Responses to Frequently Asked Questions About the Anonymous Reporting Line

1. Why is this line going to be established?

This is being done as part of a continuing process to insure that policies designed to protect the University and its resources are followed by everyone in the university community.

Ohio State already has a number of mechanisms designed to prevent or detect potential wrongdoing, including an Audit Committee of the board of Trustees, financial training for faculty and staff, detailed reporting requirements on compliance, and strong internal and external audit functions.

An anonymous reporting line provides an opportunity for people who have knowledge of suspected wrongdoing, especially by supervisors and high level officials, to report concerns without fear of retaliation.

Many universities have adopted anonymous reporting lines run by third party firms to assure protection of the identity of the person(s) reporting.

The University is establishing such a mechanism with the full support of the administration and the Audit Committee of the Board of Trustees. An RFP process has been concluded and Ethics Point, a private firm that specializes in this service, has been selected as the provider.

2. What types of complaints will be on the line, which departments will be involved? All of academics and business of any kind at the university? Athletic complaints?

The primary impetus for this reporting line is to provide an additional tool to detect and investigate financial fraud. Some other universities have also incorporated other compliance such as NCAA violations, research compliance and human resources issues. Which of these activities will be included and when is still under review by the University and will be determined after consultations with various stakeholders including faculty leadership and the administrative offices involved.

3. Is it a recorded line or do you speak with a real person? How does a caller know their complaint is really being investigated?

A publicized reporting line phone number and secured web address will be established. Individuals who choose to report a complaint over the telephone will be connected to a live operator, employed by Ethics Point, trained to solicit and log the appropriate information. As an alternative, individuals who choose to report a complaint via the web will follow the same process except that a standardized web-based questionnaire will be completed in place of speaking to a live operator. An appropriate University contact will be notified of the report.

The individual will be able to log into Ethics Point’s system or call back to follow up on their report by using a report identification number supplied by Ethics Point and a password.
chosen by the individual. The progress of the report will be tracked and monitored until closure is obtained.

4. If it is anonymous, how do you get back in touch with the caller if you need more information to investigate the claim?

This is one of the many benefits of using an outside vendor. The caller can remain anonymous as indicated in the preceding question. The area responsible for investigating the claim can correspond with the caller by posting questions in the reporting database. The caller can call back or log back into the system as described above and answer follow-up questions.

5. Who investigates the complaints?

University contacts will be established for each type of complaint and will be responsible for investigating and resolving those complaints directed to them. This will not replace existing University processes for dealing with allegations of non-compliance. As an example, financial fraud complaints will still be directed to Internal Audit for investigation.

6. Is there a “whistleblower” status for people who, in good faith, make a complaint but were wrong and the compliant is untrue? How are they protected from retaliation of any kind?

The purpose of having an anonymous reporting line is to protect persons who report suspected wrongdoing from retaliation. In addition, the University is also looking into developing a policy that protects anyone who reports suspected wrongdoing, regardless of how it is reported.

7. What about folks that have a personal grudge against someone at the university or the university itself and simply abuses the line to try and damage someone’s reputation?

The anonymous reporting line is intended to be another source from which an investigation can be initiated by the University. The investigating unit, whether it is Internal Audit or some other group, is then responsible for determining if further action is warranted. It will be our policy to protect the privacy and reputation of person being investigated until such time as the validity of the complaint can be fully determined. This is consistent with our existing policy regarding such reports.

8. Can students report on the line or is it just for staff/faculty?

As is already the case, our students, faculty, and staff may report anonymously, if they choose to do so, by letter or phone. An specific anonymous reporting line is an additional process that would be available to students, as well as other members of the University community.
9. If a complaint turns out to be a crime, what happens? Do you call police to investigate or does the university do its own investigation?

The reporting line is NOT to be used to report immediate threat to life or property. If someone requires emergency assistance, they are to call 911.

The University currently performs investigations. Any investigation that identifies potential criminal activity (e.g., theft), will be referred to the University Police and the Office of Legal Affairs.

10. How have complaints been previously reported/handled?

Each area has currently and will be responsible for investigating each type of complaint which has been directed to them. The reporting line will not supercede our current processes. The reporting line is being set up as just another vehicle to receive concerns.

11. When does the University plan to have this up and running?

Our goal is to have this up and running on January 1, 2006, but we want to make sure appropriate policies are in place to protect the identity of users of the reporting line, as well as the identity of those involved in potential investigations.

12. How much will it cost?

The contract with Ethics Point will cost $36,000 annually. Investigations will be handled by existing departmental personnel.

13. What has been the experience at other universities?

This is still a fairly new development, so experience has not been extensive. However, early feedback has been favorable. There has been no evidence of widespread abuse of the reporting line, for example. A list of other universities with reporting lines is attached.

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