



# THE BIAS RESPONSE AND REFERRAL NETWORK

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

August 2019

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 education and consultation about the BRRN to campus groups.
- Meets to discuss current issues and trends.
- Publishes annual reports to the community.

The first and second annual reports can be found on the [BRRN website](#).

The BRRN receives reports from many sources, primarily from the online reporting tool [Ethical Advocate](#) (formerly UReport) and its email account, [enrbias@umn.edu](mailto:enrbias@umn.edu). Sometimes, an individual member of the BRRN will receive a report. BRRN members also provide information to the group about incidents that have occurred in their units.

## FREE SPEECH AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

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 to the vice president for equity and diversity and the executive vice president and provost and comprises members from:

- Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action
- Faculty representatives
- Global Programs and Strategy Alliance
- The Graduate School
- Housing and Residential Life
- 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\*

\*At the end of this year, a slight change in structure was implemented to shift from committee representation, designed to ensure organizational and community representation, to an ad hoc structure. This change was made because of the fluid nature of committees. Since the BRRN's inception, two of the three committees with representation on the BRRN have disbanded. The shift to ad hoc representation is intended to ensure organizational and community representation will continue.

A full roster is available on the [BRRN website](#).

A [Faculty and Student Consultation and Advisory Group](#) provides insight, expertise, and feedback to the BRRN.

## YEAR THREE HIGHLIGHTS

During its third year of operation, the BRRN primarily worked to more clearly define and consistently follow protocols and procedures initially established during its first two years, pursuant to the direction from administration. This was also informed by the national trends of legal challenges to bias response teams in higher education. In particular, the BRRN focused on adhering to its intended role as a resource and referral entity.

The BRRN team considered how it might include more education and training around bias and free speech issues, but concluded that this type of work falls beyond BRRN's scope. Additionally, due to limited human and financial resources, further education and training is not feasible.

BRRN team members provided informational presentations about the BRRN to various committees and groups, and promoted the BRRN through established publications such as Brief, the weekly e-newsletter for faculty and staff, and the student undergraduate and graduate newsletters, which are published every other week. A new online resource was created, which lists [existing educational and training resources](#) available to the University community.

***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.***



***“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.

Other visibility and marketing efforts included promoting the BRRN on digital signage across campus and creating a promotional postcard that was broadly distributed to a variety of college departments and administrative units through an opt-in process set up through Printing Services. This allowed departments and units to order the number of postcards they needed for distribution free of charge.

Working with University Relations, the [BRRN website](#) was redesigned to more effectively and efficiently highlight pertinent information on the home page, including a summary of what we are and what we do; how to report an incident to the BRRN; our commitment to free speech; condensing content to a page about structure and membership; and an FAQ page with detailed information about the BRRN.

A group of six staff leads formed in year one met every other week, solidifying their role in providing overall leadership for the team, working with the executive oversight leaders, responding to incident reports on a day-to-day basis, and identifying

issues for discussion with the full team. The staff leads also received training on how to use Ethical Advocate, the University’s new official reporting system.

The full BRRN team typically met every other week. Full team meetings focused on reviewing reported incidents since the previous meeting, reviewing reports of issues from team members, and updates and information related to our work. The full team shifted to more of an advisory role in the last year, with individual team members working with staff leads on incident responses specific to their departments or expertise (e.g., Housing and Residential Life, Student Unions and Activities, and the Graduate School).

BRRN team members report that their involvement with the BRRN has provided new opportunities to discuss the BRRN and responding to bias on campus within their units.

The faculty and student advisory group met once per semester, providing key insights and observations about responses to bias on campus.

# INCIDENTS AND TRENDS

Between May 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019 the BRRN received 126 reports, some of which included reports of the same bias incident. For example, in October of 2018, there were nine identical reports about the one incident. These reports and this specific trend are discussed in more detail below. In total, the BRRN received 123 total reports of bias incidents with 104 distinct reports that involved a bias incident that impacted our campus community. [1]

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 the 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. Based on the limits of the current data and for clarity, BRRN has separated and limited the categories accordingly.
- **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 defacing or tearing down posters related to the Black Lives Matter movement.
- **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 international students feeling as if they were being treated differently from domestic students while working on campus and inappropriate assumptions 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. Most 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.

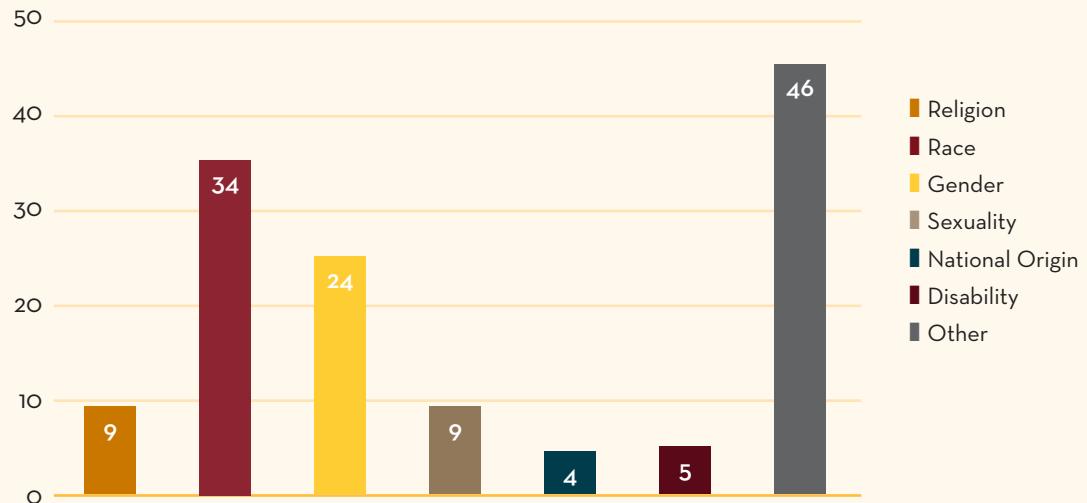
# 123

In total, between May 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019, the BRRN received 123 total reports of bias incidents with 104 distinct reports that involved a bias incident that impacted our campus community.

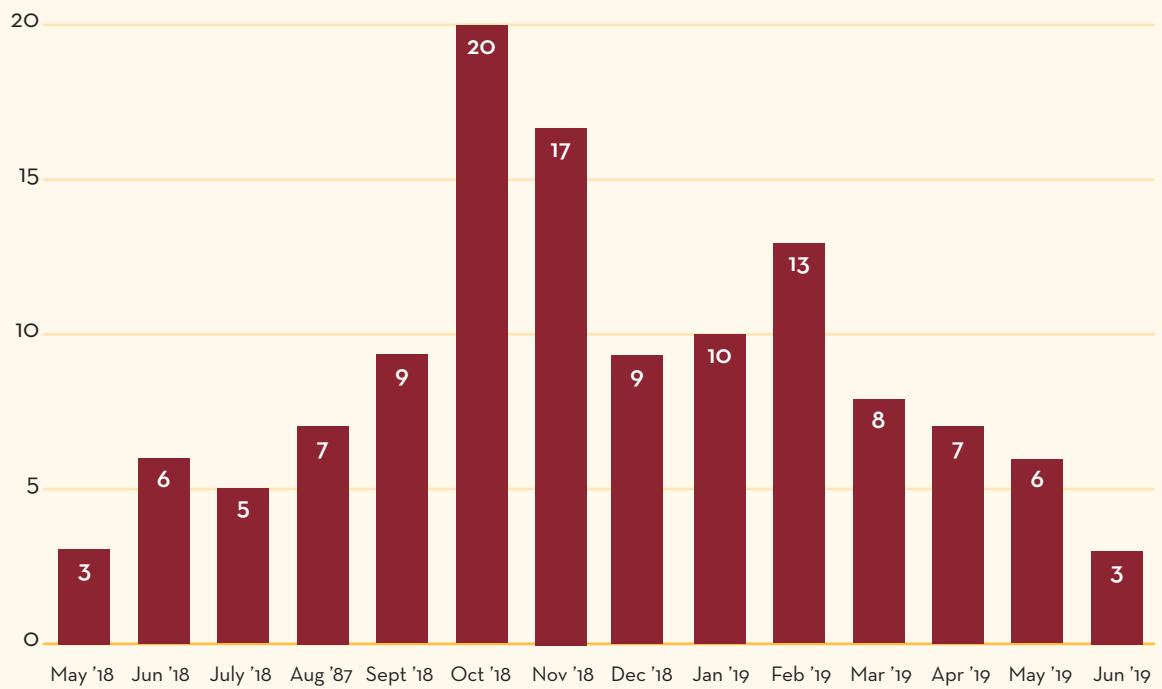
[1] Of the 126 reports, three were not considered bias reports. These reports included one that was seeking information to be proactive, a report that was related to an employment performance issue, and a report that was not related to a protected identity.

Incidents and Trends, continued

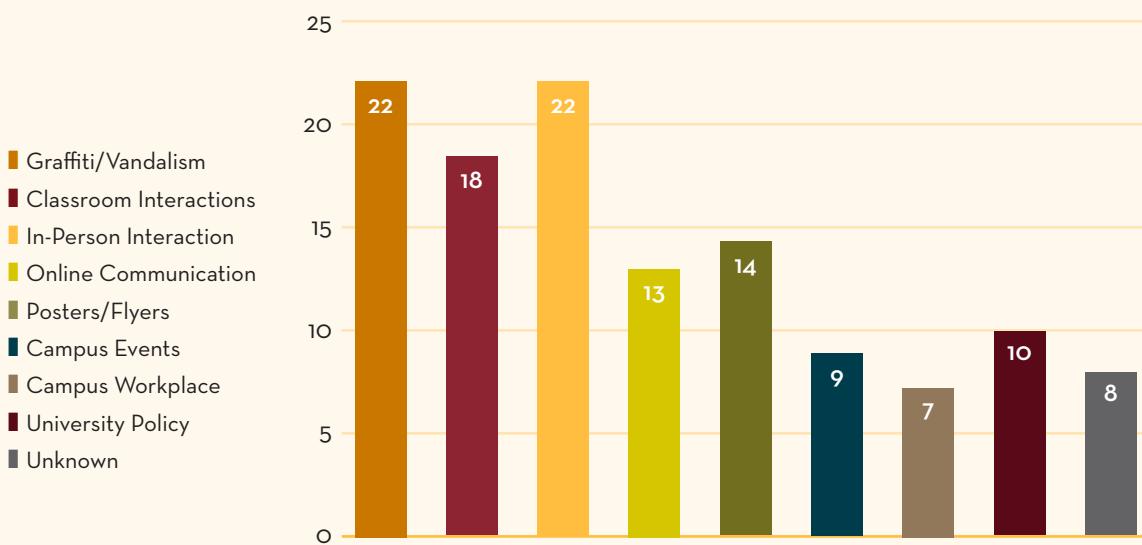
**CHART 1:** Bias Incidents Reported by Protected Identity between May 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019



**CHART 2:** Bias Incidents Reported by Month between May 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019



**CHART 3:** Bias Incidents Reported by Method and Location between March 1, 2017 and April 30, 2018



- **Graffiti and Vandalism** includes swastikas, hateful messages, and other biased comments etched into or drawn on University property, including whiteboards and bathroom stalls. It also includes defacing or removing community members' Black Lives Matter signs.
- **Classroom Interactions** includes those that occur between students, students and teaching assistants, students and faculty, and teaching assistants and faculty in an academic setting. These interactions include incidents where a student felt a professor's comments were sexist, felt a professor's comments were racist; and a graduate student reported sexual harassment by a professor.
- **In-person Interactions** includes interactions between University community members that were perceived as bias. For example, there was an escalating situation of racial bias between roommates in a residence hall, and concerns of discrimination and harassment based on gender and sexuality between fraternity brothers.
- **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 re-
- porter. Another report raised concerns regarding an email sent by a faculty affinity group that the reporter perceived to exclude individuals from underrepresented backgrounds.
- **Posters/Flyers** includes paper items found on or near campus, including flyers about gender pronouns with a student group logo, cards that promoted an white supremacist/nationalist groups, and anti-Semitic flyers found on campus.
- **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 reports where the reporter was an employee of the University experiencing bias in the context of a campus workplace. These reports include a staff member raised concerns about a Halloween costume they believed to be offensive at an office party; a professor who believed she experienced gender bias which impacted her work environment; and a staff member reporting concerns about pay

*Biased and  
hateful expression  
causes harm and  
fractures in  
our campus  
community that  
must be  
addressed.*

inequity that may be related to discrimination. 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.

- **University Policy** includes reports related to decisions made by or matters within the control of the University. These reports include a non-affiliate's concerns about the lack of informational posters with sexual violence resources in the men's restrooms; concerns about the locations of gender neutral restrooms; concerns about the accessibility of Duo Mobile; and multiple reports about the University's decision not to close completely due to inclement weather on January 29, 2019 citing that the decision was biased against the socioeconomic status of certain employee classifications.
- **Unknown** includes reports in which the reporter articulated that they had experienced bias, but did not describe the incident or provide specific information. This category also includes reports about overall structural or institutional bias that is not attributable to a particular incident, event, or University policy.

## NEW AND CONTINUING TRENDS

- **Reports related to University policy** is a trend that differentiated itself from the other categories; hence, "University Policy" is a new method and location category. Of the ten reports in this category, five were related to the University's decision to not close completely on January 29, 2019, when the low temperature reached negative twenty-five degrees Fahrenheit. The reporters were referred to the Office of the President, University Relations, and the Vice President of University Services so that they could voice their concerns regarding bias based on socioeconomic status and employee classification. Other examples of reports in the University Policy category include a reporter concerned with the lack of informational posters with sexual violence resources in men's restrooms; and a re-

porter concerned about the Timely Warning policy regarding vague racial descriptors. Because these reports are directly related to University decision-making, BRRN finds that it is essential to continue to track these trends.

- **Reports related to incidents in the context of campus workplaces** is another emerging trend, which created the new "Campus Workplace" method and location category. This year, there were a total of six reports that fell under this category. For these types of reports, BRRN provided support resources and notified the pertinent Human Resources departments or referred to EOAA for follow-up. Although there is not a specific trend regarding the type of incident in the context of campus workplaces, it will be important for BRRN to continue to track related incidents for future trends.

- **Reports related to gender and sexuality** made up thirty-three reports this year, indicating a trend. Of these, twenty were about gender identity such as reports of a student being stared at due to their gender identity; language regarding gender pronouns on a student group's bridge panel; flyers regarding gender pronouns; and microaggressions (brief, commonplace words and actions that can be intentional or unintentional and are derogatory in nature) based on gender identity. There was also a student who reported general concerns regarding the safety of transgender and non-binary students. For these reports, BRRN responded with referrals to various support resources such as the Gender and Sexuality Center for Queer and Trans Life, Student Unions and Activities, and the Queer Student Cultural Center. For the student with general concerns, BRRN provided a link to a statement by Office of Equity and Diversity Vice President Michael Goh reiterating the University's commitment to transgender and non-binary people on campus, including the status of the administrative policy under development, "Equity and Access: Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Names and Pronouns." By tracking this trend, BRRN can continue to monitor the campus climate surrounding gender identity and expression.



- **Reports related to race** made up a large percentage of the total reports this year with thirty-three reports. While there was no single trend for bias incidents involving a specific race, ten of the reports involved graffiti and vandalism. Four of the reports regarding racial bias in the form of graffiti and vandalism involved removal of community members' Black Lives Matter posters, and three reports about the same incident of vandalism with racist messaging in a Coffman restroom. It is encouraging that reporters felt the need to let BRRN know about these instances of racial bias, so that BRRN can note any trends and respond by ensuring graffiti is removed and providing applicable referrals and support resources.

- **Reports related to political speech and affiliation** continues to be a trend this year, as it has been since the first year of BRRN's operation. Like last year, reports related to political identity often took the form of flyers that aligned with a particular viewpoint. In addition, many

reports related to political identity were about a student group's Paint the Bridge panel and flyers. There were ten total reports regarding this incident, with nine specifically about the panel and flyers' references to gender pronouns, and one regarding the panel's use of an email address that the reporter felt signaled support for the United States–Mexico border wall. There was also a report regarding vandalism on the student group's panels in the month following the Paint the Bridge event. For the reports, the BRRN acknowledged that free speech may also be harmful or hurtful speech, while also providing resource and referral information. Although neither political speech nor political identity are protected, the BRRN noted the intersection of political speech and identity, including protected identities, and free speech. These reports continue to reflect an ongoing trend surrounding divisive political discourse on campus and across the United States.

# RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

*In year-four, the BRRN will consult with President Joan T.A. Gabel and the new provost, when hired, to inform them about our work, and to gain insight into preferences they may have for our structure and protocols.*

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

After three years of operation, based on feedback we have received, the BRRN has become more established as a campus resource. To continue to build upon the BRRN's impact and effectiveness, recommendations for year four include:

- **Consult with new senior leaders:** Consult with President Joan T. A. Gabel and the new Provost, when hired, and their key staff about the BRRN to inform them about our work, and to gain insight into preferences they may have for our structure and protocols. Continue consultations as other new senior leaders are hired (e.g., Vice President for Human Resources).
- **Further educate the campus community about academic freedom and free speech:** 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. It remains critical to provide education to the campus community about free speech and academic freedom, including how campuses can approach protected speech that is harmful or hurtful. We recommend developing a robust free speech website and to work in collaboration with other campus partners to develop and deliver educational presentations about this topic.
- **Develop mechanisms to evaluate our effectiveness:** Last year, work began on a tool to evaluate the effectiveness of our work for those who report bias incidents. A similar tool also needs to be developed to learn more about how well and often our referrals to the offices to address these incidents are being utilized.

During year four, it will be critical to develop and implement effective evaluation tools so we can better learn what's working and what needs to be improved.

- **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. The BRRN needs to look for and leverage important 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. A key place to begin is by meeting with those offices where we refer reporters to learn how we can better collaborate in our work, and to get a more complete picture of how bias is showing up in our campus community. Another strategy is to revisit the faculty and student advisory group to ensure this is an impactful and effective resource for the BRRN.
- **Increase awareness of and trust in the BRRN:** While knowledge about the BRRN has grown on campus, the work to build awareness and trust is ongoing and involves both promoting the BRRN's track record in responding to incident reports and engaging in both formal and informal communications. Last year we developed templates for a variety of informational presentations that can be customized to various campus constituents, such as international students, advising staff, and facilities management staff. In year four a priority is to be more proactive and intentional in reaching out to the campus community through these presentations and ongoing promotional/marketing strategies.

**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 report 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.

---

The Bias Response and Referral Network compiled this report and its recommendations. Feedback and suggestions can be submitted to  
[enrbias@umn.edu](mailto:enrbias@umn.edu).

