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Bias Education and Response Team

Promoting a respectful University of Mississippi community.

[← Access, Opportunity, and Community Engagement](#)

Addressing Bias-Related Incidents at the University of Mississippi

While freedom of expression and the open exchange of ideas are important to the University of Mississippi, actions and behaviors that are bias-motivated, prejudiced, or otherwise disrespectful can negatively impact individuals or groups.

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- **Bias-related incidents are defined as** alleged threats or acts of harassment or intimidation, whether verbal, written or physical, which are motivated by a bias against a person or property in whole or in part because of that person's age, color, ability, marital status, national or ethnic origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sex (including pregnancy), socioeconomic status, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, veteran status, family medical or genetic makeup or information, intellectual perspective, criminal background and potentially other identities or identifiers.

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Meet the Executive Team

The executive team members liaise between the affected parties and the Co-chairs, connect involved parties to campus resources, and develop educational resources.



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How Does the Bias Education and Response Team Work?

The Bias Education and Response Team is here to help the campus community thrive. Learn more about the way we do our work below.

How can I report incidents of perceived/alleged bias?



Members of the university community who have experienced or witnessed perceived/alleged bias incidents are encouraged to complete **this reporting form**.

- This form will give you the opportunity to share the details of the incident including the impact it has had on you and/or others.

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- The Bias Education & Response Team (BERT) will review all submissions to determine appropriate next steps.

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Our priority is connecting those who have been impacted by bias incidents to the appropriate resources and support.

Please note that BERT is not an investigative, adjudicatory, or disciplinary body and does not function in lieu of any disciplinary or complaint processes within or outside of the University.

In addition to filing an incident with BERT, individuals may also file a complaint with the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution, University Police Department, Equal Opportunity and Regulatory Compliance, or other appropriate offices.

- If a report is made to these offices, they will determine jurisdiction and investigate alleged or potential violations of policy and/or law if warranted.
- However, it is important for you to know that some bias-motivated, prejudice or otherwise disrespectful acts may be constitutionally protected speech and thus not subject to University disciplinary action or formal investigation.

Reports submitted anonymously are accepted, but may limit BERT's ability to offer support or follow-up. BERT values your privacy and trust.

- However, we cannot guarantee complete anonymity in circumstances which threaten safety and/or involve potentially criminal acts.
- BERT handles all submissions in alignment with university privacy policies, and will only share your information with individuals who have a legitimate need to know.

If you have questions, you may also e-mail daoce@olemiss.edu or call the Division of Access, Opportunity, and Community Engagement at **662-915-2933**. For immediate assistance or emergencies, please contact the University of Mississippi's Department of Police and Campus Safety at **662-915-7234**.



What can BERT help me with?

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The Bias Education and Report Team is a non-judicial team of faculty, staff, and administrators which supports members of the University of Mississippi community who bring forward allegations of bias:

- Connecting University of Mississippi Community members who have been impacted by bias incidents to education, resources, and support
- Facilitating immediate and continuing opportunities for restorative justice, community dialogue, and other education about alleged bias/bias incidents proven to have transpired and freedom of expression
- Promoting the principles of civility and respect in the free and open expression of ideas
- Working with University administrators to support transparent and open communication about allegations of bias incidents
- Tracking bias concern data and reporting trends

What BERT can't do

- Make determinations about policy violations and/or crimes
- Investigate, adjudicate, or take the place of any other University of Mississippi processes or services
- Make criminal referrals



Frequently Asked Questions

Find some answers to frequently asked questions about the Bias Education and Response Team below.

What is an allegation of bias?



An allegation of bias or a bias-related incidents are defined as purported threats or acts of harassment or intimidation, whether verbal, written or physical, which are motivated by a bias against a person or property in whole or in part because of that person's:

- age
- color
- ability
- marital status
- national or ethnic origin
- political affiliation
- race
- religion

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- sex (including pregnancy)

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- gender identity
- gender expression
- sexual orientation
- veteran status
- family medical or genetic makeup or information
- intellectual perspective
- criminal background AND
- potentially other identities or identifiers

What is the difference between an alleged bias incident and a hate crime? —

According to the FBI, a “hate crime” is a traditional offense like murder, arson, or vandalism with an added element of bias.

- For the purposes of collecting statistics, the FBI has also defined a hate crime as a “criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity.”

Hate itself is not a crime—and the FBI is mindful of protecting freedom of speech and other civil liberties.

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Doesn't this limit free speech?

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While the Bias Education and Report Team acknowledges the harm that bias incidents can have on individuals and groups, it is important for you to know that some bias-motivated, prejudice or otherwise disrespectful acts may be constitutionally protected speech and thus not subject to University disciplinary action or formal investigation.

- BERT prioritizes connecting University of Mississippi Community members who have been impacted by bias incidents to education, resources, and support in these instances.
- In addition to filing an incident with BERT, individuals may also file a complaint with the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution, University Police Department, Equal Opportunity and Regulatory Compliance, or other appropriate offices.

If a report is made to these offices, they will determine jurisdiction and investigate alleged or potential violations of policy and/or law if warranted. However, some bias-motivated, prejudice or otherwise disrespectful acts may be constitutionally protected speech and thus not subject to University disciplinary action or formal investigation.

Why should I report bias incidents?

The form will give you the opportunity to share the details of the incident including the impact it has had on you and/or others. The Bias Education and Report Team will review all submissions to determine appropriate next steps. Our priority is connecting those who have been impacted by bias incidents to the appropriate resources and support.

When you complete a report, you partner with the University as it works to create an environment that values and celebrates our diverse community, fosters respect for every individual, and promotes the free and open exchange of ideas. The more information we have about bias incidents on campus (e.g., who engaged in the behavior, the identity targeted, where the incident occurred), the better BERT and other offices can focus their educational programs, outreach efforts, and responses.

With your help, we can continue to provide opportunities for all persons to perform to their full potential. As we continue to work towards providing excellent research and learning opportunities in a place as special and unique as the University of Mississippi, we also need to continue to promote and support a community that is welcoming, inclusive, and conducive to the open exchange of ideas.

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How do I report a bias incident?

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Members of the university community who have experienced or witnessed bias incidents are encouraged to complete this reporting form.

What will the Bias Education and Response Team do when I make a report?

BERT will make initial contact with reporting parties within 24 hours. BERT will work to gather all information and facts related to your concern before making recommendations. Our priority is connecting those who have been impacted by bias incidents to the appropriate resources and support.

What are potential outcomes of this process?

The Bias Education and Response Team will collaborate with the reporter, university community members impacted by bias, relevant offices/departments, and administrators to develop an appropriate response. BERT's work throughout this process may result in one or more of the following responses:

- conversation with university leadership
- restorative circle or conference
- changes in university policies or procedures
- statement to the campus community which acknowledges bias impacts
- educational programs
- referral of impacted individuals to campus or community resources for support
- determination that the occurrence is not a bias incident



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