



## University Relations

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 10, 2019

News Release

# UW System joins national effort to prevent sexual harassment in higher education

*The Action Collaborative is convened by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*

MADISON, Wis. – The University of Wisconsin System is joining more than two dozen other institutions and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NAEM) to form the Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education.

“Our interest in joining the Action Collaborative as a founding member reflects our ongoing dedication to addressing the disturbing and persistent problems of sexual harassment and sexual violence in our society, and to identify and implement real, tangible approaches to continue tackling these challenges across higher education,” said UW System President Ray Cross.

The four goals of the Action Collaborative, being announced nationwide today, are to:

- Raise awareness about sexual harassment and how it occurs, the consequences of sexual harassment, and the organizational characteristics and recommended approaches that can prevent it;
- Share and elevate evidence-based institutional policies and strategies to reduce and prevent sexual harassment;
- Contribute to setting the research agenda, and gather and apply research results across institutions; and
- Develop a standard for measuring progress toward reducing and preventing sexual harassment in higher education.

The 28 founding members of the Action Collaborative include Harvard University, Northwestern University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Michigan, University of Southern California, Stanford University, University of Washington, and Yale University. UW System is the only system of higher education represented.

In addition to President Cross, the Chancellors of all 13 UW System institutions have signed separate letters of commitment to the goals of the Action Collaborative.

“Ensuring the safety of our students and our employees at every institution is one of the most important responsibilities of the Board of Regents,” said Regent Vice President Drew Petersen. “We strongly support the efforts of the Action Collaborative to help reduce and prevent sexual harassment in higher education.”

The Collaborative will support colleges, universities, federal agencies, and the science, engineering, and medical communities as they seek to take targeted, collective action that moves beyond basic legal compliance to evidence-based policies and practices at the individual and system level for addressing and preventing all forms of sexual harassment.

The announcement comes amid National Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Gov. Tony Evers has declared April Sexual Assault Awareness Month in Wisconsin.

The UW System has focused increased attention on addressing sexual harassment issues in recent years. In 2014, President Cross called for the creation of the UW System Task Force on Sexual Violence and Harassment, a two-year investigation of current and best practices. In 2016, the UW System put forth a comprehensive new Board of Regents' sexual assault and harassment policy, codifying the UW System's commitment to address the issue and mandating sexual violence and harassment training for all UW System employees and students. As of February 2019, UW System reported a nearly 100% compliance rate for employee training. The student compliance rate was about 85%.

In 2018, the UW System instituted groundbreaking new policies on reference checks and the sharing of personnel files that aim to prevent the "pass the harasser" practice. The new policies, unanimously approved by the Board of Regents, require all UW System institutions to document in personnel files instances of sexual violence or sexual harassment perpetrated by employees and to share that information with other employers. The policy also requires that final employment candidates be asked whether they have been found to have committed harassment.

In January 2019, the UW System also submitted comments to the U.S. Department of Education regarding the proposed changes to Title IX rules, reflecting the UW System's larger commitment to provide support to students and employees who allege sexual assault and harassment as well as robust due process protections to students and employees accused of misconduct.

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*The University of Wisconsin System serves more than 170,000 students. Awarding 36,000 degrees annually, the UW System is Wisconsin's talent pipeline, putting graduates in position to increase their earning power, contribute to their communities, and make Wisconsin a better place to live. More than 80 percent of UW System graduates stay in Wisconsin five years after earning a degree. The UW System provides a 23:1 return on state investment. UW System institutions also contribute to the richness of Wisconsin's culture and economy with groundbreaking research, new companies and patents, and boundless creative intellectual energy.*

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