



COUNCIL SPECIAL DISCUSSION

August 22, 2018

“What role(s) should ACS play in preventing sexual harassment in the sciences?”

Introduction

ACS President Peter K. Dorhout introduced and led a special discussion at the Council meeting in Boston on “what role(s) ACS should play in preventing sexual harassment in the sciences?” He highlighted several recent articles, workshops and studies that have called attention to the issue, notably,

- a symposium, “Science of Sexual Harassment” organized during the ACS National Meeting in New Orleans (Spring 2018) by the Women Chemists Committee and *Chemical & Engineering News*; and
- a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine consensus study report: “Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine” (2018).

He directed Council’s attention to existing ACS codes and initiatives to address sexual harassment, and offered items for discussion and possible action:

- More signs/information at National Meetings regarding our policies and supporting information.
- Trained volunteers at national meetings for reporting sexual harassment.
- A webinar on preventing sexual harassment for local sections or divisions.

The [ACS Volunteer/National Meeting Attendee Conduct Policy](#),¹ [The Chemical Professional’s Code of Conduct](#),² and the recommendation, [“Encourage involvement of professional societies and other organizations”](#),³ from *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine* were included in the [Council agenda](#)⁴ as background materials for the discussion.

Survey

To help inform the discussion and stimulate input, a brief survey was conducted using the electronic audience response system. The questions and responses follow.

1. ***Have you ever witnessed or experienced sexual harassment at an ACS meeting or ACS event?*** (413 responses)

Yes 23% (94) No 77% (319)

[During the comment session, a Councilor requested that the question be modified and posed separately to first the women and then to the men. It is included here.]

Have you ever witnessed or experienced sexual harassment at an ACS meeting or ACS event, or in your professional workplace or learning environment? (Asked of women and men separately; 182 women / 223 men responded)

	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
Yes	77% (141)	57% (127)
No	23% (41)	43% (96)

2. ***How familiar are you with the ACS Codes and initiatives for professional conduct?*** (417 responses)

Very Familiar	38% (157)
Vaguely Familiar	46% (192)
Not Familiar	16% (68)

3. ***Has your local section or division instituted a sexual harassment policy of its own?*** (419 responses)

Yes	3% (12)
No	73% (309)
Don't know	23% (98)

For Discussion – Possible Action

After the survey, Dr. Dorhout listed prompts for discussion or consideration for possible action, and invited Councilors to address them in their comments from the floor:

- More signs/information at national meetings regarding our policies, with supporting information
- Trained volunteers at national meetings for reporting sexual harassment
- A webinar on preventing sexual harassment for local sections and divisions
- Councilor input: what other roles should ACS play in preventing sexual harassment in the sciences?

Comments from Councilors (*Redacted for clarity*)

Speaker 1: One recommendation I would make is that either the Committee on Divisional Activities or Committee on Local Section Activities might potentially provide some draft documents based on existing policies that local sections and divisions could adopt.⁵

Speaker 2: I agree, and obtained yesterday a Word document of the National Meeting Volunteer and Attendee Policy. I'm modifying that for local sections. I've already spoken to LSAC about collaborating to make that template available.

Speaker 3: We left out regional meetings and regions (boards). The Northwest Region...has modified that national policy and it is available on our website. If we can have signage (at meetings) that says, "Do not record these talks" we can have signage that says, "Treat each other respectfully."

Speaker 4: We have to take a much higher profile on this issue. We need to take the lead nationally, to make sure that every local section, every region, every aspect of ACS has some sort of policy and that everybody knows about it.

Speaker 5: I suggest we look at what [the American Geophysical Union] has been doing, because the report does call them out specifically...it's like 12 very proactive components.⁶

Speaker 6: Is there any consequence for our Society members who are known to have committed sexual or other discriminatory acts on their campuses? Should they still be allowed to be members? Should they be allowed to attend meetings? [There] probably needs to have a better more straightforward way to report these items, so that folks who are ... reluctant to come forward have a ...safe space.

Speaker 7: I would suggest that not only should there be policies in place, there should be enforcement publically of those policies. [Example given of 2009 textbook language.]

Speaker 8: It's more than what we can do at local section or regional meetings. It's sexual harassment in the workplace or in the classroom, and you have to make policies where you can enforce...Let's do something about sexual harassment. Let's do something where we can enforce it. ...The Chemists Code of Conduct needs to be widely distributed...it has to go back to the workplace.

Speaker 9: We could do some sort of video where it's like choosing your own adventure, much like the Office of Research Integrity does for NIH.

Speaker 10: The prompt was phrased as a question of action, and action needs to be taken. To assist in preventing sexual harassment ACS needs to be proactive – clear, readable and obvious signage needs to be present as part of the registration process, at all poster sessions and halls showing the ground rules and the sections of the code of conduct specifically about sexual harassment. We need to develop a buddy culture where we encourage bystander intervention – nominate members of the technical programming group to monitor poster sessions and opportunities for unwanted attention. Incorporate identifying and preventing sexual harassment in our mentoring programs. Most importantly, ACS needs to develop a functional and clear reporting system and a capable and empowered response team to handle complaints.

Speaker 11: I think we need to turn our attention more to how to improve [the] organizational climate. [The NAS report has] so many suggestions for professional societies. My hope is that WCC will continue this work... [and] that it be widely published.

Speaker 12: [Twenty-five] years ago I led the team to author the University of South Carolina sexual harassment policies. I noticed two difficulties, and I noticed that same problems with ACS policies. The first...is a definition of sexual harassment. The second are the adjectives 'zero' and 'tolerance' to describe the word 'policies.'

Speaker 13: To make sure that everybody understands the policy...when they sign up for ACS membership, they have to click on a pop-up window that says they've actually read that conduct policy.

[**Speakers 14 and 15** requested additional polling of women only, and then men only, on a modified version of the first survey question posed at the beginning of the discussion. See results in "Survey" above.]

Speaker 16: WCC is pleased to see this discussion topic included on the Council agenda, and hopes that it expands to include committees and divisions. WCC has a Sexual Harassment Task Force; is concerned about sexual harassment not only at national meetings but at local and regional meetings. The NAS report is focused on academic settings – WCC represents women in all employment sectors. The topic of sexual harassment is an issue of personal health and safety, which ACS should prioritize. Councilors should share reflections with the task force at wcc@acs.org.

Speaker 17: We need a culture shift in what we expect from our members in all settings. We need to act like it is a core value...and drive it...across all our organizations.

Speaker 18: ...while we are advanced on societal issues like diversity...we are behind the curve on this issue, looking at how many divisions and sections have nothing. We need to give our members who are volunteering and working on our outreach a lot of assistance because [the issue] varies from state to state; the laws are different, [e.g.,] what you have to report, what you have to look for.

Speaker 19: This is a huge issue in educational institutions. We need to be able to bring these people [harassers] into some type of situation where they're going to be held responsible for their actions. We have great [policies]. Let's just amend them to make them appropriate for different sections, but let's get working on this.

Speaker 20: I'd like to advocate for communication on this issue as being essential for awareness and compliance with the policies. We need short, concise statements with well-designed graphics. I'd like to volunteer the Chicago Section and the Great Lakes Regional Meeting as a laboratory for effective graphical communication on this issue.

Speaker 21: Awareness is the first step. We saw the steps, we realize how important this is, now we can move. Many of us are already engaged in various ways of improving the climate. But behavior is modeled and we are the modelers. We need to remember that.

Speaker 22: This conversation...needs to involve graduate students in particular because of the generational gap that's frequently there and the difference in power and the voice. Many graduate students don't feel that they have enough voice in what happens in their career (and that's directly linked to what they're doing in graduate school). So frequently they don't know how to bring up the conversation when it has to deal with sexual harassment.

Speaker 23: We need to get comfortable having uncomfortable conversations [and] discussions. This needs to be embedded into our committees, departments, meetings, workplaces. Having a reporting place is critical. How we navigate wanted and unwanted sexual advances is critical to our professional atmosphere.

Speaker 24: The national office needs to have the constant presence and be willing to swoop in to the local level when an issue has arrived.

Speaker 25: One point early on was on equity and inclusion. I would like to see this broadened to the fullest extent, beyond sexual harassment to include broader harassment issues. There are models out there.

Speaker 26: In addition to reporting mechanisms that are visible to all members, it is critical that we follow up with the complainants so that they know we are taking them seriously.

Speaker 27: As one of the countless survivors or victims, I'd like to beg everyone here: if you see something, please do something.

Speaker 28: I think this is a very important subject, and it should be even beyond just the sexual. It is critical to our future that we always treat everybody with respect. We have to be role models in this.

Speaker 29: [Could we know about in some manner] known convicted sex offenders and make sure that they are not in our leadership; make sure they're not our invited speakers; make sure they can't interact somehow if [they're] in membership. It's quite embarrassing when you have to remove someone. Just proactively, can we use that some way?

Follow up Actions

- A statement will now be included on the national meeting registration form requiring registrants to indicate acceptance of the *ACS Volunteer/National Meeting Attendee Conduct Policy*.
- ACS will participate in the Societies Consortium on Professional Conduct to Prevent Sexual Harassment in STEM, organized by AAAS. The consortium was created to help societies, research supporting organizations, and academic research institutions address the key recommendations of the National Academies' June 2018 [Consensus Study Report on Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering and Medicine](#).

References / Notes

¹ <https://www.acs.org/content/dam/acsorg/about/governance/councilors/volunteer-and-national-meeting-attendee-conduct.pdf>

² <https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/careers/career-services/ethics.html>

³ <https://www.nap.edu/read/24994/chapter/9#184>

⁴ <https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/about/governance/councilors.html>

⁵ <https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/membership-and-networks/ls.html> See the "Volunteer Conduct Policy" in the "What's Important Now" box at upper right.) The Committee on Local Section Activities (LSAC) approved the policy in 2015. LSAC modified the *ACS Volunteer National Meeting Attendee Conduct Policy* for adoption by Local Sections.

⁶ <https://harassment.agu.org/>