, Title IX, free speech, student disability rights, student data privacy and policy development. She has extensive experience representing educational institutions in responding to complaints filed with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, Illinois State Board of Education, Office of the Illinois Attorney General and Illinois Department of Human Rights. Emily regularly represents school districts and higher education institutions in state and federal court on civil rights and constitutional claims and breach of contract claims.

Prior to joining Robbins Schwartz, Emily represented students with disabilities in special education matters. Emily attended the George Washington University Law School, where she was a member of the George Washington International Law Review and the GW Law Moot Court Board. Prior to attending law school, Emily taught high school mathematics and science in Hangzhou, China.

### **RECENT PUBLICATIONS**

"Disabled Athlete Can't Support ADA Claims," *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin* (2018)

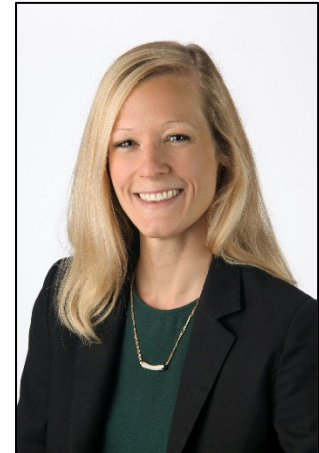
### **RECENT PRESENTATIONS**

*Legislative Update: A Review of New (and Proposed) Laws Affecting Illinois Community Colleges' Risk Management Practices*, Illinois Community College Chief Financial Officers Fall Conference (October 2019)

*A Student's "Right" to a College Education: Due Process Rights in Academic and Non-Academic Discipline*, Illinois Community College Chief Student Services Officers' Summer Meeting (June 2019)

*Updates and Recent Developments out of the U.S. Department of Education*, Chicago Bar Association Education Law Committee Spring Seminar (March 2019)

*Legal Hot Topics for Nursing Program Administrators and Faculty*, Illinois Organization of Associate Degree Nursing (March 2019)



### **PRACTICE AREAS**

Education Law  
Special Education  
Student Discipline

### **EDUCATION**

J.D., *with honors*, George Washington University Law School

B.S., *cum laude*, Vanderbilt University

### **ADMITTED TO PRACTICE**

U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit

U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois

Supreme Court of Illinois

### **ORGANIZATIONS**

Chicago Bar Association

Illinois Council of School Attorneys

National Council of School Attorneys

# Robbins Schwartz

## **MATTHEW M. SWIFT**

**ASSOCIATE, CHICAGO**

312.332.7760

[mswift@robbins-schwartz.com](mailto:mswift@robbins-schwartz.com)

Matthew is a member of the labor and employment practice group. He counsels employers in various aspects of labor and employment law, such as employee discipline, labor relations, wage and hour, and employment discrimination matters under both federal and state laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, Family and Medical Leave Act, Age Discrimination in Employment Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, and Illinois Human Rights Act. He also represents clients in state and federal courts and advises on Illinois Freedom of Information Act and Open Meetings Act matters.

Before he joined Robbins Schwartz, Matthew served as in-house counsel and FOIA Officer for the Illinois Office of the Governor. In that role, he counseled dozens of agencies on compliance with sensitive FOIA requests, advised on current and potential litigation issues, and served as a legal liaison to the Illinois Department of Human Rights and the Illinois Human Rights Commission.

### **RECENT PUBLICATIONS**

“All Together Now – Employment Law Issues in the New Title IX Rules,”  
*Chicago Daily Law Bulletin* (2020)

“Life After Leave: Bringing Employees Back in a COVID-19 Age” *Best Practices Magazine*, American Association of School Personnel Administrators (2020)



### **PRACTICE AREAS**

Labor & Employment

### **EDUCATION**

J.D., University of Chicago  
Law School

M.P.P., University of  
Chicago, Harris School of  
Public Policy

B.B.A., *summa cum laude*,  
Baylor University

### **ADMITTED TO PRACTICE**

U.S. District Court for the  
Northern District of Illinois

Supreme Court of Illinois

### **ORGANIZATIONS**

Chicago Bar Association