

Climate Resources for Graduate Students in the Mathematics Department

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This document tries to answer the following question: If you experience an issue related to a negative work or learning environment in the department, who can you talk to?

The answer is a little complicated, and in fact the question is a little complicated too. An exact meaning of “negative work or learning environment” is a bit hard to pin down. Some incidents could fall under the envelope of *harassment and discrimination*, or *hostile work environment*; other incidents might not clearly fit under those envelopes but nevertheless still be disconcerting.

Here are several examples:

- (1) Your pre-PhD advisor has not seemed supportive in the past, and as a result you don't feel comfortable talking to them about some academic issues you are struggling with.
- (2) A fellow graduate student in one of your classes routinely jumps in and talks over other people who are speaking, making the classroom environment uncomfortable.
- (3) A student or teacher in one of your courses occasionally makes jokes that seem a little sexist.
- (4) You often overhear a GE in the office next to yours speaking to undergraduate students in a way that seems derogatory, and using language not appropriate to the workplace.
- (5) You go to a colloquium dinner and during the conversation someone makes a comment that is disparaging to minorities.
- (6) A graduate student in your office often makes comments to you that seem somewhat condescending and rude.
- (7) A teacher in one of your courses mentions one day that in his experience men tend to be more successful at mathematics research than women.

In some of these scenarios there are clear elements of harassment and discrimination, some involve hostile work environment, and some are a bit more nebulous. In an ideal world you would not experience any of these scenarios, but in fact the chances are that you will experience more than one during your graduate education (and later in life as well). It is important to realize that the department does not want you to be alone in dealing with these things: only by talking about them openly with each other can we gradually improve our departmental climate.

Who can you talk to inside the department?

- Sherilyn Schwartz (Department Manager-DM)
- Daniel Dugger (Department Head-DH)

It is natural to think of the Department Head and Department Manager as the *last* resources, the people you go to only when things have reached very serious levels. But a better perspective is that you should always feel free to come and ask for help from these people, even if you just want to talk something out. They are more than willing to provide assistance, ideas, or help point you in the right direction.

One thing to keep in mind, though, is that the Department Head is a so-called “Designated Reporter”. This means that they are **required** by UO policy to report to the administration any information disclosed to them about harassment, discrimination, or other prohibited conduct. The main advice to remember about talking to a Designated Reporter is to clarify with them at the beginning of the conversation what the boundaries are, so that you don’t unwittingly trigger a chain of events that you hadn’t wanted.

- Mike Price (Assistant Department Head-ADH)
- Nick Proudfoot (Associate Head and Chair of the Graduate Affairs Committee-CGAC)
- Mary Brown (Acting Graduate Coordinator-GC)

The above three people (and also the DM) are termed Student-Directed Employees. This means that in cases of sexual or gender-based discrimination or harassment the employee will only report shared information to the administration if the student disclosing the information asks that it be reported (except in cases where there is imminent risk of serious harm to someone, or a minor is involved). Student-Directed Employees are still required to report all other forms of prohibited discrimination and harassment, so the same suggestion as for Designated Reporters applies here: clarify the boundaries at the beginning of the conversation. A detailed description of reporting responsibilities for all employees is here:

<https://investigations.uoregon.edu/employee-responsibilities>

- Any faculty member who you feel comfortable with.

Students sometimes feel that they can only talk to faculty about mathematics, but faculty are here to help you navigate through all aspects of your graduate experience: from ideas about living in Eugene to advice about future careers. You should feel free to contact any faculty member about any topic, and chances are they will be very

happy to try to assist you. If what you need help with is outside of their knowledge base, they can help connect you with someone who is better equipped to help.

Note that faculty not in administrative positions are Student-Directed Employees.

- Certain non-tenure-track faculty who have volunteered to be contact people:
 - Dr. Jennifer Thorenson, jthoren2@uoregon.edu
 - Dr. David Steinberg, dcstein@uoregon.edu
 - Kristen Henderson, khender3@uoregon.edu

Talking to tenure-track faculty might feel unsafe or difficult because of the possibility that things you say could have unintended effects on your career—either in the department, or beyond. To help with this, the above Career Instructors have volunteered to be contacts. Unless required by UO regulations, any information shared with them will be kept totally confidential.

While you can talk to people in the departmental leadership on any subject, here is a guide to their main areas of expertise:

- DH: Directly supervises faculty, ultimate supervisor of GEs.
- DM: Coordinates all departmental issues around personnel and human resources.
- ADH: Direct supervisor of GEs. Main contact for anything related to GE teaching or work assignments.
- CGAC: Main contact for graduate student academics.
- GC: Good resource for all things related to graduate students.

Going back to scenarios (1)–(7), here are people one might think to contact first (but again, there is no *requirement* that you go to these people first, and your choice would possibly be governed by other factors):

- (1) CGAC (note that you are welcome to change pre-PhD advisors at any time!)
- (2) Maybe first talk to the teacher in the course. But then CGAC or DH.
- (3) ADH or CGAC or DH (note that jokes that are even “a little” sexist should definitely not be happening and are almost certainly prohibited behavior, so this scenario could be quite serious).
- (4) ADH or DH, since this is most related to GE work rather than academics.
- (5) Note that seminar dinners qualify as work events, and so comments over dinner are governed by UO workplace rules. This scenario brings up issues of harassment, discrimination, and hostile workplace. So probably ADH or DH on this one.
- (6) This is an issue of hostile work environment, and so is very serious. So ADH or DH or DM.

(7) CGAC or DH.

Anonymous reporting

The department is interested in building as complete a picture as possible regarding climate issues. To this end, we are offering the following link where you can file an anonymous log of your experiences:

https://oregon.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b9Mo9o8c8ibze5v

Certainly our hope is that all cases of sexual harassment or discrimination get reported through official channels. This is very important. But at the same time, we know there are very real obstructions to that happening. Also, there are incidents that perhaps are not harassment or discrimination but still have negative effects on people. If you do not feel comfortable talking to anyone about an incident, or feel that it is a “borderline” incident that is problematic but doesn’t rise to the level of a reportable offense, we would still really like you to submit a log of your experience at the above link. Information submitted there goes only to the department head and contains no identifying information other than what you provide. Even if we cannot take action, we think it would be useful for us to be assembling an overall picture of departmental climate. (Note that you can also log *positive* experiences as well, it doesn’t just have to be negative experiences).

There are some warnings to be made regarding anonymous reporting. Sometimes incidents that are perceived as problematic are actually misunderstandings—that is the way life is, sometimes misunderstandings do occur. If we investigate an incident and realize a misunderstanding was involved, then it can be very hard to clear it up if the incident was reported anonymously. This is not necessarily the end of the world, but it is something to be aware of.

Secondly, it is almost impossible to discipline an employee based on an anonymous complaint, unless it is somehow possible for us to verify the incident independently. Again, that’s not necessarily the end of the world—often the best outcome consists of conversations and the department being aware of an issue, without any discipline taking place. But in extreme cases where the department and university need to exert pressure to make change happen, we don’t have the ability to exert that pressure unless complainants are willing to go on the record.

Resources Outside the Department

If you are not comfortable talking with anyone inside the department about an issue, the university has several other resources available. The webpage

<http://respect.uoregon.edu>

is a central hub for these resources.

Some particularly important resources:

Office of Investigations and Civil Rights Compliance
investigations.uoregon.edu
icrcinfo@uoregon.edu
541-346-3123

24-hour support hotline for victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault
safe.uoregon.edu
541-346-SAFE

Dean of the Graduate School
Kate Mondloch
mondloch@uoregon.edu

Another really great resource is the university's Ombuds Program, whose entire mission is to provide "a central, safe, and easy place to gain support and problem-solving resources." See their webpage at <http://ombuds.uoregon.edu>. The following is quoted from their online materials:

"People visit the ombudsperson for many reasons. They may want to have a confidential conversation with someone who has an impartial perspective and no organizational allegiance to any university department, for example. Or they might like help thinking through (or practicing) a non-escalating approach for dealing directly with an issue. Or they may be uncertain about taking a matter through other university channels because of reporting or other concerns.

Whatever your reason for visiting, the ombudsperson will not tell you what to do and will not take action against your wishes. Rather, the ombudsperson will talk you through strategies, options, and resources for addressing your concern. Additionally, unless what you say indicates that there is an imminent risk of serious harm to you or other people, everything you say to the ombudsperson remains confidential. Even the fact that you visited the ombudsperson is confidential."

The person in the Ombuds Office with whom we had the most dealings has moved on to a new job outside the university, but the Ombuds Office has a strong reputation on campus for having extremely competent staff.