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AAU Harassment Survey Shows Higher Levels of Faculty Misconduct Against Grad Students

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Although students remain far-and-away the largest perpetrators of harassment, assault and stalking against both undergraduates and graduates, teaching assistants and faculty are more likely to commit such incidents when the victims are “graduate/professional” students than when they are undergraduates, a new survey shows.^[1]

Overall, undergraduate students had “higher rates of harassment than graduate/professional students,” the survey found, with rates of 31.3% for undergraduates and 19.9% for graduate/professional students, according to a landmark, 33-school survey of more than 180,000 students commissioned by the Association of American Universities (AAU).

But nearly 25% of female graduate/professional students who reported being sexually harassed said the perpetrator was a “faculty member or instructor,” compared to only 5.5% of undergraduate women. Similarly, 6.5% of graduate/professional women who had been stalked “reported a faculty member, compared to 1.3 percent of undergraduate women.”

These data points are among those in the AAU report that compliance and oversight officials and others in leadership positions concerned with federal research support may find particularly noteworthy. Issued Oct. 15, the report comes on the heels of increasing focus by U.S. agencies and Congress on rooting out sexual misconduct among federally funded investigators.

AAU said the findings “will help...colleges and universities in their ongoing efforts to address the critical problem of sexual assault and other sexual misconduct.”

A total of 181,752 students at 33 institutions participated in the survey, which was conducted online. Undergraduates totaled 108,221; 73,531 were graduate and professional respondents. Public institutions accounted for 85,777, and 95,975 respondents were from private schools.

The survey is a follow-up to one conducted in 2015 but is not entirely comparable. That survey included 21 schools. Questions are also different in the two surveys.

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