

2023 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Columbia University Irving Medical Center

Implementing and Evaluating a New Office of Professionalism

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

1. **Response:** Addressing Gender Harassment and Other Harmful Behaviors; Restorative/Transformative Justice and Alternative Resolutions; Transparency and Communications
2. **Prevention:** Identifying and Reinforcing Community Values;

Description of Work:

The Office of Professionalism at the Columbia University Irving Medical Center (CUIMC) was established in 2021¹ in response to the recommendations of two large CUIMC task forces: The Faculty Liaison Network to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine's (NASEM) Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education and the CUIMC Task Force to Assess Anti-Racism in Health Care and the Health Sciences. The goal of the office was to serve as a central resource to the CUIMC community, and to promote the values and behaviors associated with an organizational climate and culture of respect, support, and positive career growth.

Before the establishment of the office, concerns involving academic officers were addressed by the Senior Vice President of Faculty Affairs and Career Development and Assistant Vice President for Academic Appointments and Professionalism at CUIMC. Additionally, many matters were handled locally within departments. No formal mechanism for addressing such concerns were in place, nor were there organized remediation resources or transparent processes.

In 2022, the Office of Professionalism was fully staffed. It established its mission statement (see below), finalized and disseminated the *CUIMC Code of Values* (known as CUIMC CARES), formalized training of all of its staff in restorative justice practices, and began to address appropriate problems.

Mission Statement:

The Office of Professionalism aims to:

1. resolve conflicts that detract from a productive, respectful work environment;
2. promote tolerance across differences; and
3. provide learning resources and other tools to promote and foster the development of communication and other skills that result in improved teamwork.

¹ See earlier descriptions of work for information on the process that led to the establishment of the Office of Professionalism: "[Working Group for Civility and Professionalism at Columbia University Irving Medical Center](#)" and "[Toward a Collegial, Professional, and Civil Culture in the Health Sciences](#)."

2023 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Relationship to Action Collaborative Rubrics:

The Office of Professionalism, whose work and processes have grown and become more refined in the past year, as described in what follows, serves to promote and reinforce a medical center-wide culture and environment that is civil, respectful, ethical, and supportive and free of discrimination, harassment, and bias. The Office of Professionalism, under the leadership of the Vice Dean for Academic Affairs and SVP for Faculty Affairs and Career Development at the CUIMC, Anne L Taylor, works through strategic alliances with CUIMC Human Resources (HR), Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA), Postdoctoral Affairs, the Ombuds Office, CUIMC Deans of Students, CUIMC Cope Columbia, New York-Presbyterian Hospital (NYP), Research Misconduct Compliance and Training, Public Safety, the Office of Academic Affairs, departments, and others to ensure that the work to address issues of professionalism and civility is handled with equity, consistency, and transparency across issues related to faculty, staff, students, and trainees. Additionally, the improved processes to refer and resolve complaints centrally and at the school and departmental levels serve to better address problematic behavior in an effective and timely manner, with an emphasis on remediation and restorative justice rather than punishment.

Updates of Implementation:

Since the start of 2022, the office has been fully staffed and operational. It has noted a 286% increase in cases since its first year of service. It began the implementation of a case management database. The Office also developed and facilitated dozens of presentations for departments highlighting the work of OOP and sharing the CUIMC Code of Values (CUIMC CARES). The process for handling the processes by which cases were handled continues to be improved.

Developing Processes:

This past year, the OOP has refined its processes for handling professionalism concerns across campus. The step-by-step process is outlined below:

1. Analysis of initial concern conducted by OOP staff
2. Collection of data from various sources (CUIMC HR, Academic Affairs, OME, etc.)
3. Coordination of resources among NYP partners (NYP HR, NYP Respect, OPLE, and GME)
4. Complainant, witness, and respondent interviews
5. Communication with department leadership
6. Resource sourcing, delivery, and monitoring to respondent
7. Follow up and collaboration with the department, since this is where the impact of negative departments is most strongly experienced.

Promoting Safe and Inclusive Work Environments

The Office has been fielding and addressing a variety of professionalism issues across student, staff, faculty, and trainee groups. The most common types of issues include:

- Disruptive behavior
- Uncivil communication
- Bullying or verbal abuse, such as public humiliation, degrading comments,

2023 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

insults, microaggressions or name-calling

- Failing to follow University Policies

All staff in the OOP who work on cases are fully trained in conflict resolution processes and restorative justice principles which informs the practices for handling all cases.

University and hospital policies are also considered in addressing behavior. Working with strategic partners ensures a uniform and transparent approach to handling issues as they come through the office.

Ongoing Assessment

Preliminary informal feedback from departments who have received services from the office has been positive. The office will begin formal evaluation practices in the coming year to assess the impact, satisfaction, and longer-term outcomes of interventions.

As the rest of Columbia University aims to develop a centralized approach to addressing bullying issues, there has been much interest in this model and the practices of the Office of Professionalism.

Next Steps

Goals for the office include:

- enhancing processes to shorten timelines for cases,
- continuing to promote proactive prevention strategies to departments and schools,
- providing skill-based tools and toolkits for remediation focused on re-education and support for complainants and respondents
- increasing collaborations with medical center-wide interventions that focus on well-being diversity, equity, and inclusion,
- evaluating services and programs to ensure that goals are being met and their satisfaction with services.

Website for further information (if applicable):

<https://www.vagelos.columbia.edu/about-us/explore-vp-s/leadership-and-administration/academic-affairs/cumc-office-professionalism>

Point of Contact Name: Anne L Taylor, MD

Email Address for Point of Contact: Office_Acad_Affairs@cumc.columbia.edu