

Year 1 Public Description of Work for  
Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Vanderbilt University

**Surveying Faculty and Postdocs about Experiences with Sexual Harassment and Misconduct at the Institution**

**This Action Applies to Rubric Item(s):** 23 - Conducting a Climate Survey

**Description of Work:**

Vanderbilt University administered its first sexual harassment survey of Vanderbilt University-employed faculty and postdoctoral fellows and trainees in spring 2019. This institutional effort was informed by findings and recommendations released in the [National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine Sexual Harassment of Women Consensus Study Report](#) in 2018.

The Sexual Harassment Survey had several goals:

- Estimate the prevalence of sexual harassment of all forms for faculty at Vanderbilt.
- Assess the distribution of sexual harassment across groups of faculty.
- Compare faculty reports of sexual harassment to those of post-doctoral fellows (who completed the same instrument), to those of staff (who will complete the same instrument at a later date), and of undergraduate and graduate students (who completed the 2019 AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct).
- Provide a baseline for future surveys of faculty.

**Selecting the Instrument**

In 2018, the Office of the Provost decided to survey faculty about sexual harassment. The Office for Faculty Affairs in the Office of the Provost, in collaboration with the leadership of the Provost's Steering Committee on Initiatives Focusing on the Status of Women determined that there was no well-established faculty survey of experiences of sexual harassment. This finding is consistent with that reported by the National Academies in their 2018 study (National Academies 2018, 39). The National Academies' report, however, cited and analyzed results from longitudinal studies based on an instrument used by the U.S. military. The Department of Defense has been a leader in researching sexual harassment, developing a behavioral instrument that has been used regularly by the U.S. military and other organizations. The Department of Defense Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ-DoD) has been closely studied and evaluated by scholars. The standard SEQ-DoD has 23, five-option items divided into four subscales that measure four facets of sexual harassment: sexist hostility (sexist behavior), sexual hostility (crude or offensive behavior), unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion.

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Vanderbilt chose to use a more recently developed version of the survey known as the SEQ-DoD-s. Scholars developed a shorter version of the survey based on item response theory (Stephen Stark, Oleksandr S. Chernyshenko, Anita R. Lancaster, Fritz Drasgow & Louise F. Fitzgerald, Toward Standardized Measurement of Sexual Harassment: Shortening the SEQ-DoD Using Item Response Theory, 14 Military Psychology 49 (2002)). The resulting 16-question survey retains four questions for each facet of sexual harassment. It drops questions that were found to be redundant or failed to solicit meaningful responses.

The Vanderbilt University survey asked respondents to report whether during the respondent's past three years at Vanderbilt (or since they arrived at Vanderbilt if they started less than three years prior) anyone at the university had ever done any of the listed acts to the respondent personally. The available answers were never, once or twice, sometimes, often, or very often.

1. Repeatedly told sexual stories or jokes that were offensive to you?
2. Made unwelcome attempts to draw you into a discussion of sexual matters (for example, attempted to discuss or comment on your sex life)?
3. Treated you "differently" because of your sex (for example, mistreated, slighted, or ignored you)?
4. Made offensive remarks about your appearance, body, or sexual activities?
5. Made gestures or used body language of a sexual nature which embarrassed or offended you?
6. Displayed, used, or distributed sexist or suggestive materials (for example, pictures, stories, or pornography which you found offensive)?
7. Made offensive sexist remarks (for example, suggesting that people of your sex are not suited for the kind of work you do)?
8. Made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic sexual relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it?
9. Put you down or was condescending to you because of your sex?
10. Continued to ask you for dates, drinks, dinner, etc., even though you said "No"?
11. Made you feel like you were being bribed with some sort of reward or special treatment to engage in sexual behavior?
12. Made you feel threatened with some sort of retaliation for not being sexually cooperative (for example, by mentioning an upcoming review)?
13. Touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable
14. Made unwanted attempts to stroke, fondle, or kiss you?
15. Treated you badly for refusing to have sex?
16. Implied faster promotions or better treatment if you were sexually cooperative?

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### **Survey Content and Mode of Administration**

The survey measures four facets of sexual harassment: sexist behavior, crude or offensive behavior, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. Each type of sexual harassment was measured using four questions. Respondents were asked to limit their answers to the last three years or since they arrived at Vanderbilt, whichever is shorter, and to only report incidents that have occurred at Vanderbilt and involved members of the Vanderbilt community. The full instrument was approved for implementation by the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The Sexual Harassment Survey was administered as a web survey by a third-party vendor, AnswerKey Technologies. Row-level, identifiable response data is maintained by AnswerKey Technologies exclusively to maintain anonymity. Each page of the web survey included links to general questions as well as resources such as University support centers and services and national rape crisis hotline numbers. Web survey pages also included the third-party vendor's Help Desk phone number to aid participants who needed technical assistance.

The survey was administered in spring 2019 to all full-time, active Vanderbilt University-employed Vanderbilt faculty (N=1,498). Emeriti, part-time, and VUMC-employed faculty members were excluded from the survey population. The Office of the Provost as well as other offices and academic leaders reached out to participants to encourage them to complete the survey. A news story as well as reminders about the survey were posted on MyVU. Participants were not incentivized at the University or school/college level to complete the survey.

### **Survey Procedures and Response Rates**

The Sexual Harassment Survey was launched on April 2, 2019. Email invitations to participate in the survey were sent to faculty's university email addresses through AnswerKey on the first day of data collection. An email from Susan Wente, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, was sent prior to the first email notifying faculty about the survey. To prompt completion of the survey before the deadline, reminder emails were sent from AnswerKey, university deans, and vice provosts. The survey closed on April 30, 2019.

Overall, 60.3% of faculty and 56.1% of postdocs responded. The faculty response rate was above 50% in all schools and colleges. Female faculty were slightly more likely than male faculty to complete the survey. Gender was not associated with response rate for postdocs. The high response rate provides greater confidence in the results as approximating the experiences of the population of faculty and postdocs.

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### Reporting and Using the Survey Results

In fall 2019, Vanderbilt issued separate reports on the Faculty Sexual Harassment Survey and the Postdoctoral Sexual Harassment Survey in conjunction with the release of the university's report on the results of the AAU campus climate survey, which was administered shortly before the faculty and postdoc sexual harassment surveys. All relevant materials are available on Vanderbilt's Gender Harassment Portal:

<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/genderharassment/campus-surveys/>

The survey results have and will continue to serve as the basis for developing and implementing evidence-based policies and practices to support university faculty and postdocs. Vanderbilt plans to survey faculty and postdocs in 2022-23, relying on the same instrument to allow for longitudinal comparison.

The survey is part of a broader project at Vanderbilt to consider the ways that gender harassment and discrimination affect faculty, staff, postdoctoral fellows and trainees, and students and to develop innovative and effective responses.

#### Website for further information (if applicable):

<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/genderharassment/campus-surveys/>

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