Guidelines for Classroom Discussions of Sexual Violence
Senate Task Force to Address Sexual Violence and Survivor Support

Dear Teaching Faculty,

Last spring, sexual assault allegations unsettled many people in our campus community. Media responses to these events amplified racial tensions on campus. These are difficult issues to grapple with, for both teachers and students, many of whom may have experienced such forms of violence themselves. We heard from many students last spring quarter about challenging discussions that were taking place in classrooms across campus concerning sexual violence.

The Senate Task Force to Address Sexual Violence and Survivor Support recognizes that this may be difficult territory for you and your students and offer the following information to help you navigate this terrain.

As teaching faculty, you need to be aware that there are likely to be student survivors in your classrooms and faculty survivors in your departments. You also need to know that discussing sexual violence in a context where faculty members and students do not have training or the critical facility to make sense of the relevant research and issues can cause more harm than good since inexperienced faculty members and students can discuss sexual violence in ways that stigmatize those who have experienced such traumas. Insensitive or judgmental comments, for example, like those that focus on a victim’s behavior or the alleged perpetrator’s race rather than that of the behavior of a perpetrator and the systems that allow it to go unsanctioned, can compound a victim’s distress.

If sexual violence is not related to the course material you are teaching, we recommend that you urge students to seek out venues with trained facilitators to discuss these issues. If sexual violence is relevant to your course material, but you do not have experience facilitating conversations about it, some campus organizations will make classroom appearances to facilitate discussions about sexual violence in cases where you feel that conversations about sexual violence might be important to the material you are teaching. A partial listing of these resources appears below.

You might also consider inviting UO’s Sexual Wellness Advocacy Team – SWAT (http://swat.uoregon.edu/) to make a presentation to your class. Please contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 541.346.3216 regarding other opportunities to incorporate education about sexual violence into your classroom.

Below are resources that can be shared with other members of our community:

1. The Sexual Violence Response and Support Services Coordinator in the Office of the Dean of Students is available to provide support to students who have experienced any form of sexual harassment or assault, or for students who experience forms of post-traumatic stress. This office works with students to provide services and support, including helping students access health and counseling services, academic accommodations, legal protective orders, housing
accommodations, and more. You can reach them at 6-8194. Their 24-hour crisis line is 541 346-SAFE.

2. The University Counseling and Testing Center (http://counseling.uoregon.edu/dnn/) and the University Health Center (6-2770) provide confidential services for the purpose of mental health or health services consistent with federal and state law, including support, evaluation, and counseling for students experiencing personal difficulties as a result of having experienced an incident of sexual harassment or assault. Professional counseling staff with experience in trauma response and healing are available to assist students with personal counseling.

3. The Office of the Dean of Students has a new website (safe.uoregon.edu) that provides information useful to both survivors and to faculty or others working with survivors. They can also send you copies of a pamphlet, "Help for Students -- A Guide for the University of Oregon Community," produced by the Dean of Students, if you would like to distribute them to your students.

4. Sexual Violence Prevention and Education (http://svpe.uoregon.edu/) offers a comprehensive list of community and campus resources.

5. The Teaching Effectiveness Program (TEP) is available for individual consultations to discuss classroom dynamics. You can reach them at tep@uoregon.edu or 6-2177.

6. The Center on Diversity and Community (http://codac.uoregon.edu/resources/) offers workshops and other trainings about how to have difficult dialogues about race and sexuality.

7. The Office of the Vice President for Equity and Inclusion offers confidential counseling and assistance to faculty on a host of equity issues, including gender equity.

8. Sexual Assault Support Services of Lane County (http://sass-lane.org/) provides community education, outreach, advocacy and support to survivors of sexual violence and their families.