

# Shifting the balance of power: the problems of campus sexual harassment

by Cathy McDonald  
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If the situation is severe, the committee will hold hearings and may recommend the university take punitive action, ranging from a reprimand to dismissal.

The definition of sexual harassment is the most difficult part in creating a grievance procedure. The Canadian Association of University Teachers has a definition many faculty unions are now including in their contracts.

As part of its guidelines on professional ethics and relationships, CAUT says sexual harassment entails advances, requests for favours and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when it is combined with the threat of damaging the person's employment or academic status. Sexual conduct that unreasonably interferes with an individual's academic performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment, is also termed sexual harassment.

Some men are wary of attempts to define harassment. Men have told Leonardi they are intimidated because they do not know what acceptable behaviour is and feel women might misinterpret an innocent gesture.

"Surely one stare is okay," one man exclaimed.

"I say it's not okay," Leonardi said. "Their idea is that women have to put up with something ... If men don't know (when they're harassing women), then that has to do with their attitude towards women. They see women as sex objects."

Redefining relationships between men and women to that of mutual respect is what the new grievance procedures are all about, and education on campus is an important part of the process. But not everyone is happy with the increased discussion of sexual harassment.

The York committee has been accused of "policing" professor-student relationships. Their reply was they had no wish to stop relationships from running their natural course, but the university had a responsibility to protect its community.

Leonardi feels there is a lot of unfocused resistance in the university that is holding up implementation of the grievance procedure. She says support for it is strong, coming from support staff and teaching assistants, but mostly from students through the campus women's centre.

But most of the questions and anxiety are coming from men.

"With 97 per cent of men doing the harassing, its obvious why women understand the need (for the grievance procedure)," she said.

Some men worry a few women will abuse the process to "gang up" on an innocent man. But Leonardi says the victim must be believed.

"Nobody wants to report it when they are harassed, never mind make it up."

Students on another Ontario campus have taken the initiative towards a sexual harassment committee, but feel the administration is stalling.

"The administration has been totally non-committal," says Anita Braha, a member of the University of Toronto's informal sexual harassment grievance committee.

The initiative for the committee came from the graduate student union two years ago. A coalition representing students, faculty, staff and unionized employees was formed and continues to develop the procedure. Now the committee is waiting for administration endorsement to give it official weight.

Women have made strides into academic life, and Leonardi's job is a recognition that women's battles to enter non-traditional roles continue. Male professors still hold the sexist attitude that "jokes" or put-downs like "I can see why you're having problems on assignments, being up with the boys all night..." The

most pervasive kind of harassment is a professor's classroom attitude, such as comparing the structure of a bridge to a woman's body — "well-built".

Taking female engineering students as an example, Leonardi says women must deal with a lot of unspoken resistance to their new roles.

"She has to break a lot of boundaries. She has to be willing to take risks, to be frightened and to take a lot of flak, anger and hostility that has nothing to do with her personally."

"Men don't have to put up with that."

Grievance procedures for sexual harassment are becoming available to help a student deal with situations that jeopardize her emotional well-being as well as her academic goals.

Women's struggles for academic excellence could be termed a handicap race. They carry an extra burden around with them from class to class — their body.

Male professors often think women's bodies are as worthy of comment as the mark on their last exam, knowing in most cases the student will put up with it.

From sexual innuendo, suggestive remarks and touching to proposition combined with outright academic threats, male professors have enjoyed the benefits of their ivory tower status, allowing them to put women students through embarrassment and emotional hell.

Professors hold power over students — they control their learning environment and evaluate their work. For students who feel harassed by unwanted sexual attention, their options are minimal — they comply, reject the professor's advances and risk a lower grade or drop out of the course.



## Discrimination of women faculty

by Canadian University Press

First class of the term. You survey the cluster of nervous, first-year faces and wish your students did not, like your academic colleagues, automatically underrate your teaching performance. But you know, sure as your salary is lower than average, sure as your chances of promotion are limited, sure as you'll be the first to go in a cutbacks crunch, that by the end of the week students will transfer out of your class. For you are a woman.

"What do you do when you discover that students are walking out of your class at the beginning of the term because you are a woman?" asks University of Toronto professor Kathryn Morgan in her paper "Amazons, Spinsters and Women: A Career of One's Own."

What do you do? The question is generating controversy at campuses across the country as educational institutes frantically set up committees, establish affirmative action programs, and publicly proclaim their support for women in the face of increasing criticism against sex discrimination.

Morgan, who teaches philosophy and women's studies, says in her paper women professors are subject to alienation and self-consciousness because male professors and students judge them on the basis of sex. She points out women professors are greatly outnumbered, occupy lower-paid positions, and face reprisal if they take time off for pregnancy.

"Given these stresses and forms of alienation it is not surprising that many women decide to leave the academy," she says.

Sue Sherwin, chair of the Philosophy department at Dalhousie, agrees that women professors face additional stress because of their minority status.

"I want just to have to prove things for myself, not the entire gender," says Sherwin.

She says that the biggest problem is the load put on women professors as role models.

Morgan's points are also clearly backed up by "Some Questions of Balance", a recent report by the Commission on Canadian Studies. The report discusses the larger issue of education's failure in Canada, but 20 of the commission's 85 recommendations relate to the status of women.

Despite a 50 per cent increase in women students over the last 15 years, the report says women faculty have not increased. "There have to be more women for the health of the system," says James Page, one of the report's two authors. "Women should be encouraged to pursue academic careers. But when only 15 per cent of faculty are women, there is a lack of role models (for female undergraduates)."

Some institutions have dealt with the problem through affirmative action, but not without a great deal of opposition, even from women. At Concordia University in Montreal, the senators who objected strongly to the establishment of a committee to study the status of women at Concordia were two women.

June Chaikelson, Dean of Arts and Science, told the senate at a November meeting affirmative action is demeaning. "It may put women in the positions, but they'll have less status because of it," she said after the meeting.

Chaikelson said she had achieved her position through her abilities, not because she had been artificially promoted to increase the number of women in top-level positions. "When I get my next position people will say I got it because I was a woman," she said.

Concordia education professor Arpi Jamalain said a status of women committee would do little to ensure women get fair treatment. "If we have one committee, five committees, 10 committees, how is the situation going to be different," she asked.

Despite the arguments, the senate voted 25

to 11 to establish an eight-member body with the power to take action on achieving equality of the sexes. Senate also advised the administration to hold open senior positions and posts in male-dominated faculties like engineering until qualified women could be found to fill them.

Dalhousie is another institution that has taken concrete steps to increase the number of women professors and their salaries. Since the release of a status of women report four years ago, the faculty association, the president's committee on the employment of women and the Dalhousie Women's Faculty Association have succeeded in attaining better conditions for women.

"There are now more women in teaching and administrative positions and relative salaries have improved," says professor Judith Fingard, history department chair and vice president of women faculty. But she stressed the need for further work.

One victory women attained during contract negotiations last year was an agreement to make part time professors — of which a high proportion are women — eligible for tenure. "We are all very very pleased (with the new collective agreement)," said women's faculty president Christine Boyle. "It shows that this university is a progressive employer that is not prepared to allow women to wallow in the ghetto of secondary employment and job discrimination."

Despite such victories, women still face a difficult struggle in academia. And that struggle gets even tougher as government funding for education shrinks.

Phyllis Leonardi, coordinator of the Carleton University Status of Women office, says cutbacks are often used as an excuse for not hiring women. And Page, in "Some Questions of Balance", says the wage gap between women and men is steadily widening.