

**Testimony of Dr. Jean Morrison, Provost and Chief Academic Officer of Boston University  
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
Hearing on Combatting Sexual Harassment in Science  
June 12, 2019**

Chairwoman Johnson, Ranking Member Lucas, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify this morning. I am Dr. Jean Morrison, Provost of Boston University. That means I am the University's chief academic officer, overseeing BU's academic programs, research, global engagement, enrollment and student affairs.

My testimony will focus on two things: (1) how BU is addressing gender-based harassment on our campus and (2) what legislators can do to help universities address harassment in the most effective way. First I want to share my own story and stories of my BU colleagues, so you can understand academia's evolving approach to gender-based harassment.

### **My Story**

I have served as BU's Provost for more than eight years. I am a geologist by training, and my research has focused on the evolution of the earth's crust over time. I entered academia and began pursuing my doctorate in the 1980's. Then, like now, excellence in science demands rigor and discipline. Our job was and is to blaze a fact-based trail to the truth. Our methodology is exacting and unforgiving in its objectivity. Had those traits applied only to our science it would have been a good thing. But as scientists we let those traits encroach into our workplace culture. That culture, like our science, had to be tough, and if we were to be demanding in our methodology we believed we had to be taskmasters as well of those under us. Our students had to be taught how to play the game, and with the power squarely on the side of the faculty, the work environment was harsh, and hazing not infrequent. This was especially true for women who had the added burden of gender-based discrimination.

In the five institutions where I've studied and taught, I was often the only female in a meeting or one of only a small number of women at a field site. Bullying behavior was baked into the system, and there certainly wasn't an expectation that science be collaborative or welcoming.

Back then, efforts to change that culture were only sporadic and arose from individual efforts, and not from the scientific or academic communities-at-large. In fact, you would not have been considered a serious scientist if you even raised the issue for discussion. And, despite the existence at that time of laws and policies prohibiting sexual harassment and other forms of sex discrimination, attempts to report and enforce these laws and policies was also rare and could be perilous to a budding scientist's career.

But with the publication of the *Study on the Status of Women Faculty in Science at MIT* in 1999 and the acceptance of the findings of that report by the leadership of the Institute, the ground began to shift. It became acceptable to both be a serious scientist *and* to want to work to change the culture and enhance the opportunities for women in science and engineering. In

2002, I became the founding Director of the University of Southern California's Women in Science and Engineering (WiSE) initiative, and today, as provost at Boston University, I supported the launch of the ARROWS program - Advance, Recruit, Retain & Organize Women in STEM.

I feel this issue very deeply and personally. My daughter is in a PhD program in STEM and I want to be sure that she has the opportunity to thrive.

### **Boston University**

Happily, time and people's attitudes are changing, and the fight for gender inclusion in science is not as lonely anymore. Today's scientists and engineers are showing my generation that excellent science is compatible with a culture of inclusion and respect, and – furthermore – a welcoming, positive culture makes it *more likely* the best science will result!

When I think of the current generation of scientists, I think of people like BU neuroscientist Steve Ramirez. You may have seen his famous TED Talk about whether we can implant false memories in the brain. Dr. Ramirez prioritizes a collaborative lab environment and uses the motto, "We stand on each other's shoulders, not each other's feet." He pledges to have a lab that is "supportive in our daily endeavors, conducive to rigorous science, proactive about collaborating, and full of solidarity." It's no surprise, then, that his team of post-docs, research assistants, and students is majority female. Dr. Ramirez understands that great science is inclusive.

And I think of BU ecosystems ecologist and biogeochemist Robinson "Wally" Fulweiler, who is thriving in her research. This year, Dr. Fulweiler won BU's highest teaching honor, the Metcalf Cup and Prize, because she understands that the "legacy of your students is how you really make a mark on the world." Dr. Fulweiler is dedicated to lifting up the scientists coming behind her, welcoming people into science rather than pushing them out.

### **BU's Path to Change**

This new generation of scientists is changing academia's norms, and they need our help. I am pleased to tell you what BU is doing to support them, but I want to make clear that we are still a work in progress. Yes, our values and our intentions are in the right place, but our job is to take the concrete steps needed to match those values with actions.

You are no doubt familiar with the case that was publicized in *Science* magazine in 2017: an earth scientist at BU was accused of harassing and bullying two of his former graduate students more than twenty years ago at a field site in Antarctica. One student was so fearful that reporting the behavior would derail her scientific career that she waited until she was a tenured professor at another institutions to let BU know what had happened. Following our investigation, we initiated a serious consequence: the BU scientist lost his tenured position and was terminated.

This case and its repercussions reverberated powerfully at BU. It was followed closely by the release of the National Academies report on *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*, which starkly laid out the terrible costs of gender-based harassment in science, engineering, and medicine.

So we recognize that we need to redouble our efforts. Here's what we're doing:

1. *Diversity, equity and inclusion*. Why do I identify diversity, equity and inclusion as a necessary first step in addressing harassment? Because as the National Academies report on harassment in academia makes clear, taking explicit steps to achieve greater gender and racial equity in hiring and promotions and improving the representation of women and underrepresented groups at every level of the University is key to creating a culture and climate that rejects harassment. Those of us at the highest levels of the University have to make clear our values and act on them in order to create an environment that nurtures excellent, collaborative science.

For example, we have changed the tenure clock to include time for parental leave, we are expanding child care offerings for employees and their families, and we have a childbirth and adoption accommodation policy for doctoral students. These changes benefit all at BU, but are especially important for women.

Dr. Crystal Williams joined the BU as our inaugural Associate Provost for Diversity & Inclusion in 2017. We have increased our focus on recruiting and hiring a more diverse faculty, and Dr. Williams recently hired staff who will be engaged with inclusive organizational development and training. (<http://www.bu.edu/provost/diversity/>).

I'll note the deans of some of our leading schools and colleges - Medicine, Business, Law, and, soon, Communication - are all women, as are the General Counsel, the Vice President and Associate Provost for Research, and me, the Provost. Yes, our work continues, but we are serious about having an inclusive community at all levels of the University.

2. *AAAS STEM Equity Achievement (SEA) Change*. Dr. Joyce Wong, the founding director of BU ARROWS: Advance, Recruit, Retain & Organize Women in STEM, led a rigorous University-wide assessment of BU's commitment to inclusion and equity in science, engineering, and mathematics and developed an action plan to address the barriers she identified. As a result, BU was one of three universities recognized for STEM equity by the American Association for the Advancement of Science with its inaugural SEA Change Bronze Award ([https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2019-02/aaft-art021119.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2019-02/aaft-art021119.php)). We were recognized both for our commitment to support undergraduate students transitioning to PhD and our work to create more women STEM leaders at BU by supporting associate women STEM faculty as they transition to full professor rank. This Committee heard in May from Dr. Shirley Malcom, who leads AAAS

SEA Change, so you understand how powerful it can be for institutions to assess their own culture and commit to systemic change.

3. *Mandatory sexual misconduct prevention training.* During this academic year, BU initiated a mandatory, online sexual misconduct prevention training course for all 34,000 undergraduate and graduate students and 11,000 faculty and staff at the University (<http://www.bu.edu/safety/sexual-misconduct/training-sexual-misconduct/>).
4. *Working Group on Gender-Based Harassment Prevention.* Earlier this year, I tasked a group of faculty and University leaders to develop recommendations for how BU can advance our effort to provide a working and learning environment that is free of gender-based harassment (<http://www.bu.edu/provost/files/2019/02/Formation-of-Working-Group-on-Gender-based-Harassment-Prevention-2-26-19.pdf>). Their mandate is broader than the science, engineering, and medicine fields; the working group is looking at the whole of our University, which also includes the arts and the humanities. The group will deliver its recommendations this fall.
5. *National Academies Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education.* BU has joined more than 45 other institutions to launch the National Academies Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education (<http://sites.nationalacademies.org/sites/sexualharassmentcollaborative/index.htm>). Building upon the recommendations of the June 2018 National Academies report on harassment in academia, the group held its first meeting this week. We are eager to share best practices with our peers, develop an evidence-based approach for harassment prevention, and embark on a collective activity that can bring the change we seek in academia.

## **The Role of Federal Policymakers**

Universities are foundational to this work, but we do not operate alone. We have watched as scientific societies lead the way on addressing harassment at scientific gatherings, we have seen a handful of federal research agencies roll out policies to address harassment by grantees, and we recognize Congress will act as well. As recipients of federal funds, it is appropriate that we uphold the nation's values of respect and inclusivity as we conduct our research.

I thank this Committee for introducing H.R. 36, the bipartisan Combatting Sexual Harassment in Academia Act. I appreciate the bill's focus on a government-wide approach to handling sexual misconduct by federal grantees. There are several items I particularly want to praise:

1. *Clarity and consistency for federal grant rules.* It has been heartening to see science agencies start to tackle the issue of gender-based harassment, but it's better for all of us in science if there is one clear set of rules at the federal level. It will not make sense for

any lab to operate under different anti-harassment policies based on which agency funds its research.

2. *Research*. Thank you for authorizing the National Science Foundation to fund research on gender-based harassment – this is essential. As scientists, we want the data. We absolutely must evaluate our efforts on campus to make sure that something we do because it is well-meaning is also effective and evidence-based.
3. *Stakeholder input*. Thank you for ensuring that the interagency working group led by the Office of Science and Technology Policy will incorporate stakeholder input. When it comes to changing federal rules, it's important to consult those who will be impacted so you get it right the first time.
4. *Responsible Conduct of Research*. I agree it makes sense to have the National Academies update its "On Being a Scientist: A Guide To Responsible Conduct of Research" report to include updated professional standards of conduct and methods for identifying and addressing sexual harassment.

I do, however, want to ask the Committee to take a fresh look at a few items in the bill:

1. *Potential conflicts between federal science and education agencies, Congress, and state law*. Title IX, the Clery Act, and state law all govern how sexual misconduct is handled on college campuses. If students are involved, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) may come into play, and employment law may be a factor with faculty and staff cases. I hope the Committee will carefully assess how this bill interacts with these existing laws and regulations. I will give you two examples:
  - a. If students are considered to be grant personnel, how will a University's obligation to report a harassment case to a science agency comport with FERPA?
  - b. If the OSTP interagency group decides to mandate a climate survey, how will that fit with similar, mandatory surveys that are being proposed by the Congressional education committees and states like Massachusetts?
2. *Privacy of data collection*. The bill creates new data reporting by universities. It is important to ensure that adequate privacy protections for those who report sexual harassment are built into the bill. Despite the increasing acceptance of reporting harassing behavior, we have learned from the cases we have adjudicated that sometimes complainants and witnesses are only willing to come forward if they know their information will not be shared with anyone else. The Committee should make clear what privacy protections are contemplated.

Again, thank you again to this Committee for holding today's hearing, bringing public attention to gender-based harassment in academia, and listening to universities as we work towards solutions. I look forward to answering your questions.