

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Professor Donald H. Pfister
Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology
Farlow Herbarium, Room 1

Dear Don,

I write with deep appreciation for the good work of the Title IX Policy Review Committee. Thank you for devoting your last four meetings to considering what more we might do as a community to address and prevent sexual harassment.

As the report rightly notes, trust is essential. We will not succeed if we do not ensure that every person at Harvard has knowledge of our policies and procedures—and confidence in their efficacy. This is not a challenge for our community alone. Colleges and universities across the country are addressing structural and cultural realities just as we are, and I believe that we can and should lead the way in developing and sharing practices that work.

How do we move forward together? The report includes compelling observations and thoughtful suggestions, all of which I am taking. I also want to share information about recent and forthcoming efforts that will bring us closer to realizing our shared goals.

Improved Communication

Considerable resources have been devoted to communication since the creation and implementation of the University Policy on Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment. The only true measure of our success in this area is awareness and understanding among the members of our community, especially if we expect them to feel empowered to intervene when they witness inappropriate behavior.

As suggested, the annual reports of the Title IX Office and Office for Dispute Resolution (ODR) will be expanded, and we will launch an effort to raise awareness of the existence of this data. Websites for the Title IX Office and ODR have been improved with the help of focus groups comprising faculty, students, and staff, and they are now more navigable and informative. New ways to share more data on cases and sanctions are being developed. The Faculty of Arts and Sciences now has sanction information publicly available for both graduate and undergraduate Title IX complaints on its website.

The Title IX Office has increased its educational and outreach efforts considerably. Training increased by approximately 80 percent over the past year, and a new position to manage education programs was added this year. In October, Provost Garber and Executive Vice President Lapp announced mandatory online training for all faculty and staff, and the

Title IX Office will increase its educational efforts to alert faculty and staff of their duty to report incidents of sexual harassment and the methods by which they can do so. Bystander Intervention Education programming is also being developed, and it will promote attitudinal and behavioral change in recognizing, responding to, and preventing harassment across a variety of learning and workplace contexts.

Taking a public health approach is a thoughtful suggestion, and crowdsourcing ideas could be a valuable way of generating ideas, raising awareness, and promoting conversation. I have asked the Title IX Office to undertake this work, and the President's Office will provide resources for implementation and incentives.

Unbecoming Conduct

The University's Title IX Policy prohibits unwanted behavior of a sexual nature that is persistent and pervasive or severe and that impedes full and equal access to our programs and facilities. It is an important standard, based on the law, but it does not help us to address so-called "gray area" conduct. Some of our schools have policies that fill these gaps; others do not. I have asked the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) to share models of policies that do exist and to help any school that wishes to develop such a policy, with an understanding that each community has its own culture and needs. I will make sure that all schools know that ODR is available to conduct investigations under these local policies. It has already done so for several schools.

Whether or not a given action violates a policy, each of us has a responsibility to act when we witness inappropriate behaviors. The tools and strategies of bystander intervention can help all of us be prepared to address situations that do not comport with the values that the University represents.

Cultural and Structural Realities

I appreciate the suggestions for new mechanisms by which we might encourage reporting of sexual harassment and create a harassment-free environment, and we will explore the feasibility of each of them. I take your point that we need to provide a range of avenues to address the concerns of individuals who feel vulnerable and reluctant to report or to bring formal complaints.

Harvard College offers trained students who serve as confidential resources for fellow students. There are currently no similar student-based resources at the graduate and professional schools. The Title IX Office will explore the feasibility of implementing this program beyond the College.

The Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response currently offers students, faculty, and staff the opportunity to share information anonymously via their 24-hour hotline. I have asked the Title IX Office to develop electronic complaint filing and electronic disclosure systems.

Power Imbalance

I was pleased to learn that the last of the schools that did not have a policy related to faculty interactions with students, staff, and colleagues of different status created one because of the efforts of the Committee. Your suggestions will be passed along to OGC, which has been working with the schools to assure that they have clear and comprehensible policies.

I appreciate your sharing preliminary thoughts on some of the ways in which we can begin to acknowledge power imbalances that can make members of our community more vulnerable to sexual harassment. In the coming months, the deans, my senior leadership team, and I will continue to explore ways in which we can address these issues.

Many thanks, again, for the contributions that you and your fellow committee members have made to this important and ongoing conversation. One of the most striking suggestions made in the report is that the University provide a clear statement that affirms the values of our community. I will be writing to all faculty, staff, and students later this week to share my thoughts on the issue of sexual harassment and sexual assault—and to underscore our responsibility to one another and to this remarkable community.

All the best,



Lawrence S. Bacow