

Lafayette College
Easton, Pennsylvania 18042
March 2, 1981

President David W. Ellis
Markle Hall
Lafayette College
Easton, Pennsylvania 18042

Dear President Ellis:

Thank you for your letter of February 6. We are glad that attention is being given to procedures for dealing with sexual harassment. Enclosed is a copy of a letter which we have sent to Mr. Mignon, responding to some of the questions which you raise.

We would like also to share with you our renewed concern about the issue in the wake of the "back-to-the-womb" party held by Delta Upsilon on February 21. The party displayed not only bad taste, but also psychological and symbolic violence against women. Probably not all of the students responsible for the party intended it in that spirit, but that does not condone their participation.

Your letter suggests that in cases such as this, the Professional Women of Lafayette and the Association of Lafayette Women help to channel female students' complaints to Dean Sivulich and Dean Kissiah. We will do so when we can, but that method of redress is too haphazard to be generally effective. The kind of intimidation, hostility, and offensiveness (to paraphrase our proposed definition of sexual harassment) that occurred on February 21 is widely perceived as sanctioned behavior at Lafayette College and is therefore not usually reported to anyone. We have heard rumors of serious acts of harassment by individual students which were also unreported because the victims saw no hope of redress without embarrassing publicity.

What is needed is an official prohibition of activities like the Delta Upsilon party. We urge that the administration demand that the fraternity apologize publicly, under threat of punitive action and with the understanding that such behavior will be punished in the future. We urge further that to discourage the recurrence of such incidents, the college publicly prohibit employees and college-affiliated groups from engaging in sexual harassment (defined to include actions demeaning to women), that a female administrator be officially designated to hear reports of such harassment and to initiate investigations, and that a system of substantial penalties be announced and carried out. Such action is essential if Lafayette College is to remain a humane institution.

Yours sincerely,

Carolynn Van Dyke
Hara Wood-Yeske
Stacey Schlar
Kathleen F. Mieligan
Susan J. Tidalie
Dorothy Cielicki
John R. Henning
Professional Women of Lafayette

(over)

cc: President, Delta Upsilon
Dean Kissiah
Barbara C. Travaglini
Mr. Joseph J. Mignon, Director of Personnel
Committee on Athletics and Student Affairs, Board of Trustees
Dean Sivulich

Janet L. Loka

Mercedes B. Sharpless

Mrs. Lowcock

Susan P. Brown

Blanca L. Haendler

Maryann M. Valiulis

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Mr. Joseph J. Mignon
Director of Personnel
Markle Hall
Lafayette College
Easton, Pennsylvania 18042

Dear Mr. Mignon:

In a letter dated February 6, 1981, President Ellis informed us that you are coordinating the investigation of policies on sexual harassment. He also explained some of the specific questions which you will be addressing. Because the issue is of great concern to us and because President Ellis asked last fall for our help, we would like to share with you some of our responses to his letter. Copies of our correspondence with him are enclosed.

We endorse all of his concerns with one exception: we feel that the prevention of unjust accusations is not feasible and should not be a criterion for policies on sexual harassment. It has never been possible to prevent such accusations concerning other forms of harassment, such as slander and assault, but the protection of potential victims has generally been held to justify procedures for redress despite the risk that such procedures might be abused. To suppose that this issue is particularly likely to involve unreasonable accusations would be prejudicial to women. Perhaps the best way to minimize such accusations is to ensure that the college community understands the established procedures for reporting, investigating, and punishing sexual harassment.

With regard to the establishment of due process and the closely related issue of confidentiality, we urge that a female administrator be officially designated to hear all grievances and to initiate investigations. A director of personnel may be the logical overseer for complaints of employees, but we believe that any male official would seldom be approached by sexually harassed women unless they knew him personally. At the same time, surely a female dean would inspire enough respect to discourage any irresponsible accusations and could be depended upon to maintain confidentiality. Accusations at large could still be made, of course, but they can be made now.

President Ellis correctly points out that some of the terms in the definition of sexual harassment which we have proposed are subjective. We nonetheless strongly endorse that definition, pending the report of the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, because it is that of the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission with "employment decision" and "working environment" amended to "employment and academic decision" and "working and educational environment." As in all such legislation, the application of the definition to specific cases would be part of due process--the responsibility, presumably, of the campus official who handled the complaints and perhaps of a judiciary council.

We have written to President Ellis in response to his concern about handling sexual harassment of students; a copy of our letter is enclosed.

We are pleased that preliminary action is being taken on this important issue. We would be happy to help in any way, and we look forward to hearing from you.

cc: President Ellis