



Go Ask Rog—Sexual Harassment Advice for Graduate Students

(The following situation is fictitious and utilized solely for educational purposes. Any similarity to actual persons or circumstances is coincidental and unintentional.)

Dear Rog:

When we finish a project deadline, some people in my lab like to relax by logging on to YouTube.com to watch videos. Most of the downloads are hilarious or newsworthy, but others are offensive. We are obviously too busy to watch on a regular basis, but occasional viewing is a fun way to reduce stress. This could not be considered sexual harassment, could it?

Dear Grad:

That's a good question. What are the boundaries for appropriate internet use in a work or educational setting? The answer depends on the context of the online behavior and how it impacts the professional environment.

The popularity of blogs, social networking and video sharing websites such as YouTube has exploded in the last year. YouTube, launched in February 2005, is one of the most popular websites on the internet. Over 100 million videos are viewed daily from the site. In addition, almost 70,000 videos are added each day to YouTube. One can view television commercials, music videos, scenes from the TV show "The Office," political commentary or a cat in a washing machine. YouTube has received so much internet traffic that TIME magazine named it the Invention of the Year for 2006.

YouTube may be a social phenomenon, but should it play a role in your work or educational environment? The UCSD sexual harassment policy applies to inappropriate internet use. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature that is so severe or pervasive, it creates a hostile environment for a reasonable person. Online behavior, such as viewing YouTube, could create a hostile environment if it meets this definition.

For example, looking at YouTube in the lab could be sexual harassment if a sexually explicit video is viewed by a bystander who is offended. While YouTube tries to remove videos that might be considered pornographic, as well as copyrighted material, you are ultimately responsible for what you chose to view.

As a grad student, you are also subject to UCSD's Academic Computing Services Acceptable Use Policies. Misuse of UCSD network accounts could include engaging in harassment, viewing pornography, or reproducing copyrighted works. In addition, under University policy, "computer files, electronic mail and accounts are not private in an absolute sense." Remember that access to campus computers and networks is a privilege and users are responsible for ensuring that all activities on UCSD accounts comply with policy.

Think too about the material you chose to add to YouTube and other websites. Increasingly, search committees use Google and other search engines to look at applicants' blogs, Facebook profiles or online videos. The information you post to YouTube, a blog or social networking site may be viewed by anyone. Are you comfortable knowing that your online musings may be viewed by your future boss?

There are appropriate educational uses for YouTube, blogs and other internet resources. For example, if you are in a creative discipline such as theatre, dance, film or visual arts, posting your work online may be a good way to market your talent. Context is everything.

Grad, think wisely about how you use the internet and remember that your online behavior could influence your career for better or worse. For information about sexual harassment and gender discrimination, contact the Office of Sexual Harassment Prevention & Policy (OSHPP) at 201 University Center, (858) 534-8298, <http://oshpp.ucsd.edu>. Solutions found here.