



## Office of Employment Equity

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The Office of Employment Equity (OEE) serves faculty, staff, and students from all Rutgers campuses who believe that they have been subjected to harassment or discrimination. As an office within University Human Resources, we coordinate prevention, education, and the harassment complaint process.

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Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is dedicated by law and by purpose to serving all people on an equal and nondiscriminatory basis.

## Office of Employment Equity

## Harassment on Campus: *A Guide for Students*

**Y**our years at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, are a time to examine a world of new ideas. You'll be exposed to many different points of view and you will heartily disagree with some. But always, in the classroom and beyond, you should be able to explore and learn in an environment free of the fear and intimidation of harassment.

Harassment strikes at the core of academic values, which are founded on the free expression of ideas and opinions. It is particularly inappropriate in an academic setting because it silences opinions, curtails the expression of ideas, and reduces the opportunity for students to learn and to grow. If you feel that you are being harassed on the basis of your

- race
- religion
- color
- national origin
- ancestry
- age
- sex
- sexual orientation
- gender identity and expression
- disability
- atypical hereditary cellular or blood trait
- marital status
- civil union status
- domestic partnership status
- military service
- veteran status
- any other category protected by law

this brochure will guide you to the resources you need to resolve the issue. Copies of the complete Policy Prohibiting Discrimination and Harassment and the Harassment Complaint Process are available on request through the Office of Employment Equity, or on the office's website at <http://uhr.rutgers.edu/equity>.

## What is harassment?

Harassment is any conduct directed toward an individual or group based on one or more of the categories covered by the university's nondiscrimination policy that creates an intimidating, offensive, or hostile environment and is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter an individual's employment conditions, educational environment, or participation in a university activity. The university's policy against harassment also prohibits retaliation against anyone who complains about harassment, is accused of harassment, or assists in an investigation of harassment.

Rutgers takes harassment very seriously. It has dedicated substantial resources to investigate and resolve claims of harassment and to protect victims of harassment. The Office of Employment Equity was created to coordinate the university's response to harassment complaints on campus.

If you are the target of harassment, if you witness harassment, or if you have been accused of harassing someone else, we encourage you to take advantage of the resources Rutgers offers to eliminate inappropriate and offensive behavior.

## I feel I'm being harassed, but I'm not sure. How can I tell?

Harassment takes many different forms, from inappropriate comments to the display of offensive material. Harassing behavior can be subtle or overt, frequent or a one-time occurrence. Harassing behavior must be based on one of the protected traits noted above. Key elements of harassment include:

**Power:** At its core, harassment is an effort to gain power over someone else. People who use harassment tactics usually have more power or status than their victims, and they generally use this power to gain control of, maintain their power over, or obtain favors from their victims. If you feel demeaned because of someone else's behavior, or find yourself acting against your own best interests, you may be the target of harassment.

**Frequency and/or severity:** Harassment is intimidating behavior that is severe enough, or happens often enough, to cause the person it's directed against to do something the person otherwise would not do. For instance, if a graduate teaching assistant calls another student by a racial epithet day after day, so that the victim avoids going to a particular class, that might very well be harassment.

### What is harassment within the graduate student/mentor relationship?

Many harassment complaints from graduate students stem in some way from the student/mentor relationship. When a professor treats a student who belongs to one of the protected groups differently from other students, or wants to have a relationship with a student that seems inappropriate, harassment may be occurring.

Romantic or sexual liaisons are one problematic area, even when they are or appear to be consensual. Other students may feel that they are at an academic disadvantage because the sexual relationship appears to be a condition of obtaining the professor's attention, or a student may find it difficult to end an affair because the professor has the power to significantly affect his or her academic career.

### What should I do if I feel that I am being harassed?

- Take careful notes of any harassing behavior so that you can remember exactly what happened, when, and who else was there.
- Tell someone you trust what is happening.
- If you feel it is safe to confront the harasser, tell him or her that you find the behavior disturbing. Sometimes people do not know their behavior is offensive to you, or they want to believe that you welcome the behavior.
- If you want to confront the harasser, you may find it helpful to rehearse a phrase with a friend ahead of time so that it will automatically spring to mind when you need it. "Don't use that word in my presence," or "Please don't stand so close; it makes me uncomfortable," is easier to say if you have practiced.
- Tell the harasser's supervisor.
- Call the Office of Employment Equity at 732-932-3020, ext. 4030, to speak to someone, or to get a list of trained harassment advisers throughout campus. (The list is also available on the office's website at <http://uhr.rutgers.edu/equity>.) Then choose an adviser and make an appointment to talk with her or him.
- If you do not feel safe confronting or reporting the harasser, the adviser can tell you about other steps you can take.
- If you feel you are being harassed by another student, contact the dean of students in your college or school.

There are many reasons why it is important to act as soon as possible. Most importantly, the sooner you take action, the sooner you will be able to change a situation that is unpleasant or possibly dangerous for you. The sooner you act, the more detail you will remember. If there are witnesses to the harassment, they will be easier to find and will remember what happened more clearly.

### Why should I call an adviser?

Harassment advisers have been specifically trained to work through harassment issues. The adviser will listen to you, tell you about the resources that are available, and discuss your options with you. The adviser can also coordinate the complaint process.

### What options do I have for dealing with harassment?

Depending on your situation, there are different ways to address the issue of harassment.

**Informal:** You may choose to address the problem informally, by letting the person whose behavior is bothering you know about it and asking that the person stop. The harassment adviser can help you do this, or even do it for you so you can remain anonymous.

**Formal:** You may want to pursue a formal charge. This can result in a full investigation by the appropriate university body (depending on whether the people involved are students, faculty, or staff) and disciplinary action, if appropriate.

**University action:** The university has an obligation to address harassment swiftly and effectively. The university may use informal or formal means to address harassment once it is aware that harassment may have occurred.

### Will anyone else know about my meeting with the adviser?

Only those who have a need to know will be told about the complaint. If the issue is resolved informally, all identifying information may be kept confidential. However, in a formal complaint, because the accused person might be subject to discipline, he or she will normally be given a chance to respond to a written complaint signed by the accuser. Investigators will advise witnesses to be discreet. Your parent(s) will not be told if you complain of harassment.

### Should I report harassment even if I'm not the target?

Yes. Victims are often afraid to report harassment themselves. You can help to create a safe and open atmosphere for everyone by reporting any incident of harassment you witness, whether you're involved or not. Your report can be completely anonymous if you wish.

### How quickly will something be done?

If your safety, or the safety of others, is an issue, the university will take immediate action. In all cases, the university will act as quickly as possible to resolve the issue. However, you should know that an investigation could take time. In many cases, interim steps can be taken (such as changing class assignments) that will separate you from the offensive behavior while the problem is being resolved.