

Best Practice Suggestions for Preventing Harassment and Other Abuses of Power in Your Department

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This document has been endorsed by the American Sociological Association (ASA) Council and was developed by the ASA Working Group on Harassment based on research detailing the power dynamic inherent in many academic departments. The document does not constitute legal advice and is not meant to be prescriptive but rather to serve as a guide to help department leaders strategize about how they can best prevent and respond to harassment in their departments. The proposed practices can create limits to the use of power in department structures and may reduce some of the problems that emerge in contexts with asymmetrical relationships.

Department Climate

- Department policy on sexual harassment and harassment is detailed and reviewed with faculty, instructors, staff and graduate students at the beginning of each semester. All of these groups learn that harassment is not tolerated. The group is presented with different strategies on how to respond when they witness sexual harassment or are the victim of sexual harassment.
- Faculty, instructors, staff and graduate students know the department/college sexual harassment/ harassment reporting protocol.
- Faculty, instructors, staff and graduate students know the protocols for when they witness or receive a sexual harassment/harassment complaint.
- College and department harassment policies are visible and easy to find on websites, social media, and in buildings.
- Department personnel and current student relationships:
 - Department policy (or college policy) prohibiting dating and/or relationships between department personnel (e.g., faculty, instructors, staff) and current graduate and undergraduate students. OR (if this is not possible)
 - Department policy requiring that department personnel (e.g., faculty, instructors and staff) report relationships that they have with graduate or undergraduate students to the department head if there is any chance that student will take a future course, serve as a research assistant or otherwise report to the department personnel or need a letter of recommendation.

- Department (or college) provides a third-party entity (e.g., an ombudsman program) with whom faculty, instructors, staff and graduate and undergraduate students can file a report if they are being sexually harassed or treated unfairly as a result of an interaction with a faculty member, instructor, staff member, or graduate or undergraduate student. The existence of this resource is reviewed at the beginning of each semester in a meeting with faculty, instructors, staff, graduate and undergraduate students. AND/OR Departments have a place where people can submit anonymous complaints online (see example [here](#)). This strategy is more effective than a climate survey as it can serve the purpose of making department heads aware of climate issues in real time.
- Departments should have policies in place that recognize that harassment/sexual harassment may not only be perpetrated by faculty, instructors, or staff, as undergraduate and graduate students can perpetrate harassment. Departments should consider mechanisms for identifying and preventing harassment perpetrated by people other than faculty, instructors or staff.
- Departments should have procedures/policies to address perpetrators when complaints have been made to human resources or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Mentoring

- Each graduate student has an advising committee with three faculty members who collaboratively mentor the student rather than one faculty advisor assigned per student.
- If possible, departments should recruit graduate students whose interests match more than one faculty member's expertise so that the graduate student can switch advisers if necessary. While we know this practice will be challenging for small departments, this model will likely increase graduate student retention and graduation rates.
- Departments should encourage clear boundaries between faculty, instructors, staff and graduate students:
 - Faculty, instructors, and staff do not ask graduate students in their departments to do any personal task without pay (e.g., pet sitting/walking, house sitting, childcare, errands of any kind).
 - Faculty, instructors, and staff monetarily compensate graduate students for any personal tasks (e.g., pet sitting/walking, house sitting, childcare, errands of any kind). Department personnel

- should be mindful of their roles in these requests of graduate students and ensure such requests are not coercive.
- Faculty, instructors and staff do not loan money, cars or anything else to graduate students.
 - Department policies should be in place to address faculty, instructor and staff behavior when these boundaries are crossed.
 - Faculty, instructors, staff and students should be thoughtful about these issues when using social media. It is a venue where personal and professional lives are merged and thus can create biased evaluations of students as well as the potential for abuses of power.
- Departments should implement clear mentoring guidelines and consider implementing mentoring compacts/contracts that students enter into with faculty clarifying the rules for both parties. A good example can be found [here](#).
 - Faculty, staff, instructors, and undergraduate and graduate students should all be informed that writing letters of recommendation for individuals with whom they are or previously were in an intimate relationship is unethical and not accepted in the sociological community.

Department Social Events

Departments should strongly consider what purposes alcohol serves at department events. If departments decide to serve alcohol as part of the event, we strongly recommend the department have a clear alcohol policy that is regularly communicated to the department. Below are some key elements of the policy:

- There is a designated server at the event who limits the amount of alcohol per person at the party. The server should not be a department member.
- Department leaders organize alternative opportunities for informal socializing among faculty, instructors, staff, and students, such as a regular coffee hour.
- Clear communication to all members of the department that there is no expectation that people attend events where alcohol is served.
- Clear communication that happy hours should not be events in which people drink to drunkenness. People should limit themselves to one or two drinks.
- If people routinely violate these expectations, departments will move to a prohibition on alcohol.
- Have a department/college protocol if a social event is held at a home.

Teacher/Training- Classroom Policies

- All graduate student teachers and undergraduate and graduate teaching assistants (TAs) will be informed that harassment and sexual harassment will not be tolerated by the college or department.
- All graduate student teachers and TAs will be informed of policies to follow when they witness harassment or sexual harassment or receive a student disclosure. Department will have policy stating that TAs should not date their students. The graduate chair will inform graduate and undergraduate students that it is not appropriate for TAs to date their students.
- All new faculty, graduate student teachers, and TAs will participate in a facilitated session on harassment and sexual harassment awareness and prevention each semester that they are assigned classroom responsibilities.
- TAs and graduate student teachers will be provided with guidance from the department as to how they should respond when propositioned by an undergraduate student and to whom they should report the situation if it persists.

Conference Attendance and Other Professional Travel (including data collection or site visits)

- Department requires that faculty, instructors, and staff not share accommodations with students. Graduate students may not share accommodations with undergraduate students with whom they have a supervisory relationship.
- Departments should consider the purpose of alcohol on these trips and err on the side of prohibition.
- All working meetings should be held in site conference rooms, lobby areas, restaurants/coffee shops, or other public venues.
- All candidate interviews are held in public conference meeting rooms/areas.
- Departments have a policy that does not allow parties to be held in suites with sleeping rooms.

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