

# **Sexual Harassment at NC State University**

## **A Comparison of the 1989 and 1996 Surveys**

### **Contents:**

1. Introduction
2. Purpose of Report
3. Method
4. Tables
  - Table 1: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Incidence of Unwanted Sexist Statements
  - Table 2: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Incidence of Unwanted Sexual Statements
  - Table 3: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Incidence of Unwanted Personal Attention
  - Table 4: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Incidence of Unwanted Sexual Propositions
  - Table 5: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Incidence of Unwanted Physical/Sexual Advances
  - Table 6: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Effects of Sexual Harassment
  - Table 7: Percentage of Respondents Reporting the Filing of a Complaint
  - Table 8: Factors in Decision Not to Complain
  - Table 9: Offices Most Likely to be Contacted
  - Table 10: Factors Likely to Increase Reporting
5. Highlights
6. Conclusions

### **Introduction**

North Carolina State University issued its first institutional response to the issue of sexual harassment in 1981 with the creation of a sexual harassment policy. Since that time, the university has continued to shape its response in light of a better understanding of the nature and impact of sexual harassment on campus and on-going interpretation of federal and state laws. The past eighteen years has seen an evolution of policy and a tremendous increase in resources dedicated to eliminating sexual harassment, including one full-time professional position to provide both prevention and resolution services to the campus community.

A major catalyst for change was research conducted by an ad hoc group of university faculty and administrators in 1989 (Leonard, Carroll, Hankins, Maidon, Potorti, and Rogers). The data revealed sexual harassment to be a prevalent problem on campus for both students and employees. In an effort to further assess the incidence and impact of sexual harassment at

the university, the Office for Equal Opportunity replicated this research project in 1996.

**Purpose of Report**

The overall purpose of this report is to inform the campus community of the incidence and impact of sexual harassment at NC State University. More specifically, the data from the 1989 and 1996 surveys will be compared. It should be noted that 1996 survey included both males and females in its sample, while the 1989 survey included on females in its sample.

**Method**

For both projects, a computer generated random sample was chosen proportionately from four groups on campus: undergraduate students; graduate students, SPA employees; and EPA employees. The details of the sample and respondent demographics are detailed below. Some numbers may not total exactly due to respondents who either did not answer or gave multiple answers to demographic questions. While the overall response rate (22%) precludes an extensive generalization of findings, the data nevertheless offer substantial insights into the impact and incidence of sexual harassment at NC State.

	Population	1989		1996	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Respondents</b>	Total	1364	100	5001	100
	Males	0	0	2983	60
	Females	1364	100	2018	40
	Students	698	51	3737	75
	Employees	675	49	1264	25
		Number	Response Rate	Number	Response Rate
<b>Sample Size</b>	Total	527	38	1123	22
	Males	0	0	547	18
	Females	527	38	546	27
	Students	221	31	583	16
	Employees	306	45	655	52

\*Response Rate is proportionate to its correlate sample population.

Surveys were mailed to the subjects in both projects. Included with the survey instrument were a cover letter describing the project and instructions for completing the survey instrument. The survey instrument for the 1989 project (and used again in the 1996 project) was adapted from Allen and Okawa's schema of harassment types (1987). Five types of behavior were provided, ranging from "unwanted sexist comments" to "unwanted physical or sexual advances."

## Tables

Table 1: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Incidence of Unwanted Sexist Statements

Classification	Sex	1989				1996			
		Never	Once	Several Times	Many Times	Never	Once	Several Times	Many Times
Undergraduate Students	Male	0	0	0	0	86.6	3.0	7.3	3.0
	Female	62.9	10.9	21.1	5.1	77.1	9.9	10.9	2.1
Graduate Students	Male	0	0	0	0	90.7	3.1	4.1	2.1
	Female	74.5	6.4	8.5	10.6	69.9	11.7	13.6	4.9
SPA Employees	Male	0	0	0	0	74.2	7.6	10.6	7.6
	Female	65.3	4.5	18.1	12.1	69.9	3.0	19.5	7.5
EPA Employees	Male	0	0	0	0	77.5	1.9	13.8	6.9
	Female	40.8	4.9	35.0	19.4	54.1	14.9	20.3	10.8
Totals	Male	0	0	0	0	82.8	3.3	9.2	4.7
	Female	60.1	6.9	21.8	11.2	70.3	9.2	15.1	5.4

### Discussion:

The term "Unwanted Sexist Statements" was described as "unwanted jokes or remarks that are stereotypical or derogatory to members of one sex made in your presence, whether individually or in a group."

A higher percentage of female undergraduate students and employees in 1996 reported that they had never experienced *Unwanted Sexist Statements* than in 1989. However, the opposite was true for female graduate students, 74.5% of whom reported having never experienced *Unwanted Sexist Statements* in 1989, compared to only 69.9% in 1996. Also, more graduate student women experience one or more incidents of *Unwanted Sexist Statements* in 1996 than in 1989 (a combined increase of 4.7 percentage points).

Another significant change involves female EPA employees, nearly 60% of who experienced one or more incidents of *Unwanted Sexist Statements* in 1989. Only 46% of the 1996 group experienced one or more incidents of this behavior, a drop of almost 16 percentage points.

Overall, 70.3% of NC State women reported never to have experienced this type of behavior, and increase from the rate of 60.1% in 1989.

Male students and employees reported at higher rates than female students and employees to have never experienced *Unwanted Sexist Statements*. Overall, 82.8% of NC State men claim never having experienced this behavior, compared to 70.3% of NC State women. The largest gap came between male and female graduate students (20.8 percentage points) and male and female EPA employees (23.4 percentage points).

Table 2: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Incidence of Unwanted Sexual Statements

Classification	Sex	1989				1996			
		Never	Once	Several Times	Many Times	Never	Once	Several Times	Many Times
Undergraduate Students	Male	0	0	0	0	97.6	0	1.2	1.2
	Female	92.1	4.5	3.4	5.1	94.3	4.2	1.0	0.5
Graduate Students	Male	0	0	0	0	96.9	2.1	0	1.0
	Female	91.7	4.2	4.2	10.6	90.3	2.9	5.8	1.0
SPA Employees	Male	0	0	0	0	89.4	3.0	4.5	3.0
	Female	82.1	5.1	11.3	12.1	84.1	6.1	7.6	2.3
EPA Employees	Male	0	0	0	0	96.3	1.9	1.3	0.6
	Female	66.7	12.4	15.2	19.4	79.5	9.6	9.6	1.4
Totals	Male	0	0	0	0	95.9	1.4	1.4	1.2
	Female	83.2	6.3	8.8	11.2	88.6	5.2	5.0	1.2

Discussion:

The term “Unwanted Sexual Statements” was described as “unwanted jokes, remarks, or questions directed to you personally which have sexual implications or sexual content.”

A higher percentage of female undergraduate students and employees in 1996 reported that they had never experienced *Unwanted Sexual*

*Statements* than in 1989. The incidence rate for female graduate students changed very little.

Another significant change involves female EPA employees, 33.3% of who experienced one or more incidents of *Unwanted Sexual Statements* in 1989. Only 20.6% of the 1996 group experienced one or more incidents of this behavior, a drop of almost 12.7 percentage points.

Overall, 88.6% of NC State women reported never to have experienced this type of behavior in 1996, an increase from the rate of 83.2% in 1989.

Male students and employees reported at higher rates than female students and employees to have never experienced *Unwanted Sexual Statements*. Overall, 95.9% of NC State men claim never having experienced this behavior, compared to 88.6% of NC State women. The most significant gap came between male and female EPA employees (16.8 percentage points).

Table 3: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Incidence of Unwanted Personal Attention

Classification	Sex	1989				1996			
		Never	Once	Several Times	Many Times	Never	Once	Several Times	Many Times
Undergraduate Students	Male	0	0	0	0	97.6	1.2	1.2	0
	Female	94.9	4.0	0.6	0.6	94.3	3.6	2.1	0
Graduate Students	Male	0	0	0	0	97.9	0	1.0	1.0
	Female	97.9	2.1	0	0	89.3	2.9	3.9	3.9
SPA Employees	Male	0	0	0	0	93.9	4.5	0	1.5
	Female	88.4	4.0	6.0	1.5	87.9	8.3	1.5	2.3
EPA Employees	Male	0	0	0	0	99.4	0	0.6	0
	Female	81.9	8.6	9.5	0	94.6	5.4	0	0
Totals	Male	0	0	0	0	97.7	1.0	0.8	0.4
	Female	90.1	4.7	4.4	0.8	91.6	5.0	2.0	1.4

Discussion:

The term “Unwanted Personal Attention” was described as “unwanted letters, calls, visits, pressure for meetings, dates, etc., where personal (romantic) interest in you is implied, but no sexual expectations are stated.”

Overall, the incidence of *Unwanted Personal Attention* among female undergraduate students changed very little between 1989 and 1996. However, the opposite was true for female graduate students, 10.7% of whom reported having one or more incidents of *Unwanted Personal Attention* in 1996, compared to only 2.1% in 1989. (a combined increase of 8.6 percentage points).

Another significant change involves female EPA employees, 33.3% of who experienced one or more incidents of *Unwanted Personal Attention* in 1989. Only 20.6% of the 1996 group experienced one or more incidents of this behavior, a drop of almost 12.7 percentage points.

Overall, 91.6% of NC State women reported never to have experienced this type of behavior in 1996, a slight increase from the rate of 90.1% in 1989.

Male students and employees reported at higher rates than female students and employees to have never experienced *Unwanted Personal Attention*. Overall, 97.7% of NC State men claim never having experienced this behavior, compared to 91.6% of NC State women. The most significant gap came between male and female graduate students (8.6 percentage points).

Table 4: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Incidence of Unwanted Sexual Propositions

Classification	Sex	1989				1996			
		Never	Once	Several Times	Many Times	Never	Once	Several Times	Many Times
Undergraduate Students	Male	0	0	0	0	97.5	0	2.5	0
	Female	99.4	0.6	3.4	0	99.0	0.5	0.5	0
Graduate Students	Male	0	0	0	0	99.0	0	1.0	0
	Female	100	0	4.2	0	98.1	1.9	0	0
SPA Employees	Male	0	0	0	0	98.5	0	1.5	0
	Female	95.4	2.0	2.5	0	95.5	3.8	0.8	0
EPA Employees	Male	0	0	0	0	100	0	1.3	0
	Female	92.5	6.6	0.9	0	100	0	9.6	0
Totals	Male	0	0	0	0	98.8	0	1.2	0
	Female	96.6	2.3	1.1	0	98.8	1.6	0.4	0

Discussion:

The term “Unwanted Sexual Propositions” was described as “unwanted demands or invitations for sexual favors.”

Overall, the incidence of *Unwanted Sexual Propositions* among female students and SPA employees changed very little between 1989 and 1996. The significant change involves female EPA employees, 7.5% of who experienced one or more incidents of *Unwanted Sexual Propositions* in 1989. None of the 1996 group experienced one or more incidents of this behavior.

Overall, 98% of NC State women reported never to have experienced this type of behavior in 1996, and increase from the rate of 96.6% in 1989, a slight increase of 1.4 percentage points.

There were only slight differences in the incidence rate between males and females in 1996. The most significant gap came between male and female SPA employees (3 percentage points).

Table 5: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Incidence of Unwanted Physical or Sexual Advances

Classification	Sex	1989				1996			
		Never	Once	Several Times	Many Times	Never	Once	Several Times	Many Times
Undergraduate Students	Male	0	0	0	0	97.0	1.2	1.2	0.6
	Female	97.2	2.8	0	0	97.4	2.1	0.5	0
Graduate Students	Male	0	0	0	0	99.0	0	1.0	0
	Female	95.8	2.1	2.1	0	92.2	5.8	1.9	0
SPA Employees	Male	0	0	0	0	93.9	1.5	3.0	1.5
	Female	89.3	3.6	6.1	1.0	94.7	3.8	0	1.5
EPA Employees	Male	0	0	0	0	99.4	0	0.6	0
	Female	86.7	5.7	6.7	1.0	90.5	1.4	5.4	2.7
Totals	Male	0	0	0	0	97.7	0.6	1.2	0.4
	Female	92.0	3.6	3.8	0.6	94.6	3.2	1.4	0.8

Discussion:

The term “Unwanted Physical or Sexual Advances” was described as “unwanted touching, hugging, kissing, fondling, sexual intercourse, or other activity.”

Overall, the incidence of *Unwanted Physical or Sexual Advances* among female students and SPA employees changed very little between 1989 and 1996. The significant change involves female graduate students, 7.7% of who experienced one or more incidents of *Unwanted Physical or Sexual Advances* in 1996. Only 4.2% of the 1989 group experienced one or more incidents of this behavior, an increase of 3.5 percentage points. Additionally, only 5.3% of female SPA employees experienced one or more incidents of this behavior in 1996, a drop from the 10.7% rate experienced by the 1989 group.

Overall, 94.6% of NC State women reported never to have experienced this type of behavior in 1996, and increase from the rate of 92% in 1989, an increase of 2.6 percentage points.

There were only slight differences in the incidence rate between males and females in 1996. The most significant gap came between male and female EPA employees who never experienced this behavior (8.9 percentage points) and between male and female graduate students (6.8).

Table 6: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Effects of Sexual Harassment

Effect	1989		1996	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>Strong Emotions</b>	65.5	0	62.4	41.5
<b>Physical Problems</b>	4.0	0	4.2	3.3
<b>Negative Feelings about Self</b>	14.6	0	21.7	19.7
<b>Impaired Academic Performance</b>	6.0	0	8.5	9.8
<b>Impaired Work Performance</b>	15.4	0	16.8	18.6
<b>Altered Academic/Career Plans</b>	4.0	0	6.4	9.8
<b>Altered Employment/Career Plans</b>	4.0	0	8.5	6.6
<b>Avoid Person/Situation</b>	65.7	0	68.0	53.2

Discussion:

Of those female respondents indicating to have experienced some form of sexual harassment, most indicated to have experienced the effects of *Strong Emotions* and *Avoid Person/Situation* (both the 1989 and 1996 groups). While these were also the effects most often cited by males, these effects occurred at significantly lower rates (approximately 15 and 20 percentage points lower, respectively).

*Negative Feelings about Self* and *Impaired Work Performance* were the third and fourth most cited effects for female respondents (both the 1989 and 1996 groups). Again, these were ranked third and fourth for men as well, but at very similar rates.

Table 7: Percentage of Respondents Reporting the Filing of a Complaint

1989		1996	
Female	Male	Female	Male
4.8	0	5.2	7.5

Discussion:

Of those female respondents indicating to have experienced some form of sexual harassment, 4.8% and 5.2% (in 1989 and 1996 respectively) complained about the behavior to the university. 7.5% of male respondents indicating to have experienced some form of sexual harassment also complained.

Table 8: Factors in Decision Not to Complain

Factor	1989		1996	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
felt I handled situation myself	71	0	58	54
not a problem university could/would help with	61	0	53	55
concern of believability	17	0	18	19
concern of no action	37	0	34	29
concern of retaliation	36	0	34	26
embarrassment	33	0	31	22
concern I was responsible	13	0	12	9
unwilling to talk with opposite sex	7	0	9	9
concern of anonymity	25	0	32	24
didn't know where to go to complain	28	0	27	26
concern of action taken	29	0	40	22

Discussion:

Of those female respondents indicating in 1996 to have experienced some form of sexual harassment, the factors most likely affecting the decision

not to complain were “felt I handled situation myself” and “not a problem the university could/would help with.” While these were the top two reasons given by the 1989 group, there was a significant drop in both (13 percentage points and 8 percentage points respectively). These were also the factors most often cited by males, occurring at similar rates.

Female respondents indicated more concern about “anonymity” and “what actions would be taken” than did men (18 and 8 percentage points respectively).

Table 9: Offices Most Likely to be Contacted

Office	1989		1996	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Affirmative Action Office/Liaisons	12	0	12	12
Could find out if needed	0	0	3	4
Counseling Center	18	0	8	3
Dean/College/Department office	5	0	3	8
Human Resources	18	0	15	11
Not Aware/Don't Know	9	0	27	39
Provost Office	5	0	3	4
Public Safety	11	0	14	16
Women's Center	na	0	16	3

Discussion:

The 1996 female respondents were less likely than their counterparts in 1989 to name the Counseling Center as point of entry for presenting a complaint. Male respondents were less likely to contact the Counseling Center or Women’s Center than female respondents (5 and 13 percentage points respectively), and more likely to report through supervisory channels of the Dean/College/Department office (5 percentage points).

Table 10: Factors Likely to Increase Reporting

Factor	1989		1996	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
being taken seriously	96.0	0	93.8	93.8

confidentiality	94.4	0	91.7	85.8
designated complaint officer	81.4	0	76.5	69.0
same sex complaint officer	73.6	0	69.6	38.7
complaint officer's relative authority 0	90.3	0	90.5	86.0
independence of investigation team 0	90.1	0	89.2	83.1
clear and uniform consequences 0	89.9	0	88.2	77.8
protection from retaliation 0	96.4	0	93.7	88.1
other	unknown	0	82.3	91.6

### Discussion:

Overall, the 1996 female respondents felt slightly less strong about the increased likelihood to report based on a number of factors. The most significant gap came between male and female respondents regarding the “same sex complaint officer” factor. Only 38.7% of men, but nearly 70% of women, indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that having a “same sex complaint officer” would increase their likelihood of reporting sexual harassment.

Male respondents were less concerned with “confidentiality” (5.9 percentage point difference), although it still ranked fairly high as a factor likely to increase reporting. Men also were not as concerned about “clear and uniform consequences” as were women (10.4 percentage point difference).

### **Highlights**

1. The overall incidence rate of sexual harassment reported by the 1996 group (25%) is generally lower than the overall rate of the 1989 group (29%). However, when comparing only the female populations, there is actually an increase in the two most severe categories of behavior (*Unwanted Sexual Propositions* and *Unwanted Physical or Sexual Advances*).
2. Female respondents generally reacted more strongly to harassing behavior than male respondents.
3. Female respondents are generally less likely to complain than males, and connect ‘comfort factors’ (Women’s Center, Counseling Center, same sex complaint officer) with their decisions to make complaints. This seems to indicate less trust in the existing supervisory channels and a need for reassurance that their concerns will be handled appropriately.
4. Male respondents seemed more at ease with using existing supervisory channels and less concerned with punishment schemes, indicating more

trust in university administration.

### **Conclusions**

While the responses can not be said to be representative of the general NC State University population, they are suggestive of the campus climate specific to the issue of sexual harassment. Women still appear to be seeking alternative routes for reporting and resolving their complaints, while men appear to have less need for such alternatives. Although men are clearly effected by sexual harassment, these behaviors appear to impact women more often and more profoundly.

The university's attempt to appropriately respond to sexual harassment will continue to improve as the needs of all members of the campus community are carefully examined and considered. Future assessment efforts could be crafted to better measure the university's success in providing education and resolving complaints. Additionally, future assessments should give more consideration to how sexual harassment is defined, as this is the often the point of greatest misunderstanding.

Posted: June 22, 1999 by Leslie A. Dare