Dear friends,

As the new academic year gets underway, I am writing with several important updates in regard to Title IX, the law governing sex discrimination in higher education.

Although I regret having to return to this issue, I begin with the university’s investigation of former Associate Dean Scott Backer’s work at Wesleyan. As many of you are aware, we terminated Mr. Backer after learning that he had concealed his inappropriate sexual conduct at his previous employer. I want to say again that I am pained that Mr. Backer ever worked here at all, and that I am very sorry that his presence on campus and subsequent revelations about him have caused anguish to many members of our community. After Mr. Backer’s arrest in the spring, we engaged an outside firm to extend an earlier audit of his work at the university. That independent review has just been completed. The audit did find some inappropriate (and anonymous) photographs in his backup files, and we turned those over to the proper authorities. They found that the images warranted no further action. In regard to student disciplinary cases in which Mr. Backer was involved, the review found his work in keeping with the university’s policies and procedures.

Second, I’m pleased to announce that in response to feedback from faculty and staff, we have hired an ombudsperson—an informal, independent and confidential resource for employees dealing with Title IX and other workplace conflicts. You can read more about Israela Adah Brill-Cass and the services she provides on her website, and can contact her at jabrilcass@gmail.com or 508-889-2675. She will be on campus one day a week beginning in mid-September, and will work out of Russell House.

We have also implemented several important changes to our Title IX policies, practices, and structure as a result of the year-long work of the Title IX committees in conjunction with the recommendations of the Victim Rights Law Center’s review last year. You can read about these improvements and updates, which fall into the categories of reorganization, training, and communication, in the full VRLC report.

The full Clery report on campus crime statistics will be available on the Public Safety website by mid-September. In advance of that, you can find the 2017 Annual Report on Wesleyan’s Response to Sexual Violence, which reports sexual misconduct as well as the outcomes of cases from 2009–2016.

Finally, I invite you to visit this new website, which provides resources and support for survivors of sexual misconduct. It provides a definition of sexual violence and advice for what to do in the immediate aftermath, outlines reporting and non-reporting options, and lists a variety of support services and resources, including CAPS, the campus SART intern, chaplains, and others.
I want to thank everyone for the suggestions, expressions of concern and hard work in helping us make progress in this challenging and crucial area. When we listen to one another, take care of one another, we build a more inclusive and equitable community.

Yours truly,

Michael S. Roth
President