

There's a professor here who's been doing unprofessional things that make me uncomfortable. It's never anything huge, but it's built up over the years I've been here and I don't feel safe around him. Although I'm generally really happy at Rochester, these situations have made me miserable at times. It's Florian.

I don't specifically remember a lot of the things he's done because they were little and made me really uncomfortable, but weren't ridiculously unacceptable, just unprofessional. Stuff didn't stick out too much; I just got really uncomfortable. Also, sometimes it takes me a while to get what happened in a social interaction and understand how I felt about it and why. Early on I got the sense that he likes to push people's boundaries and that's a huge red flag to me. I've done a pretty good job of completely avoiding him since he started making me feel uneasy, except when that's impossible (department events). Two examples that do stick out are:

1. My office is 414, and his is 418 (two doors away). A couple years ago (I think early in my second year), he walked into my office without asking, picked up some post-its and a pen off someone's desk, then stood directly behind my chair at my desk (in a very large, empty office) without saying anything, for what felt like a few minutes (may have just been a minute). I turned my screen off and angled it so I could see him behind me and worked on something else. I assumed he was writing a note for his door as he had done before with our office supplies but it was creepy and unprofessional. Fortunately when Redacted moved into the office he quit poking his head in all the time randomly, which is what he'd been doing before then.

2. At the end of the final recruiting party at Jessica and Brad's this year, I was on the couch hugging one of Redacted stuffed animals. There were several other graduate students hanging out there, and Florian walked in and asked if he could take a picture of me. I said no, and he walked out. I was waiting to walk home with my neighbor and everyone had left the room when he walked by again and just took a picture of me with his phone. I was pretty angry, and the picture (if it still exists anywhere) is of me flipping him off. It makes me feel angry, sick, and my skin crawl to think of him having a picture of me anywhere.

I just told Dick about him making me uncomfortable this spring. I realize it's not ideal that this has gone on so long. This shit's been happening for years but it took me a long time to realize how uncomfortable it makes me, that it usually happens when other people aren't there to see (so they didn't know about it), and most importantly: that it's been happening to other graduate student women and it's not just me and I'm not overreacting by thinking he's creepy. I had not-great experiences with some of his students in my first semester (who have now graduated), and learned enough about him to predict that he would not let things go, so I figured if I said something about it, I would probably end up way more unhappy from social exclusion and him escalating. I had given up on anything being done about it and only told Dick because after the recruiting incident I had to interact with Florian after my short lunch talk and I realized then that I'm really upset about everything he's been doing and I want someone to know why I don't ever want to be around him.

I didn't realize how I was responding until recently, but I've dealt with this by removing myself from department activities he would be at. I feel cut out of some graduate student social events because he comes to them. There are people I don't hang out with because he'll be there, or it's hosted at his house. I have avoided going to professional learning opportunities because he would be there (or it involved his lab). I've avoided collaborating with people who work with him because I was worried I'd have to be around him, or even meet with him. This situation has

influenced me wanting to go into industry rather than academia because in industry when you get harassed it's easier to change jobs, and I'm not sure I could live with knowing another professor was harassing students somewhere I worked.

Things were fine this summer and fall, after I told Dick, because I haven't seen him and he's been on sabbatical. Florian was in town recently and the whole situation has been bothering me. He showed up to a postdoc/grad student potluck two weeks ago and I left. It's been upsetting seeing him around, especially at grad student social events. I talked to Steve about it after he noticed I wasn't doing so well and he said that you don't know about this but could do more than has been done previously (having Redacted babysit him maybe hasn't been the most effective way to address the issues). I wouldn't have said something if Steve hadn't spent some time convincing me it would be both safe to say something and worth it. I also talked to a potential CLS postdoc last weekend at a conference and she said she didn't want to apply because she was afraid if she got it she would have to work with Florian. I told her she wouldn't have to, but I don't know whether she'll apply.

Here are some actions I think would help.

1. Try to hear from other women in the department about what Florian has done to them, specifically. I can tell you what happened to me, but it's not that bad compared to some really inappropriate things that happened to others. There's a pattern, and it's recent and ongoing, and some of it is really unacceptable. I could ask some of them if they'd be ok with you contacting them? What I know about includes past and present postdocs and grad students, and one (probably many more) past undergrad. At least nine other women, some of whom don't want to say anything (unless asked directly?) because they want to stay in academia and are worried he'll retaliate by badmouthing them when they try to get jobs.
2. Can he get some training on boundaries and respecting them? Personally I doubt how effective that would be because I honestly think he's trying to make people uncomfortable, but at least letting him know that's not acceptable in this department would help.
3. It took me less than two months of being at Rochester to feel creeped out, and then two and a half years to say something to my advisor, over which time Florian's behavior continued to the point that I got so angry I could finally tell someone who wasn't a peer. It's really not easy, but it could potentially be made slightly easier for people to speak up if it were clearer in the department who to say something to and that it will be taken seriously and things will change. If there's any way to do that, it would be great. I feel bad that I haven't checked in with younger grad students because they might be going through what I went through without knowing they're not the problem, and that is shitty.
4. No graduate student should ever live with him again. He's still, as recently as this summer, getting students to rent from him and from what I've heard that is a terrible idea.

Here's what I need advice on.

1. I never want to have to interact with him again. I never want him at a talk I give. Is that possible? If he ever tries to push for interaction, is it ok to tell him I prefer not to because of how uncomfortable his unprofessional behavior has made me?
2. What do I tell prospective students? It's incredibly awkward. Nobody's ended up coming to work with him, but people ask and I feel like a terrible person for not warning them. This is an awkward thing for more than just me, and for more than just the women he's harassed.

Redacted

Redacted

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Keturah Bixby** Redacted  
Date: Wed, Nov 20, 2013 at 1:56 PM  
Subject: Re: question  
To: Redacted

Hi Redacted,

Yes, other things are going pretty well! It's been incredibly busy but I feel like there's a light at the end of the tunnel. ;)

Thanks so much for writing back! I will pass along your name.

Thanks again!  
keturah

On Wed, Nov 20, 2013 at 2:46 PM, Redacted wrote:  
Hi Keturah,

I'm glad to hear you said something. Many of us have said similar things to Redacted since Florian started and it is part of the reason I didn't have him on any of my committees although I was doing production work. I also haven't had an experience that would qualify as sexual harassment, but definitely over the line and unprofessional. It would be perfectly fine to have him contact me.

Redacted

Thanks for checking! Hope non-Florian things are well for you!

Redacted

On Wed, Nov 20, 2013 at 1:14 PM, Keturah Bixby

Redacted

wrote:

Hi Redacted,

I had a meeting with Greg this morning in which I told him that Florian has been doing unprofessional things that have made me very uncomfortable, to the point that I've avoided being around him since my first year, and only recently gotten angry enough to say something. Greg had no idea anyone had ever had problems like that, but wanted to know more so he could address it. What happened to me was not at the level of sexual harassment, but I know other people have had worse experiences that are. I think we may have talked about him once but I don't really remember. No matter what your experiences, if you were ever uncomfortable it would probably be helpful for Greg to understand what kind of things have been going on. If you would be comfortable talking to Greg, would it be ok for me to give him your name? No problem if you don't feel like it. Everything would be confidential. Sorry to be contacting you about this!

Redacted

Redacted

Thanks!

keturah

Redacted

Gmail - thanks!



Redacted

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thanks!

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Redacted

Fri, Nov 22, 2013 at 10:30 AM

To: Keturah Bixby

Redacted

Hi Keturah,

No problem. I hope I can help somehow It's the "micro" that is relevant. I wonder if people have studied this wrt sexual harassment.

Redacted . However I'm trying to find another room so we can watch the whole thing. That room has another class in it right after mine. I'll keep you posted.

Redacted

On Thu, Nov 21, 2013 at 12:23 AM, Keturah Bixby · Redacted wrote:

Thanks for listening today! I appreciate it. One thing I thought of that might help - as Greg hears from people over the next weeks or months, maybe check in with him to chat about it and make sure he understands how constant little comments or actions can eventually make things pretty unsafe. You mentioned microaggressions and I thought about it and I think in a lot of ways that fits and it's a useful concept, but for me it seems to feel different. Like microaggressions would be "this person is hurtful" versus someone pushing boundaries is "this person is viscerally unsafe." Other people might have different experiences, though!

Apparently it was more than one undergrad who left his lab because of his comments. I figured so, but the people who know them are going to let them know Greg would like to hear about their experiences.

Thanks again!  
keturah

Redacted

Redacted

Redacted

**Subject:**Re: meeting

**Date:**Thu, 21 Nov 2013 00:53:32 -0500

**From:**Keturah Bixby

Redacted

**To:**Greg DeAngelis

Redacted

Hi Greg,

Some people have asked about how confidential it would be if they talked to you, because they don't want anything getting back to Florian, and it would be possible for the situations/circumstances to identify them even without names.

I'm not as worried about confidentiality, as I don't feel like I have anything to lose. Lots of people in the department know I'm uncomfortable around him (other people are, too). I don't think it'd be hard for him to figure out I said something, but I also think if he tried to push back I'd be pretty comfortable telling someone now. So I'm not worried about that, myself.

Apparently it was more than one undergrad who left Florian's lab because of his comments. I've asked people who know them to see whether they'd be ok with talking to you about it. Of course I'll let you know if I hear that anyone is.

Redacted

is happy to share her observations, though she didn't feel harassed, and ended up having a productive working relationship with him.

Thanks again!

keturah

On Wed, Nov 20, 2013 at 6:54 PM, Greg DeAngelis

Redacted

wrote:

OK, thanks Keturah. Let me know the other people to contact whenever you are ready. I am out of town Monday and Tuesday, but I will get started on this...

Again, thanks for bringing this to me. You did the right thing, and I will keep this confidential

Greg

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Greg DeAngelis  
Professor and Chair  
Dept. of Brain and Cognitive Sciences  
Center for Visual Science  
University of Rochester

Redacted

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On 11/20/2013 3:02 PM, Keturah Bixby wrote:

Hey Greg,

I did give Celeste a heads up that I'd talked to you and mentioned her name, and she was fine with that. Redacted is also ok with talking to you about her bad-but-not-sexual-harassment experiences. I'll let you know any other names that people are ok with.

Thanks again,  
keturah

On Tue, Nov 19, 2013 at 11:48 AM, Keturah Bixby  
Hi Greg,

Redacted

wrote:

Sounds great! See you then!

Thanks,  
keturah

On Tue, Nov 19, 2013 at 11:46 AM, Greg DeAngelis  
Hi Keturah,

Redacted

wrote:

Sure. How about tomorrow at 11:00?

Greg

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Greg DeAngelis  
Professor and Chair  
Dept. of Brain and Cognitive Sciences  
Center for Visual Science  
University of Rochester

Redacted

Redacted

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On 11/19/2013 10:39 AM, Keturah Bixby wrote:  
Hi Greg,

Could I meet with you sometime this week to talk about a department thing? I'm free all Wednesday before/after the lunch talk, and all Friday before/after the 1p talk. It would probably take a half hour, and definitely no more than an hour, and it's a situation I want you to know about it and I'd like some guidance on what to do.

Thanks!  
keturah



Redacted

**Subject:**Re: mtg  
**Date:** Fri, 7 Mar 2014 19:44:23 -0500  
**From:**T. Florian Jaeger Redacted  
**To:**Greg DeAngelis Redacted

Thank you for your email and for immediately replying in the midst of a busy day. I could do tuesday 1pm or 3:15pm or later. Your email helped but any more detailed guidance would be appreciated.  
florian

On 3/7/2014 3:28 PM, Greg DeAngelis wrote:

Hi Florian,

This will be fairly quick because I am in between meetings. I'll be happy to talk more about this next week. Tuesday early afternoon works for me or Thursday morning before 11.

First of all, don't over-react. My intention was to make you aware of this, but not to have you beat yourself up. The question is how to give you more feedback without compromising confidentiality, and I'm not sure about that right now. I can try to talk to the people who raised the issue, but I'm not sure if that would lead to more details.

Importantly, there is no implication here of anything more severe. If I had thought that anything I heard was a case of sexual harassment, for example, then I would have been obligated to turn this over to the University to handle. But that is not the case.

I think you are right to feel that it is hard to respond or react to such anonymous complaints -- I totally get that. And if some formal complaint were being made, you would expect to hear the complaints and respond. But that is not where this is headed. This input just flowed to me and I felt I had to share it with you. I have no way to verify the veracity of each incident, and much of this could be misunderstandings for all I know.

I would not suggest that you try to immediately formulate new policies to deal with this. Just be sensitive to these sorts of issues regarding personal/professional boundaries going forward. That is really all that I am suggesting.

Greg

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Greg DeAngelis  
Professor and Chair  
Dept. of Brain and Cognitive Sciences

Redacted

On 3/7/2014 1:33 PM, T. Florian Jaeger wrote:

Hi Greg,

I think I need another meeting. I'm afraid I have no idea what to make out of what you said. What you have conveyed weighs very heavily in my mind and affects my well-being significantly. (not to have the courtesy to walk up to someone in my view implies that I have done terrible things to that person).

So, while I understand that there's only so much detail you can give me, this is an extremely ineffective situation and one in which I either don't change anything (because I honestly don't understand the issue) or a few people dictate the social dynamics in my lab (because I just bluntly stop/avoid anything that might under any conception fall into the vague category of interactions you described). So, while I understand that there's only so much detail you can give me, this is an extremely ineffective situation and one in which I either don't change anything or a few people dictate the social dynamics in my lab. Perhaps the following questions are ok:

Do I have to be available for every student? Isn't it ok if some students just don't work with me? It's not that I've been hiding how I am and the type of student that can't even say "no, of-campus doesn't work well for me today. let's do on-campus another day" isn't a good match for me to work with.

It would seem though that there's some deeper issue here that I'd like to understand better: my style of advising is seen as in conflict with what's acceptable: since I'm sure that there's people who like and people who don't like just about any way of advising, it can't just be an issue of my style not being liked. So, what are the things one isn't supposed to do? given that you have to keep things anonymous, perhaps you can give me a larger superset of specific things that would be inappropriate? I am sorry to put that burden on you, but I can't change what I don't understand.

Is there any claim of anything more severe? you mentioned the word "harassment", which shocked me. In that case, I would like to have the right to defend myself since I really don't see how I can have harassed someone. More generally, I have to say that with accusations like this it would seem fair if they were conveyed in a way that specific enough so that I have a chance to a) learn from them and b) to speak to them. There must be a way to do this that keeps students/post-docs anonymous?

I've thought about possible actions I can take. In Germany, I would say that everyone should feel comfortable to tell me what they think, but it's clear that this is not the case here. So, I just can't come up with a solution that is anything short of:

no of campus meeting (so they have to wait longer for a meeting, but that's fine I think)

no lab dinners

no lab retreats

no attending of social events that involve only students (I often get invited, but maybe that's just because they feel they need to)

Would that take care of all things? It seems probably not?

Florian

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T. Florian Jaeger

Redacted

Alfred P. Sloan Research Fellow  
Associate Professor  
Brain and Cognitive Sciences (primary)  
Computer Science (secondary)  
University of Rochester,

Redacted

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T. Florian Jaeger

Redacted

Alfred P. Sloan Research Fellow  
Associate Professor  
Brain and Cognitive Sciences (primary)  
Computer Science (secondary)  
University of Rochester,

Redacted

USA

To schedule an appointment, please visit

Redacted

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----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**Re: Issues we discussed a few months ago

**Date:**Thu, 13 Mar 2014 14:15:13 -0400

**From:**Keturah Bixby <

**To:**Greg DeAngelis

Redacted

Hi Greg,

Thank you very much for looking into this and following up on it. I really appreciate it.

Thanks for working to maintain confidentiality! I kind of doubt everything can be functionally confidential (especially since, for example, Redacted has talked to him about situations before) but that's something I already expected.

Thank you for your response!

keturah

On Tue, Mar 11, 2014 at 7:50 PM, Greg DeAngelis

Redacted

wrote:

Hi Keturah,

Sorry for the long silence about the issues you raised with regard to Florian. After we spoke, I also talked to a few other people who had contacted me at your behest. There were consistent patterns of behavior in the stories. I spent some time reviewing the university policies, and I concluded that none of the stories that I was told were in violation of the university's policy on harassment, etc. But they certainly represented undesirable behavior.

Florian was gone for large chunks of the past few months, so I just met with him this week to discuss this. I described the general nature of the issues, but I did not tell him anything specific, and I was very careful not to even indicate the gender or career status (student, postdoc) of the people involved. So I am sure that confidence has been maintained.

Florian took this news pretty hard, even though I tried to present it in a constructive manner. We actually had a second meeting today because he was still bothered and wanted to talk more. He was a bit frustrated at not knowing the specifics of the situations, but he understood that I could not betray confidence. I think it is fair to say that Florian was unaware about the impact he had on other people in most of these situations. So we talked

about personal/professional boundaries, how an advisor has to be careful about power relationships when trying to be social with students, etc.

In the end, I do think that Florian learned some things about himself and that he will go forward with a heightened sensitivity to such things. He really did take it very seriously. I told him I would give him more feedback in the future if I heard anything more about these issues, and I encourage you or others to let me know if problems persist.

I'm happy to get together to discuss this further if you like, but I just wanted to give you an update first.

Best,  
Greg

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Redacted