Harassment, sexual harassment and hostile work environment

What is a hostile environment?

Hostile environment is defined as sexual conduct that interferes with an individual's work or academic performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

What is harassment?

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission defines unlawful harassment as "Verbal or physical conduct that degrades or shows hostility or aversion to an individual because of his or her race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age or disability, or that
of one's friends, relatives or associates."
According to the EEOC, the conduct must be
"so objectively offensive as to alter the
conditions of the victim's employment."

The conditions of employment are altered if the
harassment culminates in a tangible
employment action (fired, suspended, denied
training, denied an award, etc.) or when the
conduct was sufficiently severe or pervasive to
create a hostile work environment. Harassment
can take the form of slurs, graffiti, offensive or
derogatory comments, or other verbal or
physical conduct. Sexual harassment (including
unwelcome sexual advances, requests for
sexual favors, and other conduct of a sexual
nature) is also unlawful. Conduct crosses the
line when it goes beyond simple teasing and
offhand comments, or when there are more
than isolated incidents and there is a pattern of
such incidents.

The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, a
supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or
someone who is not an employee of the
employer, such as a client or customer.

Harassment outside the workplace may also be
illegal if there is a link with the workplace, for
example, if a supervisor harasses an employee
while driving the employee to a meeting.

REPORT HARASSMENT

REPORT TO EXTERNAL AGENCIES

TITLE IX AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT INFO
Preventing harassment in the workplace

Unlawful harassment

Unlawful harassment is verbal or physical conduct that degrades or shows hostility or aversion to an individual because of his or her race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, sexual orientation or disability, or that of one’s friends, relatives or associates. Conduct that is so objectively offensive that it alters the conditions of the victim’s employment or educational environment is illegal.

Examples of unlawful harassment

- Written or graphic material that demonstrates hostility placed on walls, bulletin boards or circulated through email, on Facebook, or other social media
- Name calling and slurs
- Negative stereotyping
- Insensitive comments
- Threatening or intimidating acts
- Jokes that are hostile or demeaning

When does it cross the line?

- When it goes beyond simple teasing and offhand comments
- When it is more than isolated incidents and becomes a pattern of such incidents
• When it alters the conditions of the victim’s employment or educational opportunities

• When it culminates in a tangible employment action

• When it is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create a hostile work environment

**Consequences of unchecked behavior**

Inappropriate behavior, such as remarks and actions based on stereotypes, can escalate if unchecked by management. Silence is acceptance. When supervisors remain silent about inappropriate behavior, it effectively sanctions the behavior.

As behavior escalates you will typically find a targeted individual or group. This results in loss of integrity and professionalism and has a detrimental impact on the organizational mission. In some cases the behavior could culminate in abuse, such as threats and intimidation.

**UAF policy: zero tolerance**

The university will not tolerate inappropriate sexual or sexually harassing behavior, and works to prevent such conduct toward its students, employees and applicants for employment. Violation of this policy may lead to discipline of the offending party.

**Employee rights**
All employees and students are entitled to the following:

- An environment free of unlawful harassment
- An ability to file a discrimination complaint

**Employee responsibilities**

- Appropriate behavior
- Take advantage of preventive or corrective opportunities

**Prevention**

Supervisors, faculty and staff must exercise reasonable care to prevent harassment.

- Enforce anti-harassment policies.
- Provide a clear explanation of prohibited conduct and convey the seriousness of the prohibition.
- Encourage employees to report harassing conduct before it becomes severe or pervasive, and ensure employees are protected against retaliation.
- Provide employees with a copy of policy and complaint procedures.
- Provide periodic training.
- Include compliance with policy in evaluations.

Employees and students must take advantage of preventive or corrective opportunities.

**Steps to take**
• Say no clearly
• Document the harassment
• Inform your supervisor
• Inform **Title IX coordinator**
• Look for witnesses or other victims
• **File a complaint** with the Diversity and Equal Opportunity office

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**University of Alaska policy regarding sexual harassment**

**P04.02.022. Sexual Harassment**

A. The university will not tolerate inappropriate sexual or sexually harassing behavior and seeks to prevent such conduct toward its students, employees and applicants for employment. Violation of this policy may lead to discipline of the offending party.

B. Since some members of the university community hold positions of authority that may involve the legitimate exercise of power over others, it is their responsibility to be sensitive to that power. Faculty and supervisors in particular, in their relationships with students and subordinates, need to be aware of potential conflicts of interest and the possible compromise of their evaluative capacity. Because there is an inherent power difference in these relationships, the potential exists for the less powerful person...
to perceive a coercive element in suggestions regarding activities outside those inherent in the professional relationship.

C. It is the responsibility of faculty and staff to behave in such a manner that their words or actions cannot reasonably be perceived as sexually coercive, abusive, or exploitative. Sexual harassment also can occur in relationships among equals as when repeated unwelcome advances, demeaning verbal behavior, or offensive physical contact interfere with an individual's ability to work or study productively. Consensual sexual conduct that unreasonably interferes with other employees' work or creates a hostile, intimidating or offensive working or learning environment constitutes sexual harassment for purposes of this policy.

D. The university is committed to providing an environment of study and work free from sexual harassment and to ensuring the accessibility of appropriate procedures for addressing all complaints regarding sexual harassment. Nothing contained in this sexual harassment policy will be construed or applied to limit or abridge any person's constitutional right to freedom of expression or to infringe upon the legitimate academic freedom or right of due process of any member of the university community.

Downloads

PDF: Preventing harassment in the workplace

http://uaf.edu/oeo/civil-rights/harassmenthostile-environ/
Contact information:

Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity
Nordic House, 739 Columbia Circle
P.O. Box 756910
Fairbanks, AK 99775
907-474-7300
uaf-deo@alaska.edu

Find us on Facebook
Location shuttle service and accessibility

Reporting:

- REPORT ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES
- REPORT DISCRIMINATION
- REPORT TITLE IX VIOLATION
- UA CONFIDENTIAL HOTLINE

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For questions or comments regarding this website, contact uaf-web@alaska.edu.