

Worcester State University Bias Incident Response Team

Academic Year 2019-2020 Draft Report

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Committee Membership

Co-Chairs: Dr. Tanya Mears and Maureen Stokes

Committee Members: Gina Endres, Doreen Foley, Adrian Gage, Matthew Hare, Jason Kapurch, Joshua Katz, Russell Kinell, William Marrier, Kristie McNamara, Laura Murphy, Jennifer Quinn, Manuel Reyes Ponce, Marcela Uribe-Jennings.

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Introduction

During the 2019-2020 academic year, BIRT efforts started with a focus around programming around bias incidents reported to our campus community. As the academic year progressed, the focus of the work concentrated on mitigating and dealing with a set of bias incidents that took place on campus beginning mid-December, targeting different bathrooms on university buildings. As the spring semester progressed, the global pandemic made most institutional efforts shift toward the crisis. BIRT continued to meet as scheduled and is exploring further programming opportunities for early fall and possibly the summer semester.

Achievements/ New Initiatives and Activities

- ❖ The Bias Incident Response Team (BIRT) was actively involved in responding to incidents around graffiti found at different bathrooms around campus beginning in mid-December 2019. The response included:
 - ✓ Emergency / impromptu meetings held by committee members as soon as notified of each incident;
 - ✓ Tailored communication to the extended campus community rejecting the incidents each time and tuning in the message as the situation evolved;
 - ✓ A day-long session on Anti-Semitism led by the ADL, Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts, as well as students, faculty and staff. This day long programming included a presentation on Allies Taking Action Against Bias, Discrimination and Hate;
 - ✓ Further collaboration among students and faculty to begin a Chabad chapter on campus;
 - ✓ A WSU Stands Against Hate rally, which took place on February 13, 2020 and attended by close to 500 individuals from across campus.

- ❖ At the beginning of the 2019-2020 academic year, BIRT developed an updated brochure to promote BIRT's role around campus. Items highlighted on the brochure include definition of bias, how to report an incident of bias on campus and how to access the reporting tool from FacStaff online, the specific role of BIRT, among others. The brochure has been disseminated across campus offices and is used for different outreach and awareness purposes throughout the academic year. A future project will turn the brochure into a poster which will be distributed in high-traffic areas on campus.
- ❖ The Hate Has No Home Here campaign was re-launched at WSU in early spring 2020 by placing posters around campus as well as distributing magnets to be placed at the top left of each classroom whiteboard. 100 magnets were distributed around campus. This initiative was led by BIRT and signed off by all Diversity & Inclusion committees on campus, and communicated to the campus community by WSU Provost.
- ❖ BIRT is preparing a mentoring program for student members of the committee to help them understand BIRT's role and committee members responsibilities. Mentoring students on their role can make them student ambassadors for BIRT, able to explain to their fellow students what BIRT's purpose is and encourage them to report events so that these can effectively be documented and addressed through proper institutional channels.

Closing

Although a good portion of the programming taking place in early spring semester 2020 driven by the group was focused on/ in response to the bias incidents that took place on campus, the outcome and main events such as the campus-wide rally and sessions around how to report incidents of bias and hate on campus, can be seen as setting the stage for future opportunities for training and messaging from this group to the campus community in any fall 2020 scenario.

BIRT recognizes and underlines the current and ongoing challenges presented to our campus community in the middle of this global pandemic, which can exacerbate bias incidents against subgroups of our population. As such, BIRT's work is of particular importance as we delve into more concrete plans to define the fall semester. As a group, we will need to develop further efforts regarding communication, structuring and delivery of such opportunities which will need to be defined by the team in the upcoming months.