

Bias-Related Incident Protocol:

Reporting, Response, and Resources

Guidelines for Student Affairs Professionals

Virginia Tech
Division of Student Affairs
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Virginia Tech's shared values and policies

As a community, the faculty, employees, and students of Virginia Tech have defined their collective values based on mutual respect and understanding, and have pledged to:

- Affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person
- Create and maintain a respectful and welcoming environment for all
- Foster and sustain an increasingly diverse and inclusive community of learners
- Develop an appreciation for and understanding of the benefits of multicultural perspectives
- Establish a set of policies, programs, practices, and resources necessary to achieve excellence, equity, and effectiveness in the research, teaching and learning, and outreach activities of the university.

As Virginia Tech works to create a culture of respect, equity, justice, responsibility, and safety, it is crucial that students are aware of their rights and options when confronting a bias-related incident. This document outlines the university's protocol for responding promptly and equitably to such incidents. With the Principles of Community as its guiding philosophy and within the framework of policy compliance, the university investigates, adjudicates, and advocates for students, so that all parties are aware of their rights, responsibilities, and the expectations of the university community.

Virginia Tech's commitment to equity and inclusion is outlined in the following documents:

[The Virginia Tech Principles of Community](#)

- Adopted in 2005 and reaffirmed in 2014, the Principles of Community are fundamental to the university's ongoing efforts to increase access and inclusion and to create a community that nurtures learning and growth for all of its members. Virginia Tech is a place where the free exchange of ideas, in an atmosphere of civility, is valued both for the good of the individual and for the entire community.

[The Hokie Handbook](#)

- Virginia Tech students are both individuals and members of a learning community. As individuals they enjoy basic rights; as members of the learning community, they also accept certain responsibilities. To support the educational mission of the university, to create an environment where all students have the same opportunity to succeed academically and personally, and to promote health and safety, Virginia Tech has established policies and standards for student behavior.

[University Policy 1025: Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Prevention](#)

- Virginia Tech does not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. Such behavior is inconsistent with the university's commitments to excellence and to a community in which mutual respect is a core value.

[The Aspirations for Student Learning: Civility](#)

- Consideration, respect, and courtesy -- civility is a shared gift that we give and receive in turn. We strive to listen, as well as to speak to each other; we try to understand each other in our commonalities and differences; we give respect due to all members of the university community; we favor courtesy over rudeness and encourage considerate treatment over dismissive behavior; and we combine free speech with reasoned expression so that liberty and peace are both served.

What constitutes a bias-related incident?

Bias incidents are expressions against a person or group because of the person's or group's age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law.

It is always important not to label an incident too quickly. The following questions should be considered in determining whether or not an incident is bias related:

- Does it seem the incident is bias motivated?
- Does it violate university policy?
- Does it violate the shared values and expectations of university community members?
- Who is affected by the incident?
- Are there legal consequences?
- Might the incident be investigated as a hate crime?

Examples of bias-related conduct include:

- Words or actions that contradict the spirit of the Principles of Community
- Jokes that are demeaning to a particular group of people
- Holding a "date" or "slave" auction
- Performing a skit in which participants use blackface or other ethnic group makeup or props
- Hosting a culturally themed party
- Assuming characteristics of a minority group for advertising
- Posting flyers that contain demeaning language or images.

Virginia Tech recognizes two categories of bias incidents. An incident does not need to meet all criteria listed below.

Localized bias incident:

- Seen or heard by few people
- No violation of university policy
- No interest from media
- Cannot be investigated as a hate crime.

Community bias incident:

- Seen or heard by many
- Violates university policy
- Media and/or interest from outside the university community
- Can be investigated as a hate crime.

How to report an incident

Reporting guidelines:

All bias-related incidents should be reported using the following guidelines:

- Reports can and should be submitted by any member of the university community.
- Prompt reports are crucial:
 - Reports should be submitted as soon as a community member is aware of the incident.
 - Should a student not wish to report an incident, the first professional on campus to see or hear of an incident should report it.
- Reports should provide accurate information.
- Elements of a report may be shared with the university community to dispel rumors.

Direct reports should be made to the Dean of Students Office in person, by phone, or via email.

- Call: 231-3787
- Visit: 109 E. Eggleston Hall
- Email: dean.students@vt.edu

The Dean of Students staff will:

- Record the incident within the secure DOS reporting system
- Refer the incident for appropriate response if needed:
 - Virginia Tech or Blacksburg Police Department
 - Threat Assessment Team
 - Student Conduct Office.

Support, inquiry, and/or advice are available in the following offices:

- Dean of Students Office, 109 E. Eggleston Hall
- Vice President for Student Affairs, 112 Burruss
- Housing and Residence Life, New Hall West, Suite 151
- VT Police Department, Safety and Security Building, Southgate Dr.
- Multicultural Programs and Services, 150 Squires Student Center
- Women's Center at Virginia Tech, 206 Washington Street
- Cranwell International Center, 1015 Harper Hall.

Privacy and confidentiality:

Virginia Tech is committed to preserving a student's privacy. Under certain circumstances, some information may need to be shared with other university departments in order to assist the student, provide for safety, or provide for the safety of the campus community.

How the Division of Student Affairs will respond

Response is driven by the two categories of bias-related incidents listed above.

Localized Bias Incident = Localized Response

- Incidents that are localized or contained within a limited area of campus and seen or heard by a limited number of people.
- For a localized bias-related incident (i.e., occurring within a limited area of campus, such as a residence hall bathroom), the administrator closest to the incident will address the issue, facilitate a response that resonates with the student or group of students involved, and issue a community statement if appropriate.

Community Bias Incident = Community Response

- Incidents that are widely known and/or violate policy will be processed by a Core Response Team.
- For a community bias-related incident, the Core Response Team will determine if the incident can be considered a crime and whether a message from university administration is appropriate. This Core Response Team will be called together as soon as feasible when reports are shared with the Dean of Students Office. The Core Response Team will be called upon for all such incidents.

Representatives from the following departments may be called upon to comprise the Core Response Team:

- Virginia Tech or Blacksburg Police Department
- Student Conduct
- University Relations
- Multicultural Programs and Services
- Housing and Residence Life
- Department where the incident occurred
- Student(s) targeted
- Student organization targeted

Among the steps the Core Response Team may take:

- Determine the need for temporary or permanent change in housing
- Address possible fear of retaliation
- Provide phone numbers for the reporting student to call in an emergency
- Make additional referrals to counseling, medical care, student conduct, police, etc.
- Recommend that police issue a community alert or statement if appropriate
- With police input, determine if the incident rises to the level of a crime
- Discuss privacy and confidentiality issues
- Discuss options for resolving the matter
- Discuss process of adjudication with reporting student
- Determine if disciplinary action is appropriate
- Provide regular status reports to reporting student(s) until case is closed
- Designate an administrator for follow-up
- Implement appropriate restorative justice techniques or methods.

It is important to know that some incidents will not result in public disclosure. Effective and appropriate response to bias incidents must honor legal and constitutional standards, especially those that protect freedom of expression. The response team will also take into account:

- Wishes of the reporting student(s)
- Wishes of a targeted organization
- Whether a case is under police investigation
- Confidentiality due to situation
- Difficulty in identifying the perpetrator.

Specific examples of response:

Graffiti and/or vandalism to university or personal property:

- Notify Virginia Tech Police Department
- Markings of a bias, graphic, vulgar, obscene, or threatening nature will be covered or concealed in a manner that does not interfere with the original composition of the site
- During concealment, caution will be taken to preserve the area
- Once VTPD arrives, it has authority over the incident
- VTPD will make photographs and collect needed evidence
- VTPD must give the OK to clean or clear the vandalism.

Verbal harassment:

- Log details of the incident: time, location, etc.
- Determine if the incident was directed at an individual or intended victim
- Record what exactly was said
- Include bystander names.

Free Speech:

Virginia Tech is a place where the free exchange of ideas is valued and every person's perspective is important. Freedom of speech in the United States is protected by the [First Amendment](#) to the [United States Constitution](#) and by many state constitutions and state and federal laws. Free speech provisions protect many forms of intolerant statements, expressions, and conduct.

Depending on the circumstances, a bias-related incident may not be a crime. In certain contexts, courts have found hate speech to be protected even though many in the university community find it repugnant. If these expressions are inconsistent with Virginia Tech's Principles of Community, they may present an educational opportunity for better understanding protected speech and the role of tolerance in the campus community.

Some bias-related incidents may violate the Student Code of Conduct and may be adjudicated through the student conduct system. Virginia Tech cannot adjudicate matters that are deemed protected speech. Behavior that is discriminatory or otherwise hurtful to members of the community is addressed through educational interventions.

Virginia Tech is committed to stopping these behaviors. Because some incidents may be beyond the reach of policy and laws, it is imperative that the university respond as a unified community to denounce such behavior. Acts of intolerance require all members of the university community to uphold the shared values outlined in the Virginia Tech Principles of Community.

Regardless of whether incidents violate policy or are inappropriate or insensitive, it is crucial that Virginia Tech respond in a timely and consistent manner. All parties involved -- those who report such incidents as well as those accused -- will be treated with respect, consideration, and concern. Those involved will be given the opportunity to civilly discuss the incident with a trained professional and will be apprised of their options for resolving the incident.

Achieving bias-free communication

- Be aware of words, images, and situations that suggest all or most of a group are the same. Stereotypes often lead to assumptions that are unsupportable and offensive.
- Avoid qualifiers that reinforce stereotypes. A qualifier is added information that suggests an exception to what is expected.
- Identify people by characteristics only when relevant. Few situations require such identification.
- Be aware of language that has questionable racial, ethnic, class, or sexual orientation connotations. While a word or phrase may not be personally offensive to you, it may be to others.
- Avoid patronizing language and tokenism toward any group.
- Substitute substantive information for ethnic clichés.
- Review language, images, and other forms of communication to make sure all groups are fairly represented.