

## Chapter 4: Talking About It

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The general Introduction to this book details its genesis, but the particulars of producing this chapter are noteworthy. As an initial step, participants interested in writing scenarios emailed me<sup>1</sup> and indicated the gist of each scenario they would like to write. The authors' backgrounds ranged from graduate students to full professors, and some authors wrote more than one scenario.

Once a list of contributors was solidified, I provided general advice to all authors, emphasizing that the purpose of the scenarios was not *exposé* or titillation. On the contrary, the purpose was to offer snapshots of a range of experiences that academics might encounter. Another important goal in composing the scenarios was to keep all authors anonymous so that no scenario could be tied/traced to any individual or institution. Interestingly, as I read the scenarios, I found that bits

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1. The introduction to this chapter was written by Patricia Freitag Ericsson, thus the use of first person pronouns in the first few pages.

and pieces of most of them (and a few of them in total) echoed my experiences in 35 years of higher education, which included working at a small university in the Great Plains, a technical university in the upper Midwest, and a land grant institution in the West.

The specific details I provided to the authors:

- a limitation on the maximum word count: approximately 1000 words and 4-5 discussion questions;
- a suggestion to look at the CCCC scenarios (<http://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/committees/7cs/tenurepromotioncases>) as well as the 2009 case study book (*Maybe I Should . . .*) by Hamrick and Benjamin;
- a caution that each scenario must be built from a patchwork of harassment possibilities, not drawn directly from any one author's individual experience;
- an additional caution that to protect each author's identity, names of people and institutions should be carefully masked.

I received the completed scenario drafts and checked each one for any identifying information which, if included, was deleted. Once all scenarios were uploaded to a Google Doc, all authors were invited to offer revision and editing advice. This part of the process was not anonymous; names of those offering advice were available to all authors.

Once the scenario drafts were revised and edited, the original authors were asked to revise and to once again email the revised scenarios to me. As in the previous iteration, the revised drafts were uploaded to a new Google Docs file. Final revisions were made by me and by three volunteers from among the scenario authors.

To support our goal of keeping authors anonymous, attribution for contributions to this chapter is not individual, but collective. Because of the collaborative process that was used, this attribution is indeed appropriate—beyond the necessity of privacy in dealing with a topic as fragile as this one. The psychic impact of drafting, reviewing, revising, and final editing of these scenarios was shared by all authors, not just individuals in the group.

As explained more fully in Chapter 3, the most effective way to prevent sexual harassment is to “bake” prevention into institutional culture. Typical sexual harassment training has little effect other than preventing institutions from liability. The 2018 *National Academy of Science Study, Sexual Harassment of Women Climate, Culture and Consequences* concluded that positive effects of sexual harassment training are more likely when it

- lasted more than four hours,
- was conducted face to face,
- included active participation with other trainees on interdependent tasks,
- was customized for the audience, and

- was conducted by a supervisor or external expert (Johnson, P. et al, p. 152).

This conclusion solidified our belief that the scenarios could be effective training materials.

Each scenario includes at least four discussion questions; consideration of these questions is strongly encouraged. Employing definitions from Chapter 2 can augment discussion of these scenarios. Use of each reader's or group of readers' institutional guidelines should unquestionably play a role in analysis as it relates to individual campuses.

Depending on readers' backgrounds, a multitude of theoretical lenses could also be used for improving analysis. Classical to Feminist Rhetorical Theory, Articulation Theory, Actor-Network Theory, Cultural and Gender Studies, Critical Race Theory, and more could be steps toward valuable insights. While analysis via personal experience should not be undervalued, particularly in analysis of emotionally laden incidents such as those in these scenarios, discussants are encouraged to augment the personal with other kinds of analysis.

Above all, and no matter which questions, definitions, or theories are employed in analyzing the scenarios, considering issues of power is vital. In fact, a strong argument could be made that all issues of sexual harassment are issues of power dynamics. Although most who read this book have likely considered or studied power relationships, a brief review of previous scholarship on power and sexual harassment is worthwhile.

In their 1984 book, titillatingly titled *The Lecherous Professor*, Billie Wright Dziech and Linda Weiner briefly discussed "powerlessness" and contend that "Women recognize early that power and sexuality are equated by society" (p. 82) and noted that student victims fear reprisals if they report sexual harassment. "Victims often believe that the authority of the professor equals power over their futures—in a sense, their lives" (p. 83).

Just a few years later, contributors to Michele Paludi's 1990 edited collection *Ivory Power* scrutinized (not surprisingly, given the book's title) power relationships. Kathryn Quina claimed, "The sexual harasser uses his age and social position, or wields economic power and authority as his weapons . . ." (p. 94). Vita Rabinowitz argued, "it is easy for students and professors alike to underestimate the power a professor possesses in his interactions with his students" (p. 104). And Darlene DeFour reached back to research from French and Raven's 1959 publication to understand categories of power: "(a) reward power, (b) coercive power, (c) referent power, (d) legitimate power, (e) expert power, and (f) informational power" (p. 46).

In 2006, Patrice Buzzanell and Kristen Lucas identified three gendered career dimensions: time, space, and identity. "The linear temporal orientation by which individuals classify and evaluate themselves and others has differential effects on the lives of women and men" (p. 166). Time in rank in the academic world can create a hierarchy in which women are disadvantaged, especially in experiencing

and reporting sexual harassment. Space is an issue because “individual movements and locations connote power” (p. 167). The authors noted that a neutral workplace can be changed into an intimidating one by a male “telling profane jokes or making sexual references to or advances on women” (p. 169). Identity, they wrote, has many facets, but has been discussed as the way in which “individuals form their understanding of themselves in relation to their work over time and how these identities shift as individuals face particular career and/or life changes” (p. 170). Titles and rank identifiers are important identity markers in academia. Such markers leave many with lower identity labels more susceptible to harassment. Thus, time, space, and identity are all dimensions that impact power relationships.

Fast-forwarding to 2016, Ellen Mayock’s *Gender Shrapnel in the Academic Workplace* does not directly name power, but it is an undercurrent throughout the text. Early in the book, Mayock argued “the gender norms of our homes and of our public interactions that consistently follow a patriarchal flow are replicated and entrenched in the workplace” (p. 6). Although not explicitly articulating it, Mayock’s assertion rests upon an understanding of patriarchal power. In explaining gender shrapnel, she analogized it to “a series of small explosions in the workplace that affect women and men and reveal an uneven gender dynamic at all levels of the organization” (p. 6). Explosions are power-full, no matter if they are small. Mayock’s “explosions” are grown in what Caroline Fredrickson (2017) called the “fertile territory” of academia. “Academia is particularly fertile territory for those who want to leverage their power to gain sexual favors or inflict sexual violence on vulnerable individuals” (para. 5).

Analysis and discussion of the scenarios that follow will not and cannot be easy and painless. Some scenarios may trigger difficult memories and reopen wounds. Care in dealing with readers’ responses is, therefore, absolutely necessary. The voices of the many, not the powerful few, must be evoked and heard if the scenarios are to serve their purpose—that of learning and creating cultural change that will make writing studies a more equitable landscape—a landscape that is not fertile territory for leveraging power, but one that is rich ground for cultivating fairness and an equipoise of power.

## Scenarios

### Scenario I: Writing Center Leadership

This scenario details a situation that may occur when tutors in a writing center are tasked with leadership responsibilities for which they may be unprepared or undertrained.

James is in his fourth year as the writing center director at University X. He is in a tenure-track position, but not yet tenured. After he was hired, one of the first projects he pursued was the development of a tutor professionalization initiative

that paired more experienced tutors with newly hired and less experienced ones. James asks “mentor” tutors to observe the sessions of “mentee” tutors twice per semester. In addition, mentor tutors are encouraged to occasionally reach out to their mentees to inquire about questions, concerns, or challenges they have regarding not only their work as tutors, but also how they are managing the labor of balancing writing center work with their other responsibilities as graduate students. For the past two years, James has assigned two mentee consultants to each mentor consultant. The program has been working well, until now.

Following a staff meeting with the writing center tutors, James is approached by a first-year Ph.D. student named Andrea. Having waited for her colleagues to leave the room, she discloses to James that another writing consultant, Rick, has been making her feel uncomfortable. She emphasizes to James that she, in her words, “doesn’t want to get anyone in trouble,” but explains that Rick will often greet her with a hug or sometimes walk with her, uninvited, to the class she has on Tuesday afternoons after her tutoring shift. She explains she is self-conscious about how this behavior looks; specifically, she is concerned that other tutors will think that she and Rick have a personal relationship beyond their work together in the writing center.

What makes the situation even more challenging is that Rick, a third-year Ph.D. student, is Andrea’s mentor tutor. He is also ten years older than Andrea. Not only is Rick studying writing centers for his dissertation, he has been selected to serve as the writing center’s assistant coordinator for the upcoming academic year, a one-year position awarded to advanced graduate students interested in developing their experience as a writing center administrator.

During her conversation with James, Andrea insists that she doesn’t want him to approach Rick about his behavior. She just wants James to be aware of it because she is planning to confront Rick herself if this behavior persists. She does, however, ask if she can forego participating in any mentor/mentee-related activities. James tells Andrea that because there are less than two months left in the academic year, the mentorship program is all but completed and that there is no need for her to interact with Rick in a mentee-mentor context. Furthermore, James asks Andrea if she would like her regular tutoring shifts to be rescheduled so that there is no overlap between her work schedule and Rick’s. She declines this invitation, saying the situation “is not that bad.” Andrea thanks James and asks him to keep their conversation about this matter confidential.

Two weeks later, Andrea visits James during his office hours. She is nearly in tears. After James asks Andrea if she is okay, she tells him that Rick just confronted her in front of the other tutors. She explains that after her initial discussion with James about Rick’s behavior, she started to dodge Rick whenever they were both working. On this day, however, Rick approached Andrea in between two of her sessions and asked if everything was okay because she has been “acting weird.” He also asked her if he had done anything wrong. Apparently, several days earlier Rick sent Andrea an email requesting that they meet

for coffee to discuss her first year as a writing consultant. She did not respond to this request.

After he approached her in the writing center, Andrea told Rick that everything was fine and that she just had a lot of work to do. According to Andrea, Rick then asked when they could get coffee. Feeling even more uncomfortable, Andrea told Rick that she didn't want to get to coffee and that she needed to get back to work. At this, Andrea says, Rick "lost it" and proceeded to lecture her about how if she wanted to be a successful writing consultant she needed to take her work more seriously. At this point, all activity in the writing center came to a temporary standstill. Andrea then asked another consultant if they could cover her next scheduled appointment and immediately came to James's office.

Unsure how to proceed, James thanks Andrea for coming to speak to him, expresses his sympathy that she must cope with Rick's behavior, and tells her that he needs to consult with his own supervisors. For the time being, he says, she does not have to work her scheduled writing center hours when Rick is also scheduled. Even though James has a tenure-track appointment in English, the writing center is funded through Academic Affairs. While the Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs signs off on the writing center's budget, she otherwise does not exert any administrative oversight of the writing center's day to day business, nor does the English department. For these reasons, James is unsure who exactly to contact about this matter.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. Should James take into consideration the gender dynamics of mentor-mentee pairings?
2. During their first conversation, Andrea asks James to keep this discussion confidential. Even if Andrea did not report activity that on its face is recognizable as harassment—especially when Andrea herself does not identify this activity as such—what options does James have?
3. In this scenario, the writing center exists in a liminal position relative to the university's bureaucracy. Its director has a tenure-track position in English, but the funding for the center comes through Academic Affairs. How should James proceed? What college/university policies or procedures might exist to help navigate this scenario?
4. Depending on how this situation gets resolved, what are some strategies for moving forward, especially if Andrea and/or Rick continue as writing tutors? How should James discuss this matter with other writing center staff, if at all?

### **Scenario 2: International Student-Teacher/Advisor**

This scenario considers the possible complications that might arise when an in-

ternational graduate student requires employment to stay in the country and is uncomfortable with the professor she is working for.

Putre is an Indonesian graduate student at X university, holding an F1 student visa and working as a TA in her department. Starting her third semester she focuses on her thesis research with the intent to apply to Ph.D. programs after graduation. To maintain lawful residency in the U.S, Putre plans on obtaining an Optional Practical work visa (OPT). This visa allows Putre to work for a full year after graduation as a research assistant to her advisor, Dr. John Smith, while waiting for her Ph.D. program to begin.

However, for the past year, Putre has started feeling that Dr. Smith's friendly gestures toward her don't seem quite right. Putre and Dr. Smith frequently work in his office, usually sitting around a small table with their laptops open. Putre feels he pulls his seat or leans his head too close to hers when discussing something related to their research or looking at her computer screen. She tries to avoid these situations by moving her computer closer to his side to allow him a clearer view, but he always manages to push the computer back towards Putre and pull himself closer to her again. Sometimes Putre can smell his breath and cologne and often, Dr. Smith complements the smell of her perfume and hair products. This makes her so uncomfortable that she stops using perfume purposefully every time she has a meeting scheduled with him.

Although Putre feels uncomfortable, she is not sure if Dr. Smith's behavior is harassment, and she suspects he is blind to her discomfort. Putre admires Dr. Smith highly for his intelligence, guidance and support, and she believes she is growing as a scholar because of his mentorship. Putre suspects that her discomfort stems from cultural differences: perhaps Americans are not as private and conservative as Indonesians? However, Putre does not consider herself to be too conservative, and she has other male faculty members, colleagues, and friends who communicate with her closely, giving her hugs on occasions without causing her any discomfort. For some reason, Putre feels guilty and embarrassed by the whole situation. On one hand, she might be making a problem out of nothing, and on the other, she might inadvertently be giving Dr. Smith the green light by not saying anything about how his behavior makes her feel.

At this point, the situation is starting to cause Putre a significant amount of anxiety. Dr. Smith is the only professor in her department who really seems to understand and care about her research. He was the only one to have offered her a temporary job after graduation. If she was to tell him she is not comfortable with the way he physically gets close to her, he might feel offended, change the way he treats her as an advisor, move her to another faculty advisor, or most importantly, withdraw his research assistant job offer to distance himself. However, the other option sounds as bad to Putre: if she does nothing, the situation might remain the same or even get worse over time. Putre considers ignoring the whole situation to focus on her master's degree. She wishes to graduate without further complications, hoping that she will have a better chance to figure things out after that.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. As a colleague or friend of Putre's, what advice would you give her? How might your own clusters of beliefs, experiences, and values influence the way you respond?
2. Putre feels limited in how she might address her working situation. If she chooses to share her concerns with Smith, what might happen to her, to Smith, to other students and faculty, to the department, and to the university as a whole? Conversely, if Putre chooses to remain silent, what might happen to her, to Smith, to other students and faculty, to the department and to the university as a whole?
3. If a student's legal residence is dependent upon employment, what resources, training, and existing community should be available for students, staff, and faculty to help anticipate, address, and facilitate healthy working relationships between international students and the professors/programs they work for?
4. How do differences in culture complicate already challenging power dynamics between students and professors? What resources are available at your institution that help address and facilitate healthy working relationships between international students and the professors/programs they work for?

### **Scenario 3: The Chair Retires?**

This scenario details what might occur when an accused aggressor has retired but harassment still continues as a result of the aggressor's remaining relationships with faculty and staff.

The chair was retiring. His protégé had recently been promoted to a level where she could replace him. The last hires he had been responsible for were now finishing their first year successfully. One of them, a young Latina scholar, Julia Gonzales, had broken away from the chair's mentorship (without explaining why to anyone). She had, nonetheless, been given a new contract. The election for a new chair was uneventful, and the outgoing chair graciously promised to be around to give advice.

In February the following year, Julia approached Henry Garratt, the one young and untenured member of the Appointments Committee. Other than Henry, the Appointments Committee was dominated by the old guard of the department. Julia told Henry she was worried about her annual review, even though it was to be conducted by the new chair. Julia said she knew that, at the behest of the past chair, the new chair was "out to get her." Henry asked why. She explained that she had refused the old chair's advances. This experience had led Julia to refuse further contact with the old chair. He had tried to make her feel as though she "owed" him and they, according to her, had bitter parting words.

Henry promised to keep an eye on things, but he said there was very little he could do if Julia was not willing to bring a grievance—something she felt she might not be able to do given that the aggressor had retired. Neither Julia nor Henry was sure, so Julia decided not to pursue the question.

Julia's second annual review was quite critical. Julia's third-year contract was issued, but she was worried that she would be denied a fourth-year contract based on a review whose negativity, she felt, stemmed from the influence of the past chair.

The most senior member of the Appointments Committee, Joanna Stetson, had been a close colleague of the retired chair for more than twenty years and was now serving as senior advisor to the new chair. Joanna volunteered to observe Julia and write a teaching review; the report was scathing. That, along with Julia's poor annual review, made the likelihood of a new contract remote. Julia asked for a second observation, which the chair herself completed. It, too, was negative.

Alarmed, Julia began telling others about the situation, always tracing it back to the retired chair and always adding that she thought there might be a racial element as well. She continued to refuse, however, to initiate any action, feeling it was pointless and dangerous, for it was the old chair's friends who were now harassing her in his stead. Once again, Julia spoke to Henry and to her dean, who told her he could do nothing more than watch the situation and make sure that all required protocols were adhered to. He told her that she could write rebuttals for her file in all three instances but Julia declined to do so.

The following year, when it came time for the department's Appointment Committee to make its renewal recommendations to the college Personnel and Budget Committee, almost everyone in the department was aware of the situation because Julia had spoken openly about it. In the meeting, Henry was trying to argue the case for Julia when a knock came on the door of the conference room. It was Julia, who wanted to present her own case. Such a thing was unheard of; no protocol was in place that allowed for candidates up for renewal to plead their case. She was told no and was asked to leave the area, which she did not do. The Committee ended the meeting and decided to reconvene at a later day.

The Appointment Committee's vote was not to be made public; the report only went to the Promotion & Budget Committee where it would not be announced to the public either. Julia eventually received a non-renewal letter, a decision that could only be appealed directly to the university president. Julia appealed the decision.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. Henry, the young professor on the Committee, decided to meet privately with the president, apprising her of the situation. When the non-renewal was eventually appealed, the president overruled it, allowing Julia to remain in the institution's employ. Was Henry's visit to the president appro-

- appropriate give the situation's history? What kind of disclosure responsibility, if any, does Henry have to his colleagues and/or to Julia?
2. When someone, as a result of perceived harassment, is unable (for whatever reason) to act rationally in their own defense, should another step in—even if having no direct knowledge of the truth of the harassment charge?
  3. At which points in the scenario could Julia choose to take other actions? What actions could she have taken? What may have prevented her from doing so?
  4. What are the limits to what one can do for a colleague?

### Scenario 4: Faculty/Staff Dynamics

This scenario considers the dynamics between department faculty and staff, especially when it comes to socializing outside of work.

Jennifer was recently hired by the Department of Writing and Rhetoric at XYZ University as the new administrative support specialist for undergraduate studies. In addition to managing adjunct contracts, serving as an assistant to the director of first-year writing, and maintaining syllabi and other records for the department's general education courses, she also moderates the department's social media feeds and assists with various PR initiatives on an ad hoc basis. Three weeks into this new position, Howard Smith, a tenured professor in the department, invites Jennifer out for drinks with other department faculty and staff. Jennifer heard that these outings, which usually occur on Fridays, are a fairly common and informal affair. She told Howard yes. When Jennifer arrived at the bar where these gatherings typically occur, Howard was there with a group of seven other department faculty and staff members.

The following week Howard again dropped by Jennifer's office to invite her out for drinks. Even though it was a Thursday—Jennifer assumed everyone only went out on Fridays—she had a good time last week getting to know some of her colleagues, so she again told Howard that, yes, she'd like to attend. Around 4:45 that afternoon, Howard dropped back by Jennifer's office and invited her to walk with him to the bar.

When they arrived at the bar, however, Jennifer didn't see anyone else from the department. Furthermore, and much to Jennifer's surprise, Howard asked the greeter for a table for two. At this point, Jennifer felt uncomfortable. While she had a good time with everyone the previous week, Howard had made this sound like another informal departmental gathering when in fact this meeting was more like a date. But Jennifer was unsure how to interpret what Howard had done. Did he "ask her out" in the romantic sense? Or was this just his way of trying to be friendly? The ensuing conversation was pleasant enough—Jennifer kept their talk focused on work-related topics—but after 30 minutes she told Howard she had a previously scheduled engagement and needed to leave.

Over the next three weeks, Howard didn't ask Jennifer out for drinks again, but he occasionally dropped by her office for an informal conversation. While these conversations haven't made her uncomfortable, they sometimes lasted upwards of fifteen or twenty minutes and thus were a distraction that prevented Jennifer from doing her work. Sometimes he would even sit down without Jennifer inviting him to do so. Jennifer had considered keeping her office door closed, especially when she knows Howard is in the hall, but this would be tricky because technically she needs to be available for faculty and other staff members who need her assistance. Then, three days ago Howard stopped by her office and started to initiate another conversation when Jennifer was working, but this time she politely told him that she couldn't chat because she needed to finish some work.

Jennifer did not see Howard for the next two days, but the following day, when she got to the office, she found a book in her mail cubby with a note on it from Howard. It asked Jennifer to make copies of several chapters from the book and to leave them in his mailbox. In the note, he thanked her for this "favor." While part of Jennifer's job does involve assisting professors with course preparation, no part of her job involves serving as a personal assistant for faculty. Jennifer was unsure how to proceed. She didn't want to comply with Howard's request, especially since she didn't want to give him the impression that this work falls under her normal job duties. Yet she was unsure how best to respond to Howard. Should she ignore the request? Should she inform him that he needs to make his own copies? Should she ask the department chair how to proceed?

### *Discussion Questions*

1. It can be common in some academic workplaces for faculty and staff to socialize at restaurants or bars at the end of a workday. If you organize one of these informal meetings, what are strategies for ensuring that such invitations aren't coercive, especially for those who don't occupy similar positions in the academic bureaucracy?
2. What options are available if someone finds themselves in a position like Jennifer does when she realizes Howard has asked her out on an apparent date? What about when someone might pursue frequent, informal interactions that are uninvited, just as Howard does when he drops by Jennifer's office to chat?
3. Can and should non-official department socializing, especially when it involves organizing during the workday using university resources (such as the school's email domain) be subject to university or department-initiated rules and regulations?
4. How can departments ensure that its staff, especially staff like Jennifer who have well-defined responsibilities, are not mistreated by faculty whose interactions with them may or may not on the surface be influenced by gender bias?

## Scenario 5: Grad Student and Mentor

This scenario details the possible complexities that can arise between Ph.D. students and their dissertation chairs.

Mary applies to the Ph.D. program at University X primarily because David Smith, an emerging scholar in her field, teaches there. He contacts her, expressing interest in her writing sample and indicating he has received approval for funding a research assistant next term. While visiting campus, Mary has coffee with Dr. Smith where they discuss funding possibilities, the classes he is teaching next semester, and her past graduate work. Only eight years older than Mary, the two quickly establish an easygoing relationship: he tells her to call him “David,” drives her around town pointing out neighborhoods where students frequently live, and provides a list of local restaurants and bookstores. Mary accepts a position as an incoming student and research assistant; she leaves campus feeling as if she has found an important mentor in David.

During Mary’s first few years at the university, she serves as David’s research assistant. They co-author two articles, and he becomes her dissertation chair. She becomes involved in a professional organization in which he serves as a member of the Advisory Board. Occasionally, Mary runs into him at a pub across from the university. During these informal conversations, David seems more like a friend, sharing pedagogical struggles, successes, and failures.

While their relationship is relatively easy, occasionally Mary is aware of its gendered dynamics. Prior to a conference presentation, David casually mentions that they should probably discuss the clothes Mary will wear as she begins to interview. “After all,” he says, “You don’t want the length of your skirt giving anyone the wrong impression.” Mary simultaneously regrets the height of the heels she is wearing and is annoyed that David feels it is appropriate to comment on her appearance.

One night, Mary and her boyfriend run into David and his wife at a restaurant. Shaking her boyfriend’s hand, David compliments him on his “good taste” and jokes that he hopes her boyfriend won’t “take too much of Mary’s time away from her research.” Another time, David asks Mary details about her new relationship. Slinging an arm around her shoulders, he says, “Don’t let him distract you from what’s important.” While his comment makes Mary uncomfortable, she also understands that because of the time he has put into mentoring her, David wants to ensure she completes her degree successfully.

Mary has now completed a draft of her dissertation and spends extensive time with David discussing revision strategies. One evening before leaving his office, David grabs her arms and abruptly kisses her. Mary pushes him away, shocked at the gesture and angered by his impropriety. David rushes to apologize, saying it has been a long week and things are rough at home. The next day, he sends her a text that simply says, “Please keep last night’s mistake to yourself. It could ruin both of our careers.” Mary agrees. Any professional blowback to David’s reputation adversely affects Mary, especially as he begins to write letters of recommen-

dation to Mary's potential employers.

However, Mary becomes increasingly frustrated. David misses two of their scheduled meetings and is spending more time working with his first-semester research assistant. Later, three sources central to Mary's research are missing from his office; David says he has not seen them in weeks. During a committee meeting, David abruptly cuts Mary off while she is talking and after, huddles in the corner with the newly appointed department chair. They both look over towards her, multiple times. An article of David's which Mary has contributed to via her work as a research assistant appears in a journal; unlike earlier drafts, Mary's contribution is neither identified nor cited. Finally, David indicates he needs more time writing Mary's letter of recommendation for her job portfolio; he feels her work in the last semester has suffered from distractions "outside" of the department. Mary is furious. While many of the previous incidents created disruption to her schedule or could be written off as mere coincidences, some feel intentional and, more importantly, have direct professional repercussions.

Talking to a friend, Mary cautiously outlines the "professional" problems she is experiencing with David to a friend, making certain not to mention his more recent, frequent patterns of "harmless" behavior. The friend mentions that prior to Mary's arrival, David had experienced similar issues with a graduate student that left the program. However, she says, that was a different situation—she had heard the graduate student was inappropriately pursuing a relationship with David that he curtailed. Carefully, she suggests that Mary might be overreacting or misinterpreting the situation. "Are you sure you're not taking this too personally?" she asks.

Mary considers talking to the department chair, but the graduate handbook does not provide a channel for such a conversation. Conversation with other students reveals a departmental pattern of ignoring student/faculty relationships as long as they are perceived as "mutual." Moreover, there doesn't seem to be a network within the university to track student/instructor complaints regarding personal behavior. Instead, it appears that if and when students experience problems with these relationships, the student leaves the program and is constructed in department lore as "problematic," "emotional," and "retaliatory." Mary is worried how the pursuit of any claims about appropriateness of behavior will affect the completion of her degree and future employment opportunities.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. How does your position as a graduate student, faculty, or member of the administration shape the way you read and respond to Mary's story?
2. What would you identify as the troublesome or concerning characteristics of Mary and David's mentor/mentee relationship? How would you describe a healthy mentor/mentee relationship between a junior faculty member and graduate student?

3. In what ways do Ph.D. programs encourage potentially problematic relationships between students and faculty members? What options and resources should be available for students and faculty when potential problems arise?
4. What are the practical options available to Mary as a student nearing the completion of a terminal degree?

### Scenario 6: Cultural Questions

How much should cultural background be used to excuse what we might otherwise recognize as inappropriate behavior? While every situation is different, it can sometimes seem as though mitigating circumstances are nothing more than excuses. This scenario considers such issues.

Dean Angelo Garguilio, born in Italy, had been living in the United States for fifteen years when he was appointed to his position. He had been teaching at the university since he joined the institution, at fifty, to take an endowed chair, invited because of his renowned scholarship and international reputation. He was happily married, or so it seemed, and had grown children. He presided over the College of Liberal Arts, where most of the chairs, at the time, happened to be women. He was succeeding a female dean who had been promoted to provost.

Garguilio was respected but not loved. In fact, he was not an easy man even to like. Not only was his accent difficult for many Americans to understand, but he was also overly personal, especially with female colleagues—something generally passed over by his superiors as a result of his own cultural background, i.e., as something that had to be understood and worked around. When he was promoted to dean, he had been chair of his department for five years. Members of the department couldn't decide whether to be relieved or concerned at this advancement.

As dean, Garguilio took over leadership of a particularly fractious group of chairs, some of whom he wanted to see removed. He couldn't do this himself, but he hoped to show his support to various opposition groups within the departments. The chairs saw this and those who felt threatened retaliated by working to remove *him*. Chief among them was, coincidentally, another Italian, a woman, who chaired the Comparative Literature department. From an outside perspective, in their machinations against each other, neither side acted particularly honorably—though neither side would have understood how or where the problems lay.

Despite his leadership role, the dean had never been a supervisor of any sort before becoming chair, and his own department had been a small one. The three women who worked in his office quickly came to dislike him. Though he never made sexual advances toward them, they felt he looked down on them not only for not having advanced degrees but also because they were women. He was demanding and supercilious, immune to the difficulties they encountered in their work and unsupportive of their own needs and desires.

Among the chairs, he was little more liked, having developed comfortable relations only with the two males of the eight in total. The other six, the women (including the person who had replaced him in his own department), fell victim to snide comments and brusque dismissals. They retaliated by trying to undercut him through the provost, who all of the chairs knew well.

Complained to by individual chairs, the provost talked to the dean on a number of occasions about his treatment of women. He should not, she advised, comment on clothing or give even a friendly kiss. Certainly, a lingering touch should be avoided and he should never tell a woman colleague that she was looking particularly sexy. And he should listen when women spoke, not fidgeting as though anxious to move on. Clearly perplexed, he promised to change his ways, but he never managed to do so. He didn't seem to understand just how his behavior was objectionable. Knowing that he had never acted in a sexually predatory manner, he never managed to grasp exactly what the problem was.

After two years of what was, quite obviously to some, sexist behavior, the female chairs had had enough. They got together and filed Title IX charges against the dean for creating an atmosphere of sexism that impeded the growth and activities of the chairs. The investigation, handled by a university lawyer, was quite flawed, its putative secrecy abrogated at every step. Eventually, the president and provost, recognizing they might lose the case but realizing the dean needed to be removed, negotiated a leave for the dean necessitating his leaving his post. On return, he found himself effectively exiled from his own department, even his office moved from the building that housed it to a site on the opposite end of the campus, the new chair not wanting to have what she saw as an unruly and threatening presence return to the department.

Could it be that this dean lacked the cultural understanding necessary for serving in an administrative position in a U.S. university? He had absolutely no understanding of what he had done and felt that the women had ganged up against him. He felt he had treated the chairs equally, men and women, and that his choices for friendship had nothing to do with gender. Though he did not lose his job, he felt the ignominy of the events and knew that what was meant to have been secret was not. Instead of ending his career on a high note, he retired as quickly as he could.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. In multicultural environments like those of higher education institutions, what kind of resources should be available for students, staff, and faculty to become culturally sensitive in their communications and actions?
2. How does one's position in a university culture oblige them to call out culturally insensitive or inappropriate behavior?
3. Could there be alternative avenues other than removing the dean?
4. Specifically, is there an effective place somewhere between ignoring behavior and initiating a Title IX investigation?

## Scenario 7: Online Sexual Harassment

This scenario concerns an online composition class taught by an experienced female, full-time, non-tenure-track instructor and a student whose troubling behavior crosses several lines.

On the first day of class, Leah (a 34-year old female instructor) posted two general announcements on her class's learning management system: one was about class policies, and the other was about the first assignment, which was a 300-word introductory statement intended as an icebreaker. Peer responses to introductions were required. On day five of class, Farrell (a 24-year-old male student) posted what Leah described as "overly friendly" comments to the introductory statements by three female students. After sending Farrell a private message in which she asked him to refrain from posting such messages, Leah saw that he had posted a 200-word statement in the informal "lounge" section of the online class remarking how the instructor was probably a "cat lady" in need of a man for sex.

Leah was shocked and upset over this personal attack, which contained some obscene language. Farrell followed up his initial posts with additional ones containing what was later described by Leah as "overtly sexual and threatening comments on how he wanted to force himself sexually on female students." Farrell later claimed he intended the language to be "funny" rather than threatening. Leah deleted two of Farrell's posts before deciding to document the incident and sent an email to the department chair, Sarah, who was new to the position. Leah then emailed all students in her online classes, attaching an English department document that included general institutional guidelines for student behavior, to remind them of college policy regarding bullying and sexual harassment.

On day seven of class, Instructor Leah and Department Chair Sarah filled out an incident report, which was sent to Student Affairs and the dean's office. They also discussed how to confront Farrell. Leah believed that the situation was immediately dangerous; Sarah thought care should be taken to acknowledge student rights for both the women and Farrell. While debating whether to remove Farrell from class, Leah and Sarah could not agree about how online harassment situations differed from threats on campus and how or if an online student might be a "physical danger." Leah sent Farrell an email, cc'd to Sarah, about his inappropriate postings and attached a copy of college policy regarding general harassment. Leah and Sarah searched online for information about Farrell, although they wondered if they were breaking some sort of ethical code by trying to investigate Farrell's digital presence.

On day eight, Leah and Sarah found pictures on Farrell's Instagram and Twitter accounts showing him smoking what appeared to be marijuana and pointing what appeared to be a real gun at the camera. Both women began to worry about possible physical violence. Five female students emailed Leah to say that they would not be attending an on-campus class orientation scheduled for the next

week out of fear that Farrell would attend. Sarah suggested that Leah not cancel the orientation since security would be checking the classroom. Leah received a vaguely apologetic email from Farrell in which he claimed he was “just messing around” when he posted the comments. Department Chair Sarah emailed Farrell and instructed him to meet with a college counselor, Jonathan. Leah sent screen captures of the disturbing social media images to Jonathan to illustrate what she considered “violent potential” in Farrell.

Orientation took place on campus at 6:00 PM on day nine of class. Two members of campus security were present—but Farrell did not attend. Sarah discovered that Farrell worked for the college part-time in the Student Recreation Center. The fact that Farrell had access to staff areas on campus alarmed Leah, Sarah, and Jonathan. However, the dean, Richard, seemed less disturbed. The dean emailed Sarah indicating that he wanted the issue to be dealt with as quickly—and quietly—as possible.

On day eleven of class, Jonathan and the dean’s office informed Sarah that Farrell was not being fired from his job on campus, adding that he had been told by a male supervisor to “cut out the behavior.” Leah emailed the women who were concerned about his threats and encouraged them to remain in class. Farrell dropped the class. Department Chair Sarah asked Leah to sign additional documents sent by Campus Security, legal counsel with Student Affairs, the dean’s office, and Jonathan.

A month later, Leah heard through the grapevine that Farrell was never fired from his job at the college, but he chose to quit for reasons seemingly unrelated to this incident. She was also told that Farrell claimed to some students and staff members that he had been treated unfairly by Leah because he was the only male African-American student in the class. Emotions among all involved had subsided, but Department Chair Sarah told Leah that she worried many legal and ethical lines might have been crossed in handling the matter.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. What assumptions about sexual harassment, online education, and institutional policies do you bring to your reading of this narrative?
2. How might we account for the Department Chair Sarah’s reaction to these events in relation to the Instructor Leah’s? To what extent are both Sarah and Leah concerned for the same things? How would you react if you were in either Sarah’s or Leah’s position?
3. Although the fact is not disclosed until the end of the narrative, how might racial identity play a role in how Leah and Sarah viewed the situation as opposed to how Farrell viewed it? Might Farrell, as the only African-American man in the class, have a legitimate point about being judged unfairly?
4. How is online sexual harassment in this narrative presented as a problem distinct from on-campus harassment? How might institutional policies

that address sexual harassment need to differentiate between what happens in digital environments and what happens on campus?

### Scenario 8: Graduate Student Instructors and Their Students

This scenario explores issues that develop between female graduate student instructors and male students at a large, private university.

University X's program for graduate students in composition and rhetoric is competitive and provides a range of opportunities for supervised teaching in the university's first-year composition program. Graduate students who are accepted attend a pre-term, three-day workshop that provides detailed information on the FYC program and preparation of classroom activities, assignments, and response strategies. These new instructors follow an annotated syllabus designed by the supervising faculty member for the first half of the term, after which they can craft their own classroom activities and assignments. As instructors teach their first course, they also take a companion graduate teaching practicum that provides week-to-week guidance and problem-solving.

Recently, students in both the graduate program and the teaching apprenticeship have been predominantly female. In the current term, six graduate instructors in the teaching program were females and two were male, all between the ages of 22 and 30. Most had also taken the writing center training course and were involved in writing center work. Several had previous teaching experience although not in first-year composition, and some had presented at local and national conferences. They were knowledgeable, confident, and predictably excited and nervous about the upcoming teaching experience.

Part of each class period in the practicum was set aside for debriefing on the week's teaching—successes, challenges, and questions. The first two weeks of the term went reasonably well, with predictable missteps and bumps as the new instructors familiarized themselves with the workload and the challenges of juggling classroom prep and responding to student work. Instructors testified to how pleased they were with how their students reacted to them.

Beginning the third week of classes, a worrisome trend began to emerge and eventually dominated discussion. The female instructors reported on disconcerting exchanges with some of their male students. While the incidents varied in nature, by the end of the term nearly all the female graduate instructors reported troubling interactions with male students. The two male graduate instructors listened attentively and were very supportive to their female colleagues, but they reported none of the seemingly gender-based conflicts.

One of these graduate instructors, Lucy, described a series of incidents with one of her male students that "made her uncomfortable." The student, an eager classroom participant, regularly stayed after class to talk about the course. Eventually, his talking points became more personal as he pressed her about her tastes in music, food, and movies. One day, the student came up to her in the university

cafeteria and gave her a big hug. When this unwanted physical contact happened again, the instructor realized she had to do something. She asked the student to meet with her, and, as gently and firmly as she could, explained that while she was flattered, his behavior was inappropriate and would have to stop. The student seemed stunned, but he indicated that he understood and apologized. From that moment on, however, the student refused to participate in class, began missing classes, and was inconsistent about turning in work. The instructor spoke to him again, encouraging him to keep up, explaining that he could do well in the class, but his classroom work continued to deteriorate.

Another graduate instructor, Mia, organized a computer-classroom workshop in which students could work on their in-progress essays. The instructor circulated around the classroom providing help and suggestions as they worked. One male student seemed to be working on an essay that did not follow the instructions for the assignment. Mia talked to him about it and made suggestions. He nodded, then continued to work. As Mia came around to him again, he was still moving in the wrong direction, so she spoke to him again. This time, he seemed very irritated by her intrusion. At the end of the class, students submitted their essays electronically to their portfolio site for instructor response and evaluation. When the instructor read this particular student's essay, she was stunned. The essay had turned into an angry, sarcastic diatribe in which he expressed his desire to either smash her in the face if she continued to give him advice, or better yet, pull out a gun and shoot her.

Late in the term, Elise, another graduate instructor, admitted to ongoing problems with a student in her class—a male student, a few years older than the rest of the first-year students. The student, perhaps sensing that she was a new instructor, would yell at her angrily during class if he thought an assignment was pointless or felt like she wasn't being clear enough. Despite her private one-on-one interventions with him outside of class, this belittling behavior, often in the form of loud outbursts, continued throughout the term both inside and outside of class.

These and other incidents were shared in the practicum and discussed by the graduate instructors and the supervising faculty member to develop strategies for handling them. In most cases, the graduate instructor was encouraged to contact the Academic Affairs office to solicit advice and recommendations on how to proceed. The response from the university was less than optimal. Although the young man with ideas about pulling a gun on his instructor was taken seriously (though not expelled), the other investigations led to quick fixes. Instructors were asked to ignore the problems and see if they went away on their own. The instructors, all of whom were young and new to the profession, were uncomfortable about these solutions, but obliged.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. How familiar are you with your own institution's policies and resources

- available on harassment? To what extent do these policies and resources advocate for female instructors in particular?
2. Recent articles in the media (for example, “Chief Targets of Student Incivility Are Female and Young Professors” in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*) suggest a trend in the kinds of issues discussed in this scenario. How does this scenario align with your experiences?
  3. One component of the training these graduate instructors received was work on creating a teaching persona. As a final project for the companion course, the graduate students wrote a reflective piece about the evolution of their teaching persona—their perceived successes and challenges. How might you address the creation of a teaching persona in anticipation of the problems above?
  4. Several of the instructors were quite angry that they were experiencing these kinds of problems, assuming it does not happen to male instructors. How true does this seem to be in your experience? What are the challenges of having to prepare young female instructors for this type of harassment and how should male instructors be trained in this regard?

### Scenario 9: Student-Student-Student

Are problems in relations between graduate students things that should be addressed by members of the department?

William is a new MA student and a TA in the English department in a mid-sized top-tier research school in a conservative town. He identifies as gay and he has just broken up with his boyfriend. William feels lonely and insecure in this new town, starting an MA program, and teaching for the first time in his life. He lives on campus in the graduate student apartments and is hoping to engage in campus life, avoiding contact with the local community. When William meets Rayan, a second-year Ph.D. student, he starts having hope that the two would develop a friendship and an academic partnership.

Rayan has been a TA since he joined the department. The department considers Rayan a star scholar and teacher. Not only does he thrive in his research and with his undergraduate students, but he has also accumulated impressive experience in community-based research and service focused on sexuality as social justice. Rayan has a wide circle of friends around the university and in the town. He identifies publicly as straight, and he has a girlfriend, Jade, who moved with him when he relocated.

Over time William, Rayan and Jade develop a close friendship. As they live off-campus and own a car, Rayan and Jade always offer rides to William. William is grateful and feels lucky to have been accepted intellectually and socially by this couple.

Spending considerable time at Rayan and Jade’s apartment, the three cook, talk, and watch movies. Although attracted to Rayan and somewhat jealous of his

happy relation with Jade, William feels included; he wishes he could find a happy relationship like theirs someday.

When William starts noticing Rayan coming in close physical contact with him while sitting on the couch or cooking at the kitchen, William isn't sure whether this happens intentionally. The physical contact triggers William's emotions, but he doesn't act upon them to avoid complicating his friendship with the couple and his interactions with Rayan in the department. William also considers that the physical closeness was probably unintentional.

However, things change suddenly in a way that William has not anticipated. One evening Jade and Rayan pick William up from his on-campus apartment and take him to theirs where they cook and have dinner as usual. As they are having their second drink, Rayan and Jade join William on the living room couch, putting him in the middle, which feels weird to William. Rayan asks William whether he would like his palm to be read, and Jade chimes in that Rayan is good at it. William feels he has to say yes and he opens his hand for Rayan, who starts moving his fingers on William's palm, reading his past and future. William feels that the touching and Rayan's tone of voice are undoubtedly sexual.

William stays passive and lets Rayan finish his reading though everything feels weird and confusing. He is aware of his vulnerable situation, one person versus two. He is at their apartment off-campus, and he does not have any means of transportation other than their car. He feels he needs to be friendly with the couple until he is able to leave. He tries to make a joke out of the situation, saying, "You guys feel weird tonight. Are you too drunk?!"

Eventually, Rayan leaves the couch, mentioning that he has work to finish; Jade offers William a ride home. During the ride, William tries to fill the silence by complementing Rayan's and Jade's relationship in an attempt to assert himself as a friend who is not interested in a romantic relationship with the couple. Jade, however, tells him clearly that they have lots of love to give, and that he is welcome to join them. This comment makes William feel very uncomfortable. Dropping William off, Jade turns her cheek to him to kiss. Like a robot, William gives her that kiss, regretting it and hating himself.

Once in his apartment, William texts both Jade and Rayan saying that he really appreciates their friendship but is going to stay away for a while. Jade responds by apologizing that she and Rayan had scared him off and assured him they appreciate his friendship as well. That night William can't fall asleep. He feels mixed feelings of guilt, fear, and shock about what happened. He was uncertain whether he did or said something that gave Jade and Rayan the wrong impression.

Trying to put an end to his uncertainty, and fearing the loss of friendship with the couple, William texts both Rayan and Jade first thing in the morning asking them to meet and clear things up. William hopes to restore the friendship. Rayan responds inviting William to the couple's place, but William asks to meet in a public place. He then receives a confrontational text message from Rayan blaming him for his distrust in asking for a public meeting. Rayan becomes defensive

and aggressive and reminds William of all the good things that he and Jade have done to make William feel loved and at home.

William, totally crushed, feels at a total loss, experiencing embarrassment, guilt and fear. He feels disappointed, weak and sexually abused. He immediately goes to the campus counseling center seeking help and relief.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. What type of power structure can allow a situation like this to develop?
2. If you were a professor or chair in the department, what kind of advice would you have for William and Rayan?
3. How might the incident affect William overall? How might it affect his study, work, and interaction in the department?
4. If you were a friend of William's and he came to you for advice, what would you have said? Why? What does this tell about you? How might that advice conflict with William's values, thoughts, and experience?

### **Scenario 10: Can Age and Experience Excuse Behavior?**

This scenario details the challenges a professor experiences during her first year as a tenure-track hire at a small liberal arts university.

As a newly minted Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition, Alina is a 32-year old recent hire teaching a 4/4 load in the English department at a small liberal arts school. She is the first English hire in eight years; while friendly, her colleagues are all significantly older. Alina is newly pregnant, and her partner works at a university three hours away.

Settling into the semester and her role as faculty member, Alina is surprised how different a small college is from the larger universities she attended. She meets faculty from a number of different departments, all of whom are friendly and enthusiastic about her hire. At a reception for new faculty, the chair of the biology department, Dr. Roberts, who also serves as the faculty senate chair, speaks to her individually and remarks that she looks "really young," suggesting that some students might struggle with someone who "looks like her" in charge of the classroom.

"How old are you anyway?" he queries. Taken aback by the question, Alina doesn't want to rock the boat with a senior colleague she barely knows and reassures him she has quite a bit of experience teaching. In retrospect, Alina is frustrated by her behavior; she wishes she had been clear about the offensiveness of his comments and resolves to speak up if a similar situation presents itself again.

The following semester, Alina is responsible for describing the development of a writing emphasis within the English major to the larger faculty body. This is a project she is passionate about; she is nervous about her presentation and, at first, glad to see a familiar face in the room: Dr. Roberts. Eyeing her up and down

he exclaims, “Well, well . . . look who has a bun in the oven! Congratulations!” Giving her a hug, he says, “I didn’t see a ring so figured you were one of those feminists!” Alina is irritated and expresses her feeling, yet Dr. Roberts dismisses her discomfort. Walking away to call the meeting to order, he remarks to a female colleague standing nearby, “These new hires are all so sensitive.” Stunned, Alina stares at the faculty member, who laughs and places a hand on Alina’s arm. Leaning in, she says, “Don’t take Dr. Roberts seriously. He’s been here a long time and doesn’t mean any harm.”

When it is her time to present the departmental changes, Alina reads from a statement she has prepared. She is highly aware of her shaky voice and slight roundness of her pregnant body, along with her anger towards Dr. Roberts and the female colleague who defended him. Halfway through her presentation, Dr. Roberts interrupts: “Basically,” he says, “It sounds like our new professor wants students to take a less traditional approach to their English degree and focus on that new media stuff the university is so fond of.” Alina starts to object and again, Dr. Roberts speaks over her. “Why don’t you just send the description to me, and I’ll forward it to the faculty?” Alina looks around the table for some support but most of the faculty are looking down at phones or appear uninterested. Alina slowly sits down.

A few weeks later, Dr. Roberts asks Alina to meet with him to discuss the proposal. Alina dresses carefully for the meeting, making sure to avoid any clothing that emphasizes her pregnancy. Dr. Roberts closes the door to his office after she enters and invites her to sit down. When she remarks that she would feel more comfortable with an open door, Dr. Roberts ignores her. He tells her he’s heard students in his lab classes complaining about her writing course for being “too hard” and has suggested to them her expectations are simply “hormonal.” As faculty chair, he wants to know if she’s happy at the college.

Next, he slides over to her side of the desk, placing the folder containing the department proposal open on her legs. Leaning over, he points to various concerns he has. There is nowhere for Alina to move; she panics at his proximity, his breath, and his overly comfortable manner.

When done with his questions, Dr. Roberts places his hand on top of the folder. “I just think you need to have a little fun,” he says. “Why don’t we go have dinner and talk more about your ideas?” Alina firmly removes his hand and clearly states, “Your behavior makes me uncomfortable and is distinctly inappropriate. I’d appreciate our relationship remaining professional.” She walks out the door.

Although concerned about being labeled a troublemaker, Alina goes directly to her department chair to discuss the meeting with Dr. Roberts. A tenured female professor who has been at the university for twenty years, her department chair listens carefully to Alina’s complaints about Dr. Roberts: his focus on her appearance, her pregnancy, his behavior towards her at the faculty meeting, his inappropriate remarks about her teaching to his students. While sympathetic, her chair suggests that Alina simply should avoid interacting with him if she finds

his behavior offensive. The chair then observes that filing a grievance against a tenured faculty member is complicated and has rarely been used, noting that Dr. Roberts has been an esteemed member of the university community for the last 30 years. She points out that Alina is only in her first year of a tenure-track position and isn't yet a very strong presence on campus beyond teaching and required meetings. "Instead of attending campus events, I've been focused on publishing pieces of my dissertation", Alina says. "Yes", her chair agrees, "yet very few people on campus know you well enough to vouch for your 'collegiality' because of this."

Alina walks away from their meeting upset and embarrassed. She feels as if her concerns were dismissed and her collegiality and understanding of tenure responsibilities called into question. Left wondering if she has simply overreacted to the inappropriate, old-fashioned behaviors of a longstanding faculty member, Alina sees no pathway to a formal complaint or support for her concerns.

### Discussion Questions

1. How would you proceed as the department chair? As Alina?
2. How do differences in institutional size pose challenging questions/complications regarding faculty behavior, relationship, and formal complaints?
3. Alina has addressed the problematic behavior with the individual involved and her department chair. What other resources should she pursue?
4. How do age, gender, institutional, and faculty history complicate this situation?

### Scenario 11: WPA and Assistant Mentoring

This scenario describes how a white, heterosexual cisgender female WPA took advantage of perceived intimacy with the male Assistant WPA and used it politically to smooth over the fallout from her behavior and control the story of her labor, accomplishments, and merits.

Leo Foster had known Karen Johnstone through academic and friendship circles several years before he started working with her. Leo had come to his associate WPA position through a network of acquaintances that included Karen, as often happens in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. This was his first permanent job in the field. Leo was grateful not to be a freeway flyer, whisking himself and his materials to adjunct jobs at multiple institutions. He felt deep gratitude that he had a little edge because of friends of friends who knew him and his work.

All of this was evident in the opening moves of this new employer/employee relationship, and it provided a platform for important mentor-mentee interactions. Leo expected to be mentored, and he did not notice, or was naïve about, the ways Karen used familiarity and perceived close connection to quickly build intimacy. At this beginning stage, casting it as an "honor," Karen used this premature intimacy to vent her frustrations about WPA work, the low program budget, and

the lack of respect she perceived from College of Liberal Arts colleagues.

She tried to shape Leo's impressions of colleagues, mapping for him her intended political maneuvering to "get back at" those who were keeping her from the material resources she wanted for the program, or to "demand" the professional respect she felt was "overdue." Leo did not know what to do with much of this information.

Nor did Leo know that he would become the target of her anger and frustration as their work relationship progressed, eliciting it simply by offering a different interpretation of an encounter or scenario.

Though Leo gained confidence and knowledge over time, there was no accompanying and appropriate transfer of power and responsibility; Karen had no place for a colleague, he began to see, merely for an unquestioning subordinate. As Leo developed authentic opinions of and relationships with their common colleagues, Karen withdrew her confidences. Transparency became an issue, and Leo was often left out of the loop on important decisions affecting his areas of work. When he raised the issue of transparency, he was told that it was his imagination, that she had been open, and why wouldn't she be, with someone she trusted so implicitly? Didn't Leo trust she was making the right decisions for "us"?

When projects Leo led were appropriated as her work, and he said something, he was told that it was a team effort, and she was simply presenting material to the higher levels of the university's administration to which she had access but he didn't. Even though she could have made the introductions necessary for him to present his own work, she did not.

When Leo began to build and train a strong writing instruction team, Karen began selecting and removing key players from the team, tapping them to do other work without consulting them or Leo. All along the way, she explained away unilateral decisions by telling him to trust her; they were good friends, remember? She surely wouldn't take credit for work that wasn't hers. And yet she did.

None of this seemed quite right to Leo, but it also didn't seem quite wrong enough for action. He was in the first few years of his first full-time job; he wasn't even sure if he knew how this was supposed to go. Leo had been trained by principled and honest WPAs in his graduate program and had spent much of his graduate career thinking and writing about power dynamics and privilege in classed and ranked systems.

The more Leo drew on that training and developed his own collaborative and transparent leadership style for the projects he supervised, the more at odds he and Karen became. This led to her shaming Leo in public meetings, dismissing his comments and contributions. Later, Karen would ask him to excuse her rudeness, saying that it was just that they were such good friends, like family, and don't we all argue with our family?

At some point during this time, Karen's husband Jake (who was faculty in Sociology and had befriended Leo from the outset) invited Leo to have a beer after work. Leo sat in disbelief as Jake explained earnestly, "Karen really does have your

best interests in mind.” It was then, three and a half years in, that Leo realized he was in what amounted to a codependent, abusive relationship with his direct supervisor. Now her husband was involved.

Leo didn’t know how to extract himself from this unwanted power struggle without endangering his position. He thought he could finally see what was wrong, but didn’t know how to fix it, nor did he know where to go for help or whom to trust for guidance.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. How can “common sense” ideas about workplace power dynamics affect the perceptions and behaviors of new employees?
2. How can institutional and cultural norms provide the underlying foundation/support/justification for the described scenario?
3. How can (forced) intimacy in a professional setting affect power dynamics between two people of unequal rank, regardless of the gender identity or sexual orientation of the people involved?
4. Do new employees in your institution receive information about how to address sexual harassment, discrimination, or assault in the workplace?

### **Scenario 12: Graduate Faculty and Graduate Student**

This narrative begins with a graduate class taught by Julie, a tenured Rhetoric/Composition faculty member at a research institution, and her interactions with a doctoral student, Walter.

After class one evening during the spring term, Julie, a tenured professor in rhetoric and composition, walked to her office accompanied by Walter, a first-year doctoral student. Excited by the class conversation on visual rhetoric, Walter asked if they could keep talking, and Julie, ready to go home after a long day, said, “Of course, as long as you walk with me to my office.”

“Great,” Walter replied, as he returned to the question of how common it was for images to change as they moved through contexts—and how important that might be for a theory of circulation.

At the office, Julie packed up her things while Walter kept spinning out examples of images; they walked away from her office, down the hall, and out of the building toward the parking lot. The evening was pleasantly cool but, as was common at that time of night, very few students were around. Interrupting his queries about images, Walter paused, asking, “It’s ok if I keep walking with you?”

Julie replied, “Sure, but I’m almost at the car.”

She began to add, “I’m glad to meet with you later in the week if you’d like to keep talking,” but Walter interrupted: “I’ll walk you to the car.”

Julie, thinking that Walter was being protective, asserted, “No, really, it’s ok,” but Walter kept walking; two minutes later, they were at the Honda. Pushing her

electronic key, she opened the back door and tossed in her backpack, closed the door, and turned around, only to find Walter bending over her and pushing himself up against her. "I think a kiss would be nice, don't you?"

Taken aback, Julie exclaimed, "What are you doing, Walter?"

"Just helping us get closer: you asked me to walk with you to your office," he breathed softly, as he tried to kiss her neck.

"Walter, no, no, that was only because," she started to explain, when Walter said, "Don't tease me; I know you want this as much as I do."

"NO!! Julie yelled; "I don't."

Momentarily chastened, Walter stepped back: "Ok, Julie," he replied, "you're right; we're in public. We'll do this another time," he said quietly but intently, as he turned away and quickly strode back toward the building.

Shaken, Julie slipped into her car, simultaneously slamming the door and locking it. She wasn't quite certain what had happened, and she couldn't quite believe that whatever it was *had* happened. Walter had seemed like such an interested student.

No student had ever approached her in this way, not in 15 years of teaching. Should she tell anyone about this? Whom would she tell? What would she want them to know?

Julie didn't sleep well that night. She worried that somehow she had signaled to Walter that she was interested in a physical relationship with him, and she worried about what to do about that. She worried about if and how to follow up with him. Should she ignore this episode and treat it as an anomaly? Should she speak to him to correct his misunderstanding? She worried about whether she should alert others about this: Was he behaving this way toward other faculty or students? Should she tell her department chair about this episode? Or, wary about all of these discussions, should she simply ignore the episode? That last option, ignoring it, was the easiest and most familiar, to be sure, but in this case, was it the best response?

Julie saw Walter the next week in class; he behaved as though nothing had happened, which was a relief; perhaps doing nothing was the best response. When he left the room at the end of class, though, Julie thought she saw Walter winking at her.

Or was that her imagination?

Julie continued trying to return to acting normal. With only three weeks left in the term, she thought she might just succeed. As usual, she scheduled the conferences that she required students have with her before submitting their final projects. Although she didn't want to meet with Walter, she didn't see how to avoid it, but she took care to schedule all of the conferences during busy times of the day, and as usual, she would keep her door open.

The conferences had proceeded normally when Walter arrived for his. They had a brief discussion about his project, which wasn't very well designed, with Julie making three suggestions toward a major revision. Walter seemed unhappy

about the need to do a considerable amount of additional work, but he indicated that he knew what it was and why. As he got up from his chair, he seemed to take on another persona: winking at her, he said softly, “I think about our special moment a lot.” Julie, standing up, replied, “Walter, you need to go now.”

“Of course,” Walter responded. “See you soon.”

Julie picked up the phone to call her chair, asking if she were available for a quick consultation. “Come on up,” the chair said. Breathless, Julie collapsed in the chair’s office as she begins her story: “I have a problem with a student, Walter Smith.”

“Oh, that cute young grad student in your program? He is such a good student—and a fine teacher, I hear.”

“Yes,” replied Julie, wondering if this consultation with her chair would provide a remedy after all.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. Has Julie experienced sexual harassment? How, specifically? Are there mitigating factors (e.g., gender, age, status)?
2. What evidence can Julie present to demonstrate that something untoward has happened? How could that affect her decision about pursuing the issue?
3. After the first episode, what options did Julie have? Julie identifies some; are there others, and if so, what are their advantages and disadvantages? What repercussions might each have?
4. As a colleague or chair who was approached by Julie for advice, what recommendation would you make after the first episode, and why? After the second episode?

### **Scenario 13: Graduate Seminar and Gender**

The challenges of seminar topics and gender are explored in this scenario.

Mary Morris, a new faculty member in the rhetoric and composition program at Big Bend State University (BBSU), was teaching her first graduate class, “The Rhetorics of Gender and Sexuality.” Because she was new and had written her very recent dissertation in this area, students were initially excited to take her course. A few weeks into the semester, however, several students were upset.

Because of Mary’s recent arrival, her reading list and syllabus were not available until the first day of class. On the first day, students were surprised that most of the readings were about male power and privilege, toxic masculinity, and rape culture. In a private conversation after the first class, three of the five male students in the twelve-person seminar voiced their concerns to each other about the readings but decided that considering the rhetorical aspects of these topics would be worthwhile.

By Week 5, the initial concerns of the three male students were becoming more serious. In further outside-class conversation, they found their worries were shared by the other male students as well as two female students. Instead of an even-handed rhetorical approach to the topics, the seminar had become a venue for telling stories of sexual abuse and for damning particular cultures for encouraging and producing “macho-male” attitudes and predatory behaviors. The representations put forward in class made the men in the class (two African American, one Latino, and two white men) feel unfairly represented and occasionally attacked. When they spoke up in class, they were regularly shut down, and the teacher did not intervene. The two women who attempted to allow the men a voice in the class were verbally sidelined by the others. After one particularly contentious class session, one of the two women distressed by the attitude toward men was warned by another female student that by siding with the men she was “a traitor to her gender.”

The seven concerned students talked and decided to send an emissary to the teacher. Two of the male grad students set up an appointment, and Mary greeted them cordially. As they voiced their concerns, Mary nodded, but eventually told them there was nothing she could do to change the tenor of the seminar. She explained that she was not willing to intervene because she was a strong believer in a student-led pedagogy even though it might create controversy and chasms. When the two male students told her they felt bullied and sometimes harassed in the class, she smiled and simply said, “Well, that’s turning the tables, isn’t it?”

The male grad students left Mary’s office with a sense of disbelief. When they told the others about the interaction, all seven became upset and confused. They needed the seminar credits, but they wondered if they could continue in the class. The two who visited Mary’s office were worried that their grades would be compromised by the interaction. All of them wondered what, if anything, they could do.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. Is there bullying, discrimination, or harassment taking place in this seminar? What BBSU documents could be consulted to answer this question?
2. Should the students report this situation? How might a complaint to the department chair or Human Resources be received?
3. Could creating waves possibly harm their careers? In what ways?
4. What assumptions about learning, faculty rights, student rights, and more seem to be in play in this scenario? Given those assumptions, what is the appropriate course of action for each person concerned?

### **Scenario 14: Bystander Responsibility**

This scenario considers how involved a bystander should be, especially in a case in which the bystander knows the possible aggressor.

Jana, a student in the Rhetoric and Writing Studies graduate program at X University, works several times a week in the writing center (WC). The WC is staffed by graduate and undergraduate tutors and supervised by a director and assistant director. Now in her second year as a tutor in the WC, Jana is familiar with consultation protocol and the best practices that the director and assistant director review in their monthly training sessions.

Jana has noticed that Tom, a tutor who is also a graduate student in the program (in fact, Jana and Tom are members of the same cohort), has been flirting with several female undergraduate students who have come to the WC for consultations. This is not unlike his behavior with members of their cohort, Jana wryly noted to herself the first time she observed it. In fact, Tom had flirted heavily with Jana their first year, and she finally needed to firmly reject him. She had done so as gently as she could and, as far as she could tell, had hidden her distaste for Tom well. She knew that she needed to keep a collegial relationship with him. They both were still in coursework, so Jana didn't want to create a scenario that would make working alongside Tom in the program any more difficult than it already had become. Since then, Jana and Tom's relationship had been somewhat distant although they had no trouble working together in the WC. Jana had never since spoken to Tom directly about his WC behavior and had avoided socializing with him.

But, in addition to the overt flirting, Jana had recently overheard Tom make questionable comments and suggestions to the female undergraduate students, comments that go beyond the bounds, she is pretty certain, of appropriate tutor/student relations. Jana had heard Tom ask them about their class schedules, for example, and what they like to do on the weekends for "fun." At least twice, Jana had heard Tom offer "extra help" to these women if they want to contact him after hours when the WC is closed. This disturbs Jana, but she does nothing at first, worried that she is reacting to her own distaste for Tom, overreacting to what she worries might or might not be unwarranted advances. She knows that Tom is going well beyond flirting—and she recognizes that flirting itself is something of a problem in this context.

The assistant director comes in and out of the WC office space (her office is located on the floor above the WC) and Jana has come to realize that Tom has never engaged in this questionable behavior when the AD is present. In fact, most of these incidents occur during a two-hour window on Tuesday afternoons when Jana, Tom, and one undergraduate tutor, a junior named Emily, are the only tutors on shift.

Jana is concerned about Tom's behavior, but doesn't know what to do, especially given her own feelings concerning Tom. Is she, she asks herself, worrying about something that is none of her business simply because of her own distaste for Tom? Also, she suspects that the AD is aware of what had happened between the two of them and guesses that she might even have them working some of the same hours so that she provides balance to Tom.

Given her own reluctance to face Tom about this new manifestation of his behavior, she hasn't asked Emily about it, although Jana is curious if she has noticed anything. Also, Emily is an undergraduate, so Jana doesn't want to put her in an awkward situation where she may have to speak out against this more-senior graduate student coworker.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. To keep from making waves, Jana is considering talking to some of her fellow grad student friends about this situation. Is this a good approach? Why or why not?
2. What additional evidence, if any, does Jana need to report this situation as sexual harassment?
3. If Jana does report the behavior, to whom should she turn? She knows both the director and assistant director, but she has a much closer relationship with her advisor in the graduate program, so she is considering talking to her. Is this a good idea?
4. What kinds of policies or protocols might the director (and assistant director) of a WC put in place to help bystanders like Jana when they witness behavior like Tom's? What about if bystanders witness behavior that isn't so explicit? That is, what if Tom wasn't visibly flirting with these students, but still offered them "extra help" during times when the WC is closed? Is that still grounds for concern?