

**Sexual Harassment and Unwelcomed Behavior
At the University of Iowa**

Results of a Campus-Wide Survey

**Council on the Status of Women
Sexual Harassment Survey Subcommittee
The University of Iowa
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Executive Summary

In the early 1990's, the Council on Status of Women determined that a campus survey was needed in order to have a true picture of the impact that sexual harassment had on The University of Iowa campus and to address this sensitive issue authoritatively. That survey was administered in 1992 and the report issued in 1993.

In 2003, The Council on the Status of Women was again charged to carry out a survey relating to sexual harassment. The new sexual harassment survey was designed to:

1. assess the prevalence and perception of sexual harassment and sexual harassing behaviors on campus today as compared to 10 years ago;
2. re-evaluate the scope and nature of sexual harassment on campus;
3. understand the responses to sexual harassment of students, staff, and faculty and the University, and
4. determine what strategies the University needs to take both to minimize the occurrence of sexual harassment and associated behaviors and to respond most effectively to reports of these behaviors.

The survey was written by a committee of 12 members including students, staff and faculty. Several members of the committee had extensive background in conducting surveys and assessing the results. The survey was pre-tested, revised accordingly, and received IRB¹ approval for distribution. On September 13, 2004, everyone who had an active affiliation with the University of Iowa and a UI e-address was sent a mass e-mail request to complete a sexual harassment survey. A follow-up reminder was sent the following week. In total, 42,839 individuals were sent one or both of the two e-mails.

In sum, 11,063 people responded to the sexual harassment survey, for an overall response rate of 26%. Of these, 10,956 provided usable responses, with the following characteristics:

- Almost two-thirds (64.4%) were female, somewhat greater than in the UI population, which is 56% female.
- The proportion of the sample who indicated they were members of an ethnic minority group (9%) was close to the UI population distribution (11.5%).

¹ Institutional Review Board, which approves research on human subjects.

- Although undergraduates made up the largest percentage of both the sample (36.5%) and the UI population (44%), they were somewhat less represented in the sample than the population.

Because research has shown that many people are reluctant or unwilling to label even serious unwelcomed behavior (e.g., physical assault of a sexual nature) as sexual harassment, this survey separated questions about respondents' experiences with unwelcomed sexual behaviors from the question of whether or not they felt they had experienced sexual harassment. The intent was to capture more accurately the occurrence of behaviors without the stigma of the label.

This survey asked about eight types of unwelcomed behavior which **may** constitute sexual harassment. A majority--52%--of respondents indicated that they had experienced one or more of the eight categories of unwelcomed behavior. Yet, when these responders were asked explicitly about whether they had experienced sexual harassment in the past 10 years at UI, most responders (62%) indicated that they had **not** been sexually harassed, whereas 24% (805 individuals) indicated that they considered the unwelcome behavior to be sexual harassment. This represented 26% of female and 19% of male responders.

Some of the discrepancy in these percentages arises because the unwelcomed behaviors were not considered serious by the responder (e.g., they were taken as jokes). But some of the behaviors were clearly serious; for example, among those who reported experiencing "physical assaults of a sexual nature (grabbing, slapping, pushing, shoving) an average of more than once a month at the UI over the past 10 years," only 48% believed that they had experienced sexual harassment. Students, in particular, were far less likely than staff to consider this unwelcomed behavior to be sexual harassment (43% vs. 86%).

Most of the unwelcomed behavior (65%) came from people who were **not** in a more powerful position than the responder. This apparent lack of power differential flows from the fact that undergraduate students were both the majority of responders who experienced these behaviors (52%) **and** were identified as the primary perpetrators of the behaviors (34%).

Similarly, in most other status groups (e.g., graduate/professional students, P&S and merit staff, tenured faculty), the perpetrator was most likely to be identified as someone from the same status group. However, non-tenured, tenure-track faculty were most likely to report that the perpetrator was a tenured faculty member (35%).

The bulk of unwelcomed behavior (39%) occurred on non-university property, and there were many comments about behaviors by students in bars and about harassment occurring during football weekends, especially by people who were tailgating.

Self-help methods were the most common way of dealing with an unwelcomed behavior (see Tables 30a and 30b). People ignored unwelcomed behavior (36%) or avoided the perpetrator (28.4%). It is reasonable to assume that these more common actions are more likely to be taken when persons do not believe they have been sexually harassed and, conversely, rarer actions (e.g., filing a formal complaint), which are more serious and formal, are taken when they do.

Of the 5,503 people who reported experiencing unwelcomed behavior (including those who believed that they had explicitly experienced sexual harassment):

- 80 filed a formal complaint (1.5%) and 252 reported the behavior (4.6%)
- Women were more likely than men both to report the behavior and to file a complaint
- Merit staff were more likely to file a formal complaint than were P&S staff or faculty
- All groups were more likely to report the behavior rather than file a formal complaint
- If the responder reported the unwelcomed behavior or filed a formal complaint, it was most likely reported to the immediate work supervisor (23%), particularly by Merit and P&S staff.

Respondents who reported the unwelcomed behavior or filed a formal complaint indicated that the most frequent outcomes were that the behavior ceased (36%), but also that the incident undermined self-confidence (25.5%), affected the respondent's health negatively (22%).

In 22% of reported cases of unwelcomed behavior, the behavior continued and in 21%, had minimal negative effects. When asked about the consequences for the perpetrator(s) of the unwelcomed behavior, responders reported most often that there were no negative effects (33.5%), minimal negative effects (27%) or the person was disciplined (25.5%).

After reporting the behavior or filing a formal complaint, 32% of respondents indicated that the situation was resolved to their satisfaction, and 31.4% stated that it was not. Nineteen percent indicated partial satisfaction with the outcome.

For the respondents who were not satisfied with the resolution, the concerns were as follows:

- the person(s) who committed the unwelcomed behavior suffered no consequences (31%)
- nothing happened (21%)
- the complaint was not taken seriously (17%), and/or
- the unwelcomed behavior did not stop (14.5%).

The most common reasons for not reporting the unwelcomed behavior or filing a formal complaint were:

- was not sure it was sexual harassment (11%),
- was not sure the unwelcomed behavior was anything anyone could do anything about (11%),
- thought it would be too much of a hassle (11%), and
- did not believe that a complaint would be taken seriously (8%).

There were virtually no differences between groups on this question.

More than half the respondents (53%) were not aware of the current University of Iowa procedure for making a sexual harassment complaint, and 18.5% were not sure whether they knew it or not. Although undergraduate students were most likely to be both the victims of unwelcomed behavior and the perpetrators, only 8% responded that they knew how to file a sexual harassment complaint. Similarly, only 18% of graduate/ professional students were aware of the procedures. Faculty (52%), P&S (46%) staff, and Merit (39%) were more aware of the policies, but these percents are still far from widespread knowledge.

Among those respondents who believed that they had been sexually harassed, again over half (57.5%) were not aware of the current University procedure for making a sexual harassment complaint, and another 14% were not sure whether they knew it or not. More than 40% of respondents (41.4%) did not know where to find or obtain a copy of the current University Policy on Sexual Harassment.

Although one of the primary purposes of this most recent survey was to assess today's perceptions and behaviors versus those recorded 12 years ago, to some extent it is difficult to compare the results of this survey with the 1992 survey. There are vast differences in the sample size, distribution method and in some instances the method of analysis. Nonetheless, there did not appear to be any critically significant change in the level of sexual harassment on campus. In 1992, 44.7% of respondents indicated they had not experienced any unwelcomed behavior. This figure compares to 47.9% in 2004. In 1992, 15% of respondents reported an experience of sexual harassment. In 2004, this figure is 24.2%. Although this is not a trivially

greater number, it is likely that it reflects a greater awareness about sexual harassment rather than a greater amount of sexual harassment on campus.

More significant perhaps is that a comparison of the two surveys suggests that certain things have not changed, e.g., awareness of the University Sexual Harassment Complaint Policy and Procedure. In 1992, 71% of all survey respondents stated that they either did not know or were not sure of the university procedures for initiating a sexual harassment complaint. In particular, 92.1% of undergraduate students reported a lack of awareness. While a greater number of people reported awareness of the policy and procedure (47.1%), only 8% of undergraduate students and 18% of graduate/professional students responded that they were aware of the current University procedure for filing a sexual harassment complaint.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this survey, the Council on Status of Women makes the following recommendations, explained more fully in the full report:

- 1. It is critical that the University of Iowa dedicate energy and resources towards ensuring that its community knows about, understands, and feels free to use its sexual harassment policy and procedures.**
- 2. The University must take complaints of sexual harassment seriously and the UI community must know that to be true.**
- 3. All people at the University of Iowa who are charged with administering the sexual harassment policy must understand the policies and the nature of sexual harassment.**
- 4. The University must pay attention to sexually harassing behaviors that occur in connection with the use of alcohol, including tailgating before football games.**
- 5. The University should continue to strive for gender-balanced work environments.**
- 6. The University must continue to try to eliminate e-mail SPAM.**
- 7. The University of Iowa should conduct a follow-up survey of sexual harassment and unwelcomed behavior within the next five years for undergraduate students.**

8. Future surveys should endeavor to maximize the response rate, especially for undergraduate students.

Recommendations Beyond Sexual Harassment

9. The University of Iowa should consider how to address the broader issue of respectful treatment on campus.

10. The University needs to publicize its anti-harassment policy (see <http://www.uiowa.edu/~our/opmanual/ii/14.htm>).

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990's, the Council on the Status of Women determined that in order to have a true picture of the impact that sexual harassment had on The University of Iowa (also referred to in this report as "University" or "UI") campus and to address this sensitive issue authoritatively, a campus survey was needed. The original survey was designed to:

1. Establish a baseline on the incidence and prevalence of sexual harassment on campus;
2. Define the scope and nature of sexual harassment on campus; and
3. Determine the best strategies to deal with sexual harassment problems. (1992 Survey)

The resulting report (see Appendix F for its Executive Summary) not only documented the development of the sexual harassment policy, but also included a number of criticisms of the development of the policy and the procedures for reporting sexual harassment. Moreover, the report noted the inadequate number of staff in the office that was primarily responsible for implementing the policy, then called the Office of Affirmative Action (OAA), now called the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity (EOD). Finally, that report offered a brief discussion of the *Jean Y. Jew* sexual harassment lawsuit against the University of Iowa.

Ten years later, the Council on the Status of Women sought to reassess the University population's experience with, perceptions of, and methods of addressing sexual harassment. The decision to conduct this second sexual harassment survey was in part a response to a recommendation by an Ad Hoc Campus Climate Committee that had been convened by Interim President Willard "Sandy" Boyd (see Appendix G, Final Report of the 2003 Committee on Campus Climate).

The new sexual harassment survey was designed to:

1. Assess the prevalence and perception of sexual harassment and sexual harassing behaviors on campus today as compared to 10 years ago;
2. Re-evaluate the scope and nature of sexual harassment on campus;
3. Understand the responses to sexual harassment of students, staff, and faculty and the University, and
4. Determine what strategies the University needs to take both to minimize the occurrence of sexual harassment and associated behaviors and to respond most effectively to reports of these behaviors.