THE STUDENT WHO HAS BEEN SEXUALLY HARASSED

Sexual harassment involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct; it is usually found in the context of a relationship of unequal power, rank or status. It does not matter that the person’s intention was not to harass. It is the effect of the harassment that harms. As long as the conduct interferes with a student’s academic performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive learning environment, it may be considered sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment usually is not an isolated one-time-only case but a repeated pattern of behavior that may include:

- Comments about one's body or clothing.
- Questions about one's sexual behavior.
- Demeaning references to one's gender.
- Sexually oriented jokes.
- Conversations filled with innuendoes and double meanings.
- Displaying of sexually suggestive pictures or objects.
- Repeated non-reciprocated demands for dates or sex.

The California Educational Code Section 89535 covers sexual harassment of students. Common reactions by students who have been harassed is to doubt their perceptions, wondering if it was a joke, did it really happen or if, in some way, they have brought it on themselves. A student may begin to participate less in the classroom, drop or avoid classes, or even change majors.

Response:

The following may be helpful in dealing with students who may have experienced sexual harassment:

1. Listen to the student’s concerns.
2. Handle the situation with sensitivity regardless of your personal biases.
3. Tell the student about helpful resources for problem resolution.
4. Share factual information about the campus policy on sexual harassment.
5. Refer the student to a resource for informal or formal resolution of the concerns.

It may not be helpful to do the following:

1. Ignore the student’s complaint.
2. Take action based on your personal biases.
3. Take action without consultation.
4. Tell the student nothing can be done about sexual harassment.