Report: August 23, 2018 Stanford Campus
Discussion of the National Academies’
Report on Sexual Harassment of Women in
Science, Engineering, and Medicine

Organized by the Physics Equity and Inclusion Reading Group, Women in Earth Sciences (WES), and WISE Ventures (Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity, and Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs)

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Executive Summary

In June 2018, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) issued a preliminary report of a consensus study, "Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine." Realizing mutual interest in reading and discussing this report on campus, the Physics Equity and Inclusion reading group, WISE Ventures, and Women in Earth Sciences (WES) teamed up to organize a discussion for interested students, postdocs, faculty, and staff during the summer quarter, with consideration of reactions to the report, and recommendations for Stanford. We anticipated a lively, informative, and proactive discussion of ways to improve our academic cultures and reduce gender and sexual harassment. Our expectations were exceeded – both in the high attendance (~125 attended) and in the abundance of ideas for actionable steps during the discussion.

Given the number of ideas and wide interest in continuing this conversation, we (the organizers) present the recommendations spawned during this campus discussion in anticipation of further action and conversation about this issue at Stanford. In this report we have outlined both actionable steps and items for further discussion or consideration so that individuals and leaders across campus can have a sense for what the community has already actively identified. Furthermore, to members of our scientific community at other institutions: we hope you are facilitating similar conversations and moving towards action. If so, this discussion format and/or ideas might be useful models.

The report’s findings of pervasive gender harassment resonated with the experiences of those participating in this discussion at Stanford. There is considerable interest in taking further steps to address and prevent harassment, if the large numbers of participants at this discussion are any indication. Effectiveness in addressing and preventing the full range of sexual harassment needs to include more attention to the reduction of the most common form of sexual harassment: gender harassment. Preventing harassment of all kinds should be part of the continuum of the work of the numerous groups across campus, both informal and formal. This will reduce harassment and promote equity more generally. More action and attention is needed in Stanford’s scientific and engineering labs, classrooms, and other workplace environments to limit harassment and promote inclusive and productive work practices.

In discussing the report, participants had many action-based recommendations for Stanford institutional action to address sexual harassment. Concrete steps to reduce gender and sexual harassment can be taken by individuals in all roles at Stanford, by departments and schools, and by organizational units serving the whole University.

In the following sections, we describe the August event itself, provide a condensed list of the topics and recommendations discussed, and summarize our own high-level recommendations for next steps across the University.


Discussion Event Context

The organizations (Physics Equity and Inclusion Reading Group, Women in Earth Science, and WISE Ventures) which teamed up to host this August 23, 2018 program reached out to potentially interested constituents and invited them to a 12:00-1:30 p.m. overview and discussion in room 102-103 of the Physics/Astrophysics Building (Kistler Conference Room), noting that the planned discussion was intended particularly for graduate students, postdocs, and faculty, with consideration of reactions to the report, and recommendations for Stanford.

Interest in the program was high. Nearly 150 people from across Stanford registered in advance; due to limited space in the venue we were forced to curtail registration at this point. Approximately 125 attended. Participants represented the Schools of Engineering, Humanities & Sciences, and Medicine; the Graduate School of Education; Hopkins Marine Station (remotely via Zoom); and staff from a number of other organizational units on campus. A detailed description of attendee demographics can be found in Appendix A.

Prior to the discussion, we asked those attending to read at least the summary of the report, with the following resources readily available:

- Prepublication versions of the summary and the full report (available for free download) at this website:
- Highlights of the report:
- A video highlighting the report's recommendations:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuJu2mg5y5M

We also noted that the National Academies were hosting a webcast discussion of the report featuring a number of leaders in higher education (at the National Academies' Beckman Center in southern California) on Tuesday, June 26, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. Pacific Time, and provided registration information.

The session itself consisted of an overview of the context and content of the NASEM study presented by Physics Professor Bruce Macintosh, followed by 20 minute breakout discussions in groups of ~5 participants. Each group was requested to focus on recommendations from the report in one of three broad areas – climate, process, or long-term change – each of which areas were summarized in a handout (available here). Within each area, the following guiding questions were posed

1. What is the highest-priority step that Stanford could take to address these recommendations?
2. What are some barriers to following these recommendations?
3. What can you as an individual do as a response to these recommendations?
Approximately 10 minutes were devoted to discussing responses to these questions in each of the three areas in plenary, with graduate student Katerina Gonzales acting as moderator. The slide deck containing the report overview and discussion agenda can be found here.

Outcomes

Discussion Topics, Responses, and Ideas for Action

Below is a summary, grouped by topics, of discussion points that emerged within the whole group discussion, following small group breakout discussions. We recognize that those making recommendations may not have had the benefit of awareness of or access to all existing resources in formulating these initial recommendations. As the record of these conversations is shared with on campus, however, we expect the general direction of these recommendations will be helpful, if incomplete, and can be refined and advanced, as they are taken up and implemented by appropriate parties.

Climate: Promoting Civility

Required civility workshops at the Dept/School level: Overall, participants identified a need for regular, ongoing, high quality civility/climate workshops at Stanford; and noted the potential impact of frequent civility training in shaping expected behaviour, in contrast with one-time required training framed on eliminating unwanted behavior. In addition, the discussion stressed that poorly designed trainings can have negative effects.¹

Recommendations:

- Trainings should be done well and preferably in person. Skits or role-playing can be more effective than generic online videos. Trainings should equip the community how to respond; not just regarding knowing the law.
- Trainings should be done frequently, not just once upon arrival, as time at university may be long for PhD students, staff, and faculty.
- Harassment prevention training should clarify the definition of harassment.
- Civility training should map back to real-world academic situations and/or specific roles within the university; e.g. how it applies in TA’ing, lab meetings, conferences, faculty meetings, etc.
- Take a pedagogical approach to training. Studies show that training framed as harassment prevention training is likely to have only limited effectiveness.¹ A reframing of these trainings towards “Respectful Community workshops” or terms that denote education could be more effective. Along with this, workshop facilitators should assess the pedagogical strategies for effectiveness and adjust, taking advantage of campus

based resources, such as those in VPTL, just as we would thoughtfully prepare to teach a course.

**Promoting civility in the lab and at the department level:** Participants identified the pervasive need for culture change around the issues of respect in order to rid the climate of hostility and latent harassment (or microaggressions). The discussion recommended focusing on respect and civility rather than a reactive approach to harassment episodes. Climate surveys and exit interviews were brought up as ways to highlight issues within specific departments and to demonstrate that departments are not tolerant of harassment.

**Recommendations:**

- **Individuals** (including but not limited to department leaders) should reinforce a climate of civility and respect and department gatherings (e.g. department colloquia).
- Train all members on how to respond as bystanders when someone is a target of harassment, incivility, or microaggressions (e.g. in lab discussion, dept seminar, or outside conference settings).
- PI’s and lab group members should facilitate annual lab meetings about lab modus operandi/codes of conduct, lab values, and PI/lab expectations.
- **Individuals** (including PI's) can facilitate lab meetings and/or regular reading groups about inclusivity issues in STEM.
- Departments and/or Schools should plan for regular departmental data collection.
  - The University (or School) should require a departmental plan on climate assessment. Climate surveys should be implemented regularly.
  - Climate surveys should not be labeled as harassment surveys in order to capture all issues that relate to a hostile climate. Also, harassment victims are unlikely to self-report on surveys labeled as harassment surveys, even if they are completely confidential.
  - Departments should be diligent to keep data on attrition / completion rates and demographics. This should include when students switch departments and advisors within departments.
  - Departments should require exit interviews for all students, postdocs, and staff, especially for trainees that exit without a degree or those who “master out”. These interviews should be at a sufficient depth and the interview collectors should collect data and/or themes. Departments/schools should explore ways to implement exit interviews so that retaliation is not possible from the PI or other Department leaders.
- **Individuals** (including PI's) can create a culture of openness in talking about difficult issues – both in helping awareness but also in creating precedent on what is okay to talk about if negative situations arise. PI's are encouraged to provide clear mechanisms for feedback. Trainees and PI's both could use training on how to give and receive feedback from peers and advisors; this training could perhaps be provided by the University or institutionalized programs/offices external to the lab.
- Faculty should be trained on more interpersonal issues, including:
- Inclusivity training
- Management training / dealing with conflict

- Alcohol was discussed as an exacerbator of unwanted behaviour, and the discussion noted that alcohol should not be the scapegoat in such situations. With this in mind, the discussion focused on creating an inclusive academic culture in which alcohol use is not perceived to be “required” to succeed professionally. To this end, the discussion suggested that individuals and department leaders develop community-focused events that are not centered on alcohol. Also, the attendees suggested tightening up boundaries between events that are research-related and social-centered; for example, event planners should consider the impact that serving alcohol at a poster session will have.

**Promoting civility through University, School, or Department-level policies:** while the discussion identified the need for a pervasive climate shift that each individual can contribute to, we identified some top-down mechanisms for shifting the culture of gender harassment.

**Recommendations:**
- Get Stanford to adopt broad/encompassing definition of harassment
  - This discussion at the university level needs distinctions between academic workplace harassment and undergraduate harassment, assault, and violence. The discussion on types of harassment not only requires this level of distinction, but so do the actions for awareness and prevention.
  - Get Stanford to broaden or develop targeted resources to include academic harassment. The majority of students at Stanford are graduate students, yet it appears that the majority of harassment resources are targeted towards sexual assault and relationship violence towards undergraduates. The university can reframe the communication of existing resources to benefit graduate students, postdocs, and staff, and broaden resources to recognize the sexual and gender harassment that graduate students, postdocs, and staff face.\(^2\)
  - Enact policies to prevent and address both gender and sexual harassment, at the department level and above. Create a climate of transparency of consequences of gender and sexual harassment, with equal transparency regarding student, faculty, and staff perpetrators.

**Community leadership on culture change:**
The discussion noted the potential impact of community leadership at multiple university role levels. By the conclusion of the discussion, there was shared interest in the room in continuing the discussion to develop synergy at multiple levels and departments to take action against harassment. Because different fields may have different cultures, there was caution against discussions becoming too far removed from the problem, and from advocacy for

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\(^2\) Stanford’s most recent Title IX report shows that workplace harassment is reported at similar rates by staff, graduate students, and undergraduates.
Department/School-level action. However, collaboration (both in ideas and in already-developed resources) across departments could be effective and efficient.

**Diffusing the advisor/advisee hierarchy:**
Funding can be a barrier to switching labs, and within a lab a PI can hold considerable power in directing a student’s or postdoc’s research trajectory (which may be gender biased), and may even demand unreasonable research output from a student or postdoc. Schools can explore ways to reduce funding dependence on advisors. Furthermore, when situations are exacerbated to the point when students want to switch labs, bridge funding may need to be provided by the School or Department until the affected student is able to join a new lab.

Independent funding, however, will not completely alleviate the strong advisor-advisee hierarchy, since advisors frequently continue to play a key role in advisees’ professional lives years later (e.g. through letters of recommendation, and even evaluation of performance). Alternative models for advising and mentoring that may help to address this include

- Co-advising (Barrier: faculty may not have time to advise/co-advising multiple students and postdocs), a practice endorsed by Stanford policies.
- A more-involved dissertation committee. (Example: implementing a closed-door period without the advisor at annual reviews to discuss how things are going.)
- Assigning an “academic resource” advisor.

**Process: Empowering and Supporting Targets**
This discussion focused on not only the reporting process, but also shifts in the culture of the institution to inform, equip, and empower potential targets. The theme of the discussion was giving targets agency throughout the entire process. In this vein, we discussed supporting potential targets before they decide to report, centering around questions that a target might have, including, “which campus resources are actually confidential?”; “I don’t want to file a report, but how can I document instances of gender harassment?”, and “This type of behavior is occurring in my work environment; is this toxic?” Supporting the target also includes setting up transparent workflows post-incidents for how one could seamlessly change labs and/or departments without having to conduct the logistical and emotional labor that this process might require (e.g. interviewing to work with new PI's, wondering where funding will come from if they switch labs…).

Recommendations, in order of the process (pre-report, reporting, post-reporting):

- Leaders and individuals should create a climate of transparency of consequences of gender and sexual harassment.
- Provide safe spaces for talking about issues while a target is deciding on whether to report or not.
- Provide resources to the entire community, including a flowchart of where to go to talk through issues, and clearly communicate the scope and confidentiality of these resources. Train leaders and mentors to refer to these resources.
• Provide resources ahead of time to potential targets specifically as to what happens if or when they report. (E.g. Callisto vs. Confidential Support Team.) Make a one-page graphic or flow chart that is widely distributed and known about.
• In addition to the above resources above, there should be intentional communication about which resources apply to each career level / university role (e.g. students, staff, postdocs, faculty). For the roles that have unclear resources or processes (e.g. postdocs), the university should intentionally fill this knowledge and communication gap.
• School leaders should streamline the process for switching advisors, out of a lab, and perhaps within Schools, out of a department. Schools without a rotation system might especially consider alleviating the difficulty of switching out of a toxic lab by setting up a process for these situations.
• Reduce funding dependence on advisor (see section on Reducing the Advisor-Advisee Hierarchy); furthermore, guarantee financial support during an interim period of time when the target may not have an advisor after switching out of a lab.
• Departments and individuals can implement a culture of up-front transparency in revealing the roles of “mandatory reporters”. For example, TA's are obligated to report and should let students know early on.
• Pre-, during, and post-reporting, the Title IX office should be accountable to transparency regarding the timeline of the process and the outcomes of the report. Pre-reporting, there should be transparency regarding the possible outcomes.
• Pre-reporting, there should be transparency about the possible consequences to the reporter (e.g. when the harasser is in immediate work environment, such as a lab, who is moved – the harasser or the target?).

Long Term Change

This portion of the discussion focused on synthesizing recommendations from earlier with an eye towards long-term change. This includes more mechanistic ideas for implementing infrastructure for long-term change, and also holding ourselves accountable for the actions that gradually promote culture change. Because faculty have the potential for high impact on our university’s culture for the coming decades, both for positively and negatively, the discussion delved into ways to improve the diversity of faculty and hold faculty accountable for producing healthy work environments for their trainees.

Recommendations:
• Provide mechanisms for feedback regarding workplace and campus climate
• It is important for Schools and Departments to take data collection into account in strategic planning. This includes broad climate assessments, recruitment and attrition statistics, and exit interviews (regardless of whether a student completed the degree). Assessment coordinators might consider ways to reduce the possibility of retaliation, including installing unbiased mediators to collect data / conduct exit interviews. Data collection must take intersectional identities into account. Climate assessments must evaluate both sides of the iceberg’s “waterline”, and evaluate the presence of both gender and sexual harassment. Assessment facilitators should design questions and
collect data specific for academia and be sure to not leave any roles out (i.e. survey students, faculty, staff, and postdocs).

- Stanford should be involved with multi-institutional data collection surveys (e.g. AAU).
- Quarterly, anonymous solicitation of issues across the university, all levels.
- The University and leaders within the University should take leadership on issues of gender and sexual harassment; communicate priorities for long-term change.
- Faculty, departments, Schools, and the University can set norms for faculty hiring, accountability, and promotion.
  - Because new faculty hires are the leaders of the future, the community should strive for faculty not only to represent diversity but also actively facilitate inclusivity on campus and beyond. Committees can decrease bias in hiring; plan for diversity and an equitable process. Recognize that reference letters are subject to bias.\(^3\) Require diversity statements in all faculty job postings.
  - Faculty should be held accountable for their behavior. Departments and Schools can work across disciplines to communicate best practices. Departments, Schools, and the University should take responsibility for keeping their faculty accountable.
  - Faculty should be held accountable for facilitating an equitable and respectful workspace. The University can continue to improve faculty training and professional development. The community can also foster the next generation of respectful and inclusive faculty (i.e. current postdocs; students) by providing opportunities for inclusivity training and harassment upstander training.
  - In the faculty promotion process, make equity part of evaluations, not just box checking. Consider adding questions to the evaluations, such as what has the faculty member done regarding diversity and inclusion of their field and workplace? Evaluate professional conduct from trainee letters, both by asking in the request for letters and by implementing measures to enhance trainee transparency and safety (see the point on exit interviews).
- Enact strategies and programs to make Stanford community members at all levels aware of factors that contribute to a hostile work environment, from implicit bias to microaggressions.
  - Use strategies to mitigate bias for specific situations: e.g. Faculty hiring, graduate admissions.
  - Require faculty to quantify what they mean by “cultural fit” – or “having a good feeling about the candidate” in hiring, admissions, and promotion committees.
  - Suggest the [gender bias calculator](#) for faculty when writing letters of reference for their trainees.

Post-Discussion Feedback

Following the discussion, a survey was sent to all those who registered in advance or shared their email addresses in person. In addition to soliciting feedback about the logistics of the meeting, the survey asked respondents what they learned, and what follow-up they would like to see across the University setting (respondent identification was optional). A summary of the most common recommendations from the latter query follows.

- Provide additional education on sexual assault and harassment, especially by experts in the subject.
- Foster similar discussion programs crossing department and school boundaries and involving students, faculty and administration.
- Improve mandatory sexual harassment training and provide opportunities for voluntary additional training.
- Clearly communicate the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault in Stanford, and what the University is doing about it.
- Expand existing initiatives to reduce sexual violence to encompass sexual and gender harassment.
- Formulate a mechanism for reporting sexual and gender harassment and assault that gives targets control of the process (including their own confidentiality) to the greatest extent possible.
- Support a departmental role “on the ground” in supporting targets.

Recommendations to Stanford for Next Steps

Concrete steps to reduce gender and sexual harassment can be taken by individuals in all roles within Stanford, by Departments and Schools, and by the University administration.

Improving Individual Behavior

- Individuals directly influence the climate in which harassment occurs. They can educate themselves about the issues surrounding harassment, learn to recognize behaviors that contribute to a climate that normalizes harassment, and call out those behaviors when they are observed. Those in positions of authority in labs or departments have a responsibility to model and actively promote a positive climate.
- Departments and Schools have a role in promoting education about harassment by facilitating the creation and operation of reading groups, seminar series, student groups, and other bodies, and by providing effective training at the local level, thus enabling individuals to contribute most effectively.
- The University similarly has a role in modeling and promoting positive climate at the highest level, and in promoting education about harassment through campus-wide events, training, and “healthy workplace” initiatives.
Enhancing Interactions Between Groups

- Numerous groups across campus, both informal and formal, are working to reduce harassment and promote equity more generally. The University can promote this work by providing fora for these groups to exchange ideas and inspiration.

Administrative Actions

- Stanford should prioritize the reduction of gender harassment, in addition to reducing sexual violence.
- The University should clearly communicate to its constituents the prevalence of harassment, initiatives being undertaken to reduce it, and procedures for reporting.
- Stanford should formulate policies for reporting both gender and sexual harassment that go beyond the mandates of law and that provide targets as much control of the process as possible.
- Stanford should continue to participate in multi-university climate surveys such as the upcoming AAU survey.

As demonstrated by the attendance, discussion, and earnest desire for concrete action, it is clear that this issue is important to the Stanford community. To facilitate the continuing discussion, in response to requests received in the feedback from this program, we’ve set up an email list (addressing-harassment) for all interested in addressing harassment toward creating more productive and inclusive cultures at Stanford. As organizers of this campus discussion and authors of this summary of it, we hope to see our community implement some of the actions outlined here, and Stanford lead in taking action against sexual and gender harassment in the STEM fields.

“Together, we can do better.”

Appendix A: Demographics of Attendance

This event was attended by approximately 125 people, including undergraduates, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, staff, and faculty. The numbers are approximate because they are generated from a list of RSVPs prior to the event, as no demographics were collected at the event itself and respondents to the RSVP were not required to verify whether they attended. The demographic information requested was affiliation (e.g., Ph.D student, faculty…), school, and department. The information is self-reported by the respondents. The first pair of charts below break down the attendance by affiliation and school. The remaining four charts break down each school’s attendance by department.

The significant representation of those from the Physics department and the School of Earth, Energy, and Environmental Sciences reflects the affiliations of two of the primary organizers of the event, leading to particularly extensive outreach to those groups. The central campus
location of the discussion, in a Physics building, also likely made attendance more convenient for representatives of the Schools of Humanities & Sciences and Engineering, compared with, for example, those from the School of Medicine. Thus, these statistics should not be interpreted as reflecting the level of interest of various campus groups, but rather the extent to which each group was represented in the discussion.