

Guidance on Creating Respectful and Healthy Virtual Spaces

Promotion of key messages and resources

The President's Initiative to Prevent Sexual Misconduct is encouraging the inclusion of key messages that promote the principles of respect, safety and dignity in virtual spaces in communications to faculty, staff, and students.

The University of Minnesota is a participating member of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Action Collaborative (NASEM AC) on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

NASEM AC has compiled information, strategies, and questions on how institutions can and are in the spirit of collaboration across the 57 participating Institutions of higher education adapting. The document notes that higher education has temporarily become a virtual world, but sexual harassment doesn't stop, nor does the need to handle existing cases, support those who have experienced harassment, and prevent harassment from occurring. ***This working document, cut and pasted at the end of this document, is collecting information and does not imply or constitute an endorsement or promotion of these practices by NASEM.***

This information below includes suggestions of key high level and positive messages that could be considered. UMN and additional resources are also included.

If you have other resources to share with our community, please send them to Sara Veblen-Mortenson, veble001@umn.edu.

Key messages and resources

1. Messages for faculty, staff, and students

- Emphasize the importance of attention to our **institutional values of creating a culture and climate of respect, safety, and dignity.**
- Our communities are so important to us right now and **we need to do all we can to honor the relationships we have as we learn and work together in virtual spaces.**
- **Codes of conduct** apply to the **virtual learning and working** environment.
- **Support services** are available for faculty, staff and students
- Provide UMN and tailored resources **to instructors** to create a culture and climate of respect, safety, and dignity in this online learning environment

- *Work to ensure that online instructional formats are accessible and inclusive*
- Provide UMN and tailored resources to **department leaders and supervisors** to create a culture and climate of respect, safety, and dignity in the virtual space

2. **List of resources for *Creating Respectful and Healthy Virtual Spaces* on the UMN campus and from other Universities**

a. **UMN Resources specific to sexual misconduct or other online harassment**

1. University Relations: Responding to Online harassment
<https://university-relations.umn.edu/resources/resources-responding-online-harassment>
2. Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action: Remote work/COVID-19
<https://eoaa.umn.edu/resources>
3. Bias Response and Referral Network
<https://bias-response.umn.edu/>

b. **Other Institution Examples (*see more in the NASEM AC cut and pasted document below)**

1. Equity and Inclusion During COVID-19*
 - a. This guidance document has been prepared by the Council of Chief Diversity Officers at the University of California to assist campus decision makers, faculty, administrators, students and staff on providing supportive positive and inclusive campus climates during the COVID-19 crisis.

<https://diversity.universityofcalifornia.edu/policies-guidelines/covid-19.html>

2. hollabackL: Bystander Intervention Training to Stop Anti-Asian/ American and Xenophobic Harassment

c. Faculty and Instructor resources

1. UMN

- a. Center for Educational Innovation
<https://cei.umn.edu/homepage>

- See “Support for Teaching Remotely”

2. Other institutions:

- a. UC Berkeley has created a [Toolkit on Creating a Healthy Virtual Environment](#): comprehensive resources within this toolkit are provided above in the document.

- Guide from UC Berkeley on Establishing Your Virtual Culture:
<https://diversity.berkeley.edu/establishing-your-virtual-culture>
- Guide from UC Berkeley on Setting up Your Virtual Space:
<https://diversity.berkeley.edu/setting-your-virtual-space>

d. UMN Support Services

1. The Aurora Center for Advocacy & Education
<http://aurora.umn.edu/>

2. [UMN Safe Campus website](#)

Updated on May 19, 2020

How Higher Education Institutions are Adapting Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response During a Pandemic: Information, Strategies, and Questions

Compiled by the [Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education](#)

Higher education has temporarily become a virtual world, but sexual harassment doesn't stop, nor does the need to handle existing cases, support those who have experienced harassment, and prevent harassment from occurring. In the spirit of collaboration, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education is compiling information, strategies, and questions on how institutions can and are adapting. ***This is a working document that is collecting information and does not imply or constitute an endorsement or promotion of these practices by NASEM.***

Information will be added and revised as it is collected. Please share your suggestions and comments, and contribute to the document by emailing SHActionCollab@nas.edu.

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Sexual/Gender Harassment and Discrimination in the Virtual Environment

How does sexual/gender harassment and discrimination look in virtual spaces

Types of Sexual Harassment

[There are three types of sexual harassment](#) (sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention, and gender harassment) and they occur during in-person interactions and in virtual interactions such as on the internet, in emails, and during virtual meetings.

The following descriptions and examples from [Barak 2005](#) provide information on what the three types of sexual harassment look like on the internet.

Gender harassment is the [most common form of sexual harassment](#). It can be communicated verbally or graphically, and either through active or passive manners (see below).

Types of Gender Harassment on the Internet

Mode and Manner	Description	Examples
Active Verbal	Offensive sexual messages actively initiated by a harasser toward a victim, including gender-humiliating comments, sexual remarks, dirty jokes, etc.	Gender-humiliating comments ("Leave the forum! Go to your natural place, the kitchen"); sexual remarks ("Nipples make this chat room more interesting")
Active Graphic	Intentional sending of erotic and pornographic pictures or videos through individual online communication channels, such as email	Pictures, videos
Passive Verbal	The harasser does not target harassing messages directly to a particular person or persons, but rather to potential receivers	Nicknames (e.g., CockSucker, WetPussy, XLargeTool); terms attached to a user's personal details ("Want a fuck?" in Internet relay chat user's details).
Passive Graphic	Pictures and movies published on websites. Comes into effect when web users do not know in advance and have no prior clue concerning what might later prove offensive to them.	Forced pop-up window, redirected links to pornography sites, etc.

Unwanted sexual attention is the [second most common form of sexual harassment](#).

- Description: Intended to solicit sexual cooperation of some sort, either virtual or in face-to-face contact, and usually necessitates direct personal verbal communication between a harasser and a victim ([Barak 2005](#)).
- Examples: Personal communication with messages directly relating to sex and sexuality (e.g., "how large are your boobs?"), sex life ("when did you fuck last time?"), or intimate subjects ("do you have your period now?"); invitations, insinuations, or offers for sex-related activities; or imposing sex-related sounds or images on a message.

Sexual coercion is the least common form of sexual harassment, both on and off the internet, but occurs in this case without physical contact ([Barak 2005](#)). Can include:

- **Threats to elicit sexual cooperation.** Although the use of physical force is impossible online, victims might perceive threats to use physical force realistic on the Internet as in face-to-face situations. Examples: Explicit threats of harm to a person or their relatives or friends; threats of damage to property; “following” virtually by trailing visits to chat rooms and forums.
- **Activities that closely parallel offline situations.** Examples: breaking into a victim’s personal computer and causing damage or threatening to do so; sending frightening e-mails, sending viruses, and flooding an email inbox (e.g., Dibbell, 1998).
- **Bribes and seductions** to achieve sexual gains. Can include impersonation and the use of incentives (baits) to encourage sexual cooperation.

Impact of Sexual Harassment

Some evidence suggests that the impact of sexual harassment on the internet¹ mirrors that which is experienced offline².

Technology provides a harasser with additional access to the victim; the perpetrator can use technology to monitor a victim’s whereabouts and be in constant communication, and this increased access may exacerbate feelings of powerlessness for a victim³.

Additional Questions to Consider

- What are other ways in which harassment can manifest in remote learning environments?
 - Guide from UC Berkeley: <https://diversity.berkeley.edu/recognizing-problematic-virtual-behavior>
- How might it look different in a virtual space compared with in-person? (e.g. virtual stalking versus in-person stalking, or written sexual harassment versus physical sexual harassment)
- What should people be watching out for to identify more subtle forms of harassment and discrimination in these virtual spaces?

¹Gáti, Á., Tényi, T., Túry, F. and Wildmann, M. (2002), Anorexia nervosa following sexual harassment on the internet: A case report. *Int. J. Eat. Disord.*, 31: 474-477. doi:[10.1002/eat.10029](https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.10029)

²Harned, M. S., & Fitzgerald, L. F. (2002). Understanding a link between sexual harassment and eating disorder symptoms: A mediational analysis. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 70, 1170-1181.

³Southworth, C., Finn, J., Dawson, S., Fraser, C., & Tucker, S. (2007). Intimate Partner Violence, Technology, and Stalking. *Violence Against Women*, 13(8), 842–856. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801207302045>

Harassment/Discrimination of Parents

Concerns are being raised about the potential impact that working or interviewing while also parenting can have on women because of assumptions related to their commitments to family and work if their children were to interrupt interviews, meetings, etc.

- Mothers (but not fathers) are assumed to lack work devotion and are thus devalued (Blair-Loy 2003; Blair-Loy & Cech 2017). Evidence shows that mothers look similar to non-mothers (women and men) in terms of 1) Time spent on research, 2) Scholarly productivity, and 3) Grants. Yet, the belief that mothers are more distracted and less devoted remains (Blair-Loy & Cech, in progress; and *Gender, Parenthood, and Career Trajectories in STEM* by Mary Blair-Loy).
- *The Pregnant Scholar: Legal Protections for Parents* by Jessica Lee

Zoombombing

Uninvited guests are entering virtual meeting spaces and using hate speech, explicit imagery, verbal and visual sexual and racial harassment to disrupt meetings. Some strategies that have been identified for addressing this issue are:

- Using meeting waiting rooms
- Disabling the screen share, drawing tools, and chat feature
- Using meeting passwords
- Not using the personal meeting ID (since it stays the same for each meeting) and instead using the randomly generated meeting id
- Avoid using ‘Join Before Host’ feature
- Allow only signed-in users: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360037117472-Authentication-Profiles-for-Meetings-and-Webinars?zcid=1231>
- Remove unwanted or disruptive participants

RESOURCES:

- Zoom has also provided some guidance here: <https://blog.zoom.us/wordpress/2020/04/01/a-message-to-our-users/>
- UC Berkeley Guide on Zoom Settings for Preventing Zoombombing: <https://security.berkeley.edu/resources/cybersecurity-and-covid-19/settings-preventing-zoom-bombing>

Prevention

Guidance on Creating Respectful and Healthy Virtual Spaces:

Resources and guides are needed for creating respectful, safe, and healthy virtual spaces for communication, learning, and work.

QUESTIONS:

- What training/quick tips can be provided to faculty/facilitators on how to reduce the likelihood of harmful online behavior?

RESOURCE:

- Guide from UC Berkeley on Establishing Your Virtual Culture:
<https://diversity.berkeley.edu/establishing-your-virtual-culture>
- Guide from UC Berkeley on Setting up Your Virtual Space: <https://diversity.berkeley.edu/setting-your-virtual-space>

Communicating that Sexual Harassment Policies Apply to the Virtual Environment:

This includes clarifying that virtual education environments are still covered by codes of conduct and title IX; clarifying what sexual harassment looks like in a virtual space; and clarifying to faculty and staff that responsibilities for responding, reporting, and supporting students remain and providing information on how to fulfill these responsibilities in a virtual space.

EXAMPLES:

- https://www.washington.edu/provost/springquarter/?utm_source=uwhp&utm_medium=tiles&utm_campaign=coronavirus-spring-quarter#sexual-misconduct-response
- <http://oeo.unm.edu/assets/docs/t9-covid-faq.pdf>

[Barak \(2005\)](#) suggests that “although it is practically impossible to change the culture of the internet, much can be done in local online communities through the exercise of responsible, dedicated leadership endorsing a firm anti-SH policy⁴.” Barak suggests that this can be implemented through:

- Continuous messages
- Verbal messages and attractive banners
- Transparent sanctioning against any deviation from these standard

Converting In-Person Prevention Programs/Education to Virtual Programs

In part because sexual harassment continues to occur even when we are working and learning virtually, prevention programs and training need to continue. Institutions are moving in-person workshops and training sessions to “static” online programs or real-time virtual learning using virtual meeting software and developing strategies to try to ensure these spaces are still safe for discussing sensitive topics and that they are engaging. Strategies for doing this include:

- Facilitators are using poll-everywhere and break-out room tools to provide individual engagement during the virtual learning

⁴Barak A. (2005) “Sexual Harassment on the Internet.” *Social Science Computer Review*, 23:1, 77-92.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0894439304271540>

- Support staff are being used during the training to focus solely on monitoring chat boxes, and break-out rooms to watch for escalation or bad behaviors.

Preventing Abuse in Relationships with Power Differentials

Federal Funding Flexibility:

Federal Agencies have publicly clarified how they can be flexible with existing grants and new proposal submissions ([NSF](#) - see OMB Memorandum M-20-17, FAQs, and page on the “Impact on Existing Deadline Dates; [NIH](#) - see FAQs and resources under Proposal Submission & Award Management). Sharing this information with those on grants (beyond Principal Investigators) could help to prevent those with lower power from being pressured into working when they are unable because of their own health or care responsibilities.

Response

Virtual Complaint Resolution Challenges

General Guidance on Things to Consider When Adapting the Complaint Resolution Process:

- Addressing Title IX obligations, due process, and student reasonable expectations in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://www.nixonpeabody.com/en/ideas/articles/2020/03/17/title-ix-inquiries-must-proceed-during-covid-19-crisis>

EXAMPLES:

- [## Privacy and Safety with using Virtual Meetings:](https://www.wisconsin.edu/sexual-assault-harassment/download>Title-IX-Investigation-Guidance(3).pdf</div><div data-bbox=)

Remote environments are generally not conducive for these sensitive conversations. Some students are expressing concern about doing a virtual Zoom interview and only want to do a phone call, if that. This can mean due process requirements are not met and institutions are trying to figure out what to do in that instance. There are also institutions that have decided, for a variety of factors (e.g., privacy, connectivity, resources, private location access), to delay Title IX hearings until on campus activities resume, but are continuing with investigations.

QUESTIONS:

- Are there more secure and confidential virtual meeting technologies that would help individuals feel more comfortable? Perhaps tools from medical settings that regularly have to deal with patient privacy?
- How might due process requirements need to be adjusted temporarily in light of the current situation?

Accounting for Support Needs During Investigations:

There are concerns about the ability for people to access needed support as they go through a potentially traumatizing investigation process. Because people are socially isolated they may not be able to turn to their family/therapist/friends for in-person support as they would normally. This means that going through the retraumatizing process of being interviewed, may be more harmful than previously when individuals had access to their support networks.

Privacy and Confidentiality with Digital Investigation Documents:

Confidential documents pertaining to an investigation were previously shared in a physical printed format to prevent electronic sharing. The current physical distancing practices make protecting confidentiality significantly more difficult and it is unclear how privacy and confidentiality can be protected if these documents are shared electronically. While file sharing software tools provide some protections, there are ways around them. To address this, some institutions are developing language to have parties sign an agreement to not screenshot or download.

QUESTIONS:

- Are there document sharing technologies from the medical fields or finance fields that could be used to ensure confidentiality when sharing these documents electronically?
- Is there a way to prevent screenshots being used to capture and share confidential documents?

Access to Technology:

There are also challenges with ensuring students or those that want to report or discuss sexual harassment experiences have the technology needed to participate in virtual meetings/conversations. Additionally, that instructions or how-to documents are provided for how the technology will be used.

Use of Interim Measures During Investigation Delays:

If the complaint investigation process can't happen virtually, then while it is suspended interim measures and remedies for complaints may need to be adjusted or stepped up. For instance, no-contact orders may need to be adjusted and reviewed to make sure that they robustly address the virtual environment as well as social media, and should account for the potential rise of virtual stalking.

Updating Resource and Reporting Information

Institutions are updating their resource lists and reporting information to reflect the virtual options available, how to get in touch, to note when in-person options are not available, and to note when the scope of services available has changed. As online tools and resources are developed and used, it is important to ensure they are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

EXAMPLES:

- https://www.washington.edu/provost/springquarter/?utm_source=uwhp&utm_medium=tiles&utm_campaign=coronavirus-spring-quarter#sexual-misconduct-response
- <https://livewellhuskies.com/uw-confidential-advocates-are-here-for-you/>
- <http://oeo.unm.edu/assets/docs/t9-covid-faq.pdf>

Responding When Witnessing Sexual Harassment in Virtual Spaces

Responding When it Occurs:

QUESTIONS:

- What training/quick tips can be provided to faculty/facilitators on how to address sexual harassment it when it happens during a virtual meeting or over a group message?
- How can bystander intervention strategies be applied to virtual settings?

RESOURCE:

- Guide from UC Berkeley on Responding: <https://diversity.berkeley.edu/guidance-responding-problematic-behavior>

Documenting Behaviors:

QUESTION:

- What training/quick tips can be provided to faculty/facilitators on how to collect digital evidence of harassment (i.e. saving a chat thread before ending online instruction)?

RESOURCE:

- Guide from UC Berkeley on Responding: <https://diversity.berkeley.edu/guidance-responding-problematic-behavior>

Support and Remediation

Notification of Virtual Services

Out of Office Messages:

Practitioners that provide services to support those experiencing sexual harassment and other harmful behavior are using “out of office” messages to share that they are able to provide virtual services even while campuses and buildings are closed.

Updating Resource Lists and Websites:

See section above on [Updating Resource and Reporting Information](#)

Providing Support Virtually

Changing Rules/Laws Around Providing Telehealth Services:

"Since the COVID-19 outbreak, mental health professionals of all disciplines have been struggling with keeping up with the changing rules/laws in each state related to providing mental health services via telehealth across state lines. This is particularly true for mental health professionals who work with college and university students, as many students are away from campus and might be in different states from where the university is located. Penn State University and the University of Texas at Austin teamed up to create a central resource with up-to-date information on the status of these rules/laws in each of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia for marriage and family therapists, professional counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers." This resources is available here:

https://cmhc.utexas.edu/state_telehealth.html

Supporting those in Harmful Home Environments:

In some cases home environments are dangerous, such as in cases of domestic violence and intimate partner violence, and stay-home directives are putting people at higher risk. For the folks who are confined at home with their abusers and/or who do not want the folks they share a home with to know they are seeking advocacy services, advocates and other response staff are taking steps and being intentional in how they communicate with individuals and provide support and resources.

Addressing Technology Limitations

In an acknowledgement that technology limitations may be a problem for those trying to access services, some practitioners have asked individuals to notify them of the technology constraints they have so a solution can be found. In some cases institutions are working to provide technology to individuals to enable them to access services, and in other cases when in-person support is urgently needed, organizations are finding ways to provide this safely.

EXAMPLES:

- https://provost.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/Faculty%20Advancement/Best%20Practices%20for%20Inclusive%20Remote%20Work_0.pdf

Providing Resources For Managing Physical Distancing, Social Isolation, and the Crisis Situation:

Training and resources are being developed that provide information about how to manage the challenges of physical distancing, social isolation, and the stress of a global health crisis. These include resources on topics such as "boundaries 101", communicating under stress, safety planning in isolation, raising awareness about services for those living in unsafe homes, and handling the emotional burden of crisis situations.

EXAMPLES:

- <https://livewellhuskies.com/>
- <https://sites.google.com/view/stanfordstudenthelppsite/home>

- https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-You-Should-Ignore-All-That/248366?cid=wsinglestory_hp_1a&fbclid=IwAR1L4UoWTTsVreiLNcbguY5nSFbFYAZgeg6x_nQsyQOufybeZIW1pf1BL7M

Advising and Mentoring Virtually

Students will continue to need advising and mentoring during this time, if not need it more, and individuals have begun to identify some strategies for converting in-person advising/mentoring into virtual mentoring/advising.

EXAMPLES:

- <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/03/23/advisers-will-need-develop-new-means-working-students-given-covid-19-opinion>

Providing Space for Survivors and Targets to Share Stories and for the Community to Support Them

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month and many in-person events were planned to support survivors and targets and to give them spaces to share their stories. While some campuses have rescheduled these events to when physical distancing is over, other campuses are finding creative ways to convert these spaces into the virtual world.

EXAMPLES:

- Stanford's Virtual Take Back the Night: <https://www.saamatstanford.com/tbtn>

Support for Sexual Assault and Harassment Survivors during COVID-19

A number of challenges based on the response to COVID-19 have been identified that complicate the ability for survivors to access the support they need. For instance, medical systems are overwhelmed leaving survivors with more limited access to urgent medical care; it is more difficult to access trauma-specific and therapeutic services; some may experience sexual harassment at heightened rates during this time because no one is paying attention to and checking abusive behavior in the workplace ([#MeTooVoter response to COVID-19 for Sexual Assault Survivors](#)).

RESOURCE:

- The National Women's Law Center, Justice for Migrant Women, National Domestic Workers Alliance and 'me too' International created a trauma-informed Toolkit for Survivors during COVID-19, which includes tips for survivors; tips for coping with triggers, coping with PTSD; considerations when seeking mental health support; and tips for those supporting a survivor: https://metoomvmt.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020-04-02_MeTooVoter_COVIDResponse_v2.pdf
- The "metoo." Movement compiled a list of resources and information on supporting survivors: <https://metoomvmt.org/advocacy/metoo-voter-response-to-covid-19-for-sexual-assault-survivors/>

Evaluation and Assessing Environments

Climate Surveys

Some institutions were in the process of initiating or conducting climate surveys. Some are delaying the launch of the survey to reflect that their community has limited bandwidth doing work.

Monitoring Virtual Environments

Some campuses are thinking about how to monitor virtual spaces for harassment and discrimination. What tools could be used to assess people's experiences on a regular basis to flag problems and what types of problems are occurring?

Organizations Providing Additional Information and Resources

[CAPPA \(Campus Advocacy & Prevention Professionals\)](#) is working to serve as a national resource and online space for sharing effective/new advocacy and prevention practices. Access to these resources is limited to those who are members of the group.

[SUNY Student Conduct Institute](#): recording of a [webinar](#) is available on "Charting the Uncharted: Addressing Changes To Investigations and Adjudications During Campus Closures and Times of Social Distancing"

UC Berkeley has created a [Toolkit on Creating a Healthy Virtual Environment](#): resources within this toolking are provided above in the document.