



THE BIAS RESPONSE AND REFERRAL NETWORK

YEAR-FOUR REPORT TO THE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA TWIN CITIES
CAMPUS COMMUNITY

June 2020 (released June 2021)

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

The Bias Response and Referral Network (BRRN), established in January 2016, furthers the goal of a campus climate that is welcoming, inclusive, and respectful to all by responding to reports of bias incidents on the Twin Cities Campus

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES:

The BRRN compiles information about bias incidents involving the Twin Cities campus community, supports those who experience bias, and promotes a healthy campus climate through dialogue and education about the nature and impact of bias incidents in our working and learning community. Specifically, the BRRN:

- Refers reporters to appropriate campus offices that can effectively respond through investigation, educational coaching, or other resources depending on the nature of the incident.

- Provides referrals to support resources for students, faculty, and staff.
- Logs all incidents and tracks for trends.
- Notifies campus leaders of ongoing bias incidents and trends.
- Provides informational presentations about the BRRN to campus groups.
- Meets to discuss current issues and trends.
- Publishes annual reports to the community. The first three annual reports can be found [here](#).

The BRRN receives reports from many sources, primarily from the online reporting tool [Ethical Advocate](#) (formerly UReport) and its email account, endbias@umn.edu. Sometimes, an individual member of the BRRN will receive a report.

FREE SPEECH AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

As demonstrated in MPact 2025, the Systemwide Strategic Plan, the University of Minnesota aims to foster a welcoming community that values belonging, equity, diversity, and dignity in people and ideas. The University is committed to safeguarding the free expression rights of all University community members, even if the expression is biased, hateful, and contrary to University values of equity and diversity. Nevertheless, biased and hateful expression causes harm and fractures in our campus community that must be addressed. The BRRN, along with other campus bodies, units, and departments, responds to bias incidents in ways that support those most impacted and promotes education and dialogue. The BRRN is committed to upholding free speech and academic freedom on campus and does not have an investigative or disciplinary role in responding to any bias reports.

Please visit [Academic Freedom and Free Speech at the University of Minnesota](#) for our statement of these values and links to additional information.

STRUCTURE

The BRRN team reports jointly to the Vice President for Equity and Diversity and the Executive Vice President and Provost, and comprises members from the following:

- Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action
- Faculty representatives
- Global Programs and Strategy Alliance
- The Graduate School
- Office for Equity and Diversity
- Office for Student Affairs
- Office of Human Resources
- Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost
- Office of the General Counsel
- Office of the President
- University Services
- Ad hoc members*

*Ad hoc members are chosen to fill essential perspectives related to their work or the communities they represent.

A full roster is available on the [BRRN website](#). Five members of the BRRN serve as staff leads, responsible for day to day responses to incidents, organizing full team meetings, and other coordination activities for the BRRN.

A [Faculty and Student Consultation and Advisory Group](#) was formed three years ago to provide insight, expertise, and feedback to the BRRN. In Year-Four, the group was put on hiatus to provide time to assess how to best utilize this resource.

YEAR-FOUR HIGHLIGHTS

During its fourth year of operation, the BRRN moved into a “stay the course” mode, focusing on responding to incident reports and maintaining its protocols for operation, with the exception of putting the faculty and student advisory group on hiatus for the year, pursuant to direction from its executive leadership. The purpose of this pause was to give new University leadership—especially the President and Provost—time to determine their strategic priorities and how a bias response entity fits into them. The BRRN continued to adhere to its intended role as a resource and referral entity.

In addition to responding to incidents, the BRRN continued its marketing efforts, which included promoting the BRRN in campus publications, on digital signage across campus, and offering a promotional postcard that college departments and administrative units could order at no cost to distribute broadly within their constituencies. The BRRN also provided information at New Employee Orientation, and stands available to groups, committees and department for educational presentations.

The group of staff leads continued in its role of providing overall leadership for the team, responding to incident reports on a day-to-day basis, and identifying issues for discussion with the full team. The full team continued to serve in more of an advisory capacity, providing expertise and insight about incidents and trends on campus.

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“Being a part of the BRRN has allowed me to provide resources and information about the BRRN and responding to bias incidents to Facilities Management and University Services staff. It’s been important to reach our front line staff with this information as well as managers.” – Coy Hillstead, Assistant Director, Human Resources, University Services.

The full team membership structure remained the same with one small but important change. Originally, the BRRN drew representatives from three committees. Two of those committees have since dissolved. As a result, the BRRN established ad hoc representation for the BRRN that would not rely on committees, but would continue to ensure that membership is appropriately representative of key campus communities and functions.

In March 2020, the University [initiated a number of measures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19](#), including online learning and requiring all but those deemed essential to campus operations to work from home. These measures remain in place. With very few people physically present on campus, the nature and frequency of bias complaints changed. Bias incidents fell into two main categories – those related to racism and xenophobia directed at Asian and Asian American members of the campus community, and incidents occurring in online

learning environments, such as “Zoom bombing” offensive words and images. Overall incident reports dropped significantly during this time.

However, after the May 25 killing of George Floyd, incidents related to race and racism increased markedly, with incidents related to racism on social media posts by University community members occurring at a higher rate.

Overall, the number of distinct incidents reported to the BRRN this year dropped to 63 as compared to 123 in the previous year. Assessment about how to improve its use as a trusted resource will be important in the coming year. Detailed information about incidents and trends follows.

INCIDENTS AND TRENDS

Between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020, the BRRN received 92 reports. Some incidents generated multiple reports, and some reports received did not relate to actual bias incidents. These reports and trends are discussed in more detail below. In total, the BRRN received 83 total reports of bias incidents with 63 distinct reports that impacted our campus community. The following section contains a breakdown of various types of reports that the BRRN received; the conduct in these reports has not been confirmed.

For purposes of this summary, the incidents reported are organized into three charts. The first chart organizes the incidents based on the reported targeted protected identity. BRRN recognizes that some incidents included biased conduct against persons or groups based on multiple identities. When identifiable, the same incident was recorded under each applicable identity. Based on a review of the reports, BRRN has identified the following seven protected identities that were targeted in reported incidents during this time period: religion, race, gender, sexuality, national origin, disability, and other. An explanation of each category is below:

- **Religion:** Biased conduct or comments made against a person or group because of their actual or perceived religious or spiritual beliefs or identities. Some of these reports are characterized as “anti-Semitic” by the reporter and include complaints of offensive comments toward the reporter’s religion. BRRN recognizes the intersectionality of some incidents in this category, specifically national origin.
- **Race:** Biased conduct or comments made against a person or group because of their actual or perceived race. Incidents include racial slurs, racist graffiti, and concerns about racial bias.

- **Gender:** Biased conduct or comments made against a person or group because of their actual or perceived gender identity or gender expression. Incidents under this category include transphobic flyers, gender discrimination, sexist comments, and sexist language.
- **Sexuality:** Biased conduct or comments made against a person or group because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or sexual identity. Incidents within this category include discrimination and harassment based on sexuality, homophobic comments, and homophobic vandalism.
- **National Origin:** Biased conduct or comments made against a person or group because of their actual or perceived country of origin. Incidents include inappropriate assumptions and comments based on national origin.
- **Disability:** Biased conduct or comments made against a person or group because of their actual or perceived physical or mental abilities. Incidents under this category include concerns about accommodations and accessibility.
- **Other:** Biased conduct based on other protected identities, such as age. This category includes reports that did not specify which protected identity was targeted or where several identities may have been targeted but were not explicitly identified. For example, reports may only mention people of “diverse” or “underrepresented backgrounds” or the incident involved general biased or hateful messaging such as neo-Nazi, and white supremacist or white nationalist flyers that do not target a specific identity.

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In total, between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020, the BRRN received 123 total reports of bias incidents with 104 distinct reports that involved a bias incident that impacted our campus community.

[1] Of the 126 reports, three were not considered bias reports. These reports included one that was seeking information to be proactive, a report that was related to an employment performance issue, and a report that was not related to a protected identity.

CHART 1: Bias Incidents Reported by Protected Identity between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020

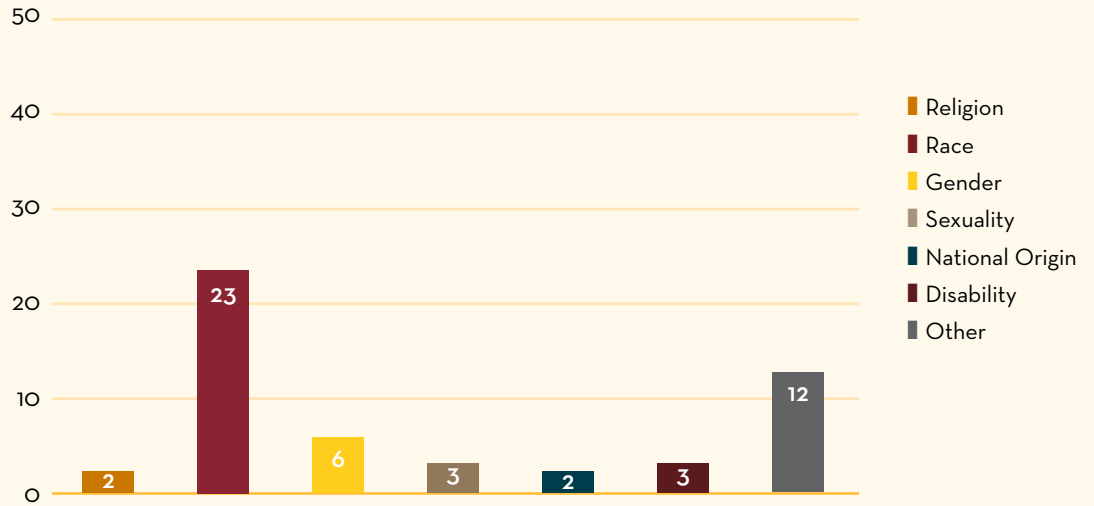


CHART 2: Bias Incidents Reported by Month between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020

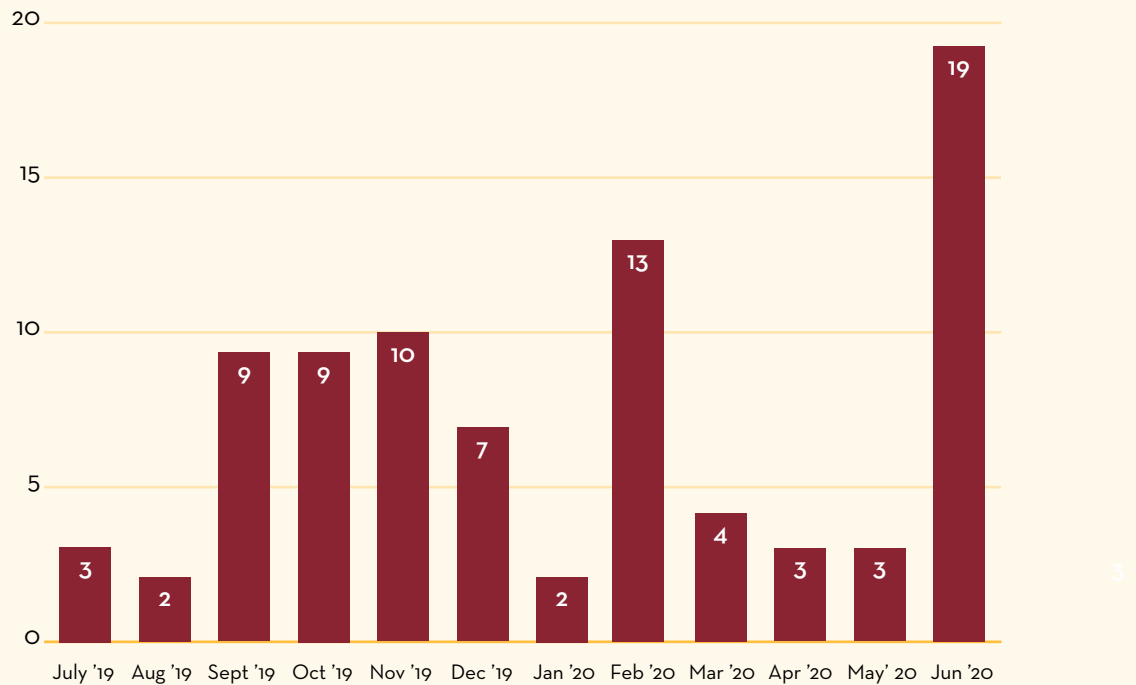
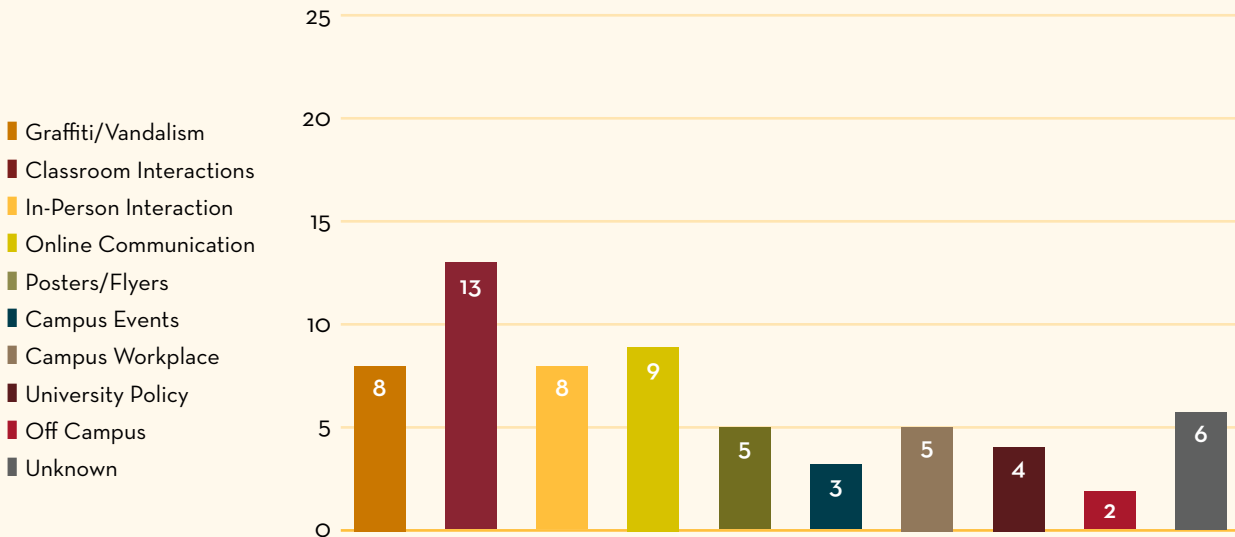


CHART 3: Bias Incidents Reported by Method and Location between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020



- **Graffiti and Vandalism** includes swastikas, hateful messages, and other biased comments etched into or drawn on University property, including whiteboards and bathroom stalls. These incidents also include tearing down “Queer is. . .” posters on campus.
- **Classroom Interactions** includes those that occur between students, students and teaching assistants, students and faculty, and teaching assistants and faculty in an academic setting. Classroom interactions include incidents that occur in person and during online classes via services such as Zoom. These interactions include use of blackface in a Shakespeare class performance by a student, a professor misgendering a student, an advisor misidentifying a student’s race and ethnicity, and a student using Nazi and white supremacist imagery as a Zoom background during an online class.
- **In-person Interactions** includes interactions between University community members or others on campus (not in a classroom) that were perceived as bias.

- **Online Communication** includes biased comments observed or received through social media or email. For example, concerns were reported about a student’s comments on social media platforms that were directed at the reporter.
- **Posters/Flyers** includes paper items found on or near campus, including flyers stating “It’s ok to be white” and “Diversity Destroys Nations”. This also includes finding “Queer is...” posters that were torn down and thrown away.
- **Campus Events** includes reports regarding a topic or incident that happened at a University-sponsored event but does not include conduct targeted at a specific individual. This category includes multiple reports regarding the language on a student group’s panel during the annual Paint the Bridge event. This category does not include in-person interactions during a University event between community members.
- **Campus Workplace** includes a report of a promotion given to a staff member without a search. This category does not include incidents that may have happened between coworkers via online communication or an incident that may have occurred in the workplace but was unrelated to the work itself.

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- **University Policy** includes reports related to decisions made by or matters within the control of the University. This includes a report including concerns about new mandatory interview questions.
- **Off Campus** includes a report of an incident which took place not on University property and involved a landlord.

NEW AND CONTINUING TRENDS

- **General questions, inquiries into the BRRN's role, and reports seeking advice** are a new trend this year. There were six reports that were not categorized as distinct bias incidents, but still related to the BRRN. For example, a non-university community member contacted the BRRN to ask how the University ensures students learn in a supportive environment. The BRRN explained in detail its role in the campus community and goal to contribute to a campus climate that is welcoming, inclusive, and respectful for all. Another example is a staff member that wrote to the BRRN asking if "health status" is a protected identity. The BRRN explained to the staff member that under some circumstances, a person's health status may be a protected disability and referred the person to the Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action office ("EOAA"). Other examples include several reports following an initial report related to an incident about a flyer on a kiosk that contained several biased statements regarding many different identities. One such report was a staff member voicing their concerns and looking for language to share with their department regarding the flyer. The BRRN forwarded the concerns to the University of Minnesota Police Department and Facilities Management while also giving the staff member helpful language to share. Another report was from a student not only reporting the incident, but also asking about

the BRRN's role in stopping bias incidents. The BRRN was able to explain its role and offer the student different support resources such as Student Counseling Services, Boynton Mental Health, and the Employee Assistance Program. This trend shows that the BRRN is not only a platform to report bias incidents, but also a source of information and resources for the greater campus community.

- **Reports related to online teaching and virtual workspaces** is a new trend this year in relation to the campus response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Beginning on March 11, 2020, the University decided to move all classes online and encourage students to stay home or return home. Then, from March 13-15, 2020 all nonessential staff began working remotely. In light of this switch, there have been reports related to the use of online platforms for classes and webinars. For example, a student's Zoom background contained white supremacist imagery and a person attending a webinar on Zoom posted slurs in the chat box where the guest panelists could view it. While bias incidents continue to be reported, the method in which they occur has changed.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

To continue building upon the BRRN's impact and effectiveness, recommendations for Year-Five include:

NEW:

- **Conduct an assessment of the BRRN and make recommendations:** The BRRN has been in operation for four years and has largely maintained the same structure and operational protocols. We recommend in Year-Five that an assessment of the BRRN be conducted to better understand what is working well and where improvements could be made. Areas to assess include the BRRN's structure, operation, resources – or lack thereof – and how the campus community and leadership perceives its effectiveness.

CARRIED FORWARD AND UPDATED FROM YEAR-THREE:

- **Develop a free speech and academic freedom website:** Bias response teams in higher education institutions across the country continue to be legally challenged for perceived threats to free speech and academic freedom. The BRRN has worked hard to continually enforce our approach to respond to bias incidents in ways that do not impede or restrict free speech. We recommend developing a robust free speech website and to develop and deliver educational presentations about this topic.

- **Collaborate more closely with those working on addressing bias and climate on campus:** The BRRN is a reactive entity in that it is designed to respond to reports of bias incidents. To increase the BRRN's impact, we recommend identifying and leveraging opportunities to deepen partnerships and collaborations with offices and individuals proactively addressing bias and climate on campus, and to leverage resources through various groups by working more closely together.
- **Increase awareness of and trust in the BRRN:** The work to build awareness and trust in the BRRN is ongoing. In Year-Five, a continued priority is to be more proactive and intentional in reaching out to the campus community through presentations and ongoing promotional and marketing strategies.

The Bias Response and Referral Network compiled this report and its recommendations. Feedback and suggestions can be submitted to endbias@umn.edu.

Please note that the release of this report was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and staff transitions.

Disclaimer: The BRRN acknowledges that the reports received do not include all bias incidents that impacted University community members during this time period, but only include the incidents that were reported directly to the BRRN. This reports reflects our best estimate based on the information that was provided to us. At times, reporters do not provide detailed information about an incident and do not follow-up when more information is requested. Other times, reporters experience bias based on not one, but numerous protected identities. Therefore, it is sometimes challenging to accurately categorize incidents as reported.

To report an incident submit an anonymous report online to [U Report](#) or email endbias@umn.edu. Call 911 in case of emergency.

