

MEMO TO SEAC MEMBERSHIP

TO: SEAC Membership
FROM: SEAC Executive Committee
DATE: July 24, 2019
RE: Responses to 2018 report from Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Assault

The SEAC Executive Committee made a major decision in Spring 2019 regarding a possible grievance procedure for complaints of sexual harassment and assault. This memo provides information about why and how that decision was made.

In Fall 2018, the SEAC Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Assault (the "Task Force") submitted its second major report to the SEAC Executive Committee (the "Board"). The report is available on the SEAC website at: https://www.southeasternarchaeology.org/wp-content/uploads/SEAC_Task_Force2018.pdf. The report contained thirteen recommendations for next steps to be taken by SEAC to continue to combat harassment and assault and to improve the environment of the profession and organization.

In Spring 2019, following a public comment phase (Nov. 6, 2018 to Mar. 1, 2019) which yielded 20 comments, the Board evaluated recommendation #11 to establish a grievance process for adjudicating complaints of sexual harassment and/or assault. In May 2019, the Board voted to not establish such a grievance procedure. The goal of this memo is to explain that decision and how we reached it.

The motion we voted on

The wording of the motion discussed and voted on by the board was:

The Southeastern Archaeological Conference will implement a grievance process for complaints about sexual harassment and/or sexual assault. The Executive Committee of SEAC charges the Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault with drafting detailed procedures for such a process. The final written draft will be reviewed and approved by the Executive Committee.

The final vote was 10 against and one abstention.

Why did we choose to focus first on this recommendation?

We started with this recommendation because there was significant interest in a grievance procedure and because a grievance procedure would take major human and financial resources to implement appropriately (and might require a change to SEAC's bylaws depending on how such a process is structured). Therefore, it might absorb SEAC's human and financial resources, and delay SEAC's ability to take other steps to combat harassment and assault.

How did we discuss and debate this recommendation?

The discussion began via email in early Spring 2019 on the motion.

It was clear that there were diverse opinions and concerns among Board members. Therefore, board members agreed to meet in person at the SAA meetings. Two Board members did not attend SAA and one other member did not attend our meeting, but the rest of the board was present, as was Dr. Robbie Ethridge, chair of the Task Force. We met face-to-face for 90 minutes, and vigorously discussed the issue. Wide-ranging opinions, both pro and con, were presented.

After SAA, the discussion continued for a week via e-mail, and included all voting members of the Board. Following discussion, an e-mail vote was held. As noted above, the Board voted unanimously, with one abstention, not to establish a grievance process.

What factors influenced this vote?

Among concerns expressed, several board members had insurmountable reservations about placing volunteer members of SEAC in roles adjudicating claims of harassment and assault, especially with regard to claims about incidents that occur outside of SEAC events. Major concerns expressed were: gaps in training in investigating and evaluating claims; problems with conflicts of interest (especially in light of SEAC's relatively small membership and close relationships among members); major challenges maintaining confidentiality; and workload for volunteers. In addition, significant potential financial and legal liability to SEAC and its officers and committee members also factored in to the vote for board members who expressed concerns during our extended discussions.

SEAC's commitment to the future

This vote did not end SEAC's activities to combat sexual harassment and assault. SEAC remains committed to engaging with these complex issues, and establishing strategies that we hope will improve the environment in our profession. Among other things, President-elect Dr. Maureen Meyers will be joining a working group of representatives from SAA, AAA, SHA, and AAPA to share ideas and strategies. Also, SEAC has joined with Dr. Carol Colannino as a collaborator on her NSF grant proposal on establishing best practices for field schools specifically regarding these issues.

The Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Assault, ably led by Dr. Robbie Ethridge, continues to actively work on these issues with full support from the Board.

The Board's most immediate concern is to implement policies for annual meetings, starting with the 2019 meeting in Jackson, MS. The Task Force is currently working on these issues. In Jackson, SEAC will pilot a written Code of Conduct for meetings and the use of Safe Officers, to support individuals who feel uncomfortable or threatened. We will build on experience in Jackson to expand and improve meeting policies for the future. Workshops on mitigating and preventing harassment and assault in archaeological work situations are also being planned for Jackson.

With informed input from the Task Force, SEAC has both short-term and long-term goals to combat sexual harassment and sexual assault. SEAC is committed to making the meeting a safer space for all participants, and, more broadly, to changing the environment of the profession of archaeology to one of safety, collegiality, and respect extended to all.

SEAC will continue to support education around this issue, both through online resources that include online training modules, relevant studies, and other information (<https://www.southeasternarchaeology.org/sexual-harassment-task-force/>), as well as meeting workshops and information resources first made available at the 2018 meetings in Augusta that will continue at future meetings.

In the longer term, we anticipate a range of activities possibly including a second survey to assess the efficacy of these educational measures and to assess how we can more effectively target training and education. SEAC will continue to support the Task Force activities and will collaborate with the larger archaeological community as it addresses these issues.