

University officials work to stop sexual harassment

By Colleen Pohlig
Emerald Associate Editor

As recent political events have shown, sexual harassment can happen anywhere at any time, and universities are no exceptions.

While many University officials said they believe the University has a problem with sexual harassment on campus, they don't believe it's more severe of a problem than at most other institutions.

"I think it's a serious problem, and we're just beginning to get it," University Vice President Dan Williams said. "The University is no different than other private corporations because we have corporate relationships."

Norm Wessells, the provost and vice president for academic affairs, said he believes the University hasn't had as serious a problem as some other universities.

Wessells is one of two vice presidents who makes the final disciplinary action decisions in discrimination cases for all teaching faculty. The other, Williams, makes the decisions for non-instructional employees. Neither have had sexual harassment training.

"Last summer at a meeting with provosts from other institutions, I heard about very clear and terrible cases of sexual harassment at the University of Washington and University of Massachusetts where the institutions have denied tenure and have fired tenured professors

on the basis of sexual harassment," Wessells said. "Thank God, we haven't had any like that."

Wessells said that circumstances involving non-tenured teaching faculty are "easier to deal with" in terms of disciplinary actions for sexual harassment than tenured faculty because there are far more formal procedures the University would have to go through to fire a tenured professor.

"Once a person achieves tenure, there's an extra degree of security," Wessells said. "But tenure is not a defense for this kind of irresponsible behavior. Nobody would treat tenure lightly and take it away for frivolous reasons, but it's not a defense for egregious behavior."

Wessells defined egregious behavior as "clearly physical abuse, attack instances, clearly unacceptable pressures and repeated instances."

Wessells said in his five years of being employed by the University, he hasn't known any tenured professors to be fired on the basis of sexual harassment. However, some may not have had their contracts renewed because of sexual harassment letters in their personnel file or other reasons, he said.

The two vice presidents are aided by Director of Human Resources Linda King and Vice Provost for Academic Personnel Lorraine Davis, who also review the investigative findings and make recommendations to either Williams and Wessells, respectively.

'I see a lot of things the perpetrator and victim don't see.'

— Dan Williams,
University vice president

The vice presidents also receive help from the recently formed Affirmative Action Advisory Committee, consisting of six administrators and other University officials who ensure all discrimination cases are handled similarly.

Alison Baker, executive assistant to the president and a member of the AAAC, said cases now are more difficult because certain behaviors are no longer acceptable.

"I think sexual harassment is a big problem on campus," Baker said. "People are much freer in their discussion of sexual things, and the boundaries of what is acceptable aren't so clear anymore."

"Since I've been in this job, sexual harassment has always been an issue, but the seriousness of it and the number of complaints have risen every year," she said. "I don't think there is more of it going on, but women recognize it for what it is."

Williams said he tries to balance several things when making a decision about disciplinary action, "I see a lot of

things the perpetrator and victim don't see," Williams said. "I make a judgment under all the circumstances in the investigative findings."

Furthermore, Williams said he leans more in favor of the victim than the perpetrator in employment cases because the "supervisors have greater responsibility than the workers, and with added power comes added responsibility."

Wessells said he expects more out of the faculty today than he did in the past.

"I come at it with the idea that everyone should be sympathetic of (sexual harassment) by now, and nobody should expect a sympathetic hearing."

The Office of Human Resources has recently started offering training sessions involving various diversity issues including sexual harassment sessions, and any University department or office may request any of these sessions.

"We recently hired a full-time training administrator, and at this point we're waiting to be invited by departments and offices," said King.

Everett Wells, the director of the Office of Affirmative Action, said he believes education is the key in combatting sexual harassment.

"Encouraging people to educate themselves is more important than us stringing (the perpetrators) up by their fingernails," Wells said.

NETWORK

Continued from Page 1

when the investigation begins. We have to interview the accused and most of the people who she told after it happened."

While the formal complaint process is more emotionally difficult than the informal process, Lehrman said he highly encourages women to file formal complaints and he reminds them that the office has strong retaliation protections.

"(Filing a formal complaint) is a confirmation of one's self-

esteem," Lehrman said. "You've had something taken from you and you'll never be whole again, but filing a formal complaint is the closest you can come to being whole again."

A student who feels she has been sexually harassed by a professor, supervisor or any other member of the campus community may file an informal complaint with the Sexual Harassment Resource Network as well.

Network members give support, options and referrals to students who believe they have

been sexually harassed. If the student decides to file a formal complaint with the Office of Affirmative Action, the network member may accompany the student through the entire process.

"We're there not to give advice or solve the problem, but to listen and then direct the student where she can seek help," said law school professor Caroline Forell, who is the other co-director of the network. "It's an entry way where students can go to feel safe talking with somebody."

ET ALS

MEETINGS

Students for Choice will meet and have Cynthia Wooten speak on choice issues in the Oregon Legislature tonight at 7 in Room 155 Education. For more information, call 346-0649.

Non-Traditional Student Task Force will meet today from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. in EMU Cedar Rooms A and B. For more information, call 346-0651.

Men Against Rape will meet today at 5:30 p.m. in EMU Century Room F. For more information, call 346-4206.

Software Association of Oregon Eugene will meet tonight at 6 in Deschutes Hall. Corey Smith will be the speaker. For more information, call 687-5033.

RELIGION

Christian Science Organization will

meet today at 1:30 p.m. in EMU Century Room D. For more information, call 346-9445.

People of Faith at the University Brown Bag Lunch will meet today and every second and fourth Wednesday from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Koinonia Center. For more information, call 346-3597.

MISCELLANEOUS

American Marketing Association will sponsor a presentation by Chris Kelley of Kodak tonight at 6 in Room 128 Chiles. All students are welcome. For more information, call 345-3056.

Outdoor Program will present an avalanche slide lecture today at 3:30 p.m. in Room 242 Gerlinger. For more information, call 346-4365.

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