

# Sexual harassment — a tale of two universities

by Irene Chomokovski  
Canadian University Press

**Alone and powerless.** That's how Terry felt when she saw her professor was 'coming on' to her. But what would you do if your well-liked prof told you you were 'good looking,' or tried to kiss you, or patted your ass?

Terry (not her real name) is one of the few people who go through the entire ordeal of a formal university sexual harassment panel hearing. She told eight people at the University of Winnipeg every personal detail about her experiences.

Studies estimate two in every ten female undergraduate students and six in ten female graduate students will encounter some form of sexual harassment — unwanted sexual attention linked to a threat or a reward, or behaviour which makes work or study difficult — at university.

Universities and colleges across Canada have been establishing sexual harassment policies since the mid-1980s to protect themselves against lawsuits. In 1985 a secretary, fired after she complained about being harassed, sued Brock University for \$1.5 million.

But universities often end up with more than they bargained for, according to Marilyn McKenzie, the sexual harassment officer at the University of Manitoba. "Once they get a policy in place with some publicity and someone doing the job, the cases start coming forward."

Before the University of Manitoba hired its sexual harassment officer in 1984, only four cases had been reported. In the next four years, they had 89 cases.

"I think those four just couldn't stand it," says McKenzie. "We don't know how many others there were. But it wasn't fashionable to complain so people didn't. And if they did complain they usually got fired. It was the victim that was made to pay the price."

The University of Winnipeg's policy was in place by the spring of 1987. But when Terry knew she was being sexually harassed by her professor, she didn't even know the university had a policy.

A casual glance around the U of W's small downtown campus shows clearly that the university's policy keeps a low profile. The yellow and black posters once found in some women's washrooms have 'disappeared' from campus; they haven't been replaced.

In the nearly three years since U of W implemented its policy, only two people have filed formal sexual harassment complaints.

McKenzie says only the univer-

sities that combine their policies and procedures with publicity and education get the large numbers of cases reported. "The ones who don't have a policy or have a policy sitting on the most dusty office shelf with no posters, no brochures and no education . . . they have no cases."

When Terry found out about the U of W's sexual harassment policy, she filed a formal complaint.

Out of 21 sexual harassment policies on file with the Canadian Association of University Teachers, only five use a harassment officer model like the one at University of Manitoba. York University has by far the most extensive provisions with a sexual harassment education and complaint centre on campus.

Under the one or two person advisor model, people who feel they have been harassed and decide to file a written formal complaint go through a series of interviews, with the sexual harassment officer(s) and, usually, the head of the department involved.

At U of M, the sexual harassment officer writes a recommendations report; the dean then reads the report and makes the decision; but the dean's decision must have McKenzie's approval. The results range from a verbal or written apology, a letter which

says any further behaviour will not be tolerated, a reprimand, a suspension without pay, or expulsion.

Since 1985, there have been two dismissals as well as several suspensions, letters of reprimand and apologies.

McKenzie says she doesn't want to take the 'fun' out of the workplace — she just wants to keep the sexual harassment out of the workplace and out of universities.

"When I got appointed, people

thought I was going to ruin careers, destroy marriages," she says. "People were going to come forward and lie and get professors into trouble. None of that has happened. The vast majority of cases are handled right here (in my office), on an informal basis."

Policy and procedure guidelines on sexual harassment routinely carry phrases such as

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Where: Student Union Building

Where: Student Union Building, Rm 226

For inquiries call the International Student Centre, 424-7077.

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