

Bias Incident Response Team

Fitchburg State is committed to an inclusive living, learning, and work environment for members of our community.



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Bias incidents cause pain and hurt for the targeted individuals, harm our entire community, and undermine the ability of members of our community to thrive. People who are the target of bias may stop contributing his/her/their unique perspective in the learning or work environment, suffer psychological distress, or even leave the community. When one person engages in acts of bias, our entire community suffers the effects.

Report a Bias Incident

Our Purpose

The Bias Incident Response Team (BIRT) ensures students, faculty, and staff affected by bias or a bias-related incident have access to appropriate resources and assists the university in its response in situations that may impact the overall campus climate around diversity and inclusion.



2. Act as a referral resource, directing reporters or the incident response to appropriate campus departments
3. Assist in and consult on the development of community level response to the incident

What is a Bias Related Incident?

A bias incident is described as any behavior or act – verbal, written or physical – which is personally directed against or targeting an individual or group based on perceived or actual characteristics such as race, color, religion, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, national or ethnic origin, disability or veteran status. Behavior reflecting bias may or may not constitute a violation of Fitchburg State University policy or constitute a crime (i.e. hate crime). Events that may constitute a bias incident include, but are not limited to, threatening telephone calls or messages (including email, text and social media), harassment, graffiti, physical assault, vandalism or destruction of personal property.

Individuals who have been subject to or have information about a bias incident are encouraged to report it using [this link](#).

When there is an emergency or a need for immediate assistance due to a risk to health or safety, the most appropriate first step is to contact University Police at 978.665.3111.

EXPAND ALL | **COLLAPSE ALL**

Bias Incident Response Team Members

The team is composed of individuals across campus whose job responsibilities are connected to one or all of the following: incident/behavioral response and protected groups in reference to the

on next steps. Guidance will be based on the type of incident and could include additional conversations with other administrative members of the Fitchburg State Community based on the nature of the incident presented. The team can also be contacted at birt@fitchburgstate.edu.

Dr. William Cummings, Director of Compliance and Title IX, Co-Chair

Robert Gilman, Lieutenant, University Police

Rachel Graddy, Director of Disability Services

Dr. Hank Parkinson, Dean of Students (Co-Chair)

Junior Pena, Director of Student Diversity, Equity, and Belonging Programs

Jason Smith, Assistant Dean for Student Success

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What Can I Expect if I File a Bias Related Incident Report?

We will listen to you and support you.

We can brainstorm options with you (e.g. help you prepare for a conversation, accompany you to a meeting, facilitate a conversation, etc.). We will share what we know about the limits of those options.

We can provide resources to help you to continue to be successful in the university community.

We can support you through systems advocacy, if you decide to take action. This could include sharing information about how various systems and structures work.

We will be committed to protecting the privacy of all individuals involved in a report of a bias incident. Every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of individuals targeted and to maintain the confidentiality requested by the reporting party. The outcome of any reported incident will take into account the confidentiality of the involved parties.



University Policy Relating to Harassment/Discrimination

Fitchburg State University's **Equal Opportunity Plan** is the policy that outlines expectations and accountability regarding incidents that are rooted in bias and/or discrimination.

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First Amendment Considerations

Although bias-related incidents cause harm, it is important to note that not every act which may be offensive to an individual or group will be considered to be discriminatory conduct or a violation of institutional policy. Whether a specific incident constitutes harassment proscribed by university policy will be decided on a case-by-case basis. Due consideration will be given to the protection of individual First Amendment rights to freedom of expression and academic freedom.

While the First Amendment protects the free expression of ideas that are sometimes offensive, that does not mean the university is powerless to respond.

Instead of trying to censor or punish free speech, we seek to:

- Assist the reporting party in obtaining necessary resources

- Develop educational opportunities to address intolerance

- Make recommendations to assist with the prevention of future bias related incidents

Of course, people who commit acts of hate or bias that are not protected under the First Amendment may be subject to disciplinary proceedings or prosecution. Possible examples include physical assault, vandalism, trespassing, harassment, incitement, or genuine threats of violence.

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What is a bias-related incident?

A bias-related incident is an act motivated by the offender's bias against the actual – or perceived – age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religion, religious practices, or sexual orientation of the targeted person or group, but does not rise to the level of a criminal offense. A bias incident can occur whether the act is intentional or unintentional. Speech or expression that is consistent with the principles of academic freedom does not constitute a bias incident.

Examples may include telling jokes based on stereotypes; posting on social media about someone based on identity; using offensive language that may pertain to identity; and taking down or tampering with bulletin boards or displays.

What are some examples of bias-related incidents?

Writing a racial epithet on someone's dry-erase board, making fun of another person because of their language or accent, or making insulting comments about someone's traditional dress or geographic origin are examples of bias-related incidents.

What are some examples of hate crimes?

Painting racial slurs on the side of a campus building, assaulting another person because of their perceived sexual orientation, or throwing a rock through someone's window while yelling derogatory comments about their religious affiliation are hypothetical examples of a hate crime.

What is the difference between discrimination and bias-related incidents?

Unlawful discrimination refers to specific conduct prohibited by law that unfairly treats people differently because of their characteristic or perceived characteristics that the law deems to be



Bias is a preconceived negative opinion or attitude about a group of people who possess common physical characteristics or cultural experiences. An example of a bias incident would be writing racist or homophobic graffiti on the dry erase board of a student's room.

Although bias-related incidents cause harm, they do not always result in treatment that violates nondiscrimination laws or College policies.

What is structural (systemic) oppression?

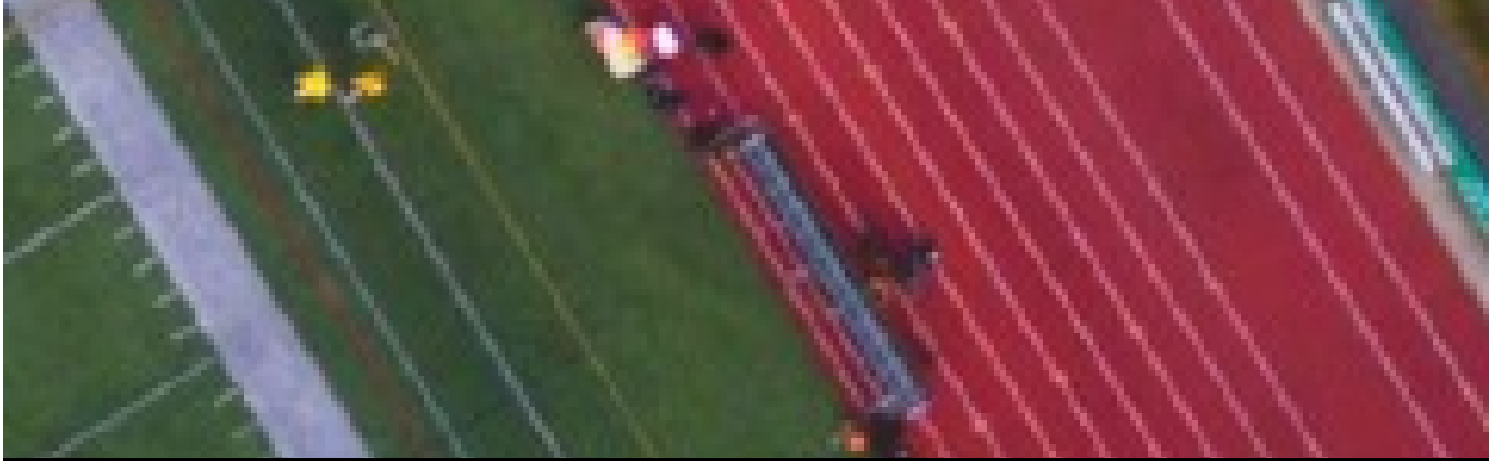
Structural oppression manifests when the mistreatment of people within a social identity group is supported and enforced by the society and its institutions, solely based on people's membership in a specific social identity group. It refers to the ways in which dominance and supremacy are exercised within institutional structures, policies, and practices in order to maintain hierarchy based on race, class, gender, gender expression, sexuality, and/or other group identities. Structural oppression is often invisible and normalized within institutional settings.

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Definitions/Terminology

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