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Frequently Asked Questions

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What is “bias”?

Bias is a form of prejudice that results from our human need to quickly classify individuals and experiences into categories.

Biases toward individuals typically form around the identity or perceived identities of target individuals or groups and are often associated with identities protected by law including, but not limited to, age, color, disability, gender, pregnancy status, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status.

What is a “bias incident” and what’s the difference between a bias incident, harassment, and a hate crime?

A bias incident is conduct, speech or expression motivated, in whole or in part, by bias or prejudice.

Harassment is unwelcome conduct directed at an individual because of one or more of that person's protected characteristics that is so severe or pervasive and objectively offensive that it interferes with, limits, or denies the individual the ability to participate in or benefit from the University's educational or employment programs, services, opportunities, or activities. Harassment is prohibited by law and University policy. Complaints of harassment are handled through processes outside of the Bias Incident Response.

Virginia law ([Va. Code § 52-8.5](#)) defines a hate crime as: (i) a criminal act committed against a person or his property with the specific intent of instilling fear or intimidation in the individual against whom the act is perpetrated because of race, religion, gender, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ethnic or national origin or that is committed for the purpose of restraining that person from exercising his rights under the Constitution or laws of the Commonwealth or of the United States; (ii) any illegal act directed against any persons or their property because of those persons' race, religion, gender, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ethnic or national origin; and (iii) all other incidents, as determined by law-enforcement authorities, intended to intimidate or harass any individual or group because of race, religion, gender, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ethnic or national origin. Hate crimes are handled through the police and the criminal justice system.

What about free speech and the First Amendment?

A bias incident that does not violate University policy, does not constitute conduct rising to the level of harassment, and is not a crime is considered free speech protected by the First Amendment—even if it is upsetting, insulting, or offensive to others. The University cannot take disciplinary or other action against an individual for engaging in protected speech. The University can provide support and resources to those impacted by a bias incident OACC and the Center for Leadership and Intercultural Engagement may retain general and statistical information about the incident and may engage in voluntary educational conversations with members of the community about the incident.

May I report a bias incident anonymously?

Although you may choose to report a bias incident anonymously, please understand that doing so may limit the University's ability to respond. Your input directly impacts does not the

response process.

Will my report automatically be shared with other University offices (e.g. GMU Police, Human Resources, Student Conduct, Provost, etc.)?

Incident reports and related follow up are treated as private, though not confidential. This means that other University offices may be contacted as necessary in order to provide resources and support, and communicating with other offices may be considered among options when discussing appropriate steps toward resolution. follow-up are treated as private, though not confidential. This means that other University offices may be contacted as necessary to provide resources and support, and communicating with other offices may be considered an option

As with most other University officials, individuals involved in the Bias Incident Response process are responsible employees and must refer reports of conduct that potentially violates Mason policies (such as policies on [Non-Discrimination](#), [Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Other Interpersonal Violence](#), or the [Code of Student Conduct](#)), the Commonwealth of Virginia's [Civility in the Workplace](#) policy, or constitutes a crime to the appropriate offices.

What happens if I am listed as an alleged offender in a bias incident report?

The Bias Incident Response is not an adversarial, adjudicatory, or disciplinary process. Individuals involved in the process may reach out to those involved in the incident regarding voluntary educational conversations. There is no penalty for choosing to not engage with the Bias Incident Response process.

Separate from the Bias Incident Response process, a reporter may also choose to pursue a complaint through another existing university procedure, or a referral may be made to another office. If that occurs, someone from that office may contact the alleged offender as part of their procedure.

Does the Bias Incident Response address off-campus incidents?

Yes, the Bias Incident Response process can provide support and resources to University community members who experience a bias-related incident no matter where the incident occurs.

What do I do if I believe I have been the victim of a crime or subjected to discrimination or harassment?

The Bias Incident Response can provide you with resources and support, but it is not a disciplinary process. It does not replace any existing university process or procedure to address crimes, discrimination, violations of Mason policy, or violations of the Code of Student Conduct.

If an emergency is occurring or you are concerned for your or others' safety, call 911.

If you would like to report conduct that you believe constitutes a crime:

- For emergencies, call 911.
- All other non-emergency incidents can be reported to George Mason Police at [703-993-2810](tel:703-993-2810). Anonymous tips can also be [submitted online](#).

If you would like to report allegations of discrimination or harassment based on protected characteristics (including allegations of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, or interpersonal violence) or other alleged violations of University Policy 1201, 1202, or 1203 by a university faculty member, staff member, or student, please contact the Office of Access, Compliance, and Community using the Bias Incident Reporting Form.

What happens to the bias incident report form after the process is complete?

Incident report forms and related materials are maintained in the Office of Access, Compliance, and Community (OACC), and information is only shared on a need-to-know basis to achieve an appropriate resolution. General and statistical information about the incident may be retained by OACC and the Center for Leadership and Intercultural Engagement for inclusion in annual reports, including information on the date, location, and nature of the incident and how it was resolved.



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