



Teaching For Success® National Faculty Success Center

QuickCourse Series

Harrasment in the Academic Setting





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Harassment in the Academic Setting

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Disclaimer: This QuickCourse is NOT intended to dispense legal advice nor set policy for any institution. Its sole purpose is to increase awareness among instructors, staff, and administrators of harassment issues and to help foster professional teaching behaviors and practices. This material has been written from the instructor's point of view.

Dedication

This Course is dedicated to Julie, Richard, and all those who are victims of sexual harassment. Their lives are affected forever by their unfortunate and unnecessary experiences.

Dr. Shmaefsky is TFS Partner Editor and instructor of Biology & Environmental Sciences at Kingwood College.



Much learning occurs through interactions between faculty and students. A wealth of content is offered to students during faculty-directed discussions, lessons, or readings.

1. Getting Started

The things taught in schools and colleges are not an education, but the means of education.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journal, 1831

Emerson's quote reinforces the idea that college faculty are not merely robotic conveyers of information. Much learning occurs through interactions between faculty and students. These interactions are not to be taken lightly, for a professional, supportive learning environment is a crucial component of student learning success.

A wealth of content is offered to students during faculty-directed discussions, lessons, or readings. A large proportion of student learning occurs through faculty presentations of new information, and an important part of each presentation is creating an effective learning environment: Numerous studies have shown that the successful acquisition of knowledge by students occurs best when faculty teach in an atmosphere conducive to learning.



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Conducive Conditions

Conducive learning conditions involve a complex set of factors ranging from comfortable seating to teaching strategies that touch upon all learning styles. An important condition in the environment that is sometimes overlooked is faculty conduct.

The way an instructor behaves sets the tone of the learning environment. Student evaluations of faculty competence reflect that faculty behavior plays an integral role in developing a learning environment for the students. So, even with the best instruction, student comprehension can be compromised and diminished when faculty are perceived to act in inappropriate ways.

Role Models

This situation also casts faculty as role models of teaching and ambassadors of their disciplines. Plus, many students perceive faculty as representing the integrity of the institution and academe itself. This holds true for faculty behavior inside and outside the classroom. Administrators and attorneys can attest to this statement. This perception of the stature of faculty makes it very important that college faculty exercise discretion on the job and in public.

Another fact of being an instructor is that faculty are tacitly perceived as being in a position of power. College faculty have situational authority over students. They have the power to assess student performance, and the power to create a learning environment for student success.



This situation also casts faculty as role models of teaching and as ambassadors of their disciplines. Plus, many students perceive faculty as representing the integrity of the institution and academe itself. This holds true for faculty behavior both inside and outside the classroom.

This puts faculty in an authoritative position that must not be used to the detriment of student learning. Unfortunately, this power situation creates opportunities for sexual

harassment. This Course provides an overview of sexual harassment in the academic environment. It looks at deliberate and incidental sexual harassment situations.

Please use the review questions at the end of each section in this Course to ensure that you comprehend the material being presented before proceeding to the next section.

Place your answers on a sheet of paper or enter your response into your favorite text editor, and compare your answers to the relevant section identified after each question.

Review Question:

- Why should faculty be acutely aware of their behavior in and out of class?
(See Section 1, Role Models.)



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2. Defining Harassment

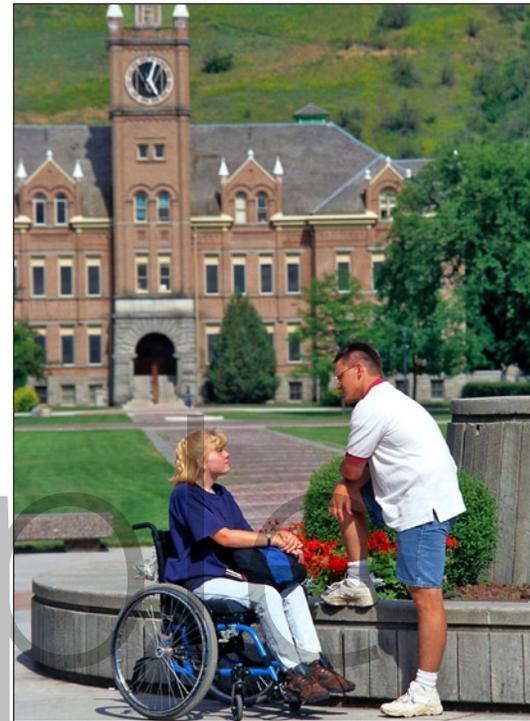
There is no simple definition for sexual harassment. Much of what is interpreted as sexual harassment has been determined in courtrooms by judges and juries. However, a rational and workable definition is needed to prevent people from behaving in ways that can be construed as sexual harassment.

This definition should not be used as a mechanism to protect academic institutions from lawsuits. It must be a guideline for protecting individuals from the emotionally destructive effects of sexual harassment.

Procedures and Policies

Most academic institutions define sexual harassment in their procedures and policies guidelines. These guidelines usually include the definition of sexual harassment adopted by the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC):

The use of one's authority or power, either explicitly or implicitly, to coerce another into unwanted sexual relations or to punish another for his or her refusal; or the creation of an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment through verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.



Most academic institutions define sexual harassment in their procedures and policies guidelines. These guidelines usually include the definition of sexual harassment adopted by the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

This rule applies for:

- Males in positions of power or authority over females.
- Males in positions of power or authority over males.
- Females in positions of power or authority over females.
- Females in positions of power or authority over males.

Sexual harassment law is now being interpreted for incidents between peers or coworkers in work or social situations.



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3. Harassment Situations

There is a common misconception that sexual harassment must involve some type of physical relationship. In fact, true harassment is a specific, purposeful, systematic form of discrimination—and it is as likely to occur on-line (through electronic communications) as off-line. It is just as illegal, too.

How Is It Defined in Academia

To be defined as sexual harassment, the questionable behavior must be harsh, relentless, and insidious, as well as offensive to the victim and any other reasonable person. Harassment includes any of the following situations, as identified by the governing bodies of the American Academy of Religion and the American Association of University Women:

- Insults, including lewd or suggestive remarks or conduct.
- Pressure to accept unwelcome social invitations.
- Unasked-for written notes or personal phone calls.
- Request for sexual favors.
- Sexist remarks, jokes, or behaviors.
- Sexual assault, including attempted or completed physical sexual assault.
- Unwanted or coerced inappropriate touching or body contact.



Use of professional authority to inappropriately draw attention to the gender, sexuality, or sexual orientation of the advisee, employee, client, colleague, or student can be construed as sexual harassment.

- Unwanted sexual advances.
- Uninvited electronic communications, including e-mail, messages in chatrooms, and postings on USENET, instant-messaging programs, or on Web sites.
- Use of professional authority to inappropriately draw attention to the gender, sexuality, or sexual orientation of the advisee, employee, client, colleague, or student.
- Use of professional authority to compel the advisee, employee, client, colleague, or student into a sexual relationship or intimate social association.
- Visual displays of degrading sexual images or pornography.
- Untrue and unsolicited communication between coworkers (gossip in nature).