

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Committee Against Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

Guidelines on Preventing Sexual Harassment

Introduction

These advisory guidelines complement the CUHK Policy Against Sexual Harassment in maintaining the University community as a place of mutual respect and gender equality free from sexual harassment. The purpose of these guidelines is to offer some positive measures and suggestions for members of departments and units to maintain a workplace and educational environment with a minimal risk of sexual harassment.

Gender Equality

Sexual harassment is an abuse of power that often occurs in a relationship of unequals. While hierarchy may be unavoidable in any organizational settings including universities (involving for example teacher-student, supervisor-staff), hierarchy should never be related to gender, and must never be abused. There is the need to promote mutual respect among members of different social groups, especially between members of different genders, and to minimize the undesirable effects arising out of unequal relationships. This may require people in various positions to reflect on their cultural preconceptions and practices. Such positive acts include but are not limited to the following:

- a) Teaching staff (including teaching assistants) should avoid the use of remarks that have the effect of demeaning or stereotyping members of a certain gender in a classroom setting. Such sexist remarks should also be avoided by supervisors toward those they supervise, workers toward their colleagues, and students toward their peers in their day-to-day interaction and student activities. Common examples of sexist remarks include:
 - portraying women as sex objects or as being less motivated in career pursuits;
 - stereotyping men or women's aptitude in certain subjects or types of work; and
- b) Instructional/supervisory staff should treat students/workers of both genders equally, as should students toward their peers. This includes:
 - giving equal attention to the views of male and female students/workers/peers in a group discussion;
 - responding to their comments with equal attention; and
 - giving them equal chances to voice their views.

Respecting Others

Since sexual harassment involves an affront to subjective feelings of other people that the alleged perpetrator may not be aware of, it may be combated if everyone develops more sensitivity and respect for others to create an atmosphere of acceptance and respect for other people's values, cultures and feelings.

- a) We should be willing to change our words or actions when someone complains about them. While conduct may attract serious consequences, sometimes an immediate apology is all that is required to prevent allegations of sexual discrimination or harassment.
- b) In a public setting, one should always show disapproval of conduct which is sexually discriminatory and stand by anyone who is being harassed. This means not laughing at offensive remarks disguised as humour, offering supportive remarks to the victims of harassment or criticizing behaviour that you find objectionable.
- c) Organizers of activities should be sensitive to the feelings of their peers and avoid sexually offensive activities. The student body will demonstrate their maturity and intelligence, and gain respect for themselves through the respect for others.
- d) One should bear in mind that sexual harassment is contrary to law and University policy, and should not be treated lightly as it may attract serious consequences for the alleged perpetrator. You are not helping anyone by condoning such activities.

Responsibility of Supervisors and Teaching Staff

Many universities in the world have statements on consensual relationships between teaching staff and students or between supervisors and subordinates in their policies concerning sexual harassment or conflicts of interest. While consensual relationships between teaching staff and students/supervisor and staff are not within the purview of the Sexual Harassment Policy, our staff should be cautious about the inherent power differential between teaching staff and students/supervisor and staff. As such, their engagement in romantic relationships may constitute a conflict of interest, arouse complaints of favoritism from other parties, as well as leave the teaching staff/supervisor open to allegations of sexual harassment should the relationship cease and further conduct become unwelcome to the other party.

Apart from playing a leadership role in fostering a culture of equality and respect, persons in management and supervisory positions are responsible for promoting and maintaining an atmosphere that deters sexual harassment, and actively discouraging all behaviours that might be construed as such. They should:

- a) regularly alert their staff and/or students to the CUHK Policy Against Sexual Harassment;
and
- b) offer positive assistance in case they are approached by victims for help or advice.