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In sharing with one of my mentors how heartbreaking the work of victim advocacy can feel, she responded that “the only thing more heartbreaking would be to do nothing at all.” I would go one step further and say that the most heartbreaking thing would be to do this work alone. The memories of the communities that I have witnessed and been invited into are the single most important tool that I will take away from this summer. Let me share about a few that I have had the honor to watch in action.

The first is the NOVA team. As we prepare for NOVA’s 51st annual conference—this year themed Celebrating Community—I’ve had the honor of watching and joining our staff pull off the impossible: making a national, virtual conference feel personal, connected, and alive. In the final sprint of a year’s work, I’ve seen every member of this team prioritize accessibility, build in moments of joy, and center the people on the other side of the screen.

The second is the Community Violence Intervention (CVI) field—advocates, legal professionals, and front-line workers partnering with individuals most at risk of being involved in gun violence. I have just gotten to glance at this summer, and has multiple times left me on the brink of tears, goosebumps running down my arms from the brilliance and fiery dedication of every leader. On a call facilitated by the Community Violence Legal Network to update the community after a crushing court ruling, one leader said “If you are more scared of losing your job or of your single organization going under than the people getting shot in the streets, then you have no business in the movement.” In a moment of existential threat to the field, advocates from around the country continue to, in community, rally around the work that they know is saving lives.

Finally in preparation for this week's crash course on Title IX, I had the opportunity to speak with nationally renowned attorney and advocate Cari Simon. It was a professional privilege to speak with such a force in the field. However, even more lasting will be the knowledge as a young advocate, college student, and fellow policy buff, that people as precise, rigorous and defiant as Cari Simon have created the path that I plan to follow and the field that I will contribute to. Community and mentorship are the best conduit I have come across for our most basic good.

Stick with me... This Might be Useful

A Crash Course on Title IX

Cari Simon is a nationally recognized Title IX attorney and Harvard Law School graduate who represents survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in educational settings. Through her impact litigation she has played a key role in expanding Title IX protections to include stalking, dating violence, and off-campus misconduct, and is widely regarded as an expert in gender violence law and policy.

Title IX is first and foremost a law to protect one's access to education, free from discrimination on the basis of sex. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational institutions that receive federal funding. It does so in just 37 words — words which, in my senior year of high school, I memorized to impress my superintendent and now recite occasionally as a remarkably boring party trick. But those 37 words have carried enormous weight.

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

I could speak for far longer than you might want to read about Title IX, and then twice as long as that about the conversation I was lucky enough to have with Cari Simon. However, the purpose of the Crash Course is to look at aspects of this field's work that may go underrepresented, so in this discussion on Title IX, I want to focus on the resources and remedies that Title IX provides beyond the disciplinary and grievance procedure that I believe get far more coverage.

Known as “Supportive Measures” in the current federal guidance, Ms. Simon says the remedies available through Title IX are “the heart of what this law can really do.” While Title IX is often discussed in terms of investigations and hearings, these remedies are what allow students to continue with their education and begin to heal in the aftermath of trauma. Title IX was created to preserve education, to preserve what Horace Mann, a pioneer of American public schools in the 19th century called the “great equalizer.”

The last thing a survivor should be thinking about in the aftermath of harm is the effect that it will have on future career opportunities, graduate school applications, and academic reputation. Yet because the harm is perpetrated in this pivotal moment of one's young life, these are often some of the first concerns. It is the ethical and legal responsibility of the academic institution to consider this for the survivor, maybe relieve their student from at least part of their pain.

What are these remedies? More than you might think. They can include academic accommodations: the reconsideration of a low grade on a transcript, retaking a test or extensions on coursework. It could be changes to class or housing assignments, no-contact directives, campus escort services, or access to mental health support. Importantly, these measures need to be offered regardless of whether a student chooses to file a formal complaint. The goal is to reduce the immediate barriers a student might face—missed classes, safety concerns, mental health challenges—and to restore equal access to educational programs. I could not possibly put it better than

Cari Simon: “Your grades should be reflective of your merit, not your rape.”

That quote will stick with me because of how deeply it reflects the spirit of this law when it's working the way it should. Title IX is at its best when it functions as a safety net ready to catch students who might otherwise leave education, closing doors to their future opportunities. And that only works when institutions commit to protecting all students. That's why I couldn't bring myself to write about Title IX without addressing how it's being used—and misused—in debates around LGBTQ+ inclusion.

As a young advocate and female athlete recruited to compete at the Division I level, Title IX has always symbolized opportunity and fairness to me. It has been deeply painful to watch it used in ways that exclude the LGBTQ+ community. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to speak with Cari Simon on this issue, but I could not bring myself to discuss Title IX without mentioning the current state of the law.

“Sex” itself—now understood in law and policy to include not just biological categories, but the full range of sex-based expectations, including those related to gender identity and expression. The legal reasoning of this is simple: you cannot punish someone for failing to conform to sex-based expectations without engaging in sex-based discrimination. Title IX was written to prohibit sex-based discrimination. It was never meant to enforce rigid gender roles or decide who qualifies as “woman enough” to participate.

Supportive measures are not footnotes to the legal process—they are the process for many. They are what keep the promise of Title IX alive, especially for those who never file a formal complaint. In my conversation with Cari Simon, I was reminded that law can be both a shield and a scaffold—not only a means to respond to harm, but also a way to rebuild students. If we forget that, we lose sight of what Title IX was meant to do in the first place. I will wrap it up here but before I do I am excited to share that Cari Simon will be presenting at this year's NOVA 51 Conference, and I for one would not miss her session for the world.

Thank you, Everyone. I hope this was useful.

A Resource for the Road



NOVA 51ST ANNUAL TRAINING EVENT

The NOVA team recently demonstrated the NOVA51 conference interface to the staff. I must admit, when I first heard about a conference with workshops that were all going to happen online, I had a picture in my mind that may have been reminiscent of my Zoom school days. How insulting, I know. This is anything but that.

In a year where the theme is *Celebrating Community*, NOVA has built a space that reflects it. The platform is accessible, easy to navigate, and designed in a way that encourages people to actually connect rather than just to log on and listen. NOVA51 is shaping up to be more than any conference I could have imagined.

I'm looking forward to attending—not just because I'm proud of the team that pulled it off, and not just because Cari Simon is speaking (though that alone is worth showing up for)—but because this feels like the kind of space our field needs right now. This year's conference will be an opportunity to be in community and to Celebrate the Community of victim advocacy and crisis responders. I hope I'll see many of you there.