

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

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Assessment of Institutional Annual Reports and Timelines

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

Improved Communication and Increased Transparency (15): The 2018 NASEM report describes the importance of the community believing that reports of sexual harassment will be taken seriously, that those reporting experiences will not be harmed, and that perpetrators will be held accountable (because these factors signal an organizational climate that does not tolerate sexual harassment, and such a climate is a predictor of lower rates of sexual harassment). For a community to believe these things, the 2018 NASEM report cites the importance of increased transparency and clear communication. This includes, but is not limited to: Increased Transparency About the Handling of Reports of Sexual Harassment, such as providing statistical annual reports on the sexual harassment that is reported to an organization;

Improved Policies (10): Policies and procedures around preventing/addressing sexual harassment and standards of behavior should be specific, clear, accessible, consistent, and shared with your community. Building on the 2018 NASEM report, improved policies are ones that: Provide timelines for the grievance process.

Description of Work:

During the 2019-2020 academic year, The UMass Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Assault was established by Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy. The Task Force reports to Provost John McCarthy, who serves as co-chair with Dean Tricia Serio of the College of Natural Sciences and is charged with making “recommendations for improving campus services, policies and practices relating to” sexual harassment and assault and connecting these activities to the University’s national and local work on these topics. The membership of the committee spans the STEM Colleges and Schools (Natural Sciences, Information and Computer Science, Nursing, Public Health and Health Sciences, and Engineering) and includes administrators, faculty, students, postdoctoral researchers and staff. The committee will provide bi-annual reports to the Chancellor.

The University of Massachusetts Amherst does not currently issue public reports of sexual harassment and assault, and this initiative is a new goal created since April 10, 2020. To gain insight into this practice at peer institutions, the Task Force reviewed such reports from seventeen peer institutions, including The University of North Carolina, Yale University, the University of Connecticut, the University of Tennessee – Knoxville, Stanford University, the University of Texas – Austin, Harvard University, Brown University, the University of Michigan, the University of Indiana – Bloomington, the University of California – Santa Barbara, the

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University of Colorado – Boulder, the University of Delaware, the University of Maryland – College Park, the University of Oregon, Rutgers University, and Iowa State University. This review highlighted both common and unique elements of the public reports.

With one exception, the reports compiled by these institutions are issued annually. The vast majority of reports (94%) provide quantitative information on the number of allegations and the category of allegation reported. The most frequently reported categories of allegation include dating/relationship violence (82%), stalking (82%), sex or gender discrimination/harassment (94%), sexual assault (65%) and retaliation (59%). These reports typically (88%) include quantitative information on the number of allegations leading to investigations and the resolution of these investigations, with somewhat fewer (76%) reporting the sanctions imposed as a result of a finding of a violation. These reports less frequently identified the status (i.e. student, faculty, staff) of the complainant (58%) or respondent (47%) or their gender (24%). Most reports identified each incident in any given category in its quantitative data, while 11% of reports established a minimum threshold of five incidents for reporting. In a minority (17%), a descriptive summary or location of each incident was provided. None of the reports include timelines for investigations or adjudication of allegations.

The reports varied widely in the inclusion of other information. The most common additions to the reports include information on relevant university policies (65%), definition of terms used in the report (50%), statistics on training in sexual harassment policies (88%) and campus partner programs contributing to the prevention of sexual harassment (65%). A minority of reports include information on the process to report claims of sexual harassment (12%).

In parallel, the Task Force met with representatives from the Office of General Counsel and the Office of the Vice Chancellor and Chief Human Resources Officer to seek guidance on existing laws and policies relevant to reporting. The latter also provided information on the University's on-going assessment of our own timelines for investigation and steps to enhance grievance processing, including clear policy language that defines our ability to investigate serious reports of sexual harassment in the absence of a complaint, hiring an additional EO investigator, and adding a dedicated case management platform for reporting and grievance proceedings.

The Task Force has drafted a recommendation on reporting, including frequency and context, to the Chancellor.

Website for further information (if applicable):

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