

WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

Sexual Harassment is a form of sex discrimination that is unlawful under the Equal Opportunity Act of 1984. It is any unwelcome sexual behaviour or offensive advances of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment occurs when the actions make a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated and it is reasonable under the circumstances that a person would feel that way.

Sexual Harassment may be described as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or other physical and expressive behaviour of a sexual nature when

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term of condition of an individual's employment or education;
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for academic or employment decisions affecting the individual; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's academic or professional performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive employment or educational environment.

Sexual harassment can be physical, verbal or written sexual conduct that is unsolicited and unwanted and is therefore undesirable and offensive to the recipient. At times it is conducted through electronic mail.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Different Forms of Sexual Harassment

Visual: leering, making sexually explicit gestures, unwelcome sexual email messages, flashing, displaying sexually explicit objects, pictures, posters, cartoons, pinups or images left on computer screen savers.

Verbal: sexually explicit conversations, derogatory sexual comments, epithets, slurs, jokes, unwelcomed sexual advances, sexual jokes, propositions, or demands for sexual favours and unwelcomed suggestive sexual comments about an individual's body or appearance.

Physical: unwanted touching such as patting, pinching, hugging, brushing against another's body, coerced kissing or fondling. Physical assault is a crime.

Sexual Harassment Can Occur in a Variety of Circumstances

- A victim may be a man or a woman of the same gender of the harasser.
- A victim may be an individual affected by the offensive conduct.

- A harasser may be a victim's supervisor, a supervisor in another area, a peer, a member of the staff, a colleague, or a university vendor (sales-person) or contractor.

Why do Incidents of Sexual Harassment Sometimes go Unreported by Victims?

- Victims believe the harassment will stop if ignored.
- They are afraid no one will believe them.
- They feel intimidated, embarrassed, ashamed or helpless.
- They are unfamiliar with University policies and complaint-handling procedures relating to sexual harassment.
- They fear retaliation from the harasser, the harasser's colleagues or the University.
- They assume the harasser will not face any consequences even if the allegations are proven true.

What Should You Do if You Believe You Are a Victim of Sexual Harassment?

Object to the behaviour:

Since lack of response may be interpreted as approval, state clearly that the behaviour is offensive and unacceptable and must cease immediately. Direct action on your part may put an end to the harassing behaviour.

Keep a record:

Record in a personal journal/diary the events and behaviours that you feel are objectionable and the dates of occurrences. Also record your reactions and feelings about any such incidents.

Report the behaviour:

Each member of the University community has a right to an educational and work environment that is free from all forms of sexual harassment. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported to the Equal Opportunity Office, 9360 6495. There are options for informal and formal complaint handling procedures. These are available at <http://equalopportunity.murdoch.edu.au/complaints/complaints.html>

Equity Information Officers and Equity Conciliators.

There are a number of staff members who are trained in the University's Equal Opportunity Policy and Procedures for handling equity complaints. They assist members of the University community who believe they have been sexually harassed by providing information and acting as a liaison between those individuals and the Equity Conciliators. With the help of these Equity Officers Murdoch University hopes to better ensure access to accurate information and prompt assistance.

The information officers are listed on notice boards around campus, at the Equal Opportunity Section website <http://wwwadmin.murdoch.edu.au/equity/> and also available through telephone extensions 6495 or 6084. Members of the University community are free to use someone outside their School, Division or other administrative area if they choose.



What is the University's Policy Regarding Sexual Harassment?

Murdoch University seeks to ensure that the University community is free from all forms of sexual harassment in educational setting and in employment.

Because the University considers sexual harassment inappropriate and prohibits it, individuals who believe they have been sexually harassed may seek assistance through the established procedures of the University.

Complaints of sexual harassment will be responded to promptly and equitably. Confidentiality will be maintained and victimisation/retaliation against individuals bringing complaints will not be tolerated. Individuals found in violation of the sexual harassment policy are subject to disciplinary action, which may include suspension from the University.

More Information

Copies of Murdoch University's policy and procedures are available from:

Equal Opportunity Office
Room 1.8 Social Sciences Building
Murdoch University
South Street, Murdoch WA 6150
Telephone: (08) 9360 6495

and

Room 2.030
Rockingham Campus
Telephone: (08) 9360 7040

or

e-mail: equalopp@central.murdoch.edu.au
for assistance.

You are also encouraged to refer to other related policies such as the University's Students Legislation Statute 23 available on the Secretariat website:

<http://www.murdoch.edu.au/admin/legsln/statutes/statute23.html>

and the University's Codes of Ethics & Conduct available on:

<http://www.murdoch.edu.au/vco/secretariat/admin/codes/ethics.html#conduct>

Prepared by



EQUAL OPPORTUNITY SECTION of HUMAN RESOURCES

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Definition and Resource Guide



Sexual Harassment is Unprofessional, Unacceptable, and Unlawful Conduct