

Free research paper about sexual harassment at colleges and universities

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Introduction

Sexual harassment can be defined as offensive or threatening physical or verbal conduct of a sexual nature. It can also be defined as sexual advances that are unwelcome and are often severe or pervasive thereby affecting the activities of an individual. Sexual harassment can be perpetuated in colleges and universities in the form of promises of work or academic benefits like promotions, high grades, and recommendation letters in exchange for sexual favors. As such, colleges and universities have established policies that seek to ensure that students and employees are not subjected to sexual harassment.

Firstly, the guideline of academic institutions aims at clearly defining what sexual harassment means. Most institutions have adopted the definition provided by state and federal laws (Francis, 2001). The laws stipulate that sexual harassment is unwelcome physical and verbal sexual advances that may cause an individual to feel intimidated, humiliated, offended, and those that show hostility to individuals and their learning and working environment. For example, Harvard University has sought clearly define sexual harassment to include jokes, gestures, comments that are sexually suggestive, and emails, voicemail, websites, and downloaded material which are sexually explicit. Furthermore, rape and physical touching are also regarded as sexual harassment.

The second aspect in the guideline of academic institutions deals with the procedure to be followed in the event sexual harassment. In cases where a student is sexually harassed, he or she is required to report immediately to the department that handles gender issues or to department heads and

associate deans for colleges and universities. In cases where employees are involved, the matter may be reported to the associate dean.

The appropriate way to handle allegations of sexual harassment is to report to the appropriate authorities. Consequently, investigations have to be conducted to determine the validity of the rumors. The allegations should be investigated in a timely manner according to Title IX, in order to enhance an environment that is free of retaliation (Klein, 1992). Mr. Chris Dussold's who was a university professor had his services allegedly terminated for plagiarism. Gary Giamartino, a dean in SIUE's school of business claimed that Dussold had plagiarized the "teaching philosophy. Actually, the termination of his employment was done shortly after it was alleged that he had been involved in sexual misconduct. Given that plagiarism is a serious offence, his services were terminated under the guise of academic malpractice when, in fact, the reason was due to the allegations of sexual harassment which were not properly investigated.

A similar case was depicted when a freshman in Northwestern University lodged an official complaint against Peter Ludlow, a philosophy professor in 2012. The female student alleged that the professor got her drunk and eventually kissed and groped her upon blacking out (Crouch, 2001). The professor had violated the institution's rules upon sexual harassment yet nothing was done to remedy the situation. The difference between Dussold and Ludlow's case is that Dussold's services were terminated without proper investigations yet Northwestern responded to Ludlow's case with indifference. As such, Dussold lost his job yet, he was wrongfully accused while Ludlow continued teaching despite being guilty. Despite the affected

student sinking into depression and attempting suicide, no action was taken against Ludlow. Fortunately, investigations were carried out much later after the female student narrated her story to a history professor as well as another one who deals with journalism. In contrast to Dussold's case, Ludlow was punished by being denied a raise and an endowed chair as well as making it mandatory for him to undergo sensitivity training. Another difference is that it became apparent that Ludlow had engaged in sexual harassment yet even though Dussold was innocent, his credibility was ruined because the outcome of the investigations was never acknowledged publicly.

Conclusion

Sexual harassment is a contentious issue in institutions of higher learning thus should be handled in accordance to the stipulated guidelines.

Furthermore, the issue should be treated with the seriousness and urgency it deserves. This move will prevent unnecessary retaliatory attacks and suffering from the victims of sexual misconduct.

References

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