Preventing Sexual Harassment

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What is Sexual Harassment?

Unwelcome sexual advances or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute harassment if:

- It is a condition for employment, admission, progress, or is used as the basis for decisions about job status, academic standing, etc.
  - Quid pro quo (This for that)
  - Sex in a power relationship
  - Note that graduate students can both exploit and be exploited

- It has the purpose or effect of interfering with an individual’s performance, or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.
  - Purpose or effect
  - Verbal, visual, physical
  - Walls are public spaces (no porn on walls)
  - Tacit support by observers
Sexual harassment can occur in a variety of circumstances, including but not limited to the following:

- The victim as well as the harasser may be a woman or a man. The victim does not have to be of the opposite sex.
- The harasser can be the victim’s supervisor, an agent of the employer, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or a non-employee.
- The victim does not have to be the person harassed but could be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.
- Unlawful sexual harassment may occur without economic injury to or discharge of the victim.
- The harasser conduct must be unwelcome.
What if Sexual Harassment happens?

Sexual harassment is treated very seriously by the university and the department.

Complaints are investigated by the Office of Diversity and Affirmative Action.

Disciplinary action for misconduct can include letters of reprimand, loss of employment, exposure to legal action.

If you feel victimized, you should talk to somebody: peers, Laszlo Mihaly, Sara Lutterbie, Pam Burris, Sally Sternglanz (Women’s Studies), various University offices, myself.
Women in the Department

- Although this is not directly related to harassment, women in physics are a clear minority.

- Female graduate students will be invited to regular lunches for women in the department.

- Feel free to discuss anything at these meetings or in private.

- In Spring we had a meeting with the gender equity committee of the APS.

- Some concrete results are that there will be a graduate student on the admissions committee and we will allocate resource to improve the “quality of life” inside the department (suggestions are welcome).

- There is also a webpage “Women in Physics and Astronomy” at http://mini.physics.sunysb.edu/~womenp/people.php
Example 1: Harassment or Bad Taste

“This guy in the department keeps asking me out and coming by my office. I don’t know how many times I can be busy for the whole weekend. I don’t want to be mean or embarrass him by telling him I have absolutely no interest. Besides, I work with him in a study group.”

Comment: In this case it is not clear that this is harassment, because both parties might have a different interpretation of what is going on.
Example 2: Harassment or Bad Taste

“I was being introduced to a guy in the department. I smiled and said hello. He responded with 'Hi, I've seen you around. Well, I mean I've noticed you have a really nice ass.' ”

Comment: This is blatant harassment
Example 3: Harassment or Bad Taste

“One guy I barely knew came up to me in class and started touching my hair, and said, 'your hair looks good today.' ”

Comment: You just don’t do this
Example 4: Harassment or Bad Taste

“To witness harassment and laugh or give it positive attention is to grant tacit approval. How do you react if you see one of your colleagues approaching the women in the department as if trying to pick them up in a bar? Do you notice how the women react?”

Comment: I think that you should treat people in a bar the same way as in the department.
Example 5: Harassment or Bad Taste

“I complained about a disgusting comment one of the (male) students made to me. The men around me rolled their eyes and laughed about it. ‘We do not love coming to work and feeling evaluated sexually instead of intellectually.’ ”

Comment: Respect your female colleagues as physicists
Instructors are also bound by University policies which state that any consensual relationship with students that might compromise the objectivity and integrity of the teacher-student relationship is out of place. Examples include romantic, sexual, or financial relationships.

Use of student-teacher affiliation to seek such relationships is a flagrant abuse of power and is especially prohibited.
What if You Fall in Love?

Short term instructional relationships: wait until the term is over.

Long term professional academic relationships: (student and faculty member of same department) In consultation with chair, GPD and/or UPD, etc., remove instructor from and/or add independent members to supervisory situations in so far as possible.
Final Comments

✓ Cultural differences: It is the cultural background of the harassed party that counts.

✓ There is a fine line between harassment and relationships. If you make a mistake correct it as soon as possible.

✓ Use common sense and put yourself in the shoes of the other party.