

Year 2 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

National Association of Graduate-Professional Students

Leadership Education and Improved Policies

Relevant Rubric Areas:

Prevention: Leadership Education and Skill Development

Background:

Graduate and professional students often work in an isolating environment and depend greatly on support and guidance from faculty members and their advisor - both inside and outside of their area of work. This power dynamic, coupled with the isolating environment in which many graduate and professional students work, make them particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment from faculty. In fact, **graduate students are nearly twice as likely to have been sexually assaulted by their advisor** or another faculty member as their undergraduate counterparts, with nearly 25% of all reported cases falling into this category.¹ Furthermore, with how closely graduate and professional students are often expected to work with faculty members, **the impact on their work can be tremendous.**

Compounding this problem even further, significantly less attention is given and fewer resources allocated to help graduate students resolve these problems when they occur. **It is therefore critical that graduate students bring attention to these issues, as well as advocate for changes in policies which will help to resolve them.**

The National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS) represents over 250,000 students at institutions across the country, and is committed to addressing these issues by training our members to be leaders at their own institutions and to advocate for changes in policies at both an institutional and national level. **It is our objective to train a network of effective graduate student advocates;** not only **to effect change in federal policies** that will reduce the incidence of sexual harassment against graduate and professional students, but also **to empower our members to more effectively negotiate** on their and other students' behalf to improve policies/practices at their home institutions to that same end.

Summary of work: Advocacy Summit and Legislative Action Day

To better prepare our members to perform advocacy with their federal legislators, and to help enact changes in federal policy relating to graduate students, we hosted a two-day seminar series, "Advocacy Summit and Legislative Action Days" (LAD) on April 10th and 11th, 2021, after which attendees were encouraged to schedule meetings with their representatives to advocate for the policy changes discussed during the weekend sessions. The conference included programming on the following topics:

¹ American Association of Universities (2020). Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct.

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Discussion of our policy agenda for the semester

Our legislative agenda included the Combating Sexual Harassment in Science Act, which would direct the NSF and OSTP to establish several initiatives:

- Begin a grant program to fund research on sexual and gender harassment in the STEM workforce
- Create a working group which will develop a survey and gather information on the prevalence and implications of sexual and gender harassment in institutions of higher education.
- Work with NASEM to update the NSF responsible conduct guide, which outlines standards of conduct in research and practices for fostering a climate that is intolerant of sexual and gender harassment, as well as study the influence of such harassment on the career advancement on the STEM workforce, specifically citing that this guide shall take into account the recommendations of the NASEM report.
- Create a working group to coordinate the federal science agencies' efforts to reduce the prevalence of harassment involving grant personnel.

The bill directly cites the 2018 NASEM report “Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine” as motivation², and is an important effort to begin carrying out the report’s recommendations.

Our approach to preparing our members for conducting advocacy relating to this and other bills was to:

1. Introduce the provisions and expected impact of the bill on graduate and professional students
2. Give an overview/example of a pitch one may give to a congressional office
3. Discuss which offices we are currently targeting around this issue
4. Distribute [advocacy materials](#) that we developed around this issue for use in members’ hill meetings.

Advisor-Advisee Relationships

One talk we would like to highlight was on advisor-advisee relationships, given by the Framework for Accountability in Academic Research and Mentoring (FAARM) team. The talk addressed many of the issues that can arise in these relationships: neglect, exploitation, and abuse; as well as the organization’s mission: to mobilize federal funding agencies to incentivize the improvement of advising and mentorship for graduate students. Items that they outlined during their talk include: creating/improving reporting procedures for federally funded projects, student contact policies for agency staff, and mandatory mentorship training for research advisors.

The FAARM team introduced some of their recent and upcoming projects, which included [a document](#) outlining immediate needs at federal funding agencies to safeguard research trainees, as well as a [thank you letter](#) and outreach to the NIH for their work in implementing policies addressing these issues.

² <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2695/text#H3D1CC3E52D1946618A4895F1A0191177>

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For steps which attendees could take more locally and immediately, the FAARM team also discussed implementing mentorship agreements with advisors ([an example implemented at Brown](#)), as well as advocating for mentorship training to be required of all research advisors at one's home institution.

More information on the FAARM project and their efforts can be found at: faarmproject.org.

How to conduct legislative advocacy in general

We also had more general purpose training sessions, which included: the structure and workings of congress, how to effectively meet with the staff of a congressperson, which representatives may be the best to target for advocacy efforts on certain bills, and a panel discussion with current congressional staffers, who were able to provide insight on best practices for productive meetings.

In order to solidify their policy knowledge, as well as to help build soft skills useful in congressional meetings and at their home institutions, we conducted mock visits with attendees at the end of the conference. A representative from NAGPS would play the role of a staffer and coached attendees through a congressional meeting covering one of the issues covered during the previous sessions.

At the conclusion of the event, we hope that attendees are:

- Well informed on federal policy developments related to graduate and professional students
- Able to speak effectively on these issues and their importance and potential impact
- Prepared and poised to advocate for improved policies and practices which will help to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment

Next Steps:

After the conference, attendees were encouraged to schedule meetings with their representatives and given [additional reference and leave-behind materials](#) to assist with these meetings. Feedback from attendees indicate that meetings went favorably.

NAGPS will continue its advocacy for graduate and professional students. Currently, the Combating Sexual Harassment in Science Act has passed the house, and has been referred to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. **We will continue to educate, equip, and encourage our members to hold meetings with the staff of key policymakers**, at both the federal and institutional levels to help get this and other changes implemented. We also plan to continue to work with the FAARM team to help improve policies and practices governing student advisors and mentors.

Website for further information (if applicable): <http://nagps.org/legislative-action-days/>

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