

Report: Department allows harassment

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A specially formed group of the Academic Rights and Responsibilities Committee heard testimony from Schwebach and others involved in each side of the dispute.

The report on the department's climate originated from that committee, a branch of UNL's Academic Senate.

The report was delivered to Chancellor James Moeser late last week. It calls for the political science department to be placed in "receivership" for a minimum of three years.

During this probation-like time, faculty members and graduate students must take sensitivity training, the committee recommended.

For students or faculty members with harassment complaints, uniform procedures for dealing with them also should be adopted, the committee said.

Finally, the committee of five faculty members, who are not associated with the political science department, recommended annual assessments of the department's progress toward "providing its faculty and students a safe climate in which to work and study."

Other parts of the complaint, in which the names were removed, allege that the handling of an incident involving racial slurs and plagiarism received more attention than sexual harassment complaints that had been filed with the department.

"When female students alleged a hostile climate and sexual harassment,"

the report said, "it was alleged that (Forsythe's) response was minimal."

The committee found that the political science department's response to sexual harassment complaints historically has been inadequate.

Ignorance, insensitivity or the unwillingness to address the complaints has reflected poorly on the department and the university, the committee said.

It said when female students repeatedly complained about a specific faculty member's conduct: no records were kept to establish a pattern of misconduct, the faculty member in question received no written warnings about his reported behavior, and students were not informed of any action that was taken in response to their complaints.

The committee also said faculty members acted irresponsibly in response to harassing behavior.

It said faculty members voted to award emeritus status to a professor who was known to sexually harass women in the department, and also failed to bring an official complaint against this faculty member.

The committee did not let students off the hook, either, saying they also participated in unprofessional behavior.

An untenured, female faculty member, the report said, was the target of cat calls and kissing sounds during a class, and a male student submitted a class term paper containing possible public hair to a female faculty member.

A sole member of the committee wrote a dissenting opinion, implicating

Forsythe for violating UNL's Professional Code of Ethics, the university's equal opportunity and affirmative action guidelines and its policies regarding unlawful discrimination.

"I find that the preponderance of the evidence shows that (Forsythe), in his role as department chair, did act in violation ..." the dissenting member wrote.

But administrators painted a different picture of the department in official assessments, the committee charged.

Brian Foster, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, contributed to the uncomfortable environment when he based his assessment of the climate for women solely on the people he interviewed, the report said.

In a personal interview, Foster repeatedly refused to comment on the report, the possible three-year probationary period or the climate in the department.

Forsythe, former chairman of the department, resigned in February and is now in Europe. His replacement, John Comer, is in Chicago for a political science conference. Attempts to reach him were unsuccessful.

Brian Humes, associate political science professor, said he thought sexual harassment in the department was an ongoing problem that needed to be solved.

"Any time one group is adversely affected within any work unit, it affects the whole work unit," he said.

Evelyn Fink, assistant political science professor, is one faculty member

who said she's been adversely affected by the department's climate. She has filed a complaint.

"Many people, for a number of years," Fink said, "have been well-aware of the harassment in the department."

The committee's report, though, gives Fink hope that the climate in the department could improve, she said.

"I'm really pleased that a special committee, after careful review, is willing to document what they've found," she said.

"There is harassment in the department," Fink said, "and the department's response has been less than helpful."

Fink said she hopes Moeser will adopt the committee's recommendations.

Moeser has 30 days from the time he received the report last week, per Academic Senate policy, to decide what to do about the committee's recommendations.

Schwebach's attorney said he hopes the university will take action this time.

"Any time there's gender-based discrimination that's rampant in the department, the university ought to know about it," Cope said. "They ought to take care of it and move on."

"If you sweep the discussion under the rug," he said, "it will never get resolved - somebody has to have the courage to step up and be counted."

Political science majors said they've been unaware of a possibly hostile climate in the department.

Junior Anne Ford said she has never

experienced any uncomfortable experiences in any of her seven political science classes.

Though four of Ford's classes were taught by women, she said she was treated well by the male professors.

Jamie Peterson, senior political science major, said she is "totally comfortable" talking to any of her political science professors and had never heard of any allegations of sexual harassment in the department.

"The department is dominated by men, but I wouldn't say that it is intimidating to women," she said.

Of the 21 professors in the department, only three are women.

Schwebach insists she was treated unfairly, and said she will fight for her civil rights.

Cope said if the university responds inadequately to the committee's recommendations, he and Schwebach will consider their options - including a possible lawsuit.

Though she loves teaching and researching, she will not remain in an environment where she doesn't feel her rights are protected, she said.

Schwebach said the reason she's an academic and the reason she's fighting the sexual harassment so hard stems from an experience she had in Iran during the late 1970s.

"I know what it's like to live under martial law in a nondemocratic state."

"And because I know what that's like, I will not allow my civil rights to be denied me in the United States."

Member arrested after Cornell fraternity fire

Cornell Daily Sun
Cornell University

Ithaca, N.Y. (U-Wire) - A fraternity ritual involving fire caused heavy smoke that set off the fire alarm and led to the arrest of one member of Phi Delta Gamma Fraternity Thursday.

The Cornell Police Department arrested Dave Dolpe, president of Phi Delta Gamma, for reckless endangerment, according to Cornell Police Department Captain Randy Hausner.

The 911 Dispatch Center received notification of the fire through a fire alarm activation around 1:30 a.m.

CU Environmental Health and Safety Units and CUPD arrived on the scene moments before the Ithaca Fire Department and reported heavy smoke in the basement of the house.

IFD Lieutenant Michael Schnurle said the firefighters found the source of the smoke and smelled an odor of "dense flammable liquids," which they believed to be lighter fluid. The IFD evacuated the building for more than an hour and used fans to push air into it for ventilation. No one was injured.

Following ventilation, CU Environmental Health and Safety found evidence of four to five small fires placed around the basement. According to Schnurle, they had been put out by members of the fraternity using dry chemi-

cal extinguishers.

Schnurle said CUPD officials informed him that Dolpe told them that the fires were part of a ritual.

According to Randy Stevens, associate dean of students and fraternity and sorority affairs, he will be meeting with Phi Gamma Delta alumni officers, undergraduate officers and officers from the IFD and Cornell Environmental Health and Safety this week.

Stevens said, "Following that conversation, we will figure out what the next steps are." Members of the fraternity declined to comment.

The IFD Cause and Origin Team and CUPD are investigating the nature of the incident.

"I don't think (the members) are thinking clearly about what the consequences could be," Schnurle said. "This could have ended up as a very tragic event," he added.

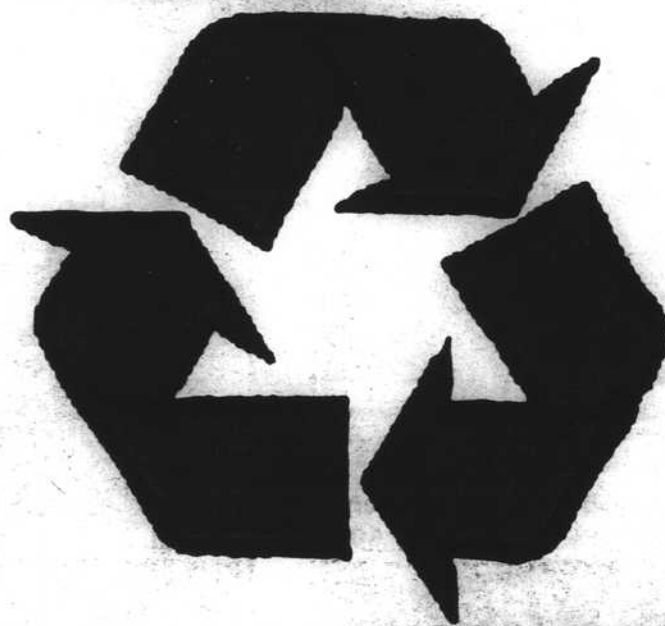
A fatal fire at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill chapter of the same fraternity killed five students in May 1996.

According to an article in the Daily Tarheel, an accidental fire broke out after a pre-graduation party had ended. The chief medical examiner said four of the five victims - all of whom died of carbon monoxide poisoning - had blood-alcohol levels significantly above .08 percent.

The pre-dawn blaze started in the basement and the actual cause of ignition could not be determined.

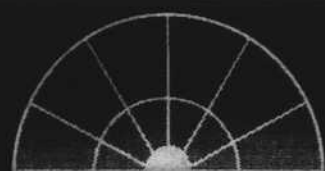
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