

Features

Report meets mixed reactions

Debbie Bodinger

One York University Faculty Association member feels the document contains a "subtle appeal to vigilante action." Another thinks it threatens faculty with trials in "kangaroo courts", and calls it "oppressive" and "frightening". But there are also those who label it "a tremendous breakthrough", saying that "it has balanced the power "between men and women."

These are some of the reactions to the "Preliminary Report of the Presidential Committee on Sexual Harassment".

All individuals and groups on campus were invited to provide the committee with their views for consideration before the final report was written, but the most vocal group by far has been YUFA. Individual faculty members were the ones who expressed the most concern at the public discussion meetings, and of the organized constituencies on campus, YUFA is the only one which has released a formal position paper on the report. YUSA and CUEW executive committees say they are considering their positions now.

In both formal discussion meetings and private reactions two major areas of concern have surfaced: whether or not the university needs special procedures for dealing with sexual harassment, and whether or not the procedures suggested take sufficient care in protecting the civil rights of the accused.

Here are some of the major concerns and the committee's reactions to them.

Definition

The most frequently voiced concern about the definition is that in the first part ("sexual harassment is unwanted attention of a sexually-oriented nature"), harassment is defined in terms of the "victim's" reaction, and thus can only be determined after the incident has occurred. As one faculty member put it, "As the definition stands, any wife who says 'not tonight dear', makes the husband guilty of sexual harassment."

The committee was receptive to this point and has promised to include the word "persistent" in the final report.

While this satisfied some, others still feel uneasy with the definition lying in the victim's reaction. Speaking to this concern, Sue Tacon, the Osgoode representative on the committee, pointed out that the same is true in certain crimes such as rape. "Yes, it's her (the victim's) reactions," she added, "but that doesn't end the matter. Because she lays the complaint doesn't mean her claim will be held up—that's why you have an investigation." (Although the report acknowledge that harassment can occur between all possible combinations of gender and roles, most of the discussion assumed a male faculty/female student relationship.)



Eugene Zimmerbner

Another problem arose over the list of behaviours the report suggests could fall under the first part of the definition: "Leering or ogling; verbal suggestion or abuse; sexist or derogatory remarks about a person's body, clothing or sexual activities; objectionable or demeaning forms of address."

Many feel that these sorts of behaviour, while socially unacceptable, are not the business of the university. York psychology professor, Dr. David Wiesenthal, for example, wrote in a letter to the President, "In the case of leering and verbal abuse, I think it is essentially a matter of manners... just as a faculty member is not expected to pick his (her) nose in front of a class, I would expect sensible mannerly behaviour from faculty in other instances."

consider arbitration rather than a formal hearing.

Ultimately, however, there is simply a difference of opinion. Some feel "leering and ogling" should be dealt with solely by the parties involved, while others think that if it is a University-related incident, York should have the power to censure it. Reacting to the suggestion that verbal abuse is too trivial to be included in the definition, one student at a discussion meeting responded, "I don't think you're capturing the whole situation. That can make a woman quit her job. We have to capture verbal taunts."

Secret Files

One of the more controversial aspects of the report is the suggestion that a student should be able to place a confidential complaint on file without having

continued on page 7

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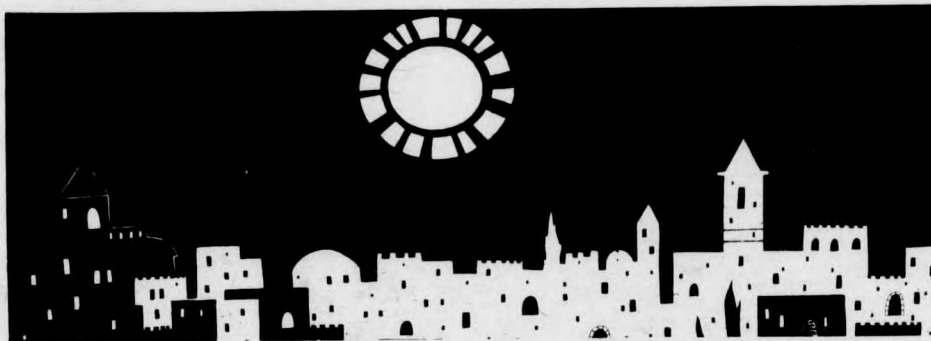
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Forum On:

"THE STATUS OF JERUSALEM"

8:00 P.M.

Moot Court, Osgoode Hall

DAVID ARIEL Israeli Consul General
"THE JERUSALEM BILL"

HAROLD RHODE Ph.D. Columbia University
"Arab History of Jerusalem"

HOWARD ADELMAN Professor of Philosophy, York
"United or Unified Jerusalem"

HAROLD CROWE Dean of Atkinson College
Moderator

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C.U.E.W. General Membership Meeting

Tuesday, November 25
12-3 p.m.
Curtis Lecture Hall "J"

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Agenda will include:

Executive Elections

Structure of the Union: Recommendations
and Proposals

Class Size Committee

Report from the Sexual Harassment Committee
Budget