



SOCIETY OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

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SOGS Response to the Gazette: Sexual Violence Against Graduate Student Teaching Assistants Is Not Funny

On August 20, *The Gazette* published the article “So you want to date a teaching assistant?” The article denigrates the work of teaching assistants and reduces them to objects of sexual gratification. It encourages sexual harassment and disregards the importance of campus and workplace safety. While the Editorial Board of the Gazette has since issued an apology and a complete retraction of the article, the publication of the article and some of the responses to it remain concerning.

Harassment, including sexual harassment, of teaching assistants has been a serious issue at Western. By running an article that makes light of this, *The Gazette* and its Editor in Chief have shown a serious disrespect for the people who have been affected by abuse and harassment, and for the problems faced by academic workers at the university.

Graduate Teaching Assistants play a critical role in the education of undergraduate students at Western, particularly in first year courses. For the Gazette to use its “Frosh Issue” to present TAs to new students as targets of objectification, rather than professional educators, demeans their work and degrades them as individuals.

The article dismissed the importance of consent. The author claimed “One of the first steps probably should have been to ensure your TA’s sexual preferences match yours.” However, this caution is not given to prevent teaching assistants from unwanted sexual advances, but rather to save the harasser from wasting their time when it would make “no difference.”

The author went on to suggest that students take “full advantage” of the “one-on-one experience” of office hours – this conflates TAs doing their jobs with making themselves sexually available to students. At best, this article dismissed the seriousness of sexual harassment, and at worst provided a step-by-step guide for students to carry out stalking and sexual harassment.

While their apology is an important first step, if the paper’s Editors are serious about ensuring that campus “remains safe and accessible,” we strongly encourage the Editorial Board to attend training on sexual harassment in the workplace to understand how the content of the article, and their decision to publish it, created an unsafe work environment for teaching assistants.

The publication of this article in *The Gazette* is symptomatic of the broader issue of rape culture and sexual violence that continues to affect students on post-secondary campuses across Canada. It is the collective responsibility of everyone at Western to play a part in making our campus safe and free from all forms of harassment and sexual violence.

As part of furthering the conversation about harassment on university campuses, SOGS has partnered with PSAC 610 and Western Solidarity Network to hold an activist assembly in September, with several panels, including one entitled “Upsetting the Culture of Rape: On Rape Myths, Consent, and Feminist Solidarity, Gender-Based Violence and Rape Culture.” We look forward to the day when all members of our campus communities are free of the threat and the reality of sexual violence, and to working with all members of our Western community to make this a reality.

The Executive
Society of Graduate Students