Discrimination and Harassment:

A Letter May Help...

Discrimination or harassment is an abuse of power. It is an attack on the dignity and security of an individual. Discrimination or harassment can be verbal or physical.

If you feel offended or believe that you are being discriminated against or harassed, it may be difficult for you to deal directly with the offending party. However, you can still take some action on your own behalf, if you wish. The use of a letter to outline the problem gives you the opportunity to put the problem into concrete terms. It allows you to inform the party that you object to the behaviour and that you want it to stop.

There should be three parts to the letter:

**Part 1:** Give an objective statement of the facts as you perceive them.

This may be the most difficult part of the letter as your objectivity may be swayed. However, it is important that this section be very matter-of-fact with no judgments or opinions made. Give dates, times, places and a description of the incident(s). Where there is more than one incident, you may find it helpful to recount the incidents in a chronological fashion. If you are not sure whether something is factual, then preface the statement with, “I believe...” or give it the Fact Test – *could this fact have been recorded visually or audibly?* If not, then it is not a fact.

**Part 2:** Express how you feel about the incident.

Let the individual(s) know how the incident has affected you. For example:

"I no longer feel I can trust you"

"I feel like I have lost my best friend"

"I can’t eat or sleep"
“I had to drop your class”

“It is difficult for me to continue to work with you”

**Part 3: State clearly what you want to happen next.**

This section need not be long. Make it short and to the point:

“*Our relationship is over. I do not want you to contact me*”

“I don’t ever want you to touch me again”

“I want our relationship to be purely professional from now on”

“I want a written apology from you”

“I want to arrange to have my work graded by someone else”

Keep one copy of the letter (as possible evidence) and send the original letter to the individual(s) by registered mail, through a friend, or deliver it in person, if you feel comfortable doing so.

**EQUITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS SERVICES**

Equity and Human Rights Services is here to support the University in its goal to provide an environment free of discrimination or harassment for all its students, staff and faculty. For individuals who feel they have experienced discrimination or harassment, we can provide advice and assistance in resolving complaints. We are also available to provide training or presentations on a variety of equity-related issues.

Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday
Evening and Weekends by appointment

Location: Rms 330-335, Arthur and Sonia Labatt Health Sciences Building
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario N6A 5B9

Contact: Tel: (519) 661-3334 or Ext. 83334  Fax: (519) 661-2133
Email: equity@uwo.ca
Website: www.uwo.ca/equity

Acknowledgement: Sexual Harassment, a letter may help..., Mary Rowe, "Dealing with Sexual Harassment", HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW May-June, 1981, p. 43.