

Committee to investigate political science department

By TIM KARSTENS
Staff Reporter

The fallout from recent sexual harassment allegations in the political science department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has prompted one student to take matters into his own hands.

Robert Herling, a senior criminal justice student, is forming a committee to educate and assist students who feel they have been sexually harassed. Herling said he decided to form the committee after Valerie Schwebach, a former political science professor at UNL, leveled sexual harassment charges against the political science department at UNL.

Schwebach, who is no longer at UNL, formally filed sexual harassment charges in June 1997. The charges stemmed from a 1995 incident where a political science graduate student found an offensive flier in Oldfather Hall. Other faculty members and some students apparently left, claiming the department tolerates harassment towards women.

The goal of the committee, which will consist of students exclusively, is to reach all victims of sexual harassment and to help victims after they have been harassed or assaulted, Herling said.

"I would like to give them the chance to alleviate the problem once they become the victim," Herling said.

While not singling out the political science department at UNL, the alleged harassment of Schwebach is symptomatic of a university-wide problem, Herling said.

"I got the impression that a lot of students on campus did not know the options given to them," Herling said. "And the political science department didn't complete the steps they had to take, or they didn't take them."

Jeff Spinner, an associate professor of political science, said the

accusations made by Schwebach in May have been investigated by the department and an outside party and dismissed.

Even though the department has found no basis for Schwebach's complaint, Chancellor James Moeser has appointed a three-member faculty committee to further investigate the matter. Spinner said he expects the findings to support the department's previous findings.

"They are just reviewing it and seeing what the climate is for women," Spinner said of the faculty panel. "I find it to be a good atmosphere. No committee has found any problems before."

Dr. Herbert Howe, an associate chancellor and professor of psychology at UNL, said the committee was formed under the auspices of the Academic Rights and Responsibilities Committee, which oversees matters involving UNL academic departments. The committee, which must submit its findings by the end of the summer, is focusing more on the way the Schwebach matter was handled currently.

"They weren't concerned about the climate in the department," Howe said of the committee's purpose. "They were concerned about the process."

Members of the ARRC panel and Dr. Howe said the information gathered so far was confidential and refused to comment on the report.

Herling said two prior studies done by UNL in 1981 and 1985 on sexual harassment indicated there had always been a problem. Considering recent events, the problem still exists and there is plenty of blame to go around.

"It just seems to me that some of the people on campus are complacent," Herling said of the campus policy towards sexual harassment. "And if these people are complacent, they are just as guilty."

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