

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

The University of New Mexico

Staff-Faculty Wayfinder Website

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

Other efforts to remediate the harm of sexual harassment and/or support those that experience sexual harassment.

Evaluating policies and procedures.

Description of Work:

The Challenge:

At UNM as in many universities, when staff and faculty experience or witness bullying, discrimination, and sexual harassment, they often don't know where to turn for help, or whether and how to report such incidents. Although all UNM employees complete annual online training on sexual harassment, and new faculty and department chairs receive additional orientation in university policies, many UNM employees have little knowledge about how existing policies and resources might – or might not – benefit them following incidents of bullying, discrimination, and sexual harassment. The challenges university employees face in accessing accurate information -- including guidance on what kinds of misconduct constitute potentially actionable civil rights complaints, and what kinds of support targets can access if they do not wish to file a complaint – presents an ongoing challenge for university's attempts to prevent and mitigate the effects of sexual harassment, bullying, and discrimination.

Compounding this lack of information are the many barriers that faculty and staff may encounter when seeking information, support, and/or redress for bullying, discrimination, and sexual harassment. The NASEM *Report on the Sexual Harassment of Women* notes the importance of social support for targets seeking information and support, as well as the detrimental effects of ineffective institutional response and the organizational cynicism it can engender (NASEM, 2018; Cortina and Magley, 2003). According to dispute resolution researchers, "The availability of multiple access points significantly reduces barriers to entering the system and encourages employees to address problems early and constructively" (SPIDR, 2001; Rowe and Bendersky, 2002). Such barriers are not unique to higher education (or to UNM), but rather common to many employment and organizational settings, notwithstanding the existence of clear and detailed policies and associated grievance processes that address bullying, discrimination, and sexual harassment. The barriers themselves, furthermore, are frequently experienced by targets as institutional betrayal, defined by trauma researchers as

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“wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings by individuals (e.g. sexual assault) committed within the context of the institution.”(Freyd, 2013)

Of course, like other universities, UNM leaders have and continue to address such incidents through multiple mechanisms – including policy, training, support, investigation, and sanction – which ensure compliance with federal and state law and do benefit some members of the university community. However, according to various UNM practitioners, as well as staff and faculty affinity groups, staff and faculty could use more support for accessing clear and accurate information about their available options. University websites provide contacts, guidelines, and policies relevant to their scope of practice, but available pathways remain complicated at best for staff and faculty who want to get reliable information about their choices. Bombarded by conflicting messages about confidentiality – frequently demanded of those engaged in mediation or formal complaints, but denied anyone disclosing sexual harassment to a university employee – university employees currently enjoy few “safe spaces” where they can share their experiences and gather information in confidence.

A Private, Trauma-informed, and User-centered Website

Inspired by research on trauma-informed websites presented by Katelyn Kennon at the Action Collaborative 2020 Public Summit, this project seeks to overcome barriers to accessing information about available university and community services by establishing a “Staff-Faculty Wayfinder” website, which will provide *accessible, clear, and accurate information* about the nature and impact of choices available to targets of bullying, discrimination, and sexual harassment. The website is designed to provide information in a *user-centered, private, and trauma-informed* format, which will order to enhance users’ sense of mastery and choice as they navigate the university’s available support and response services. Recognizing that the populations experiencing the highest rates of bullying, discrimination, and sexual harassment are communities of color, disabled persons, and sexual- and gender-identity minorities, and that many individuals experience multiple and intersecting harms, a “user-centered” website means that all users of the website have the freedom to explore and learn the pros and cons of multiple pathways – informal as well as formal, primarily supportive as well as reporting – so that they can judge whether and how to take any action. The proposal also rests on the best practice in ombuds and advocacy services, which suggest that targets of bullying, discrimination, and sexual harassment (as well as those with other concerns) generally benefit from the ability to choose their own pathways, as well as change those pathways, as circumstances and their own well-being might require. The website will be responsive to recent research on university reporting websites and provide individual users with the information they need to make their own assessments about trustworthiness and possible

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efficacy of all available options, including that of connecting to campus personnel who can offer confidentiality and advocacy if they choose to take any action.

The website will feature an “escape” button on all pages, which allows users to use it without fear of discovery by colleagues, supervisors, and others, and provide privacy information indicating what little tracking information the site will temporarily collect during use. The sites many pages will also prominently display a “talk to someone” button that links to contact information for confidential campus and community resources, thereby encouraging users to move beyond the passive website to seek direct support.

Project Development

The website project has been under development since the appointment of Dr. Liz Hutchison in the Division for Equity and Inclusion in August 2020. The steps already taken for developing the website include:

1. Fall 2020: Conceptualization and framing of website proposal, building on Dr. Hutchison’s work with Remediation Working Group and Foundations Course training with the International Ombuds Association.
2. Spring 2021: Consultation with DEI and campus partners, including the UNM Action Collaborative Team; the Office for Compliance, Ethics, and Equal Opportunity; Staff Council Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee; Ombuds Services; and Sexual Assault Advocates.
3. Summer 2021: Development of website design in consultation with the Applications Department of UNM Information Technologies, which includes 1) design and implementation of usability studies and 2) webpage privacy, design, and maintenance planning
4. Fall 2021: Webpage development, testing, and approval with campus partners, and development of communication plan for incorporating website into relevant trainings and websites, as well as ongoing evaluation plan for the website in 2022.

The Staff-Faculty Wayfinder Website will be fully operational by Spring 2022, and will fulfill the objectives of the Action Collaborative by:

- Implementing and evaluating research-based, trauma-informed interventions to enhance remediation of sexual harassment;
- Building an integrated and intersectional tool for addressing different forms and degrees of misconduct in a university setting;
- Engaging in continuous evaluation drawing on implementation science;
- Supporting privacy and self-efficacy of targets of sexual harassment and other harms.

This work is new for The University of New Mexico (created, implemented, or revised since 04/10/2020), and new or uncommon for higher ed space (created, implemented, or revised since 04/10/18).

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