



SOCIETIES CONSORTIUM

ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN STEMM

An initiative to advance *professional and ethical conduct, climate & culture*

CASE STUDY LIBRARY

Case Study 4. The Distressing Annual Meeting

Case Study 4 addresses: incidents at conferences; incidents during conferences, but off-site; incidents involving people who are too big to fail; and incidents involving structural inequity, i.e., a combination of structural/cultural/institutional barriers that create the inequity.”

A biracial, gender non-conforming, recent Ph.D. applying for a university fellowship attends a society annual meeting, arranged by the society’s in-coming President, who is also chair of the department offering the fellowship, to vet leading candidates. The Ph.D experiences microaggressions and bias—comments/questions that are dismissive, demeaning, stereotyped, “old-school,” and inattentive to identity needs.

Case Study 4. Volume II

- I. Facts and Scopes of Issues
- II. *Facilitator Guide: Reflections***
- III. Facilitator Guide: Analysis

Overview – Facilitator Guide: Reflections

This guide, which provides “pause & process” questions raised by Case Study 4’s facts, is for review by facilitators to prepare for group discussion and may be used during facilitation. Each of its color-coded segments corresponds with the same color-coded segment of Case Study 4, Volume I (Facts and Scopes of Issues) and Volume III (Facilitation Guide- Analysis). These questions invite the facilitator to prepare to encourage learners to consider the facts and events from a variety of perspectives, with a lens of empathy and reduced defensiveness, and to identify actions that might have prevented or mitigated the associated harms.

Introduction

Pause & Process

1. **From Dr. Smart’s, ACEA’s, and TU C-Eng.’s perspectives**, what are the potential benefits and pitfalls of regulating or not regulating networking, and other employment interviews and opportunities at society meetings or events?
2. From **Dr. Smart’s perspective**, did ACEA’s stated mission help them to understand what conduct norms they could expect at the meeting?
3. Why did Dr. Smart write about their experiences in a journal rather than discuss their concerns with a colleague or mentor, or report their concerns to ACEA?

Day One – Morning (*excerpted from Dr. Smart’s Journal*)

Pause & Process

4. **From Dr. Smart’s perspective**, what is the likely impact of Dr. King’s statement: “We know the right person when we see him”? What message does that selection criterion convey about the climate and culture—and about merit?
5. **From the perspectives of ACEA, TU C-Eng., and the field**, would the impact on Dr. Smart be different if Professor King responded, “In addition to excellent research skills we are looking for a candidate who brings innovative perspectives and has demonstrated a strong ability to work collaboratively with their peers in the research laboratory”?

Day One – Lunch

Pause & Process

6. **From Dr. Smart’s perspective**, what might be the impact if Jane interrupted John, “Sorry to stop you, John, but I’d like to learn more from Dr. Smart—she’s one of Dr. King’s top candidates for the fellowship and has done exceptional research.” Impact from John’s perspective? Would the impact be different if Jane were able to say to Dr. Smart, “there are some “old school” types in the engineering department, but there are increasing opportunities for early career professionals to bring new ideas and influence policies.”
7. **From ACEA’s and TU C-Eng.’s perspective**, is it ever appropriate at a professional event to touch another person’s hair? Is it ever appropriate to comment on a person’s appearance (e.g., “I love your hairstyle”)? Should either answer be different based on the person’s race? Gender? Whether the person is a “work friend”?

Day One – Drinks in Lobby After the Meeting

Pause & Process

8. **From Dr. Head’s and Dr. Vol’s perspectives**, did ACEA’s mission statement help them to understand professional and inclusive conduct norms and expectations or the importance of society leaders role modeling such conduct?
9. **From ACEA’s perspective**, would its mission statement help it determine if a society member was acting at odds with its stated aims for diversity and inclusion? Would it have been helpful to have posters of conduct “Dos and Don’ts”? How about a meeting/conference policy prohibiting society business from taking place in hotel rooms or other non-public spaces?
10. **From Dr. Smart’s perspective**, what might be the impact if Dr. Head instead interrupted Dr. Vol, took him aside and said, “Come on, my friend, business meetings don’t belong in hotel rooms—that would make anyone in Dr. Smart’s position extremely uncomfortable and won’t do anything but cause trouble for you”—and then came back to say to Dr. Smart, “I wish I could stay, but I know Dr. Vol wants to continue the conversation right here or in the hotel lounge.” Impact from Dr. Vol’s perspective?

Day Two – In Between Morning Meetings

Pause & Process

11. **From Dr. Smart’s perspective**, what might be the impact if the staff member had said instead, “I am so sorry for the inconvenience, I will talk to the hotel and make sure a gender-neutral bathroom is available within the half-hour?”
12. **From ACEA’s perspective**, could/should the society have waited until it was asked to make arrangements? Does it matter if no one who registered identified as a gender non-conforming person?
13. **From Dr. Smart’s and ACEA community’s perspectives**, what might be the impact if ACEA had indicated in meeting materials that they chose a venue for the annual meeting with awareness of the safety of all participants?

Day Two – Lunch and Meeting with Professor and Students

Pause & Process

14. Can you identify the comments that reflect identity-based, stereotyped assumptions about Dr. Smart? What would you expect their effect to be on Dr. Smart? Should their effect be assessed individually or cumulatively? Does it matter who made the comments? How would these experiences at the conference have affected your interest in the field if you were in Dr. Smart’s shoes?
15. Is legal compliance, while necessary, enough to create inclusive and equitable climate and culture in fields? Is a pronouncement of welcome—or even “zero tolerance” for harassment—in a society’s or institution’s policy enough? What aims and key content define an effective ethics policy? What associated action is needed?
16. Given Dr. Smart’s position as an early career professional, how could the behavior they encountered impact their career trajectories? What special concerns and challenges arise when considering early career professionals—generally and who have marginalized identities?
17. Were there any ways that Dr. Smart could have raised a generalized concern? Had they done so, what could ACEA and TU C-Eng. have done in response?
18. Had the society and department each provided and advertised the availability of a confidential advisor (e.g., an ombudsperson or ally), how might that have changed Dr. Smart’s experience?
19. From ACEA’s perspective, if no one is reporting concerns about their experiences at society meetings, can ACEA assume nothing problematic is occurring? How could ACEA assess experiences without relying on reporting alone?
20. This case study detailed experiences at a society meeting, how could the harms Dr. Smart experienced be amplified in other settings or situations?