

*This article is based on an article written by Professor Frank Andrews at UC Santa Cruz and on UM's Department of Psychology handbook (both used here by permission).*

*Note that the policy below, adopted by the Wildlife Biology Program, is more restrictive than the policy adopted by the University of Montana. You should read and understand both documents.*

### **Teaching Assistants and Sexual Harassment**

As a graduate student, especially in your role as TA and mentor to undergraduates, you must follow strict professional guidelines regarding equality. Because these guidelines have been changing in recent years, because they may differ from the guidelines you grew up with in dealing with peers, and because the consequences to your career for violating these guidelines are so severe, it's essential that you understand them clearly and put them into practice scrupulously.

We are committed to making this campus a comfortable, safe place for you to work and learn regardless of your gender, race, or sexual preference. We are similarly committed to the well-being of *all* students and staff, including all the students you will teach as TA or work with as a scholar and researcher. This requires that you know your rights, stand up for your rights and those of others, and remain sensitive and vigilant to see that no one's actions, including your own, interfere with the work of others.

It is not easy to make this community a safe, comfortable learning environment for everyone. But we have an obligation, together, to do just that. Some members of our community carry burning memories of having been abused, manipulated, or raped. Some members can hardly find the self-confidence to enter our buildings, let alone enroll in our courses. It is not just instructors and TAs who deliberately or inadvertently intimidate students - it is peers, fellow students, who use put-downs and one-upmanship and manipulations and exploitation that add to the burden everyone carries. All of us must be alert for behavior that could make others feel unsafe or uncomfortable, and all of us must be determined to speak out about it whenever we see it - to get it stopped and to educate us all in being more supportive in the future.

Nationwide statistics prove that some people feel so uncomfortable in science departments that they do not pursue studies in certain disciplines. Among factors that contribute to this are put-downs of women by men or of one race by another, sexual harassment, discrimination, and the injection of romantic or sexual overtones into relationships where there are differences in the power of the people involved. This statement summarizes the regulations and policies relating these issues to you.

### **Sexual Harassment**

The University of Montana defines sexual harassment to be any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favor, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

1. agreement is implied to be required for instruction, employment, or participation in a university activity; or
2. where an evaluation or grade is implied to depend in any way on activity; or

3. the request or conduct negatively affects a student's academic experience or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

The full UM policy can be found here: <http://www.umt.edu/policies/human-resources/DiscriminationHarassmentSexualMisconductStalkingRetaliation.php>

### **Examples of Sexual Harassment**

- Suggesting, even as a "joke", that schoolwork could be reduced or a grade raised if you spend time socially or romantically. Any pressure for sex or any threat of punishment for refusing.
- Any remarks about clothing, body, or activities that could be construed as sexual, either in appreciation or as a put-down. Insulting sounds, suggestive whistling.
- Intimidating, angry, loud, or insulting language referring to sex or gender (note: this is violence - verbal violence, rather than physical).
- Jokes about sex or gender. Inappropriate touching or feeling, attempted kissing or fondling, assault. Leering, obscene gestures, exposing of the body. Displaying objectionable cartoons, photos, drawings, calendars, posters, T-shirts. Saying or "joking" that, for example, women cannot learn this material or run this instrument as quickly or as well as men.

### **Unethical Romantic Behavior**

Consenting romantic or sexual relationships between TAs and students, and more generally between supervisors and employees, while not expressly forbidden by university policy, present many problems and generally are deemed unwise. A TA who enters into a relationship with a student must realize that it could be exceedingly difficult to defend against any sexual harassment complaint following the termination of any such relationship. In addition, the Wildlife Program must maintain its reputation for fairness and objectivity towards other students.

For these reasons, the Wildlife Program discourages mutually consenting romantic or sexual relationships between TAs and students. Should such a relationship develop, the TA should immediately consult with colleagues and/or staff members or faculty supervisors and transfer all professional and evaluative responsibilities for that student to a capable colleague. Failure to do this could result in disciplinary action. If a TA becomes involved with a student who is not in his or her classes, at the very least the TA must take all necessary steps to protect the student's professional future from any possible prejudicial consequences.

### **Implication for TAs**

Do not suggest or engage in any romantic activity with any student you are teaching or supervising, even if it is the student who initiates the activity. If, despite this policy, a romance should begin between you and one of your students, tell the instructor immediately. All students should have access to all educational resources, free from questions of romance or sex.

For your safety and that of your students, all meetings with one's students should be held on campus, in one's office, with the doors open. You should not meet with students after hours, alone or in a closed

room, unless a fellow graduate student or faculty member is present. You should not under any circumstances meet privately with students in their homes, apartments, or in any private place off campus.

E-mails should be sent using official University email accounts. Phone calls or texting should take place only during normal business hours. Social media are complicated and should be used carefully. For example, it would be acceptable to set up a Facebook page or Twitter account to facilitate class-related activities, but it would be unacceptable to friend a student's personal account, or to contribute to personal online discussions that aren't open to the entire class.

### **Dealing with Harassment**

The University policy outlines procedures (policy as cited above) for dealing with allegations of harassment through formal and informal channels at the University. If a student, staff member or faculty member encounters such situations, s/he may approach the Wildlife Program Director, Department Chair, or the University's Title IX/EO officer (Jessica Weltman) for details on these procedures. The new policy requires that faculty, staff and those graduate students in teaching positions report to the Title IX office within 24 hours (x 5710) of a hearing of an incident from a student.