Statement to the Faculty of University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee
January 22, 1981

I welcome the opportunity to speak out on this matter today, and I appreciate your attendance, as well as your attention to this crucial matter. I will endeavor to be brief, so that we may all discuss our views as completely as possible.

The University of Wisconsin faculty has a tradition of self-governance that has enabled persons committed to honesty and integrity to share their ideas in an open forum without fear or threat of reprisal. This is such a forum. We cherish that tradition, which is why the issue before us today is so important.

Sexual harassment is the very antithesis of the honesty and integrity from which any university draws its life. When a student is coerced or intimidated to accept sexual advances or risk reprisal in a grade or a recommendation, that student is hurt -- perhaps irrevocably. We all are. When a classroom environment -- a place where ideas are proposed and challenged -- becomes an arena for derogatory epithets directed against one group of persons, a tone is established which is contrary to creativity and learning by anyone. We all lose.

The National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs gives us a working definition of academic sexual harassment:
"...the use of authority to emphasize the sexuality or sexual identity of a student in a manner which
prevents or impairs that student's full enjoyment of educational benefits, climate, or opportunities."

That definition may lack some statutory precision, but I believe it clarifies for us the most significant and saddest outcome of this kind of abuse: that an opportunity to teach is squandered, and an opportunity to learn is lost.

The Human Rights Committee asserts, and we believe that you will concur, that sexual harassment, spanning a spectrum of behavior from non-salacious slurs about gender to sexual assault, is inimical to the atmosphere which this university exists to create and nurture. We hope that our meeting today will afford us all an opportunity to teach and to learn, and to bring our collective forces to bear on this issue, and permanently rid us of it. We are not being asked to take official action today; but rather to express our views, ask our questions, and share our ideas for preventing and remediating instances of sexual harassment. These will be reflected in a draft resolution which will be brought to the faculty senate for consideration and forwarding to the Board of Regents, who in turn will attempt to formulate a policy applicable to the entire system.

The Committee was fortunate to be able to mobilize a wide latitude of involvement in its deliberations on this issue. Professors Ethyl Sloane and Rachel Skalitzky, who represented the University Committee at the Regents' discussion on sexual harassment, shared
a number of important faculty concerns to the Regent Education Committee's original resolution. One of these was the importance of airing and collecting faculty concerns at an open meeting such as this one before a policy was formulated. Experts in Equal Opportunity legislation, including attorneys for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Mr. William Jointer, Special Assistant to the Chancellor for Equal Opportunity, gave us invaluable advice on the legal aspects of the issue. Professor Cecilia Ridgeway, who will be addressing us in a few minutes, is a member of the Regent's Task Force on the Status of Women. She will provide us with information on the history of the UW System's involvement with the sexual harassment issue and the prevalence of the problem. For all of this assistance, we are sincerely grateful. One principal concern which we feel should be addressed today is that an offense should be clearly defined before a grievance procedure is constructed to deal with its occurrence. In the calendar you received for this meeting is UWM Faculty Document #1238. On Attachment B is contained a definition which we feel is an appropriate one with two modifications. Our modified definition would read:

The following conduct constitutes sexual harassment:

a. Any attempt to engage an unconsenting person in sexual activities or physical contact of a sexual nature; or

b. The following, if unsolicited and repeated: sexually derogatory epithets, sexually derogatory statements or gestures concerning an individual's
body, or sexually derogatory statements or gestures concerning the anatomical parts specific to one gender; or

c. Unsolicited and repeated physical contact of a sexual nature.

The standards to be used in determining whether a particular action constitutes sexual harassment will be those of common sense.

We expunged part (d) because we felt that it was not a conduct separable from parts a, b, and c, and because it is implicit in those parts. Our trailing sentence on "common sense" was added to insure that reasonable standards would be applied in determining whether a particular incident constituted an actionable offense. It is important to add that at the present time, there is no clear statutory authority involving sexual harassment in academic classroom situations. That the legislative situation is presently ambiguous is probably to our advantage; by getting our house in order now, we may ward off a later overreaction by public lawmakers.

I have talked long enough. Before we move to an open discussion of the matter, I would like to introduce Professor Cecilia Ridgeway of the Department of Sociology. Professor Ridgeway, a member of the Regents' Task Force on the Status of Women, will brief us on the history of the problem, and the parameters of its occurrence, within the University of Wisconsin System. I thank you for your attention and forbearance at this late hour.

Christopher Stone, Chairman
Human Rights Committee