



SOCIETIES CONSORTIUM ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN STEM

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

CASE STUDY LIBRARY

Case Study 1. The Dinner Party Dilemma

Case Study 1 addresses: an “incident occurring in fieldwork, off-campus social gatherings, or labs (outside the classroom), including in isolated areas of campus, and involving alcohol.”

A tenured associate professor, who leads an influential research program that provides paid undergraduate internships, hosts a party at his house, serving students alcohol and engaging them in a sexually provocative ice breaker. As the party is ending, one of the students, who is also applying for an internship, visits the research laboratory with the professor and reports on Twitter that the professor subjected her to inappropriate sexual innuendos and advances.

Case Study 1. 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 1’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 1, 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.

1 Introduction

Pause & Process

1. **From the University’s and AAB’s perspectives**, what are the potential benefits and pitfalls of regulating or not regulating networking, and other informal employment opportunities, at an off-campus, social event? Is it clear in the Codes of Conduct and Ethics whether off-campus events are regulated?

2 The Dinner Party

Pause & Process

2. **From Professor Smith’s, the University’s, and AAB’s perspectives**, was it appropriate for Professor Smith to serve alcohol at a dinner at his home attended by students and early career professionals?

3 The Ice Breaker

Pause & Process

3. **From a student’s, post-doc’s, and faculty member’s perspectives**, did the University’s or AAB’s conduct policies help them understand expected conduct norms at the dinner party?
4. **From a student’s and post-doc’s perspectives**, did the conduct policies offer guidance on how to respond to the ice breaker if they were uncomfortable?
5. What might have been the impact if the postdoc had interrupted the ice breaker at the beginning, taken Smith aside, and quietly said, “Professor Smith, I know you’re just trying to have some fun and help students get to know each other better, but this game’s focus on body and sex can make people uncomfortable and land as harassment. Even if they don’t want to play, the students will feel compelled because you’re their professor. You could say you have another idea, and ask each person to share a

talent, or interest, or an experience, and add an aspiration about themselves that the group might not know”?

6. What might have been the impact if a few students had banded together to say they didn't feel comfortable and suggest a different game?

4 Late-Night Visit to the Lab

Pause & Process

7. **From Jennifer's, Dr. Smith's, the University's and AAB's perspectives**, did the University's or AAB's conduct policies provide meaningful guidance to help them understand what professional and inclusive vs. harmful conduct looks like? Were the policies clear on the conduct norms and expectations for people in Jennifer's and Dr. Smith's positions in the laboratory and in the internship application process?
8. **From a student's and faculty member's perspectives**, did the University or AAB's conduct policies help them to understand the criteria that would or should be used to select interns?
9. Why did Jennifer post about her experiences on Twitter rather than discuss her concerns with University staff, or report her concerns to the University or AAB?

5 Follow-Up Actions

Pause & Process

10. **From the University's and AAB's perspectives**, were their mission statements and conduct policies sufficient to determine if a faculty or society member was in violation of the terms and spirit?
11. Given that the dinner party incident occurred, that Smith and Jennifer did go to the lab, though they don't agree on what happened there, and the fallout from Jennifer's tweet, what could the University and AAB have done in response?
12. 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?
13. Given the students and postdoc's status as early career professionals, how could the behavior they encountered impact their career trajectories? What special concerns and challenges arise when implementing policies in incidents involving early career professional.