

# SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

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Posted by Joan Buhrman

## FROM THE PROW

From the Prow is a two-way conversation between AGU's leaders and the broad Earth and space science community they serve. It features discussions on trends, Union programs and initiatives, and reflections on the strategic direction of the organization.



*By Margaret Leinen, President, American Geophysical Union, Eric Davidson, President-elect, American Geophysical Union, and Carol Finn, Past President, American Geophysical Union*

Sexual harassment is an issue in many disciplines, including the Earth and space sciences, and its impacts can be far-reaching. As you are no doubt aware, issues of sexual harassment in the field, in the lab, and in the classroom have been widely covered in the news lately, as have the related issues of reporting, privacy, and consequences (both for the accuser and the accused).



To be clear, for AGU, and for each one of us personally, addressing this persistent problem is an issue of critical importance. Sexual harassment is wrong, and it cannot be tolerated. If we aren't able to provide a safe and welcoming environment in which science can thrive, then we have failed as a community.

Unfortunately, this is not a new problem, and AGU, like other science societies, has been grappling with it for some time. It's also not an isolated problem. Sexual harassment is part of a broader set of issues facing the scientific community, which include things like gender bias and inequality, discrimination based on sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, and the safety and supportive nature of our workplaces and learning environments (bullying, etc.).

These problems are complex and not always easy to solve, but as a leader in the Earth and space science community, AGU understands that we have an important role to play. A recent activity that you may not be aware of was a Town Hall meeting we hosted at the 2015 Fall Meeting with the Association for Women Geoscientists (AWG) and the Earth Science Women's Network (ESWN). Each of us played a role in the session, which was titled, *Forward Focused Ethics – What is the Role of Scientific Societies in Responding to Harassment and Other Workplace Climate Issues?* It featured several presentations and a panel discussion.

During the presentations invited speakers and leadership representatives from AGU, ESWN and AWG explored implicit bias in science and the multiplying effect that bias has on limiting professional advancement for women. They highlighted sexual assault and harassment in field camps and other field locations. They also discussed how increasing diversity in the scientific workforce and growing use of social media have contributed to the current surge in reports.

The speakers provided insights, experiences, and suggestions on the role of scientific societies, how AGU and other scientific societies can help address harassment and other critical issues and AGU's policies, practices, and mechanisms for reporting can be improved.



If you missed the Town Hall, a video recording can be found [AGU On Demand](#). When you log in, the video will be listed under the Science & Society channel.

In addition to the Town Hall, AGU is undertaking several other efforts focused on bringing our community together to address the issue of sexual harassment in science.

One of the more obvious is to update AGU's own ethics (for professional conduct, in general) and behavior (for meetings, etc.) policies to strengthen our position and set clearer expectations and accountability consequences for our members. That work is underway, and we will continue to update you on its progress.

Another important effort is to bring the broader scientific community together with the hope of creating common guiding principles to inform all our policies and actions related to harassment. While our work in this area is still developing, we can tell you that AGU is committed to convening the science societies around this issue as soon as possible, and thus far, they are overwhelmingly in support of the idea. Again, as more information on this effort is available, we will update you.



Other areas being discussed include education opportunities, the development of tools/resources/best practices to be shared with academic institutions, agencies, companies and other employers, and more direct support for members who are victims of harassment.

We recognize that the way AGU moves forward in addressing the issue of sexual harassment will require feedback from and engagement with our community. As such, we want to ask you, our members, for your input. What aren't we doing that we should be? What are other organizations or institutions doing that we should try? What are we doing well and should we be doing more of it? Please share your thoughts with us in the comments section below. If you would like to share something, but would prefer to do so privately, you can also send comments to [ethics@agu.org](mailto:ethics@agu.org). The AGU Council and Board will address these topics at its upcoming meetings, and your voices will be heard.

In the end, addressing the issue of sexual harassment in science is something that requires us to work together as a community – and AGU is committed to leading the way on behalf of the Earth and space science community we represent.

*In January of 2016, the American Geophysical Union highlighted the importance of addressing sexual harassment in the scientific community, and highlighted a session at their Fall 2015 Meeting with speakers from ESWN who offered insights, experiences and suggestions on how scientific societies can help address sexual harassment and increase diversity in the workplace.*