



SOCIETIES CONSORTIUM

ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN STEMM

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

CASE STUDY LIBRARY

Case Study 3. After-Conference Socializing Goes Sideways

Case Study 3 addresses: incident(s) during conferences, but off site, including use of alcohol.

A female society board member, and tenured professor, attends an annual conference, accompanied by selected students, as their faculty advisor. The group celebrates the faculty members' successful research presentation with dinner and drinking. The faculty member and some reluctant students accompany other students who plan an outing to a gay bar with a notoriously sexually explicit cabaret show. Hotel staff notice the inebriated group when they return to the hotel and notify society staff who implement a response protocol.

Case Study 3. Volume I

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

Overview – Facts and Scopes of Issues

The facts and scope of issues detail the events that took place during the case study. They invite the learner 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

Tenured Professor Jones is female identifying and on the faculty of a selective research university, where she directs a research program. Dr. Jones' twin sister is also a scientist in a different field of study. Dr. Jones' sister identifies as lesbian, and Dr. Jones has witnessed firsthand many biases and barriers experienced by her sister. In particular, her sister has recounted many times when she has felt excluded from networking and social events at scientific conferences in her male-dominated field.

Dr. Jones is also a board member of the Association of Scientists (AOS), and attended AOS' annual conference with four graduate students from her university as their assigned Faculty Advisor. After a competitive selection process, the university paid the registration, travel, meal and lodging fees for the students, several whom also worked in Dr. Jones' lab. It was some of the students' first time attending a professional society meeting. Professor Jones was scheduled to present her latest research at the conference. The night before, Professor Jones met with the students at the hotel restaurant to discuss her presentation. The conversation was lively, and the group stayed at the hotel bar well after 11pm discussing the research. They all agreed to meet again the next day to have dinner together after the presentation was completed.

Both the Professor and students were required to register for the event. The registration process required participants to read and acknowledge AOS' Policy on Diversity and Inclusion and its Meetings Code of Conduct, which requires a harassment-free and inclusive environment with a safe and positive experience for everyone, including that unacceptable behavior will not be tolerated at any time prior to, during or after an event and that a participant can be removed from the meeting without warning in response to an incident of unacceptable behavior. The society shared these goals and expectations in all conference written and electronic materials and trained all conference staff on them. The society also created an app whereby staff and members could report incidents (though not anonymously). AOS also trained hotel and conference center staff on their role in implementing the guidelines and expectations.

2

The Evenings' Events

The following day Professor Jones presented her paper and received much acclaim from society members and the science media who were present. As previously agreed, the students and Professor Jones met for dinner at the hotel restaurant. During the jovial dinner, Professor Jones told the graduate students that they could order whatever they wished for this celebratory meal, because it was "on the university." All in attendance consumed alcohol. At the end of the meal, Professor

Jones asked the students what they were going to do for the rest of the evening. One of the students said, “I heard of a really cool gay bar with a red-hot cabaret show in the area, and a few of us are going.” Professor Jones asked if she could join them. The students agreed.

3

More of the Evenings’ Events

Professor Jones ordered two Ubers using her university credit card and she took the group of students to the bar. She also paid the students’ club entry fee. While drinking throughout, the group watched the highly sexually charged show, featuring performers dancing in scantily clad costumes insinuating sexual acts. Professor Jones clapped wildly and exclaimed, “Hell, I’m a rock star scientist. I deserve this.” She then took off her shirt, exposed her bra, and started dancing with the performers in scantily clad costumes insinuating sexual acts. At least some of the students laughed and seemed to be enjoying the evening. After a while, Professor Jones ordered two Ubers that took the students back to the hotel. The hotel security guard noticed the boisterous group of obviously inebriated students, accompanied by Professor Jones, stumbling toward the elevators and asked Professor Jones for her name and whether the students were okay. Professor Jones laughed, gave her name and said everyone’s fine, as they all fell into the elevator.

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After the Incident

The head of security then contacted the AOS Chief Diversity Officer (‘CDO’) to alert him to the behavior that was observed and gave him Professor Jones’ name. The CDO contacted the President of the society, and they decided to immediately institute the Society’s protocol to respond when a potential incident involving misconduct, or implicating the safety of meeting participants, may have occurred.

The AOS CDO contacted Dr. Jones to find out what had occurred during the evening and asked her for the names of the students. Once he learned of the details of the outing, he questioned the students to determine if they were harmed or felt in danger. The students all agreed that there was no threat of harm to them, acknowledged that a lot of drinking was involved, and confirmed that there had been no inappropriate touching or sexual advances. Several students noted that they were not comfortable with attending but didn’t want to “ruin the fun” for the other students.

The AOS CDO confirmed that Professor Jones’ account was similar to that of the students. The CDO then contacted the university’s Title IX Coordinator. While waiting on a follow up response from the institution, the CDO and President conferred and agreed that based on their established zero tolerance policy regarding unacceptable behavior, and in accordance with their protocol, Professor Jones should be immediately removed from the conference. They contacted Professor Jones, told her of the decision, and asked for her to leave the premises and all conference activities immediately.

When the AOS CDO spoke to the university Title IX coordinator, the CDO said that the society would defer to the university’s decision on whether the students could remain at the conference. However, the CDO emphasized that the students would be at the conference with no Faculty Advisor. As such, given the poor judgement exhibited by the students while on a university sponsored trip, the institution instructed the students to return back to campus immediately.