



Guidance on Navigating Bias Incidents in Remote Learning Environments



Creating and maintaining inclusive learning environments in which *all* students can succeed is central to our teaching mission. Unfortunately, bias incidents – *acts directed toward an individual or community based upon actual or perceived background or identity* – occur in remote learning environments in ways that are new and challenging. But no matter where they occur, bias incidents damage communities and have negative impacts on individuals.

Instructors play an important role in creating and maintaining inclusive remote learning environments. This means addressing bias incidents in a thoughtful and timely manner. This guidance was created to help instructors, and OSU community members generally, navigate bias incidents when they occur in remote learning environments.

The guidance is organized into five stages: *Prepare*, *Evaluate*, *Respond*, *Refer*, and *Reflect*. While you may implement these stages in order, feel free move in and out of stages, or return to previous stages, as they are helpful to you.



Prepare

- **Create shared expectations** at the beginning of a course, or even part way through a course. Include these expectations in your syllabus. Revisit the expectations at regular intervals, whether or not a bias incident has occurred.
 - On the first day of the course, deliberate with students what is needed from you and others to ensure an inclusive remote environment. Expectations can include how you will commit to creating space for dialogue and disagreement, and how students will hold each other accountable when expectations for the group are not met.
- **Proactively cultivate inclusive remote learning environments** where bias incidents are less likely to have a negative impact.
 - Consult and implement guidance on [facilitating dialogue in remote environments](#).
 - Model patience and flexibility with students when navigating remote learning environments.
- **Ensure students know how they can communicate concerns** with you and the university.
 - Provide multiple modalities for communication with you outside of the remote learning environment (virtual office hours, email, phone, text, etc.)



- Include a link to the [bias incident report form](#) in your syllabus and ensure students understand how the Bias Response Team can provide assistance.
- **Familiarize yourself with the university's [Zoom security recommendations](#)** and implement these practices within the remote learning environments you host.
 - Take 30 minutes to familiarize yourself with Zoom's various features, including the use of virtual backgrounds, chat room, screen sharing, and security panel.
 - With a colleague, practice the functions you wish to enable and disable, and how to enable and disable them during a class or meeting.
- If you are concerned with misuse of Zoom functions, **implement content neutral policies in the remote learning environment**. Avoid policies that are difficult to implement and create confusion, such as prohibiting "inappropriate" virtual backgrounds.
 - if you are concerned about the use of inappropriate Zoom backgrounds, disable their use, or limit virtual backgrounds to only the defaults provided by Zoom or [OSU](#).



Evaluate

- **Practice monitoring the “intangibles” of remote learning environments.** Pause and follow up with the class or individuals if you are concerned that something is “off”.
 - Assessing class dynamics in remote learning environments be challenging. Consider asking a GTA, undergraduate learning assistant, or co-instructors to help you monitor the learning environment while you are teaching.
 - If you notice that a student who had previously been participating is withdrawn or responding differently than usual, check in with them via the private chat function, or after class.



Respond

- **If a bias incident occurs in a learning environment, your responsibility as an instructor is to address it.** Don't pretend it didn't happen.
 - Engage the incident in the moment by asking questions, seeking to understand the perspectives of those involved, and addressing the incident's impact.
 - If you are unable to address the incident in the moment, or were dissatisfied with your response, follow up with those involved. Email the [Office of Institutional Diversity](#) for assistance. Team members can consult with you on response strategies.
 - Consider that *you* may be responsible for the bias incident. Apologize, address the impact, and provide an opportunity for students to discuss with you, if appropriate.
- **Hone your ability to respond to disruption** and maintain inclusive learning environments.



- If comments are unrelated to the class topic, firmly guide contributions back to the topic at hand.
- If a comment is related to the class topic, but constitutes a bias incident, engage it through inquiry and address its impact, rather than relying on students to intervene.
- If a student's actions are disrupting the remote learning environment and you're unable to redirect, it may be appropriate to temporarily remove the student from the learning environment. Understand in advance how to respond to [disruption in learning environments](#). Reach out to [Student Conduct and Community Standards](#) to discuss your concerns.



Refer

- After the incident, **follow up with those involved to address the impact the bias incident created**. It is important to follow up, even if you were unable to intervene in the moment.
 - Familiarize yourself with resources available to [students](#) and [employees](#) to receive care and support their own advocacy.
 - Make those impacted aware of the OSU Bias Response Helpline (541-737-1731), a confidential helpline available 24/7 with providers trained to address the emotional impacts of bias.
- If the bias incident had an impact on the wider learning environment, **address the impact transparently**, if appropriate.
 - Discuss the incident's impact and how the group can respond, learn, and grow to repair damage and restore trust.
 - Ensure students are aware of available [resources](#) for care and support.
- **Report the incident** to the Bias Response Team (BRT).
 - The BRT will evaluate the incident, determine whether it should be referred to a partner office (such as Equal Opportunity and Access, or Student Conduct and Community Standards), and connect with you to discuss additional follow up.
 - Even if you were able to successfully respond, reporting the incident is important so the BRT can assess trends and create resources (like this one) to assist others in the future.



Reflect

- **Reflect on lessons learned** after a bias incident.
 - Reflect on what you did well: What are you proud of? What did you learn that you can apply next time?
 - Reflect on how you can grow: Could you have responded in the moment differently? How about afterwards?



- Give yourself an opportunity to reflect on the incident's impact on you. Reach out to the Office of Institutional Diversity to debrief.
- **Seek resources for yourself.** Sometimes, bias incidents can have a lasting negative effect.
 - These situations are frequently complex and we are usually unprepared for the emotions they create. Take advantage of the Bias Response Helpline (541-737-1731) to process the incident.
 - Engage resources available to support [employees](#).
 - Communicate with leaders in your unit about any support you may need.
- **Follow up with colleagues and unit leaders** to ensure they are aware of the bias incident.
 - Consider whether broader communication and action is necessary to reinforce organizational values and expectations.
 - Create opportunities for colleagues to learn from your experience.
- **Engage in deeper learning** about navigating bias incidents and creating inclusive learning and working environments.
 - The Office of Institutional Diversity and partner offices offer in-depth workshops on these topics and are available to deliver them remotely to your organization or unit.

If you have questions about this guidance, or want to learn more, the Office of Institutional Diversity and Bias Response Team are available to consult on response strategies and connect you to additional resources and partner offices.

For questions related to this guidance, please contact the Office of Institutional Diversity at diversity@oregonstate.edu.