

# Statement of Commitment to Zero Tolerance of Harassment and Discrimination

The Association of Schools and Programs in Public Health (ASPPH) and our member schools and programs are committed to eliminating harassment and discrimination in academic public health. It is essential to provide all our students, staff, faculty, and community partners with respectful and safe learning and working environments. We oppose acts of harassment and discrimination in all forms, while we simultaneously work towards developing schools and programs that are directed by cultural competence and humility, inclusivity, and diversity.

There should be zero tolerance for acts of harassment or discrimination in academic public health. As we aspire to apply this zero-tolerance mandate, we envision that the cultures of all of our schools and programs will be free of any forms of harassment and discrimination.

## How We Got Here – Points of Understanding

ASPPH and our member organizations acknowledge that harassment and discrimination exist in academic medicine,<sup>1</sup> nursing,<sup>2</sup> and science and engineering<sup>3</sup>; in many other branches of academia<sup>4</sup>; and even in academic public health. We affirm that the consequences of harassment and discrimination can include decreased performance by individuals, within organizations, and throughout society as a whole.<sup>5,6</sup>

We are concerned about the broad spectrum of harassing and discriminatory behavior. Rape and sexual assault reflect the criminal side of this spectrum; the physical and psychic violence experienced by survivors of these acts are most often horrific. We are also concerned about the other side of the spectrum, which includes all forms of harassment and discrimination that do not rise to the levels of criminal violence or civil rights violations (e.g., microaggression,

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<sup>1</sup> Jagsi, R., Griffith, K. A., Jones, R., Perumalswami, C. R., Ubel, P., & Stewart, A. (2016). Sexual harassment and discrimination experiences of academic medical faculty. *JAMA*, 315(19), 2120-2121.

<sup>2</sup> Castner, J. (2019). Healthy Environments for Women in Academic Nursing: Addressing Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination. *Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*, 24(1).

<sup>3</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). *Sexual harassment of women: climate, culture, and consequences in academic sciences, engineering, and medicine*. National Academies Press.

<sup>4</sup> Pyke, K. D. (2018). Institutional betrayal: Inequity, discrimination, bullying, and retaliation in academia. *Sociological Perspectives*, 61(1), 5-13.

<sup>5</sup> Rotenstein, L. S., & Jena, A. B. (2018). Lost Taussigs—the consequences of gender discrimination in medicine. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 378(24), 2255-2257.

<sup>6</sup> Raver, J. L., & Nishii, L. H. (2010). Once, twice, or three times as harmful? Ethnic harassment, gender harassment, and generalized workplace harassment. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(2), 236.

belittling, berating, and bullying).<sup>7,8</sup> These behaviors are also detrimental to the mental health of victims and to the cultures of communities and organizations. Furthermore, if not opposed, this type of conduct can lead to an impression that even more toxic forms of behavior may be tolerated.

ASPPH and our member organizations also acknowledge that harassment and discrimination have not been confined only to inappropriate actions taken by male-identified cisgender individuals against female-identified cisgender individuals.<sup>9</sup> We believe that harassment and discrimination may be better understood as actions taken by those who abuse their power and privilege in settings that permit intolerant and unethical behavior.<sup>10</sup>

Universities are among the oldest institutions in human history that have been devoted to understanding and improving the human condition, by promoting student scholarship and engagement with society. As such, universities have a special obligation to address conditions that threaten to erode their values and missions and to negatively impact their climates and cultures. To paraphrase American Psychologist Carl Rogers, human beings are driven to activate and express all of their capacities. If so, each individual should have the right, particularly within our institutions of higher learning, to pursue those capacities in climates and cultures that are free of harassment and discrimination.

ASPPH and our member organizations affirm our obligation and commitment to eliminating harassment and discrimination within the public health academy, just as our colleagues have done in medicine and other fields.<sup>11,12</sup> Academic public health should not be left behind in this important work.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Nemec, P. B., Swarbrick, M., & Legere, L. (2015). Prejudice and discrimination from mental health service providers. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 38(2), 203.

<sup>8</sup> Bleich, Michael R. (2015). Microaggression and its relevance in health care. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing* 46.11, 487-488.

<sup>9</sup> McDonald, P., & Charlesworth, S. (2016). Workplace sexual harassment at the margins. *Work, employment and society*, 30(1), 118-134.

<sup>10</sup> Tenbrunsel, A. E., Rees, M. R., & Diekmann, K. A. (2019). Sexual harassment in academia: ethical climates and bounded ethicality. *Annual review of psychology*, 70, 245-270.

<sup>11</sup> Bates, C. K., Jagsi, R., Gordon, L. K., et al. (2018). It is time for zero tolerance for sexual harassment in academic medicine. *Academic medicine*, 93(2), 163-165.

<sup>12</sup> Walsh, M. N., & Gates, C. C. (2018). Zero Tolerance for Sexual Harassment in Cardiology: Moving From# MeToo to# MeNeither. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, 71(10).

<sup>13</sup> O'Neil, A., Sojo, V., Fileborn, B., Scovelle, A. J., & Milner, A. (2018). The# MeToo movement: an opportunity in public health? *The Lancet*, 391(10140), 2587-2589.

## Where We Go From Here – A Public Health Approach

In 2019, the ASPPH Board of Directors convened a Task Force charged with developing a statement of commitment to “zero tolerance of sexual harassment and discrimination” and to propose recommendations for further actions that ASPPH might take. The nine members of the Task Force, chaired by Perry Halkitis (Rutgers University), are recognized experts in their respective fields and reflect various leadership positions within ASPPH member schools and programs of public health.

As a group of public health professionals, ASPPH and its member organizations will be directed in our efforts by the tenets of public health: human rights, social justice, and health equity. We will take proactive steps to prevent harassment and discrimination from occurring in the first place. We will actively seek to understand the characteristics of our institutions and to address the power differentials that can enable harassing and discriminatory behavior within our organizations. We will work to change our cultures and systems to stop harassment and discrimination. We will focus efforts on developing institutional climates that foster inclusion for all individuals.

Through ASPPH’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee and Diversity and Inclusion Section, we can enable our members to (1) share best practices developed and implemented successfully at their own institutions; (2) develop new strategies for addressing harassment and discrimination, as new knowledge becomes available and our understandings evolve; (3) determine how best to implement new approaches within their own organizations; and (4) empower organizational leaders by providing the tools needed to pursue approaches that are consistent with federal and local laws, as well as university bylaws and policies.

We envision the ongoing development of strategies that combat harassment and discrimination and become embedded in organizational cultures. We will encourage each member institution to enact zero tolerance approaches which align with their respective federal and local laws and university policies. We expect that these approaches will change as laws, policies, and evidence evolve. Moreover, we anticipate that this *Statement of Commitment to Zero Tolerance of Harassment and Discrimination* will also evolve and change over time.

Recognizing that efforts to prevent and reduce sexual harassment and violence require a long-term process of culture change, ASPPH is committed to providing training to organizational leaders, faculty, and staff. The Diversity and Inclusion Committee and the Diversity and Inclusion Section will make recommendations to ASPPH members about appropriate training topics and instruments

We envision that this document will be analyzed and discussed throughout all segments of ASPPH and our member organizations. It is our intent that this process will allow leaders in the academic, research, and practice segments of public health to apply the document in ways that are most appropriate for their professional disciplines.

## Proposed Tenets for Developing Zero-Tolerance Strategies

We propose 5 tenets with supporting action items that can be used by organizations to develop zero-tolerance strategies towards harassment and discrimination.

### Anti-Harassment and Anti-Discrimination Policies and Trainings

- Develop policies on harassment and discrimination, as many institutions already have.<sup>14</sup>
- Develop trainings that educate the academic community on current harassment and discrimination policies and procedures.
- Create trainings aimed at changing inappropriate behaviors, challenging biased norms and beliefs, and promoting respect and civility.
- Foster climates in which trainings are taken seriously and in which expectations for faculty, staff, and student participation and engagement are explicitly communicated.
- Identify, examine, and address policies, processes, and practices that have undermined institutional responsibility and accountability for addressing misconduct and for promoting a culture that fosters aspirational achievement.
- Periodically update and publish information about institutional policies and trainings, to keep them in sync with the evolution of social conditions, and to be sure they reach all faculty, student, and staff, taking into account the turnover that can occur in these populations.

### Identifying and Reporting Harassment and Discrimination

- Train individuals to recognize harassment and discrimination.
- Promote bystander intervention in the event of any witnessed harassment or discrimination.
- Encourage and facilitate reporting by those who are subjected to harassment and discrimination as well as by those who witness such acts.
- Empower individuals to report acts of harassment and discrimination in real time.
- Provide safe ways, including with the use technology, to report harassment and discrimination.
- Create a culture of accountability so that acts of harassment and discrimination do not go unpunished.

### Protecting Victims of Harassment and Discrimination

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<sup>14</sup> For example, University of Arizona, University of Georgia, New York University:

<http://policy.arizona.edu/human-resources/nondiscrimination-and-anti-harassment-policy>

<https://eoo.uga.edu/policies/non-discrimination-anti-harassment-policy>

<https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/anti-harassment-policy-and-complaint-procedures.html>

- Provide support, including resiliency training, for individuals who are targets of harassment and discrimination.
- Follow not only institutional but also legal policies and procedures when charges of harassment are made.
- Adopt mentoring networks including peers and senior faculty to diffuse the hierarchical relationships between faculty and students that lead to power differentials.
- Create a system of accountability so that individuals who harass and discriminate are not protected.
- Foster an environment in which it is safe to pursue difficult conversations without fear of retaliation.

### Communicating and Transparency

- State clearly and follow closely legal procedures that are in place to protect due process.
- Inform communities that individuals will be held accountable for violating harassment and discrimination policies and procedures.
- Be as transparent as possible about how reports of sexual harassment are handled.

### Shifting the Culture

- Create systems to integrate values that emphasize diversity and respect.
- Commit to changes in the power dynamics at academic institutions.
- Address institutional norms that have been shaped by centuries of power and privilege held by a select few.
- Improve transparency and accountability.
- Create a pipeline of leaders who reflect the diversity of our society.
- Demonstrate zero tolerance for the use of words that are demeaning, disparaging, or which seek to silence.