

Student Judicial Affairs

Sexual Assault Myths and Realities

Myth: You haven't been sexually harassed unless you've been physically assaulted.

Reality: Most sexual harassment is far less obvious than physical assault. Outright propositions or threats demanding sexual activity in exchange for favors (such as a recommendation for a favorable personnel review), subtly demeaning behavior (including sexist jokes and assumptions), and unwelcome physical gestures like leering, brushing up against you, squeezing, and pinching are all forms of sexual harassment.

Myth: Sexual harassment affects only a few persons.

Reality: In one national study 70 percent of female students claimed to have experienced either sexual or gender harassment.

Myth: Sexual harassment happens only to those who encourage it. It would stop if they wanted it to.

Reality: Men or women who dress provocatively or act or speak in ways that may be construed as "sexy" may get sexually harassed. But sexual harassment is still unwelcome. Many harassers are repeatedly told "No" but do not stop. "No" is too often heard as "Yes."

Myth: If you ignore sexual harassment, it will go away.

Reality: No, it won't. Generally the harasser is a repeat offender who will not stop on their own. Ignoring such behavior may be seen as assent or encouragement.

Myth: Sexual harassment is relatively harmless.

Reality: The psychological consequences of harassment are devastating. Students' physical and emotional reactions to such experiences include depression, decreased motivation, listlessness, nausea, weight loss or gain, high blood pressure, gastrointestinal disorders, inability to concentrate, helplessness, insomnia, and headaches. Sexual harassment makes the victim feel embarrassed, tense, frustrated, pressured, and nervous.

Myth: Sexual harassment does not affect career goals.

Reality: As a result of sexual harassment, students have forfeited research, work, and even careers. Students report avoiding classes or working with certain instructors because they risk being subjected to sexual harassment. Many students change their majors or educational programs because of sexual harassment. Sometimes they simply drop out of college entirely. Sexual harassment can damage a student's sense of competence and self-esteem.

Myth: Students can do nothing about sexual harassment.

Reality: Absolutely wrong. Students may talk informally and confidentially with a member of the Counseling Center Staff (Meriam Library 142, 898-6345) or make formal inquiries or complaints about peer harassment with the Office of Student Judicial Affairs (Kendall Hall 110, 898-6897) or about harassment by faculty and staff with the Office of Faculty and Staff Affairs (Kendall Hall 224, 898-5029).

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