



FIRE Doubts New Report's Campus Sexual Harassment Stats

By Jim Brown
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(AgapePress) - The [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE) says a new report claiming nearly two-thirds of college students are sexually harassed is "fatally flawed."

The report from the American Association of University Women (AAUW) finds that 62 percent of undergraduates say they have encountered some type of sexual harassment and nearly one-third of students say they have been physically harassed. However, the study's definition of harassment includes not only physical assault but also non-contact harassment, consisting of such things as "sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks."

The AAUW study found the primary form of harassment occurring in college and university settings to be such non-contact offenses. But Greg Lukianoff, interim president of FIRE, says genuine harassment is much more serious than someone merely being offended. He feels the AAUW report wrongly conflates "harassment" with speech that someone may simply deem inappropriate.

"To have a study that includes things that are actually, in some cases, criminal acts on the same continuum of someone cracking a joke that someone doesn't happen to find funny -- it just shows how detached from reality this study actually is," Lukianoff says. Harassment, he contends, is the most abused rationale for censoring clearly protected expression on campuses today.

The FIRE spokesman says the AAUW's research relied on an "incredibly overly broad definition of sexual harassment." He believes harassment accusations are often, with the help of such over-generalized definitions and restrictive speech codes based on them, leveled to censor free speech on academic campuses.

"One of the major driving forces for speech codes on college campuses is not just that people believe in the ideology of the right not to be offended," Lukianoff says, "but also because universities are so afraid of being sued."

The academic freedom and free speech advocate believes many university officials today are so fearful of litigation that they take measures that ultimately restrict students' constitutionally protected freedom of expression. Because of the administrations' anxiousness to avoid "what would normally be considered frivolous harassment suits," he says, "they feel like they have to pass these kinds of codes so people don't say things that someone could potentially deem harassment."

Lukianoff says the results of the AAUW's report claiming nearly two-thirds of students have been sexually harassed at college are "highly misleading." However, calls to the university women's group seeking comment on its study were not returned.

Jim Brown, a regular contributor to *AgapePress*, is a reporter for [American Family Radio News](#), which can be heard online.

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