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Preventing and Reducing Occurrences of Sexual Harassment and Assault at Archaeological Field Schools

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Research suggests that sexual harassment and assault frequently occur during field research and students, trainees, and early career professionals are more subjected to harassing behaviors compared to mid-career and senior scientists. In archaeology, the undergraduate educational requirement of a field school—an immersive four- to eight-week field course—has put more students and trainees in situations where harassment traditionally has been unchecked. Field school sites can be remote and students may be required to live on site with fellow students, teaching assistants, and field directors in relative isolation. In 2020 our research team, with funding from the National Science Foundation, began conducting investigations to document practices that field school directors implement to reduce and prevent harassment; to understand how directors and students perceive these practices; and to reimagine mechanisms that help improve field school learning and living conditions to more fully benefit the well-being of students. Although we are only in the initial phase of our research, we have identified several practices that may be modified to reduce and prevent conditions that have the potential to lead to sexual harassment and assault. We discuss and review these initial findings and detail our future research plans.

## **Slide 1: Title Slide**

Thank you for joining us today. I want to acknowledge my co-authors who have been instrumental in this work: Emily Beahm, Carl Drexler, Shawn Lambert, and Clark Sturdevant. I also want to acknowledge the leadership and members of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference who have supported the work. This research is funded by the National Science Foundation and investigates evidence-based practices that can reduce and prevent sexual harassment and assault of undergraduate students participating in archaeological field learning who are enrolled in a course referred to as field school. With our research, we are explicitly focused on sexual harassment within the context of the field school. Although specifics of the field learning context may differ between archaeology and other field-based research disciplines, we believe that many of the suggestions we make here may be applicable to other fields.

Research into sexual harassment and assault, particularly in the context of higher education, has focused on how women, predominately how heterosexual white women, experience harassment and assault (NASEM 2018). People of color, people of the LGBTQ+ community, people with diverse learning and physical abilities, people who are non-gender conforming, and people who identify as men may experience harassment and assault differently compared to white, heterosexual women (Berdahl and Moore 2006; Brown et al. 2017; Garvey et al. 2017; Gay-Antaki and Liverman 2018; Kalof et al. 2001; Rankin 2005; Settles et al. 2016). This research, grounded in established literature, reflects the biases of a framework constructed from the experiences of predominately white, heterosexual women. We acknowledge this bias and continually incorporate multiple voices from diverse perspectives and welcome these voices in this discussion.

Here, we present the context of this research and review the initial results of the first year of this award.

## **Slide 2: Field-based learning**

Within the context of learning, scholars recognize the positive learning outcomes that students achieve through participation in field-based research (Cartrette and Melroe-Lehrman 2012; Cooper et al. 2019; Flaherty et al. 2017; Graham et al. 2013; Jacobson et al. 2015; Mogk and Goodwin 2012; Munge et al. 2018; National Research Council 2014; Richards et al. 2012; Sheppard et al. 2010; Whitmeyer and Mogk 2009). Through these experiences, students show increases in their motivation to learn and perceptions of their abilities to succeed in their field of study. Field-based learning helps students achieve cognitive and metacognitive gains and competencies that move them from having a novice to an expert understanding.

## **Slide 3: The Context and Consequences of Sexual Harassment**

Studies also demonstrate that field experiences can come with negative consequences (Clancy et al. 2014; Hodges et al. 2020; Meyers et al. 2018; Nelson et al. 2017; Radde 2018; VanDerwarker et al. 2018). In archaeology specifically, a recent study documented high rates of sexual harassment and assault among those conducting field research (Meyers et al. 2018): Although not exclusive to field school participants, these numbers suggest that instances of sexual harassment and assault are common and that student trainees are frequently subjected to such treatment. It is clear that sexual harassment and assault may be occurring at field schools.

## **Slide 4: The Setting of Field Schools**

The educational structure of field schools varies among university programs. Generally, field schools consist of four to eight weeks of sustained field training with student working at least 8 hours each day

over the summer semester. The location of field school instruction varies. Field schools may be in remote locations where students do not have basic amenities. Others are in urban settings. Living arrangements can be residential, with students spending the entirety of their training away from their home. Others do not require students to live at the field school. Instead, students reside in their own homes throughout the course.

Some have only a handful of student trainees, while others can have over 20 students enrolled. Historically, field schools have been taught by one or more faculty. Often, graduate students and staff aid the field director. Generally, field directors have the ultimate authority in research and instruction.

#### **Slide 5: National Academies Report and Five Factors**

The *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine* (NASEM 2018) identified five factors that create conditions where sexual harassment is likely to occur. I've listed these factors here. All five can describe the culture, climate, and structure of many archaeological field schools, and as such, the culture, climate, and structure of field schools should be investigated and modified to create learning spaces where all students are safe from harassing behaviors (Colaninno et al. 2020).

#### **Slide 6: Phase 1: Research Methods**

The research team defined our first goal as determining practices and policies, within the context of other working environments, that prevent and reduce sexual harassment and assault. We then used those practices and policies to suggest practices that may work in the field school setting. We developed and administered a 64-item survey soliciting responses using a 5-point frequency Likert scale on field directors' use of these practices at their field school. We also requested field school syllabi and other related documents to code for implemented practice. We had 65 respondents to the survey (response rate of 31.7%) and 24 field directors shared their syllabi and/or other field school documents. We focus on the syllabus document analysis.

#### **Slide 7: Syllabi document analysis**

Eleven primary codes emerged when reviewing field school syllabi and other associated documents. We consolidated these down into three primary themes: 1) field school organization and expected student behavior; 2) logistics of the course; and 3) explicit policies on sexual harassment and assault. Although only one of these themes explicitly address issues of sexual harassment, all had excerpts with implications regarding power structures, students' ability to report incidents of sexual harassment, and behavioral expectations.

#### **Slide 8: Field school organization and behavior**

We observed two approaches field directors take towards leadership and decision-making. Some directors organize their field schools so that power is concentrated almost exclusively with them. This is the traditional model for field school instruction and some directors continue to operate under this paradigm.

Other directors distribute the power among participating members. Their decision-making process emphasizes teamwork and shared leadership and responsibilities. These directors note that a singular leader only emerges when needed. Some directors also work with field school students and personnel to establish a set of shared guidelines and values that steer behavior.

Many field directors also provide ample text on their expectations of student behavior. Some field directors emphasize the importance of professionalism using words like respectful, courteous, cooperation, and civility to describe expected behavior and the research environment.

Other field school syllabi attempt to eliminate unwanted student behavior like whining or complaining and encourage students to have the right attitude. These syllabi focus less on students conducting themselves professionally. Words associated with this approach include energy, enthusiastic, no complaining, and sense of humor.

Another interesting theme was the concept of the individuality of behavior. Several syllabi noted that students are singularly responsible for their own behavior. This language appears in syllabi and submitted University Codes of Conduct.

### **Slide 9: Logistics of the course**

One feature common to archaeological field schools is subjective grading primarily based on student attitude. Grading based on attitude prescribes and reinforces the student behaviors that the field directors want of their students. Student attitude may reflect difficult life circumstances outside the field schools or difficult circumstances within the field school. If attitude is prescribed and assessed without an established rubric or input from the student, and is affected by situations that include harassment, students may be less likely to report harassment.

### **Slide 10: Explicit policies on sexual harassment and assault**

Many directors also ask students to report issues of harassment directly to them. In so doing, the director then has control over this complaint to do with it as they wish, rather than what is best for the students and/or staff involved. The field director's actions to attempt to unilaterally resolve complaints may not necessarily result in the most balanced outcome. In some syllabi, the director provides the contact information for their university's Title IX coordinator in the case the student feels as though their complaint did not result in a reasonable outcome. Some syllabi also instructed students experiencing harassment to approach the student harassing them to resolve the issue. This practice places the responsibility of resolution solely on the person being harassed.

Additionally, some field directors note that cases of sexual harassment and assault will be fully investigated before dismissal occurs without mention of the direct actions the director will take to support the student who has experienced the harassment. Many directors also state that they have a "Zero tolerance" policy for harassment, but fail to define what "Zero tolerance" means. In such cases, it is often unclear how a "zero tolerance" policy will be operationalized.

### **Slide 11: Acknowledgements**

As we examine and analyze the data we have, we hope to continue to speak to areas where field directors can strive for improvements, as well as those areas where directors are creating supportive field learning opportunities. Our next step for this research is to more closely work with a sample of field directors to understand their considerations and intentions for implementing the policies and procedures they do, and how students perceive the effectiveness of these policies.

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