

**PART 3 of 6**

Complaint No: ARS-2008-00542

authorization to accommodate additional sampling in the Palmer area. Since he was unable to contact her by phone and the message she left was confusing, he e-mailed complainant. He states it was his intention to clarify her request and provide guidance since complainant was a fairly new employee and it was towards the end of the project plan cycle. He reminded complainant on the need to meet approved milestones before engaging in other activities (Exhibit 11o).

He states on August 15, 2005, he discussed with complainant her long term research plan and the desirability of developing an independent research program. They also discussed the importance of documenting collaborative efforts and the difference between extension work and ARS research programs. R. Lanier program was used as an example to illustrate the difference between research and extension programs. He states he did not question complainant's expertise or the need of a plant pathologist in the Unit. He states he was not rude or disrespectful.

He states in August 2006 and December 2008, he arranged training on conflict resolution. After engaging in conflict resolution in August 2006, he states complainant offered to be "less defensive", but there was only little and temporary improvement in communication. He states complainant refused to engage in conflict resolution during 2008. Since most of the issues are associated with complainant's disregard for approved government procedures, laws, or regulations and in an effort to reach out and solve differences and communication problems, he has asked complainant to "meet him midway." Complainant has indicated that in her opinion there are no communication problems, but failed to accept counseling or guidance (Exhibit 11m).

**Claim 5: "She was subjected to open hostility (dates not provided)."**

Dr. Pantoja states the allegation has no merit. He has no knowledge, role, or involvement in hostilities toward complainant or any member of the Unit. Complainant's allegations were addressed under Claims 1 through 4 above.

**Claim 6: "She was subjected to intimidation (dates not provided)."**

Dr. Pantoja states complainant's allegation has no merit. He has no knowledge, role, or involvement in any act of intimidation toward complainant or any member of the SARU. These allegations were addressed under Claims 1 through 4 above.

**Claim 7: "She was denied the opportunity to act as Research Leader (dates not provided)."**

Dr. Pantoja states as RL he appoints the Acting RL. From July 2003 to June 2008 the criteria for selection of the Acting RL was the grade level (preference for highest rank/grade level), time at the Unit (enter on duty date) and physical presence in the Fairbanks office. He selected the Acting RL on these criteria. During 2004 through August 1, 2008 Peter Bechtel, Jeff Conn, Dennis Fielding, Nancy Robertson, and Steve

*False* → *Despite Alberto Pantoja's protestations to the contrary, the evidence demonstrates that gender was the overriding criterion, since no woman was ever appointed to serve as acting research leader (regardless of rank or time at the Unit) until all three women had filed formal complaints outside of the traditional ARS grievance process. When U.S. anti-discrimination laws were tentatively upheld in the Unit (August 2008), the first woman scientist was finally appointed to serve as acting research leader.*

Seefeldt were appointed Acting RL. Dr. Robertson was appointed Acting RL on August 1, 2008.

He states in an effort to provide all scientists the opportunity to serve as Acting RL, a rotation system was implemented in July 2008. The rotation uses the Enter on Duty Date, then in alphabetical order as criteria to establish the order of rotations. Scientists serve as Acting RL after 12 consecutive months in the Unit with no GS grade or location restrictions. He states complainant has acted as Acting RL on three occasions since the rotation plan was implemented.

**Claim 8: "She was subjected to having her peer-reviewed publications downgraded to research notes (dates not provided)."**

Dr. Pantoja states he has not downgraded manuscripts at SARU. He states official records indicate all Research Notes entered into the USDA database were published in peer-reviewed journals (Exhibit 11p). All manuscripts presented to him have been registered and coded into the appropriate USDA, ARS database. USDA, ARS uses a reporting system called Agriculture Research Information System (ARIS). ARIS is a central repository that holds project research information to allow users to continue to input, update, and retrieve research project information. Additional guidance is provided in the ARS-115 form (Exhibit 11r). In consultation with the PWA office, he has corrected manuscripts incorrectly classified by complainant into the appropriate ARIS codes. Research Notes presented by himself and those of a male scientist working under his supervision were also coded into appropriate ARIS codes. He states ARIS codes are designed to retrieve data, not to define the peer-review process.

He states manuscripts are not loaded into ARIS. The peer-reviewed process is defined by the professional societies and/or associations and their editorial boards, not by the ARIS codes. In October 2006 Dr. Robertson elevated the publications classifications issue to the PWA office. On November 21, 2006, the Area Director, the Associate Area Director (now Area Director), and the Assistant Area Director interacted with Dr. Robertson and indicated that the ARIS codes were not designed to define the manuscript types (peer-reviewed versus research notes) or provide information about the peer review process (Exhibit 11q).

He states he never rejected a manuscript submitted by the Complainant or any scientist in the Unit. Official ARIS records reflect that all "Disease Notes" and "Primer Notes" submitted by complainant were published in the peer-reviewed journals "Plant Disease" or "Molecular Ecology Notes" (Exhibit 11p). Once the manuscript is coded into ARIS, it is the scientist's responsibility to contact, submit, and interact with the journal and the editorial board regarding the manuscript revision. He is not involved in the interaction.

He states complainant's allegation that some peer-reviewed publications for women are not given full credit are inaccurate. He states complainant was promoted to GS-13 in December 2007 confirming that all of her manuscripts received the appropriate "credit". He states the classification of manuscripts is consistent and uniform for all scientists in the Unit regardless of their gender. Official ARIS records indicate that for the years 2005

to 2007 SARU entered eleven manuscripts that were coded as research notes. Fifty-five percent of the research notes were entered by male scientists, including entries submitted by himself, and a Post-Doctoral Associate working under his supervision (Exhibit 11p).

He states the standards and requirements to report research results are defined under Critical Element 2, Report Research Results of the Annual Performance Plan and applied uniformly to all scientists in the Unit regardless of their gender. Specific goals under each element of the Annual Performance Plan reflect the scientist's field of expertise and approved milestones for the project and are not set nationally as suggested by complainant. The SARU develops, each fiscal year, annual performance plans following the PWA Guidance for Performance Plans.

**Claim 9: "She was not allowed to hire permanent technicians (dates not provided)."**

Dr. Pantoja states this claim was addressed in Claim 1 above. As the RL, he approves all personnel actions in the Unit. The grade level and type of appointments are based upon the PWA Guidance on Recruitment Actions (PWAGRA) and funds availability. The final selection of the candidate is by the hiring official based on a Certificate of Eligible's issued by the HRD in Maryland and with concurrence of the RL. He states two female scientists (Nancy Robertson and Bonnie Furman) have permanent technician positions.

**Claim 10: ""She was not allowed to hire technicians at GS-7 level (dates not provided)."**

Dr. Pantoja states as RL he approves all personnel actions in the Unit. In response to complainant's allegation that he has changed the story often in terms of grade level, he states from 2003 to 2007, the Unit has been either on the Agency closure list or under uncertain funding possibilities. Under uncertain budget considerations, the area office has advised to use term appointments whenever feasible to fill administrative and scientific support positions. Complainant was informed of budget restrictions during the hiring process and aware of the impact of budget on hiring technician (Exhibits 11e and 11f).

He states complainant's allegation that she annually requested reconsideration of grade level and permanent status because she requested a GS-5/9 permanent position in the ARMPS budget is inaccurate. He states complainant did not request promotion or conversion to a permanent technician during the 2009 ARMPS budget request. He states at a September 3, 2008 staff meeting, he announced that those scientists who had temporary technicians could convert those positions to permanent since the Unit's funding was no longer based on earmarks. 2009 is the only year since 2004 that the Unit's budget is on base funds.

He states complainant's allegation that she was only allowed to hire Andrew Krohn at a GS-5 with FPL to 7 and that she was allowed to hire Jonathan Horrell as a GS-6 and never informed the position was approved for FPL GS-6 rather than GS-7 as announced has no merit. He states complainant announced a technician position on two occasions

Bonnie Furman was hired as a curator, not a research scientist, and she inherited the permanent technician of the (male) curator before her.

Dr. Furman quit her job within a few years, rather than stay and file (the inevitable) EEO complaints against the agency.

as discussed in Claim 1 above. On April 9, 2007 complainant suggested changes in KSA's to her most recent hire and eventually contacted the HR specialist and discussed/amended KSA's to reflect a higher GS level than approved. He states according to official HR records, Mr. Krohn was qualified only at the GS-5 level and appropriately hired at that level. Mr. Horrell was qualified at the GS-6 level.

He states complainant's allegation that Dr's Conn, Seefeldt, and Kuhl were all given the opportunity to hire and promote to GS-7 is inaccurate. In the most recent hire, Conn and Seefeldt hired from the same Certificate of Eligible's. The position was announced at the GS-5/6 level with promotion potential to GS-7. Conn hired at the GS-7 level and Seefeldt hired at GS-5. Over time Seefeldt's technician reached the GS-7 level. In his last hire, Kuhl announced at the GS-5/6 level and hired at GS-5 and the technician left the Unit after reaching the GS-6 level. Kuhl left the Unit without hiring another technician.

**Claim 11: "She received unfair performance appraisals (dates not provided)."**

Dr. Pantoja states as RL, he is the Rating official for Complainant. He states complainant's appraisals have been fair. In general, complainant has disagreed with appraisals and with established procedures. If complainant decides to file a grievance because she disagrees with the rating, the grievance is addressed to his immediate supervisor. He is not involved in that procedure.

He states the requirements to meet Superior or Outstanding ratings are defined in Form AD-435P. He states complainant has not satisfied those requirements. To ensure fairness, appraisals for which he is the Rating Official are reviewed and approved by the PWA Reviewing Official before he discusses the ratings with employees. He states complainant has been counseled on the need to follow agency regulations and/or to focus on approved project milestones.

He states complainant's rating for the January 1 to December 31, 2005 rating period was adjusted to reflect a change in the rating for Critical Element 3, Resource Management. The adjustment reflected a change from "meets fully successful" to "exceeds fully successful". The adjustment was completed after an informal grievance procedure. A second adjustment is documented for the January 1 to December, 2006 rating period. This adjustment was to correct an error under Non-Critical Element 4, Represents Agency, Program Development Personal Development. The change was from "does not meet fully successful" to "meets fully successful".

He states complainant's allegation that she and Dr. Robertson have never received performance bonuses and as far as she knows all the male scientists have despite having similar accomplishments is inaccurate. Four male scientists have not received performance awards under his leadership. The records show no performance awards were given to complainant or Dr. Robertson for the 2003 to 2008 rating periods. He states awards are based on performance and accomplishments not gender. For the appraisal period October 31, 2008, 31% of the females and 42% of the male scientists in the Unit received performance awards. He states there are twice as many male research

scientists as compared to female research scientists in the Unit so it is not unusual that the statistics on awards are not gender balanced.

**Claim 12: “On September 5, 2008, she was threatened for communicating EEO issues to various people including the designated contact person for Civil Rights and Workplace Violence issues.”**

Dr. Pantoja states the Agency and USDA have several Policies and Web sites dealing with EEO issues and the Employee Assistance Programs. The PWA office has an Outreach, Diversity and Equal Opportunity Program Manager that can assist with EEO issues. The Unit posted several memos on the bulletin board: FAQ EEO Counseling Process, ODEO Washington, DC Roster, The ARS Anti-Harassment memo and Sexual Harassment Policy. Telephone numbers are posted as well.

False

He states SARU does not have a designated in-house EEO contact person. The designated EEO contact person for the PWA is Charmaine Scardina, Program Manager, Outreach, Diversity and Equal Opportunity. He states Ms. Contento is not a designated EEO contact person at the Unit. **Alberto Pantoja and Janis Contento were co-authors of SARU's Location Policy Manual, which clearly listed Ms. Contento as both the Primary and Secondary Contact for Civil Rights.**

**Dr. Andrew Hammond** (male), Area Director, ES-0401-01, USDA, ARS, PWA, Albany, CA has been in his present position since April 13, 2008 and has been employed by the Federal government for 31 years. As the Area Director he participates with the Agency Administrator and staff in implementing, coordinating, and evaluating overall research programs; and provides leadership and operational accountability within the Area (which includes the states of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada and Arizona) for research programs and related activities. This management responsibility includes operational planning, direction and evaluation of research designed to implement programs as recommended in the approved operational plan. Participates in the development of a complex national strategic plan for agricultural research in the Agency. Assures the plan is executed with a view to coordination, cooperation and integration of research with associated interests in Land-grant organizations, with Federal agencies, other public entities, and institutions in the private sector. His immediate supervisor is Edward B. Knipling, Administrator.

Dr. Hammond states he was the Associate Area Director from May 2004 through April 12, 2008. As the Associate Area Director participates fully with the Area Director in planning, coordinating, and evaluating overall research programs and provides leadership and operational accountability with the Area for the programs and activities, including planning, directing, and evaluating research programs designed and executed with a view toward Federal-State missions and goals for national programs of agricultural research, and the coordination and integration of the research with other Federal agencies, Land-grant organizations, and other outside institutions. His immediate supervisor was Dwayne R. Buxton, Area Director from November 2004 to January 2008. In an affidavit dated February 26, 2009 he further affirms to the following in substance (Exhibit 12):

Complaint No: ARS-2008-00542

He states he does not supervise complainant and has known her since January 2005. He is direct supervisor to Dr. Alberto Pantoja. He shares a professional relationship with him. He is not physically located in Fairbanks, Alaska so is not able to describe the tenor/morale of the work environment there. He states he has not observed that Dr. Pantoja treats females differently from their male counterparts. On a visit to SARU in July 2008, he observed a brief interaction between complainant and Dr. Pantoja, and it was professional. He was aware of complainant's allegation of reprisal.

**Claim 1: "On February 26, 2008, she was issued a letter of caution."**

Dr. Hammond states he had no knowledge that Dr. Pantoja discriminated against or harassed complainant. He does not recall the specific involvement on his part but likely would have discussed any claims with Dr. Pantoja and employee relations.

**Claim 2: "She was subjected to threats of termination."**

Dr. Hammond states he has no direct knowledge that Dr. Pantoja threatened complainant with termination. He states that he is not aware that the alleged threats were substantiated.

**Claim 3: "She was subjected to public humiliation."**

**Claim 4: "She was subjected to disrespectful behavior."**

**Claim 5: "She was subjected to open hostility."**

**Claim 6: "She was subjected to intimidation."**

Dr. Hammond states he has no direct knowledge of these claims.

**Claim 7: "She was denied the opportunity to act as Research Leader."**

Dr. Hammond states that he understands Dr. Pantoja established a schedule of rotating Acting Research Leaders that includes all scientists in the Unit. The Area Office is informed by Dr. Pantoja who is Acting Research Leader in his absence.

**Claim 8: "She was subjected to having her peer-reviewed publications downgraded to research notes."**

Dr. Hammond states this claim was raised in complainant's informal grievance and was answered in the grievance response. He states he was the Deciding Official for the informal grievance. One specification was acknowledged and partial relief granted (changes the rating for Element 4 from "Does Not Meet" to "Fully Successful"). All other specifications and requested relief were not supported by the facts and were therefore denied. The criteria for crediting peer-reviewed publications was documented in complainant's Performance Plan and is the same as for other scientists in the Unit.

**Claim 9: "She was not allowed to hire permanent technicians."**

**Claim 10: "She was not allowed to hire technicians at GS-7 level."**

Dr. Hammond state he does not recall specifically whether complainant was not allowed to recruit a permanent technician but because the President's budget at times proposed cutting portions of the research programs at Fairbanks, Dr. Pantoja appropriately made a practice of hiring some technical support into term positions at the Unit. He states he does not recall specifics of personnel actions initiated by complainant.

**Claim 11: "She received unfair performance appraisals."**

Dr. Hammond states complainant filed an informal grievance regarding her performance appraisal rating. He responded to the informal grievance in writing. Partial relief was granted in one specification and the other specifications and required relief were denied.

**Claim 12: "On September 5, 2008, she was threatened for communicating EEO issues to various other people including the designated contact person for Civil Rights and Workplace Violence issues."**

Dr. Hammond states he was informed of this claim by being cc'd on an e-mail from Helena Thompson to Dr. Pantoja dated November 25, 2008. He has no direct knowledge of the alleged threat by Dr. Pantoja. He states there are no specially designated EEO contacts for research units in PWA.

He states complainant cc'd him on an e-mail to Dr. Pantoja dated November 28, 2008. Complainant's e-mail was in response to one from Dr. Pantoja regarding allegations from office staff that she was less than professional when responding to inquiries or providing requested information and that her comments were causing an uncomfortable environment for the staff. He states the e-mail from Dr. Pantoja to complainant made no threat or reference to performance appraisal.

**Dr. Dwayne Buxton**, Area Director, retired, USDA, ARS, PWA, Albany, California was not interviewed (Exhibit 36)

➤ **Complainant's Rebuttal**

Complainant was provided the opportunity to review the sworn statement of respondent, Dr. Alberto Pantoja, and submitted her Rebuttal Statement dated February 12, 2009 (Exhibit 10).

Complainant states it would take her far more than the allowed 10 days in which to answer Dr. Pantoja's affidavit in detail. The most that she can offer is a list of the numbered questions on which he provided false, inaccurate, or misleading statements, cited inappropriate policy and procedure manuals, contradicted himself, fudged dates, or provided inapt documentation to:

- Questions #15, 17, 21, 23 – 50, 52 -53, 55 – 56, 59 -68m 70, 72 – 75, 78 – 83, 86  
89, 91 -98, 100 – 104

The investigator received Dr. Hammond's statement on February 27, 2009. Due to time constraints, complainant was not provided Dr. Hammond's statement for rebuttal.

➤ **Responses from Other Witnesses**

**Janis Contento** (female), Administrative Officer, GS-0341-12, USDA, ARS, PWA, SARU, UAF, Fairbanks, Alaska has been in her present position since November 2004 and a Federal government employee for almost 27 years. She provides administrative support to personnel in the management unit located in Fairbanks and Palmer, AK. Personnel include the scientists and their technicians. They also have an influx of STEP appointments which are students or LA appointments which are limited appointees that are for 130 or 180 days. Appointments are budget related. Her immediate supervisor is Alberto Pantoja, Research Leader. Dr. Pantoja has been her immediate supervisor since she started working at SARU. Her second line supervisor is Jeff Van Houten, Deputy Area Director, PWA, Albany, CA. Mr. Van Houten has been her second line supervisor since her arrival at SARU. She further swears in an affidavit dated February 15, 2009 to the following in substance (Exhibit 13):

Ms. Contento states she works with complainant and provides her administrative support. She has worked with complainant since November 2004. She tries to treat complainant the same as she would anyone else in the Unit by supporting her through her administrative abilities. She states Dr. Pantoja has an open door policy. She discusses administrative issues with him on a daily basis since he is in charge of the Unit. She states she is a third party in meetings between complainant and Dr. Pantoja. She is there as a third party observer to ensure that the communication is professional at all times. She keeps personal notes of the meetings but does not keep them. She cannot recall when she was asked to be a third party observer but has been doing this for two or three years. She has been asked to be a third party observer for other scientists. They are Dr. Nancy Robertson and Dr. Cindy Bower. She states the meetings have all been very direct and business like.

She states when she first arrived at SARU she shared an office with a secretary. It was a small space, very crowded, and her chair would bump up against the Secretary's chair. As she found out at any university space is scarce. After about a year the university gave the Unit more office space so that they could expand. She now has an office by herself next to complainant. The administrative staff of two people are next to complainant. Across the hall, there is another scientist. She states the work environment is busy and she tries to keep things light and upbeat. By and large she states the staff all get along fine. Everyone works well together. She thinks the gossip hurts their Unit and lowers morale. Since they are co-located with UAF it also damages the overall reputation of ARS.

She states she has not observed and does not believe that Dr. Pantoja treats females differently from their male counterparts. She states Dr. Pantoja has collaborated with Tara McHugh, Scientist and Research Leader at PWA. She has worked on an aquaculture project that covers fish by-products to value research. She states SARU has



three projects and fish research is one of the projects. She states Dr. Pantoja has traveled to see Dr. McHugh, talks to her about research and has funded some of her research since her arrival at the Unit in November 2004. He states Dr. McHugh's research also benefit their Unit as well so it is a mutually respected collaboration. She states the National Program Staff assigns the CRIS projects and tells them what they are allowed to do. The projects generally run for about five years. She also identified Dr. Carol Lewis, Dean for the School of Natural Resources and Agriculture, UAF as another female Dr. Pantoja has collaborated with.

She states as to Dr. Pantoja's character, she believes he would give you the shirt off his back. He has tried to promote unity in the Unit by holding diversity training, team building and alternative dispute resolution. He tries to be accommodating. He has not made decisions based on gender. She states he talks to PWA office and Headquarters a lot to make sure he understands the rules. She feels this entire situation is unfortunate.

**Claim 1: "On February 26, 2008, she was issued a letter of caution."**

Ms. Contento states she sat in on the delivery of the form. She believes complainant was cautioned that she should not try to influence the grade with the HRD. She does not think complainant was trying to influence the grade. She believes complainant followed established procedures. She also believes Dr. Pantoja followed established procedures. The ARMP showed the technician position as a GS-5/6 and that is what Dr. Pantoja wanted to recruit at.

She states in hindsight if anyone calls HRD and talks about a higher grade HRD is the final authority for announcing positions. She states HRD should remind callers that any deviation to the ARMPS must be approved by the PWA. The SF-52 action that was signed by Dr. Pantoja was in concert with ARMPS as a GS-5/6. HRD should not have announced the job as a GS-5/6/7. She states there should have been some checks and balances and that did not happen.

She believes this situation was a combination of errors. When the recruit action went forward, Dr. Pantoja was basing it on ARMPS that is part of their budget process. She does not think anyone was aware of a clerical error. She states the same thing happened to Dr. Bechtel (male scientist). That is to say the grade being wrong in ARMPS from one year to the other. Once the grade is established in ARMPS it needs to get approval at the PWA for a higher grade. In this instance, the SF-52 action went in as a GS-5/6 with full potential to a GS-7. However when all of this came out with the delivery of the caution letter, unfortunately after the fact, the position was originally recruited as a GS-5/6/7. Nobody knows how it ended up as a GS-5/6. She does not believe it was Dr. Pantoja's decision. It was just a clerical error.

She states she did tell complainant that she (Contento) was at fault since it was her job to check. It was her understanding that HRD processed an action according to ARMPS. She didn't check HRD's work. The ARMPS indicated the recruit action should be a 5/6. She never compared what was in the file, what was done before she was hired, or what

Ms. Contento certainly knew that Dr. Pantoja was required to host (as a consequence of the grievances being filed against him) all the trainings she mentioned.

was done in previous years. Now that she knows mistakes are being made, she is printing out job announcements so she can follow up to make sure what goes forward agrees with what is being announced. She felt badly this happened because it could have been avoided if someone did some checking. So, she accepts the blame.

**Claim 2: "She was subjected to threats of termination."**

**Claim 3: "She was subjected to public humiliation."**

**Claim 4: "She was subjected to disrespectful behavior."**

**Claim 5: "She was subjected to open hostility."**

**Claim 6: "She was subjected to intimidation."**

Ms. Contento states she has never heard Dr. Pantoja say to any scientist, male or female, that, "I am going to fire you. She has no knowledge that Dr. Pantoja publicly humiliated complainant. She states by nature, Dr, Pantoja does not try to humiliate anyone.

She states she attended the January 2008 meeting in which the scientists made presentations concerning their research. She states Dr. Pantoja has an accent. She states he will ask questions and if you do not understand him he will ask the question again. She states he does repeat himself but it is not to humiliate a person. He is just trying to get scientific information. She states when she does not understand Dr. Pantoja or just doesn't get it she keeps after him in a respectful manner until she gets it. She thinks this is the difference in her working relationship with him. He has a heavy accent and sometimes he really has to concentrate on getting the words out and will say, "What is the word I am looking for? In Spanish it means this." So they work at it and there is a lot of give and take. She states he is not offended because she does not understand him, nor is she offended if he doesn't understand her.

She states she has no knowledge that complainant was subjected to disrespectful behavior. She has never seen Dr. Pantoja being hostile to anyone, male or female. She recalls an incident involving herself and is ashamed to admit this but states this one is on her. She came to work in a cranky mood, should not have come to work and should have stayed home. She got into a discussion with Dr. Pantoja and she was the one who was argumentative with him. Dr. Pantoja handled the situation by saying, "I can see that you are upset. Let's talk about this later." He diffused the situation. She later apologized to him. She further states she has no knowledge that complainant was subjected to intimidation.

She states in response to complainant's claim of Dr. Pantoja's unprofessional conduct in a meeting on September 8, 2008, she states she believes this was a meeting asking complainant for a property number on a form letter. This was a form she received from another location and was using it to collect data. Complainant was gone for the day so she put the form in her distribution box. Complainant took offense and included Dr. Pantoja in a response back to her in an e-mail. Complainant basically said that the Administrative Office was trying to set her up. She states she was taken aback by this because she uses the same form for everyone. She was not aware the form would offend anyone. If someone brought it to her attention she would try to re-word or revise it. She

Unfortunately, Ms. Contento fails to state that (after witnessing Dr. Pantoja harass the Complainant) she felt compelled to intercede, thereby bringing a halt to the interaction.

A male scientist also stood up to stop Dr. Pantoja's verbal attack on the Complainant.

This was a very serious incident, which is now being trivialized by Ms. Contento.