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Position Statement on CCCC Standards for Ethical Conduct Regarding Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment, and Workplace Bullying

Conference on College Composition and Communication

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Executive Summary

The goal of this position statement is to outline expectations of ethical conduct by CCCC members as they relate to sexual violence, sexual harassment, and workplace bullying, building upon NCTE's Mutual Respect and Anti-Harassment Policy applied to all NCTE events. This position statement is meant to facilitate a greater understanding of ethical conduct as it pertains to sexual violence, sexual harassment, and workplace bullying as they occur in a range of contexts among postsecondary teachers and researchers in the profession as well as students and other stakeholders served by CCCC members. CCCC condemns sexual violence, sexual harassment, and workplace bullying in any form and seeks to foster a sense of responsibility among members as they combat these forms of ethical misconduct. This statement offers a glossary for understanding such misconduct, as well as resources on reporting sexual misconduct and workplace bullying, and resources on professional ethics.

Introduction

Given histories of sexual misconduct and workplace bullying within academia broadly and our profession specifically, CCCC forwards this statement on sexual violence, sexual harassment, and workplace bullying to help protect vulnerable or subordinate populations from harm incurred, knowingly or unknowingly, by teachers, researchers, and administrators. This document aligns with long-held positions of numerous prominent scholarly organizations (see Resources: Professional Ethics below) and builds upon the foundation laid by NCTE's Mutual Respect and Anti-Harassment Policy to address sexual harassment, sexual intimidation, and unwelcome sexual attention, with the addition of workplace bullying, as these behaviors apply specifically to postsecondary teachers, researchers, and administrators in the profession.

CCCC is committed to protecting the rights, safety, dignity, and well-being of those involved in our research, our teaching, and in the range of professional training environments that occur within the field of writing studies/rhetoric and composition. CCCC further has a commitment to creating conditions supportive of professional competence, honesty and fairness, professional and scholarly responsibility, and contributing to the public good. Thus, CCCC condemns sexual violence, sexual harassment, and workplace bullying in any form.

To behave ethically within national organizations necessitates an awareness of power differentials among students, teachers, administrators, researchers, research assistants and associates, research participants, peers, mentors, and mentees. Teachers and researchers are responsible for implementing ethical research and professional practices in association with institutional ethics review bodies such as departments, faculties, universities, colleges, community organizations, and funding agencies, as well as regional and national federations of faculty members.

This statement is intended to inform members' ethical judgments as they consider asymmetric and sometimes shifting power relations—in relation to position titles, identity politics, institutional norms, etc.—among themselves and others they work with in professional roles. The role of CCCC as a professional organization is to serve as a forum for working through problems of research ethics, teaching practices, writing assessment, working with students, and for educating the public about literacy. Its powers of enforcement are limited to moral persuasion, public discussion, and the recommendation of resources for conflict resolution. We recognize that this statement's strength and requisite influence depend on its circulation, discussion, reflection, and use by CCCC members.

Sexual Misconduct and Harassment

CCCC does not condone sexual harassment, nor does it condone the disregard of complaints of sexual harassment from students, staff, or colleagues. While relationships between faculty and student, mentor and mentee are in some ways unequal, in some circumstances they might raise actual or perceived conflicts of interest. Such conflicts may arise when personal and professional relationships are mixed, and care should be exercised under those circumstances to protect the interests of less powerful parties. Use of asymmetric power by members of the profession resulting in sexual harassment of a student, a colleague, or a staff member is seen as unacceptable and unethical behavior by CCCC (a conference of NCTE).

Intent and Impact

Intentionality is of central importance when considering instances of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and discrimination, but the lack of intentionality should not be used or accepted as a blanket excuse for harassment or discrimination. The question of the impact of one's behavior is more important than the intent behind it. Conduct that impacts a member negatively as unwelcome, coercive, or nonconsensual is determined by the recipient of the behavior rather than the initiator. Sexual, racial, homophobic, transphobic, and other such harassment are abuses of power that negate both the principle of equal opportunity and the possibilities of a good working and meeting environment.

Asymmetrical Power Relations and Exploitation

Ethical behavior by CCCC is recognized as that which recognizes asymmetries in power that are distinguishable between members and does not exploit asymmetric power for personal gain. Asymmetric relationships might include relationships between teachers and undergraduate, graduate, and research students, as well as relationships that place an individual in a position to evaluate their colleagues or allocate resources to them. We define exploitation as engaging in conduct in order to obtain personal, sexual, economic, or professional advantages. CCCC members should be aware that such inequalities of power pertain not only in cases of overt sexual harassment, but also in relationships that involve consent and an attendant hierarchy. Members should take care to ensure that personal or sexual relationships entered into at work on a consensual and reciprocal basis do not exploit those inequalities of power and do not disadvantage or unfairly advantage the less powerful.

Decisions and circumstances involving professional ethical obligations often extend past an individual moment of contact: peer and senior members of the field may be positioned in varied ways in the future beyond a direct supervisory/advisory role. In thinking through situations of professional ethics, it is thus important to remember that the colleagues one encounters today may in the future be department chairs, colleagues with oversight responsibilities, committee members who hire faculty or award grants, reviewers for manuscripts, editors of professional journals, leaders in professional organizations, and writers of support letters for employment, tenure, and promotion cases.

Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying is bullying that occurs in any setting in which work-related activities happen and consists of a pattern of behavior or behaviors that persist over a period of time. These behaviors negatively impact the target of the bullying, interfering with the target's ability to do their job. While many behaviors can make up bullying—ranging from rumors and criticism to verbal abuse—research on bullying in the WPA workplace has shown that bullying behaviors often work to exclude and isolate, to undermine individuals and writing programs, to exert control over individuals and writing programs, and to intimidate through verbal or physical actions or attacks (see *Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace*). For a list of 22 workplace bullying behaviors as identified by the NAQ-R

(Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised), see the link below under Resources for Workplace Bullying. For a more thorough exploration of bullying specific to writing programs, see the CWPA Statement on Bullying in the Workplace (also below).

CCCC does not condone bullying in the workplace, nor does it condone the disregard of complaints of workplace bullying from students, staff, or colleagues. While relationships between administrators and faculty, faculty and faculty, faculty and student, as well as mentor and mentee are in some ways unequal, power relations are often complicated and shifting. Care should be exercised to protect the interests of less-powerful parties. Use of asymmetric power by members of the profession resulting in workplace bullying is seen as unacceptable and unethical behavior by CCCC.

Intent and Impact

As with sexual harassment and misconduct, workplace bullying may be intentional or unintentional, and it is the impact of the behavior that is at issue, not the intent. In fact, bullies often do not recognize their behavior as bullying. Many scholars of workplace bullying assert that it is the target who decides when bullying has occurred, while others suggest that behaviors can be deemed bullying when a reasonable person identifies abusive behaviors as such. Because workplace bullying can negatively impact the target's ability to do their work, the impact is more important than the intent.

Structural Risk Factors and Power Differentials

Major risk factors that contribute to the widespread presence of workplace bullying in higher education include the size of higher education institutions, the tenure structure, a ubiquitous lack of resources, and perceptions of unfair practices. Most important to this position statement is the risk that comes along with the hierarchical environment in most postsecondary institutions. For example, the strict reporting lines of tenure structures and departments can make it difficult to report bullying, particularly when one's supervisor is the bully or one's supervisor chooses not to address a colleague's bullying behavior. However, having a higher status in the tenure hierarchy does not necessarily protect one from being the target of bullying, particularly as power relations can change multiple times over the course of one's career and are affected by identity politics, disciplinary affiliation, mobbing, and other factors. Structural risk factors are typically outside the control of individuals, and targets are not to be blamed for being bullied. Therefore, we emphasize the professional ethical obligation for CCCC members to be aware of their own conduct and to respond as allies when they witness bullying as referenced in the following section.

Professional Ethical Obligations

Implicit in the idea of professionalism is for those in positions of authority to recognize that their relationships with others always involve elements of power, particularly in circumstances where they might be in a position to evaluate and endorse subordinates' work or to respond to sexual violence, sexual harassment, and workplace bullying they witness or to evaluate their own behaviors for elements of these destructive actions. It is incumbent upon members of the profession not to abuse the power with which they are entrusted.

CCCC recognizes that student members of the profession (whether undergraduate or graduate) as well as contingent and untenured faculty and faculty of color or from underrepresented groups may be particularly vulnerable in the power structure of the academy. For this reason, CCCC supports the position that all members of CCCC feel secure while at CCCC-sponsored events, and that members know that CCCC is concerned with their safety, dignity, and well-being as it relates to their professional lives.

Sexual Misconduct and Harassment

CCCC expects members to recognize and avoid exploitative behavior that manifests as coercive sexual contact or harassment and to be familiar with affirmative consent. Exploitive and nonconsensual sexual relationships undermine the atmosphere of trust among students, staff, and faculty on which the educational process depends and constitute unprofessional and unethical behavior. CCCC encourages in all members a sense of care and responsibility in making decisions in situations that invoke sexual ethics and to know, use, and promote training they've received in Title IX and Equity offices in their home institutions. CCCC expects members to be familiar with the NCTE Mutual Respect and Anti-Harassment Policy, which prohibits sexual harassment, sexual intimidation, and unwelcome sexual contact in all venues and events. CCCC supports in all members those reporting obligations set by Title IX, specifically, the expectation that members report witnessed

instances of sexual violence and sexual harassment in off-campus education activities. CCCC also acknowledges, however, recommendations offered by the AAUP for colleges and universities to avoid making faculty mandatory reporters. CCCC encourages members to be aware of the ways individual administrations and institutions elect to implement Title IX policy. (See “The History, Uses, and Abuses of Title IX” linked below.)

Workplace Bullying

CCCC expects members to recognize and avoid exploitive behavior that manifests as workplace bullying. CCCC encourages in all members a sense of responsibility in making decisions in situations that invoke professional workplace ethics and to identify and address workplace bullying they've witnessed or been told about. For suggested responses to workplace bullying, see the link below to the CWPA Position Statement on Bullying in the Workplace.

Appendix: Additional Resources

Definitions/Terms

Below is a glossary of terms used to talk about sexual violence, sexual harassment, and hostile environments. The glossary is informed by terms and definitions in *Unveiling the Silence: No!: The Rape Documentary Study Guide* (2007), edited by Salamishah Tillet, Rachel Afi Quinn, and Aishah Shahidah Simmons.

- *Accountability*: a willingness for one to have their behavior critiqued by others. If applicable, accountability can also mean taking responsibility for behaviors, actions, and errors that are unjust and accepting and acting on the need for a change to occur in recognition of this new understanding of a matter learned from the response of others.
- *Bullying*: As defined by the Workplace Bullying Institute, “workplace bullying is repeated, health-harming mistreatment of one or more persons (the targets) by one or more perpetrators. It is abusive conduct that is:
 - Threatening, humiliating, or intimidating, or
 - Work interference — sabotage — which prevents work from getting done, or
 - Verbal abuse”

[\(<http://www.workplacebullying.org/individuals/problem/definition/>\)](http://www.workplacebullying.org/individuals/problem/definition/)
- *Consent*: explicit words or actions that express a choice to participate in mutually agreed-upon sexual activity. It is imperative to note that affirmative or positive consent is not guaranteed when drugs, alcohol, medication, or any substance or circumstance that could impair someone has been used.
- *Harassment*: whether verbal, psychological, or physical, behavior that may discriminate or disempower others based on another person's race/ethnicity, gender identification, religious status, nationality or national origin, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability status, political beliefs or affiliation, chosen research or teaching area, or employment status. Harassment creates a hostile environment that compromises the professional freedoms, development, and performance of its victims and undermines the atmosphere of trust essential to the academic enterprise. Members of the CCCC are expected to create professional settings that foster respect for the rights of others.
- *NAQ-R (Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised)*: a 22-item survey instrument used to measure exposure to workplace bullying.
- *Perpetrator*: one who commits or has committed a crime against another. *Assailant* and *Offender* are also often used in this statement and elsewhere to refer to a perpetrator.
- *Rape*: a crime of forced, manipulated, or coerced sexual intercourse.
- *Rape Culture*: an environment in which attitudes, ideologies, and gender socialization justify (or do not challenge) nonconsensual sexual activity.
- *Sexual Harassment*: behavior in the context of a professional and educational environment in which one person is sexualized and objectified. Examples of such harassment include sexual comments or remarks upon another individual's body or sexuality; a quid pro quo in which sexual advances or acquiescence is accompanied by the threat of retaliation or a reward. Such

behavior is illegal in the United States under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments.

- **Sexual Violence:** unwanted or coercive sexual behavior, which can range from sexual bullying to rape. The terms *rape*, *sexual assault*, and *sexual abuse* can be used interchangeably and refer to coercive, forced sexual contact.
- **Victim Blaming:** holding the victim of a harm or assault, including sexually based crimes, responsible for having been assaulted.

Resources: Reporting Sexual Assault

[Reporting Sexual Assault to Law Enforcement](#)

[How to File a Title IX Complaint](#)

[The History, Uses, and Abuses of Title IX](#)

[Bystanders: Help Prevent Sexual Assault](#)

[How to Respond to a Survivor](#)

[What Consent Looks Like](#)

[No-Contact Orders](#)

[Intersections of Race and Sexual Assault](#)

Resources: Professional Ethics

[MLA Statement of Professional Ethics](#)

[AAUP Statement of Professional Ethics](#)

[Canadian Sociological Association Statement of Professional Ethics](#)

[Canadian Association of University Teachers Policy Statement on Freedom from Harassment](#)

[Canadian Association of University Teachers Policy Statement on Professional on Professional Rights and Responsibilities](#)

[American Association of Geographers Statement on Professional Ethics](#)

[American Association of Physical Anthropologists Code of Ethics](#)

[National Communication Association Code of Professional Ethics](#)

[American Sociological Association Code of Ethics](#)

[Organization of American Historians Code of Ethics](#)

[American Musicological Association Guidelines for Ethical Conduct](#)

[American Political Science Association Guide to Professional Ethics](#)

Resources: Teaching and Learning

[Unveiling the Silence: No!: The Rape Documentary Study Guide](#)

Resources: Workplace Bullying

[Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace](#)

[CWPA Position Statement on Bullying in the Workplace](#)

[NAQ-R \(Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised\)](#)

[Workplace Bullying in Higher Education](#)

[Workplace Bullying Institute](#)

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