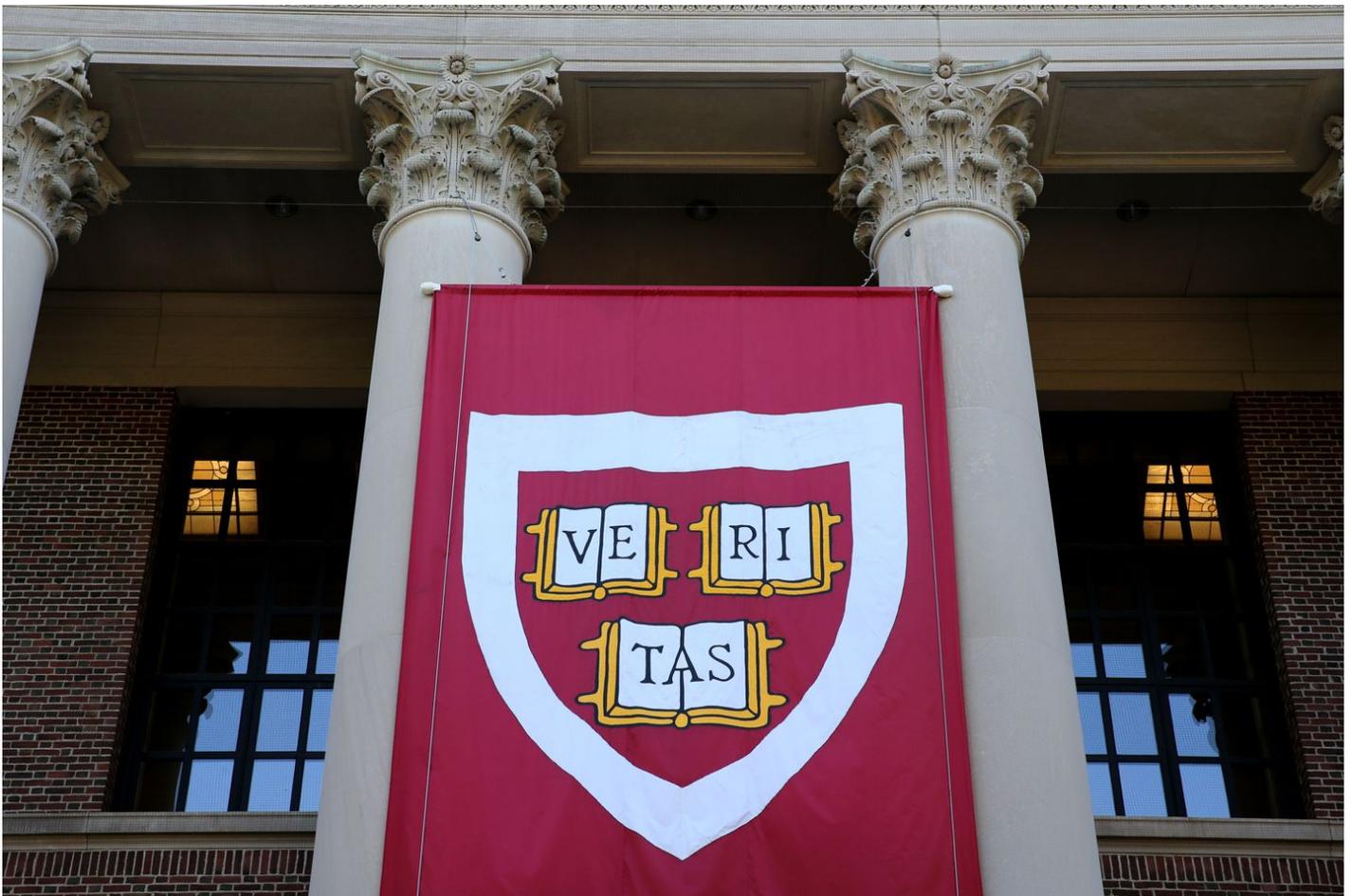


In the wake of harassment case, Harvard report finds 'prolonged institutional failure'

By [Deirdre Fernandes](#) Globe Staff, May 2, 2019, 7:08 p.m.



(CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF/FILE)

For decades, Harvard government students warned each other to wear heavy clothing and avoid late-afternoon appointments with the university's renowned Cuba expert and one-time vice provost Jorge Dominguez to fend off his inappropriate behavior. But little was done, in what an internal report now calls a "deplorable situation" and a "prolonged institutional failure."

Dominguez's behavior was an "open secret" until he suddenly retired last year following a published report alleging that he sexually harassed, touched, and attempted to kiss several women.

After a yearlong review of the school's government department — of which Dominguez was a member — a committee of Harvard faculty, staff, and students have demanded an outside investigation.

Committee members sent their letter and recommendations for change to Harvard president Lawrence Bacow and other top leaders this week.

Dominguez's climb up the ranks of Harvard and inaction by administrators "created the impression that the university knew about this behavior but did not care," the committee wrote in its letter. "Hundreds of students, staff, and junior faculty felt the consequences of this failure. We must analyze what went wrong."

Jonathan Swain, a spokesman for Harvard said university leaders are still reviewing the letter and report but that Bacow has expressed a willingness to consider an external review. But he wants the separate Title IX investigation of the sexual harassment allegations against Dominguez to be complete first, Swain said.

Dominguez did not respond to a request for comment Thursday.

The allegations against Dominguez surfaced in the spring of 2018 as part of the #MeToo movement. Several women detailed their experiences with Dominguez that stretched three decades, from 1979 to 2015, in articles in the Chronicle of Higher Education. The women alleged that Dominguez grabbed their knees, pressed his crotch into them, and touched their buttocks when he hugged them. Two women said they complained formally about Dominguez's behavior, and he was disciplined by Harvard in 1983.

But Harvard continued to promote Dominguez, even while the concerns about inappropriate behavior persisted.

Dominguez announced his retirement about a week after the Chronicle of Higher Education article.

The Dominguez allegations also opened rifts and heightened tensions between government faculty and students, said Steven Levitsky, who led the committee that reviewed the learning environment in the department.

Many students and junior faculty have questioned how longtime professors could have missed the questionable behavior, he said.

“There’s a major trust deficit between students and faculty,” said Levitsky, a government professor who has been at Harvard since 2000. “Either we didn’t know and were incompetent or knew and covered it up. . . . This weighs heavily on all of us.”

Levitsky’s committee also recommended a series of other reforms, from harassment training to improvements to reporting of sexual harassment complaints. Starting on July 1, Harvard will be piloting a university-wide anonymous reporting system, officials said.

The committee also found that only two women in the government department in the past 25 years have been recommended for tenure, compared to 14 men. The reasons varied, from women moving because of a spouse’s job to younger female professors feeling uncertain about their chances of tenure at Harvard and leaving for positions at other universities.

“It continues to look and feel like a male-dominated department,” Levitsky said.

The committee recommended better mentoring of young faculty, the hiring of professors to teach race and gender politics classes, which are in high demand but scarce on campus, and more robust recruiting of diverse faculty.

The committee also found that many students, including women, minorities, members of the gay and lesbian community, and political conservatives feel less welcomed in the government department. In fact, while the climate survey was focused on the gender and race divisions in the department, it found that nearly half of conservative students struggled to speak up in class and felt they could not be their “authentic self,” according to the report.

For the past year, Harvard’s students have been demanding changes in the wake of the Dominguez case. Hundreds have signed on to open letters and asked for stronger protections against sexual harassment. Earlier this year, many protested over how long it has taken to investigate the allegations highlighted by the Chronicle of Higher Education articles. Members of the graduate student workers union, who are in the midst of contract negotiation with Harvard, are also asking for changes to how the university deals with grievances related to sexual harassment and discrimination.

Levitsky said he understands that students want to see proof that the university is addressing their concerns.

Sophie Hill, a third-year doctoral student in the government department, said students are worried that if the Title IX investigation drags on it may be years before the university launches an outside review of how these problems festered.

“I think the recommendations are encouraging, but this was the easy part,” Hill, 28, said. “Implementing the recommendations and changing the culture is the hard part.”

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