


Leadership Excellence and Gender in Organizations

Sexual harassment of hospitality student interns

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Sexual Harassment of Hospitality Student Interns

The evidence of sexual harassment across many professions is front and center in the media today as more and more women come forward to expose their harassers. Sadly, students attending U.S. colleges and universities are not immune from sexual harassment and assault based on the 2015 study conducted by the Association of American Universities climate survey on sexual assault and sexual misconduct. One of the key findings was 11.7 percent of student respondents across 27 universities reported experiencing nonconsensual sexual contact by physical force, threats of physical force, or incapacitation since they enrolled at their university. One of the business sectors that is notorious for sexual harassment is the hospitality industry. Donald (2014) reported that sexual harassment in the restaurant industry is rampant, if not encouraged in the restaurant culture. These statistics are even more alarming when you consider the fact that hundreds of hospitality programs in the United States require students to internships in the hospitality industry. Yet, there has been no research reported in the hospitality journals as to whether or not students are subjected to sexual harassment during their internships. To determine whether or not students are experiencing sexual harassment, a survey of five top hospitality programs has just been completed. The data were collected using Fitzgerald's (1999) Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ). We also sought to determine how they coped with harassment. Finally, students were asked if they were informed as to the inappropriate sexual behavior they may encounter during the internship, whether they were given any training by the internships coordinator prior to leaving campus, or given training where they were doing their internship. The implications of this research should be clear to hospitality businesses looking to hire a talented, diverse, experienced group of students graduating from hospitality programs. If students do internships where they are sexually harassed they are unlikely to return to that toxic workplace. Worse still, female students may decide against working in the hospitality altogether given the harassment they had to endure during their internship and choose another career path, which happens based on the personal knowledge the two lead researchers have who remain in contact with students.