



# FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

## ASKEW SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY

To All members of the FSU Community,

The Askew School faculty listed below are writing in response to the recent new reports detailing the alleged sexual misconduct of a former member of the Askew School faculty and the inadequate institutional investigation and response by Florida State University. We want all those who may feel victimized by the alleged misconduct of Richard Feiock to feel supported and heard, especially our current and former students. We want to be clear that no current or former student should feel any guilt or shame about the current situation. FSU did not take action against Dr. Feiock when formal complaints were made by students prior to 2020 although School Directors actively worked to have these complaints investigated and real sanctions taken. Our Deans at the time and FSU higher administration did not take action. Our goal is to first apologize for our failings as a department and the failings of the University. We believe it is important that we also communicate the departmental changes we are making in the School to ensure that no situation approaching the allegations of egregious misconduct of the former faculty will ever happen again.

As outlined in recent news stories the evidence alleges that Richard Feiock was a sexual predator who harassed and took advantage of students for over thirty years. His alleged actions ranged from inappropriate conversations to unwanted touching to coerced sex with a student under his supervision. While some heard rumors of inappropriate interactions with students, we did not know the extent of his predation. Once the investigation by FSU's HR department began in February 2020, we were told that we could not discuss the investigation with students or even amongst ourselves to ensure an unbiased, judicious, and timely process.

We believe we have failed you. Despite our silence, the investigation was lengthy, opaque, and allowed Dr. Feiock to escape full consequences or taking responsibility for his actions by retiring. Individually and collectively, we sought to help our students informally due to the lack of a formal institutional response, but we realize we could have done more. We should have pushed back against any alleged efforts by the former professor to isolate his students from the rest of the school, paid greater attention to the possibility of any alleged continued misbehavior and problematic departmental culture, provided a safe space for our students, and been more available for our students to confide in us. The Askew School had a very stringent policy against sexual harassment that was not enforced, in large part because FSU required a formal complaint by a faculty or student who experienced sexual harassment for any investigation to take place, and our School, by itself, had no real powers to address these behaviors.. In February of 2020, with the investigation ongoing, we revised the School's bylaws to further bolster our process and policies to protect students. Our new policy explicitly encourages reporting of incidents and making available timely service for those affected by an incident.

As a faculty, we are deeply saddened and appalled by the university's weak process and leadership in responding to multiple allegations of sexual harassment of Richard Feiock dating back to 1991. The faculty and students interviewed in the most recent investigation report that the investigation itself was arduous and hostile towards those affected by Feiock's actions. The

investigators focused a lot on the race, ethnicity, and nationality of the students as well the actions of Feiock. The student identities were redacted from the report, but their ethnicities and nationalities were not, which created further fear and trauma as news publications have reported based on the full 100 page plus investigation report. Please be aware that from January 2020 and July 2020, the faculty and staff received no information about the progress of the investigation nor the potential outcomes of the investigation. Failing to swift action in response to the repeated allegations of sexual misconduct by Feiock contravenes the very essence of a free and open safe space that our University purports to represent. Accepting Feiock's resignation instead of firing him for cause is also not acceptable as it allows the whisper network and silence to continue, and potentially allows other institutions to hire him without knowing about his past behavior. .

In recent weeks, we faculty have been openly available to students, and many have talked with us or emailed. We have reached out to students by listening and encouraging actions for their own benefit, such as counseling, and not blaming themselves and getting through the hurt of interactions with Feiock as they express their feelings and also learn more information on what actually took place. We have had several doctoral student zoom meetings and other student meetings are planned. Students are beginning to speak up more about how to move forward and less about their own hurt, though both need attention. Our COSSPP Dean Tim Chapin has been supportive of honest action this past year and has arranged faculty and student meetings with VP Gibbs (head of HR at FSU) and himself.

Before calling on others to act, we recognize the importance of first making change ourselves. We have collectively agreed to design and implement an anonymous complaint reporting process free from faculty involvement, increase transparency around application processes and the award of school funding for doctoral students, and rebuild a culture of support and trust in our doctoral program. We are also having ongoing discussions with our students about power dynamics, systemic bias, and oppression in the Askew School and measures we are taking to dismantle these biases and systems of oppression. All of this will be done with full student input and involvement.

In July 2020 we created the Social Justice and Innovation Lab in response to institutional and structural racism and gender-based bias, oppression, and violence. This SJI lab aims to provide a safe space for students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders to discuss issues and systems of oppression and discover innovative ways to promote social justice throughout our community and society at large. For example, two weeks ago, the Lab had a panel discussion on Anti-Asian Discrimination for students and faculty to speak together.

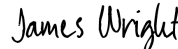
We call on the FSU Administration to also make meaningful changes to protect students and reduce the opportunity for sexual violence and oppression. FSU's Sex Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct Policy aims to "provide prompt, thorough, and impartial methods of investigation and resolution to stop discrimination, remedy any harm, and prevent its recurrence", but the recent events demonstrate that the institutional process was fundamentally flawed, and can still be improved. We welcome the student and faculty dialogue that will be possible in one or more meetings with VP Gibbs and Dean Chapin. . We sincerely hope that this letter serves as a first step in restoring the students' trust in us that was lost. While we cannot go back and change the wrong done, we hope we can co-create a better department in which students, faculty and staff feel safe, welcome and included.


Our specific recommendations are as follows:

1. The University engage the services of an outside, impartial third-party investigator or investigations team to handle all further allegations of sexual harassment, misconduct and abuse perpetrated by faculty and staff.
2. Acknowledge the university's multiple failures in ignoring prior complaints before 2020, conducting this investigation without providing any feedback to faculty and students who made complaints, protecting students, and failing to hold Feiock accountable.
3. Acknowledge the continuing harm to our community caused by sexism, racism, nativism and all systems of oppression.
4. Revisit the investigation's overwhelming evidence of wrongdoing to reach a conclusion of fault and retroactively **terminate** Feiock with cause.
5. Provide a summary of the investigation's findings to all institutions of higher education, funders or research, and professional associations that might consider hiring, funding, or being associated with Feiock absent knowledge of his wrongdoings.
6. Amend procedures and policies in order to conduct Title IX investigations in response to informal complaints and the potential presence of a hostile workplace, instead of requiring a student to make a formal complaint and be subject to personal exposure.
7. Amend retirement procedures to prohibit early retirement during an ongoing Title IX investigation.
8. Provide **external** counseling resources to current and former students impacted by Feiock's misbehavior and our institutional failures.
9. Investigate how Feiock's HR file was cleansed of all information and formal actions taken by FSU against him prior to 2020.
10. Acknowledge the continuing harm to our community caused by sexism, racism, nativism and all systems of oppression.

Our primary goal moving forward is to protect our students physically, emotionally, and professionally. We hope that the changes we make in the Askew School and the changes we recommend to FSU Administration will prevent this from ever happening again.

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