

**BIAS** RESPONSE  
*and Referral Network*

The Bias Response and Referral  
Network Year-One Report to  
the University of Minnesota  
Twin Cities Campus Community

May 2017

## BACKGROUND

In January 2016, President Kaler charged the creation of a Bias Response Team on the Twin Cities campus to quickly assemble after bias incidents are reported, ensure that there is appropriate consultation given the nature of the concern and develop responses and provide referrals when necessary and appropriate. The team began meeting in February 2016 and was asked to partner with other campus offices to be available to implement larger-scale responses to bias incidents that harm the campus climate. After consultations with governance committees, the name was changed to the Bias Response and Referral Network (BRRN) to better reflect its objectives and scope. A [website](#) was launched in fall 2016.

While the University has long had the responsibility of responding to bias incidents, the BRRN was created to ensure that we respond in a consistent and timely way with helpful referrals and appropriate consultation depending on the nature of the concern. It is responsible for ensuring a broad awareness across campus of its existence as well as existing resources related to campus climate.

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. The BRRN collaborates with campus partners to respond to bias incidents and trends in ways that affirm the University's commitment to equity and diversity while maintaining its commitment to upholding free speech and academic freedom on campus. The team does not have an

investigative or disciplinary role in responding to bias incidents.

During its first months of existence, concerns were raised about having a BRRN on campus, particularly as it related to potential infringement of academic freedom. These concerns mirrored a national higher ed conversation about bias response teams—both their strengths and challenges.

In summer 2016, BRRN members engaged in broad consultation with chairs of faculty and staff governance groups, including the Faculty Consultative Committee, Academic Freedom & Tenure Committee, Social Concerns Committee, Civil Service Consultative Committee, Student Affairs Committee, Equity and Diversity Committee, Professional & Administrative Consultative Committee, and Student Senate Consultative Committee. In fall 2016, BRRN members also attended several committee meetings held by many of these governance groups, upon the request of the committee chairs.

Three key messages emerged from the consultations:

- The BRRN should have more faculty and student involvement and input.
- The BRRN should ensure that the free exchange of ideas at the University is not stifled.
- The BRRN is a welcome and needed addition to the University.

Overall, the BRRN received very positive feedback during these meetings with chairs, committee members, and other members of the community. Via the consultations, stories emerged about how bias incidents can have

a significant negative impact on community members, our educational mission, and our campus climate. The BRRN members also heard that the group should be proactive and educational and not simply reactive.

The consultations provided the BRRN with the opportunity to hear feedback and receive recommendations from a variety of campus stakeholders. Those recommendations helped to guide BRRN's next steps, which are explored later in this document.

The BRRN team reports to the Executive Vice President and Provost and the Vice President for Equity and Diversity and includes members from:

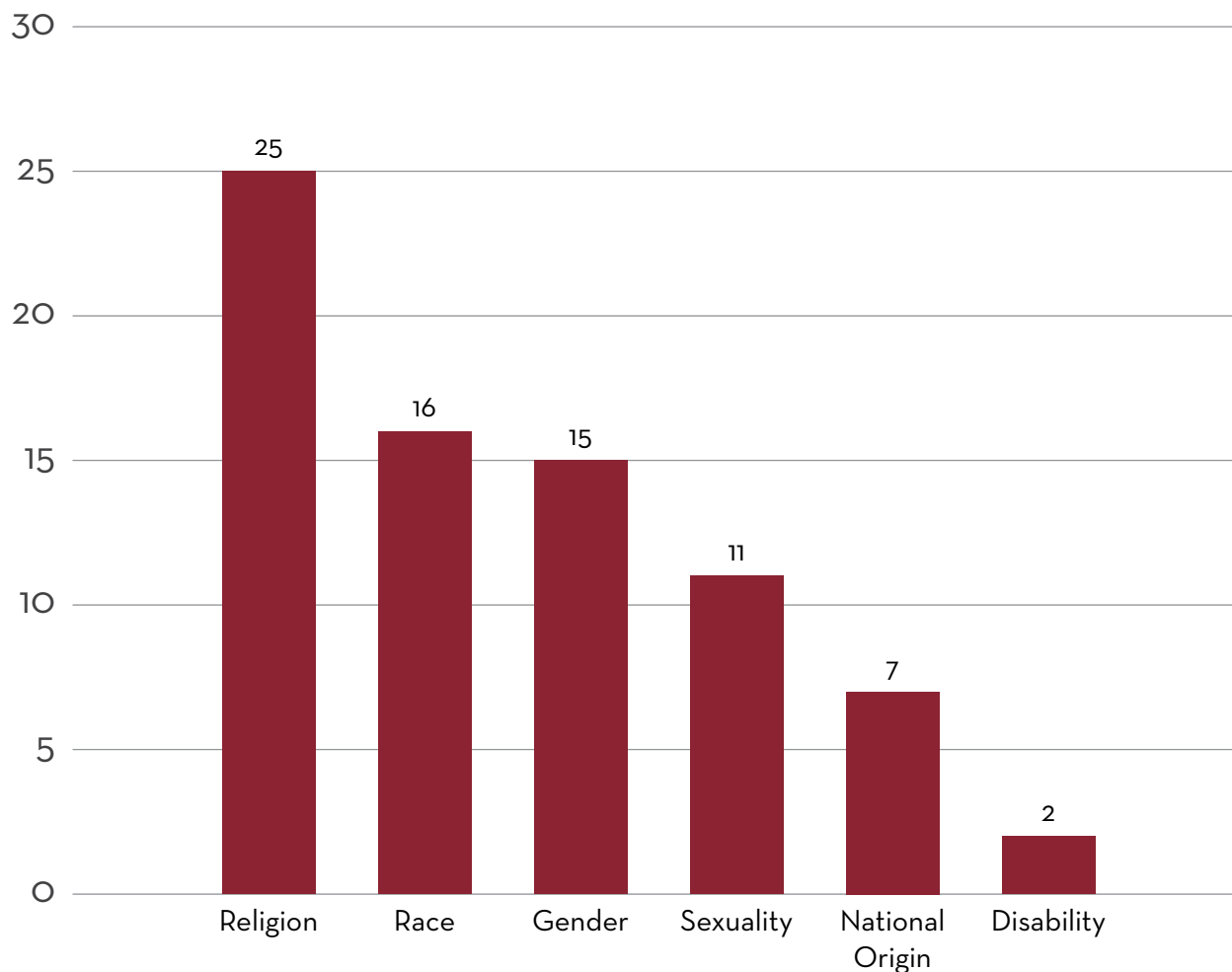
- Campus Climate Engagement Team
- Coalition for a Respectful U
- Diversity Community of Practice
- Faculty representatives
- Office for Equity and Diversity
- Office of Human Resources
- Office for Student Affairs
- Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost
- Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action
- Office of the General Counsel
- Office of the President
- Global Programs and Strategy Alliance
- University Relations

In response to the recommendations that emerged from the consultations, a [faculty and student consultation group was formed in January 2017](#).

## INCIDENT SUMMARY

Between February 1, 2016, and February 28, 2017, the BRRN received 76 bias incident reports. BRRN acknowledges that these 76 reports do not include all bias incidents that impacted University community members during this time period, but only include incidents that were reported directly to BRRN. For purposes of this summary, we have organized the incident reports into three charts. The first chart organizes the incident reports based on the targeted protected identity as reported. BRRN recognizes that some incidents include biased conduct against persons or groups because of multiple protected identities. However for clarity and simplicity purposes, and based on our review of the reports, BRRN has identified the following six identities that were targeted in the bias incidents reported: religion, race, gender, sexuality, national origin, and disability. For purposes of this summary, BRRN has included descriptions of these categories after the chart.

- **Religion:** biased conduct or comments made against a person or group because of their actual or perceived religious or spiritual beliefs or identity. Reporters often categorize these incidents as “anti-Muslim” and “anti-Semitic.” BRRN recognizes the intersectionality of some incidents in this category, specifically with national origin. Yet based on the limits of our current data and for clarity, we have 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, flyers of white nationalists and white pride propaganda, defacing posters related to the Black Lives Matter movement.



**CHART 1: Bias Incidents Reported by Protected Identity, February 1, 2016–February 28, 2017**

Included in the summary; did not identify a targeted protected identity or voiced general dissatisfaction with campus climate. 11 out of these 15 reports included concerns about political speech or political identity, including concerns related to the slogan, “build the wall” as seen on and around campus in the Fall of 2016.

- **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 comments and graffiti and comments disparaging women and sexual assault victim survivors.
- **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 homophobic comments, flyers, or electronic messages.
- **National origin:** comments or conduct made against a person or group because of their actual or perceived country of origin. Incidents under this category include harassment based on international student status and comments such as “go home.”
- **Disability:** biased conduct or comments made against a person or group because of their actual or perceived physical or mental abilities. Incidents include comments trivializing disabilities and a concern about relevant University signage.

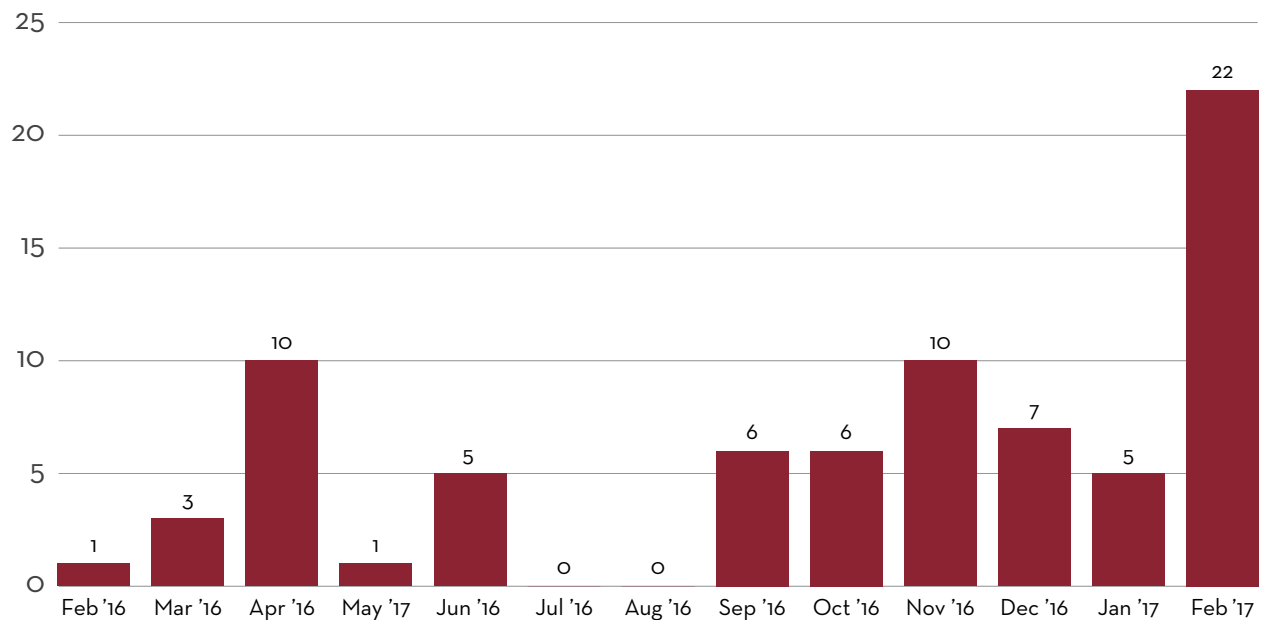


CHART 2: Bias Incidents Reported by Month, February 1, 2016 – February 28, 2017

The second chart lists the 76 bias incident reports by the month they were reported to BRRN. As shown in Chart 2, the BRRN has received more and more reports over time, with a notable increase in reports between September and December of 2016. This increase could be attributed to a number of factors, including the start of a new school year, tension during election season, actions taken by the newly elected U.S. president, etc.

Moreover, reporting rates decrease during the summer months and semester breaks due to the fewer number of students, staff, and faculty on campus as shown in July and August. Lastly, as

BRRN continues to receive media attention and conduct campus outreach and marketing campaigns, reports increase with visibility. Of note, in February 2017 BRRN received 22 reports, the highest number of reports of any month since its inception. Of the 22 reports, nine reported bias based on religious identity. All nine described “anti-Semitic” incidents, including swastikas or neo Nazi propaganda found in different locations on campus, or general concerns regarding campus climate and the rise of anti-Semitic activity. This trend reflected a national rise in anti-Semitic incidents.

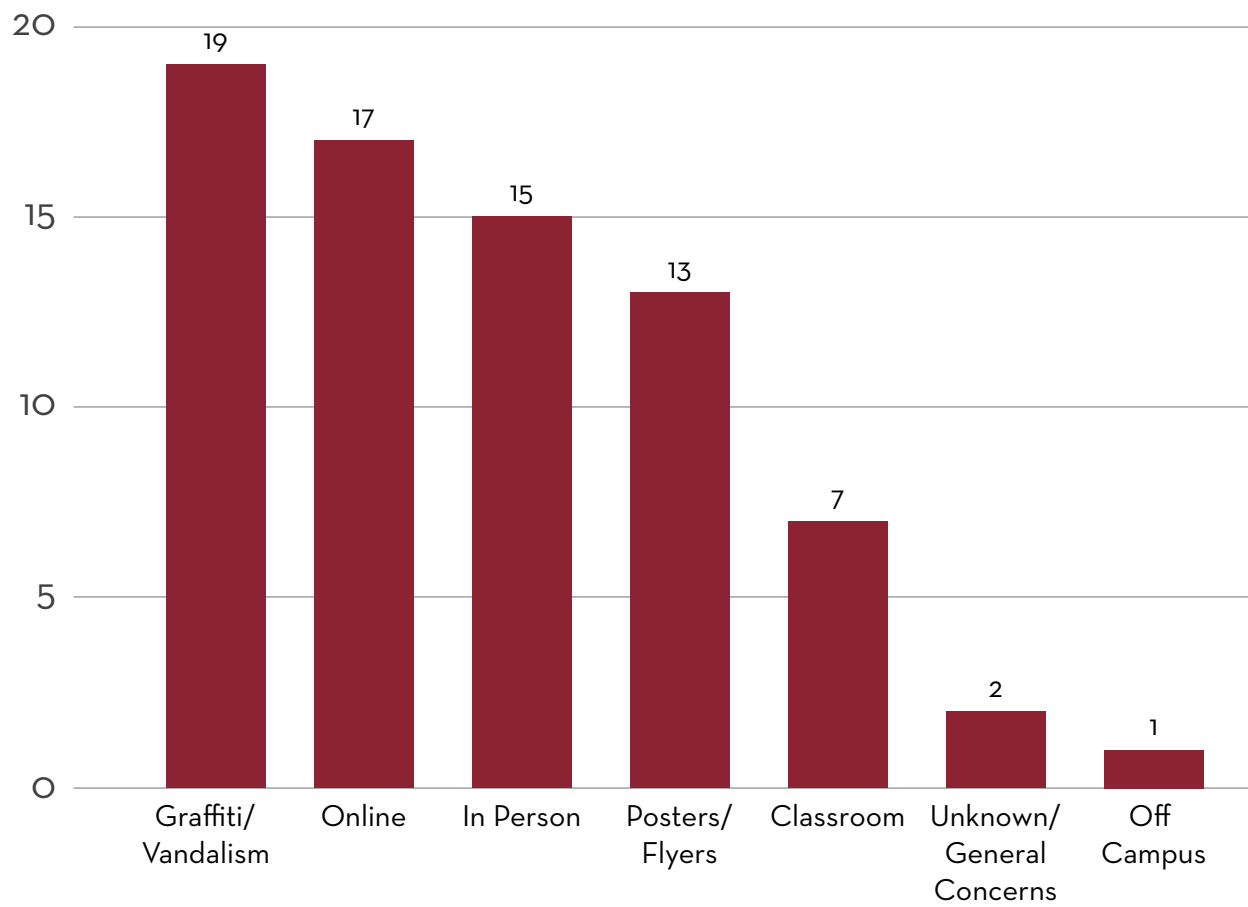


CHART 3: Bias Incidents Reported by Method, February 1, 2016–February 28, 2017

The third chart categorizes the same 76 reports by method. These categories include on campus, off campus, online, classroom incidents, posters or flyers, graffiti and vandalism, or in person encounters. As shown in Chart 3 below, the majority of the reports received detailed incidents of graffiti or vandalism, but also included a large amount of online incidents. These incidents include biased emails targeted at a person or group and biased social media posts. The “in person” category includes biased comments or conduct directed to a person or group or witnessed by the reporter, not made in the classroom or academic setting.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The BRRN has established its protocol and responded to incidents occurring in the Twin Cities campus community for the past year. The full BRRN team met biweekly during that time, identified a group of five “staff leads” to coordinate the work, and made continuous improvements driven by lessons learned through incident responses. Monthly executive oversight meetings provided important consultation and feedback from the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost and the Office for Equity and Diversity. A solid foundation was established. To build upon that

base, recommendations for next steps in year two include:

- **Work on continuous improvement of the BRRN model.** Over the course of year two, working with its executive oversight group, the BRRN should assess what's working and where improvement is needed in both structure and operations. Issues include team membership, response protocol and structure, ongoing consultation, and resource needs.
- **Launch a marketing and communications campaign.** To date, the BRRN has mostly been promoted through internal communication channels such as Brief, student updates, and the campus climate website and weekly email. Next fall, a comprehensive, audience-focused marketing and outreach campaign is needed to increase awareness of the BRRN as a resource. The BRRN does not seek to replace existing resources, but rather to ensure that impacted individuals are directed to the appropriate resources, that the incidents are tracked and reviewed, and that collaborative and impactful work by all engaged in addressing campus climate issues is considered. Additionally, tracking trends is an important function of the BRRN, so the more people who report incidents, the better the tracking.
- **Develop strategies to provide education and training.** There is a clear need to provide educational programming and training

that address issues of bias, discrimination, and hate on campus - for individuals, small groups, and through larger events. By establishing intentional connections and partnerships with other groups and campus entities who can provide such services, the BRRN can focus on responding to bias incidents while also partnering with others to provide and promote those necessary resources.

- **Build a strong Faculty and Student Advisory Consultation Group.** This new group was formed in January 2017 as the result of recommendations from the governance consultations. Thirteen members were chosen from thirty-five applications. They include four faculty members, four graduate/professional students, and four undergraduate students. This group offers a tremendous opportunity to have more engagement in the BRRN's work, for the BRRN to get feedback about bias/hate concerns on campus, for assessing the effectiveness of the BRRN, and to identify ways to become a more visible and trusted source for people who have experienced or witnessed hate and bias incidents on campus. The group can serve as BRRN ambassadors, promoting awareness of it and its value to the campus community.

---

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

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

The University of Minnesota, founded in the belief that all people are enriched by understanding, is dedicated to the advancement of learning and the search for truth; to the sharing of this knowledge through education for a diverse community; and to the application of this knowledge to benefit the people of the state, the nation and the world. The University's threefold mission of research and discovery, teaching and learning, and outreach and public service is carried out on multiple campuses and throughout the state.