

## STATEMENT ON HARASSMENT

This document was initiated and written by graduate students in collaboration with faculty. It was approved by vote of the full department in May of 2021. Its purpose is to clarify what the department as a community regards as discrimination, bullying, and harassment in the context of relationships between faculty and graduate students. Its scope is limited in this way not because abuses cannot and do not happen in other relationships but because relationships between faculty and graduate students are at once highly asymmetrical and close and thus require a special kind of care. The document provides students with language to speak about, and seek help regarding, abusive experiences, including experiences that are not named in it. The document is an expression of our commitment to making the department a safe and supportive space for all graduate students, especially those who are most vulnerable (women, students of color, undocumented students, Indigenous students, LGBTQ students, international students, students with disabilities). As with any departmental document or policy, it should be revisited and revised as needed.

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1. There is an inherent power differential between faculty and graduate students. All members of the department - faculty, staff, and students - are committed to being mindful of this.
2. Faculty as well as students who are teaching are required to undergo mandatory UC Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Training every year. As a department we recognize that this training may not always provide sufficient guidance. The department will dedicate resources to creating spaces for thinking and speaking about the complexities that the training cannot address. Some examples of the forms these spaces have taken in the past: workshops on lly training offered by the UC Irvine Disability Services Center, retreats offered by the department for female-identified and non-binary graduate students, academic talks.
3. Students in Comp Lit are not bound to any specific professor and are encouraged to work with varied faculty, both within and outside of the department. It is normal to change advisors and committee members over time. Professors should graciously accept when students decide to replace them with other professors, and students should make sure to promptly inform professors of such changes, either directly or through the DGS or Graduate Coordinator (for details, see the Graduate Handbook and Advising Guidelines). While faculty might offer advice on the composition of a student's committee, professors and advisors should not discourage students from working with other faculty at UCI.
4. We are committed to professional relationships between students and advisors in our department:

- a. Professors and students should treat each other with respect and not assume that topics such as a person's gender, race, ethnic background, sexual orientation, relationship status, weight, religious beliefs or practices, appearance are open for conversation. Nor should professors and students make passing comments about such topics. In general, professors will give graduate students the lead in determining which, if any, of these topics may be opened.
- b. Professors should avoid establishing or encouraging hierarchies among students. They should also avoid speaking about students in a derogatory manner or divulging their personal information to other members of the department.
- c. While mentoring students, professors may sometimes give difficult or unwelcome advice concerning opportunities students might pursue, job prospects, professional behavior or strategies. Nevertheless, the decision of whether to follow any given advice from an advisor or professor always lies with the student and therefore the student is within their rights to refuse (unless the professor's intervention addresses university conduct policies or legal problems). If a student feels that an advisor's behavior is coercive and transgresses personal and/or professional boundaries (an example of this might be pushing them to consume alcohol), the student should bring the matter to the attention of the DGS and/or other members of their committee.
- d. Professors should not ask students to perform personal tasks or errands for them, even if a student is their graduate assistant. If a professor asks a student to perform a professional or academic task that constitutes additional work, the student should be remunerated for their labor.

5. The department recognizes that the language of "unwelcome" or "unwanted" contact in University policy does not sufficiently address the underlying power differentials that might make it difficult for someone to explicitly articulate that a particular move or contact is unwelcome. While we strive for affirmative consent, the language of consent can still put the burden on students to create boundaries for themselves. Our department is therefore committed to fostering greater attentiveness to verbal and non-verbal cues with a view to creating a culture in which the responsibility to communicate and uphold boundaries does not lie solely with students.

According to the University's policy on Sexual Violence and Harassment (<https://www.policies.uci.edu/policies/procs/700-17.php>), sexual harassment is defined as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects a person's employment or education, unreasonably interferes with a person's work or educational performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive working or learning environment."

6. While university business is generally expected to take place on university grounds (classes, office hours, workshops and meetings), the department sometimes holds receptions as well as other events at professors' houses. Social events related to the university (such as lunch before a talk) may also take place at a neighboring restaurant or

coffee house. Accommodations can be made if such venues make any one student uncomfortable, and students should feel empowered to decline an invitation to a professor's house or to request an alternative meeting place.

When meeting students individually, professors should not assume that a student is comfortable meeting outside of university grounds. This should be reflected in the process of setting up a meeting. If a private venue is proposed, an alternative public venue should also be offered. When meeting students in their offices, professors will keep the door open unless the student requests otherwise.

7. Professors are responsible for establishing the protocols and procedures for conduct in their seminars, and for setting up spaces that are conducive to learning. This does not mean that seminars will be free of disagreement and argument. Behavior that is racist, misogynistic, or bullying is prohibited by the university code of conduct (<https://www.policies.uci.edu/policies/procs/700-18.php>). Professors and students should take care that this code is observed. If it is not, the DGS should be brought into the conversation.

8. When approached by a student who has experienced harassment, professors should:
- a. Disclose their status as a mandated reporter.
  - b. Inform the student of the options available to them.
  - c. Show concern for the student's needs and offer support regardless of the path the student chooses to pursue (at the same time, if professors exhibit neutrality, this should not automatically be viewed as unsupportive; such a posture is mandated by university policy). Professors should ask the student how or in what ways they might like to be supported.
  - d. Avoid probing questions regarding the student's experience.
  - e. Refrain from invalidating or denying the student's experience by voicing support for or justification of the abusive behavior or by demanding evidence.
  - f. Keep the conversation confidential, aside from the mandated reporting.

The department aims to be a space of safety, camaraderie, and solidarity. The responsibility of the department is not to investigate a student's experience but rather to support and protect students from abuse.

9. The department will support students who have experienced harassment (whether or not they decide to embark on a Title IX investigation). Such help might include:
- a. Aiding students in arranging a leave of absence, if desired (under no circumstances are students to be pressured to take a leave of absence).
  - b. Working with students on making accommodations that will allow them to maintain their academic standing.

10. Students in the department are also committed to supporting peers who approach them with an experience of bullying or harassment (including sexual harassment or sexual assault). To this end, students should:

- a. Familiarize themselves with this guide: [How To Help a Friend | Title IX](#)

- b. Remember that they are **not** mandatory reporters for fellow graduate students (although they are mandatory reporters for undergraduate students in their own classes)
- c. Remember that people respond to experiences of sexual violence in different ways. The focus should be on what the peer wants and needs; care should be taken not to exert pressure or center oneself .

11. Any student experiencing distress or social/academic/emotional/economic welfare issues should not hesitate to approach the DGS or the department Chair for support. The department emphasizes the availability and necessity of this support structure.