

**Year 2 Public Description of Work for  
Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education**

**Duke University  
The Office for Institutional Equity (OIE) Liaison Program**

**Relevant Rubric Area(s):** *Improved Communication and Increased Transparency; Leadership Education and Skill Development*

**Description of Work:**

*Background*

In summer 2019, Duke University performed a holistic review of its' discrimination and harassment policies and procedures. The University developed an omnibus policy, which included uniform definitions of discrimination, harassment and related misconduct. In 2020, the University merged the Student Sexual Misconduct Policy into the broader university policy to create one umbrella policy and created three separate procedures to comply with the United States Department of Education's Title IX Regulations. A key improvement to the policy was the clarification of the definition of a responsible employee, which at Duke is an employee who is required to share known details of sexual misconduct with Duke's Office for Institutional Equity (OIE). After implementation of the revised policy and as responsible employees became more aware of their reporting obligations, the University noticed increased requests for education and coordination regarding Duke's response to sexual misconduct.

While the University was in the process of revising its' discrimination and harassment policy, Duke University's President announced the University's next steps for confronting systemic racism. The President's directive for schools and departments to implement Anti-Racism aligned with Duke's 2019 Strategic Plan *Towards Our Second Century*, which included a focus on building a more inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Following this directive, Duke noticed an increased interest in the creation of internal reporting systems to address discrimination, harassment, and microaggressions. Duke also noticed an increased interest for more widespread information regarding the University's policies and greater transparency regarding handling of reports of sexual misconduct.

*Program Goals*

In May 2020, the University launched the OIE Liaison Program. The program is new to Duke in that it is responsive to the desire for local reporting and problem solving. OIE Liaisons are individuals who hold high-level positions and have a baseline understanding of operational or human resources policies. Through collaboration between OIE and schools and department liaisons, the programs seeks to offer the following:

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- Consistent identification of complaints that should be elevated to OIE or elsewhere for an appropriate response.
- Even application of consequences for similar behavior.
- Reinforcement of who is required to report discrimination and harassment as stated in existing policies.
- Local access to someone who understands applicable standard's and OIE's complaint handling process.
- Increased trust with and understanding of OIE processes for receiving and evaluating complaints.

As individuals familiar with the local work and educational environment, OIE Liaisons may in some instances serve as first responders to reports of harassment. In those situations, OIE Liaisons will identify concerns that should be elevated to OIE, and where appropriate, they will direct students, faculty, and staff to other University resources. Post investigation or other OIE intervention, OIE Liaisons will serve as a key partner to assist in navigating communication with involved parties where the OIE process has resulted in unintended impacts on the environment that could be ameliorated with more communication. Liaisons will also remind faculty and staff designated responsible employees of their reporting obligations, where gaps in reporting are apparent.

Large institutions are often faced with the challenge of applying consistent consequences for those who engage in sexual misconduct. The size and complexity of an institution can make it difficult to track and apply an even application of consequences if this information has not been reported to a central office. OIE Liaisons will have the ability to communicate with each other and collaborate with OIE to foster a more even application of consequences. The information will assist OIE with gathering a centralized repository of responses to sexual misconduct, which can be used to develop a more consistent approach to holding responsible individuals accountable. Information from liaisons will assist in the preparation of annual reports of harassment and discrimination, which will increase transparency for the Duke community.

### *Next Steps*

Duke held a 90-minute OIE Liaison meeting in May 2020 in which participants received information regarding the University's policy and procedures on harassment. Future learning opportunities include the following:

1. Each fall Duke will host one three-hour OIE Liaison Conference for the purpose of providing education on how to identify the types of sexual misconduct reports that should be routed to OIE and other University partners for appropriate response. The conference will also include scenarios and role play to train liaisons on how to respond to reports of sexual harassment.

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2. Each spring Duke will host a 90-minute OIE Liaison meeting. In advance of each meeting, OIE will seek out feedback from the OIE Liaisons about topics of interest or concern and provide pre-reading on topics related to discrimination and harassment.
3. Duke will create a listserv to facilitate networking and communication among the Liaisons. The listserv will also allow OIE to provide swift and seamless information sharing with the Liaisons.

**Website for further information:** <https://oie.duke.edu/oie-liaison-program>

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