



Thursday August 10, 2017

Dear Professor O'Connor:

Re: Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) findings on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

In response to the AHRC's findings on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities we, the Griffith University Student Representative Council (SRC), on behalf of the undergraduate student body at all Brisbane and Logan campuses would like to request that the University make swift and progressive steps to addressing the issues identified by the AHRC. To address the incidence of sexual assault and sexual harassment that our students experience or are at risk of experiencing, the SRC has identified a number of areas for reform.

The SRC requests that the University take action in the areas summarised below, further explanation of these is detailed in the following pages.

- Updates to University policy
- Procedural reform – reporting and responding to incidences of sexual assault and sexual harassment
- Greater resourcing of supports and services for students
- Improved promotion and communication regarding:
 - Griffith's zero tolerance approach to sexual assault and sexual harassment,
 - Reporting pathways and support services available to students who have experienced sexual assault and sexual harassment

Policy

The SRC understands that in 2015 the Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination Policy that applied to both staff and students was discontinued due to workplace legislative requirements. We understand that this policy was replaced with the Workplace Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination Policy and that no equivalent policy to cover students was instituted. While the existing Student Misconduct Policy has been used as a substitute this policy is inadequate in explicitly addressing concerns arising from students committing unwelcome or violent behaviour towards another student.

Recommendation:

As a matter of priority the University institute a student-oriented policy that covers sexual assault, sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying and harassment generally and that these policies cover behaviour that occurs in online communities. Further, we request that the SRC be given the right to nominate an SRC student and/or staff representative to contribute to the development of this policy.



The SRC also wishes to highlight that it would be insufficient to simply replicate the Workplace Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination Policy for the student population, as this policy in itself requires revision.

Recommendation:

The policies applicable to both staff and student behaviour explicitly reference sexual assault and sexual harassment providing expansive definitions to include a range of experiences.

Procedural Reform

The SRC requests that the University overhaul existing reporting, investigation and response procedures as those that currently exist are not sufficient.

The Student Misconduct Procedure is grossly inadequate in regards to reporting, it would be very unclear for a student reviewing this policy how (if at all) they could report an incident. Further, this document's requirements for how the University reports and tracks incidents are too vague and allow for too much discretionary power for example: Section 3 of the Student Misconduct Procedures states that: *"in some situations the staff member should also complete an Incident Report under the University's Health and Safety Policy"*.

Recommendation:

The policy and procedures require all reports of sexual assault or sexual harassment be documented in a centralised location overseen by a central community safety office (see below).

In relation to the Resolution of Complaints of Workplace Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination Procedures (Resolution of Complaints Procedures), in their current state these are overly and unnecessarily complicated, a view supported by staff from the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (ADCQ).

The Resolution of Complaints Procedures is worded in such a complicated way that it reads as if a complainant has to follow the procedures sequentially, the ambiguity of this leaves it open to interpretation and mis-application. However of most notable concern is Section 1.1. A reasonable person could conceivably take from reading this section that a complainant must attempt to resolve a concern directly with the respondent before proceeding to the next stage.

Recommendation:

Section 1.1 of the Resolution of Complaints Procedures be reworded immediately in such a way that makes it explicit that a victim of sexual harassment, sexual assault (or discrimination, bullying and harassment) is not required to approach the respondent directly.

While further revision of the policy will be required the SRC considers this change a matter of urgency to ensure the safety of our students when reporting incidences of sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Further, to ensure students can easily locate and utilise reporting mechanisms and to ensure students feel supported and safe to report, it will be important for students to have access to confidential, comprehensive and secure reporting systems that allow for the option of anonymity. While recognising the importance of the principles of natural justice, the option of anonymous reporting enables the University to track areas of the University or population that may need extra training or investigation.

Recommendation:

The development and implementation of a simple, confidential online reporting option that allows for reports to be made anonymously, this could be modelled similarly to Latrobe University's Speak Up reporting mechanism or the University of Queensland's new Sexual Misconduct Support Unit.

In conjunction with a broader revision of procedures, the SRC requests that the University introduce an independent, centralised community safety office for the coordination of reporting, investigation, response, education and prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment at Griffith University. The current arrangements that seem to include multiple departments and considerable discretionary power suggest that the likelihood for inconsistent application of policy and procedure could be high. An independent, centralised community safety office will ensure a clear, consistent and specialised response to complaints of sexual harassment and sexual assault as well as offering an opportunity to pool resources currently spread across multiple areas of the University.

For example, Professor O'Connor, in your email to the Griffith University community on July 17 you highlighted the expansion of the Harassment and Discrimination Contact Officer Network as one of the University's proactive responses to the AHRC's report. However the SRC would like clarification about how well resourced this network will be. The SRC's current understanding is that the Harassment and Discrimination Officer network have limited access (if any) to ongoing support or training for their role, a role that could be responding to staff and students who have experienced highly traumatic events. This is just one example of how the current distribution of resources is not sufficient in responding to the reporting of incidents. This is not entirely surprising with the H&DCO Network situated in Human Resource Management (HRM), here it is one small part of a portfolio with multiple responsibilities.

Further, the priority of HRM is staff and staff wellbeing. The SRC feels that there are conflicting priorities in the department, leaving students vulnerable to abuse. Situating the Harassment and Discrimination Officer Network within a centralised community safety office would remove the competition for resourcing and the blurring of responsibilities that is at risk of occurring under the current arrangement.

Recommendation:

The establishment of a centralised community safety office for responding to complaints about sexual assault, sexual harassment and other unwanted behaviours, and

- **That this office is located centrally within the University, not in an area whose primary focus is a specific demographic (i.e students or staff), recognising that this is a whole-of-University responsibility not the sole responsibility of one department (i.e HRM or Student Services),**
- **That this office have an investigative and educative/preventative function, and**
- **Ensuring that this office incorporates procedures that are sensitive to the needs of marginalised groups within the University community ensuring staff have experience in LGBTIQ+ and disabilities support; are culturally sensitive and understanding of the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and international students, and**
- **That this office be responsible for the coordination and delivery of training for the Harassment and Discrimination Officers, managers, student leaders and other relevant University community members**

Supports and Services

The SRC congratulates the University for implementing a new after-hours crisis service, this is a hugely positive step forward in better supporting students. However unless staff responding to students in crisis have somewhere to refer the student to then the benefits of this service are limited to short-term fixes only. In order to respond appropriately to student's health and safety needs the University must provide sufficient access to counselling support.

The SRC acknowledges that there will soon be a counselling position dedicated to violence response and prevention, explicitly naming this as an area of priority for student counselling is also a positive step, however the SRC asks that the University be transparent about how "new" this full-time role is. Given the University removed a full-time counselling position from the Gold Coast at the end of 2016 and given the current counselling team already support students who have been victims of sexual assault and sexual harassment the SRC would argue that rather than a new position this is in fact the reinstatement of a previous position but with a new job title. Further, the SRC understands that the Counsellor (Violence Response and Prevention) will be based at the Gold Coast campus due to availability of office space thus restricting access to students at the Brisbane and Logan campuses.

Recommendation:

That the University employ two Counsellors (Violence Response and Prevention), one based at the Gold Coast and one in Brisbane. The SRC also requests that the University make appropriate office space available to Student Services to enable counselling staff to meet student needs across all campuses.

In addition to counselling support one of the other areas of support that students who have experienced sexual assault and sexual harassment at university really require is support to feel safe after the event.

Recommendation

That the university institute robust investigative and response measures as well as supportive measures to assist students whose studies have been interrupted and well-being put at risk. These measures must ensure that students have access to learning environments that do not require them to have contact with the person responsible for the assault or harassment, and measures that allow for special consideration and other allowances to be given to students who have experienced sexual assault or sexual harassment.

Promotion and Communication

It was evident from the AHRC findings that one of the big failings of Australian universities including Griffith relates to the availability of or communication about the options students have for accessing support and for reporting incidences and the absence of a culture that encourages students to feel safe to seek help. It is important for students to feel that the complaints process is available to them at any time. It is clear in the results of the report that students regularly do not report instances of harassment and assault simply because they do not know that there is an option for them to do so.

Recommendation

The SRC recommends that resources be invested in the advertising of the complaints process to the student body, and to staff. The SRC would also be invested in advertising this service to students.

In addition to better promotion and communication about what students can access if they do experience sexual assault or sexual harassment it is evident that greater resourcing needs to occur to prevent these behaviours occurring in the first place. It is crucial that Griffith's claimed zero tolerance policy is communicated by way of a visible commitment to changing University culture.

Recommendation

The SRC recommends compulsory training for staff and students relating to healthy relationships, consent and violence prevention, for example the MATE Program developed by the Griffith University Violence Research and Prevention Program (VRPP). The SRC also supports the Consent Matters training and would like to see this promoted more broadly.

Summary of Recommendations

To summarise, the SRC recommends the University implement the following changes in order to better identify, respond to, report and most importantly prevent sexual harassment and sexual assault at Griffith University:

1. As a matter of priority the University institute a student-oriented policy that covers sexual assault, sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying and harassment generally and that these policies cover behaviour that occurs in online communities. Further, we request that the SRC be given the right to nominate an SRC student and/or staff representative to contribute to the development of this policy.
2. The policies applicable to both staff and student behaviour explicitly reference sexual assault and sexual harassment providing expansive definitions to include a range of experiences.
3. Section 1.1 of the Resolution of Complaints Procedures be reworded immediately in such a way that makes it explicit that a victim of sexual harassment, sexual assault (or discrimination, bullying and harassment) is not required to approach the respondent directly.
4. The policy and procedures require all reports of sexual assault or sexual harassment be documented in a centralised location overseen by a central community safety office
5. The development and implementation of a simple, confidential online reporting option that allows for reports to be made anonymously, this could be modelled similarly to Latrobe University's Speak Up reporting mechanism or the University of Queensland's new Sexual Misconduct Support Unit. The establishment of a centralised community safety office for responding to complaints about sexual assault, sexual harassment and other unwanted behaviours, and
 - That this office is located centrally within the University, not in an area whose primary focus is a specific demographic (i.e students or staff), recognising that this is a whole-of-University responsibility not the sole responsibility of one department (i.e HRM or Student Services),
 - That this office have an investigative and educative/preventative function, and
 - Ensuring that this office incorporates procedures that are sensitive to the needs of marginalised groups within the University community ensuring staff have experience in LGBTIQ+ and disabilities support; are culturally sensitive and understanding of the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and international students, and
 - That this office be responsible for the coordination and delivery of training for the Harassment and Discrimination Officers, managers, student leaders and other relevant University community members
6. That the University employ two Counsellors (Violence Response and Prevention), one based at the Gold Coast and one in Brisbane. The SRC also requests that the University make appropriate office space available to Student Services to enable counselling staff to meet student needs across all campuses.
7. That the university institute robust investigative and response measures as well as supportive measures to assist students whose studies have been interrupted and well-being put at risk. These measures must ensure that students have access to learning environments that do not require them to have contact with the person responsible for the assault or harassment, and measures that allow for special consideration and other allowances to be given to students who have experienced sexual assault or sexual harassment.

8. The SRC recommends that resources be invested in the advertising of the complaints process to the student body, and to staff. The SRC would also be invested in advertising this service to students.
9. The SRC recommends compulsory training for staff and students relating to consent and violence prevention, for example the MATE Program developed by the Griffith University Violence Research and Prevention Program (VRPP). The SRC also supports the Consent Matters training and would like to see this promoted more broadly.

To discuss the SRC's position and recommendations in more detail or to request a meeting with SRC representatives please liaise with Student Advocacy and Engagement Coordinator Jenna Corby P: 0411 804 406 or E: advocacy@griffith.edu.au

Yours Sincerely,



Corey Birtle
SRC Board Chairperson
SRC QCA President



Jessica Atkins
SRC Logan President



Joshua Accardi
SRC Mt Gravatt President



Lucas Kennedy
SRC Nathan President

Joumanna Haddad
SRC QCGU President

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