



News from BERT

Spring Semester Edition

Washington College is committed to fostering a welcoming community for all students, faculty, and staff. An informed awareness of the climate on campus is an essential part of Washington College's efforts to create a supportive academic, residential, and professional environment for our diverse population. Washington College has developed a system for reporting incidents involving bias incidents that include a Bias Education Response Team (BERT). BERT is responsible for serving as an educational role to continue cultivating the values of Washington College.



Washington
College

Vol.4
Spring 2024

Upcoming Events:

The President's Office and The Office of Diversity and Inclusion are proud to present an event with Bryan Fair, J.D., Professor of Law, University of Alabama.

Free Speech/ Hate Speech: Legal and Educational Perspectives

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

5:30 p.m.

Decker Theatre

This event is open to the public. A light reception will follow in Underwood Lobby.

What Would Bryan Do?

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

11:30 a.m. – 1:20 p.m.

Hodson Dining Hall

Meet and consult with Prof. Fair in the dining hall. All faculty, staff and students are welcome to stop by.

Student workshop on "Free Speech & Inclusion: Practicing the Rules of Engagement."

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

5:00–6:30 p.m.

Decker Theatre

This event is for students only and is sponsored by Politalks and the Office of Diversity & Inclusion. Advance registration via campus groups is required.

JEDI & Hillel Joint Event

This activity-based workshop focuses on bystander training within (micro)aggression situations. (Micro)aggressions range from subtle comments to overt prejudice action that can span across all areas of discrimination, but this joint Hillel/JEDI session will focus on Anti-Semitic discrimination. (Micro)aggressions are prevalent in our society and deciding how to proceed when witnessing these situations as a bystander can be difficult. This training gives participants the opportunity to learn and practice mitigating various Anti-Semitic (micro)aggressions, while attempting to preserve the relationship between the aggressed and aggressor. Mitigating (micro)aggressions is an ever-changing skill that requires daily practice, but the tools obtained within this workshop will help participants in their journey to being better community bystanders.

Mitigating Anti-Semitic (Micro)aggressions

Friday, March 22, 2024

5:00–6:15 p.m.

Hillel House

Space is limited

Max 30 participants

Registration is required

RSVP by emailing

jedi@washcoll.edu by

Wednesday 03/20

at Noon

BERT Attendance at National Student Leader Diversity Conference

In November 2023, BERT Member and Director of Student Engagement Antoine Jordan '12, along with Intercultural Affairs Ambassador Kyla Trinidad '26, attended the National Student Leader Diversity Conference at Northeastern University in Boston. The goals of NSLDC "is to help students become stronger leaders in their organizations and campuses, empowering them to create a more accepting, equitable environment and preparing them to work effectively in a diverse workplace." The featured keynote speech at NSCLDC was delivered by pioneering civil rights and diversity educator Jane Elliot, whose "Green Eyes Blue Eyes" experiment in elementary school children in the 1970s transformed how Americans view their relationship with prejudice and racism.

At the conference, workshops focused on how to interrupt bias in student leaders and advisors, developing strategies to foster dialogue, active listening, and empathy amongst student leaders, and even tools to end our unhealthy relationship with the word "sorry." Washington College was one of 30+ universities in attendance with schools from New England, North Dakota, Ohio, and even as far away as Hawaii. Antoine and Kyla both are excited to implement the skills and tools developed at the workshop into programming for Intercultural Affairs and future educational programming delivered by BERT.

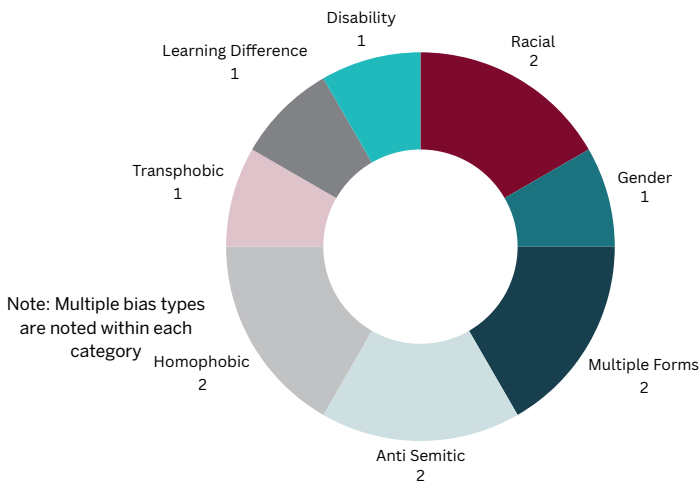


Fall 2023 Reported Bias

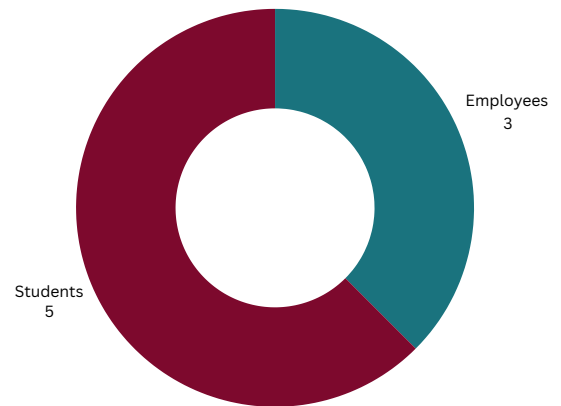
Bias report data from each semester is published at the beginning of the following semester.

Data is pulled from August 2023–December 2023

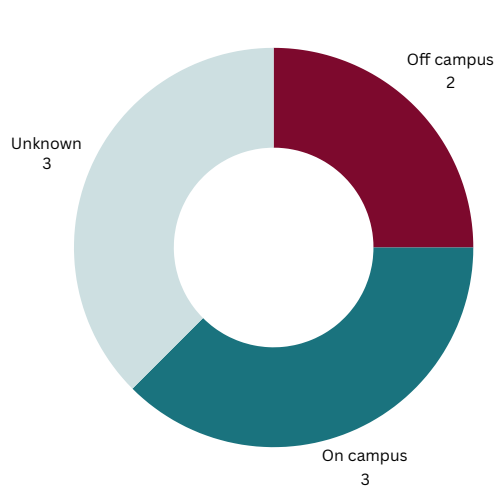
Type



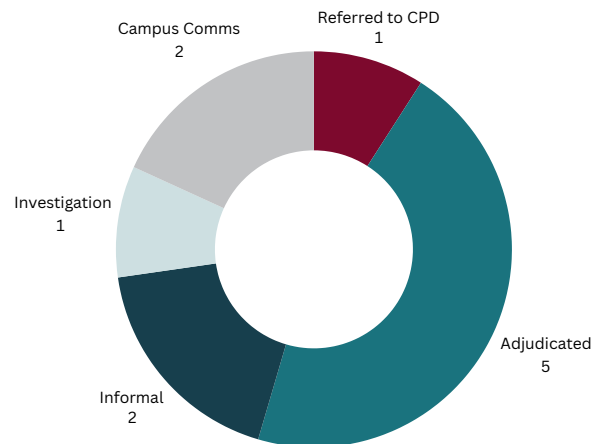
Reporting Parties



Location



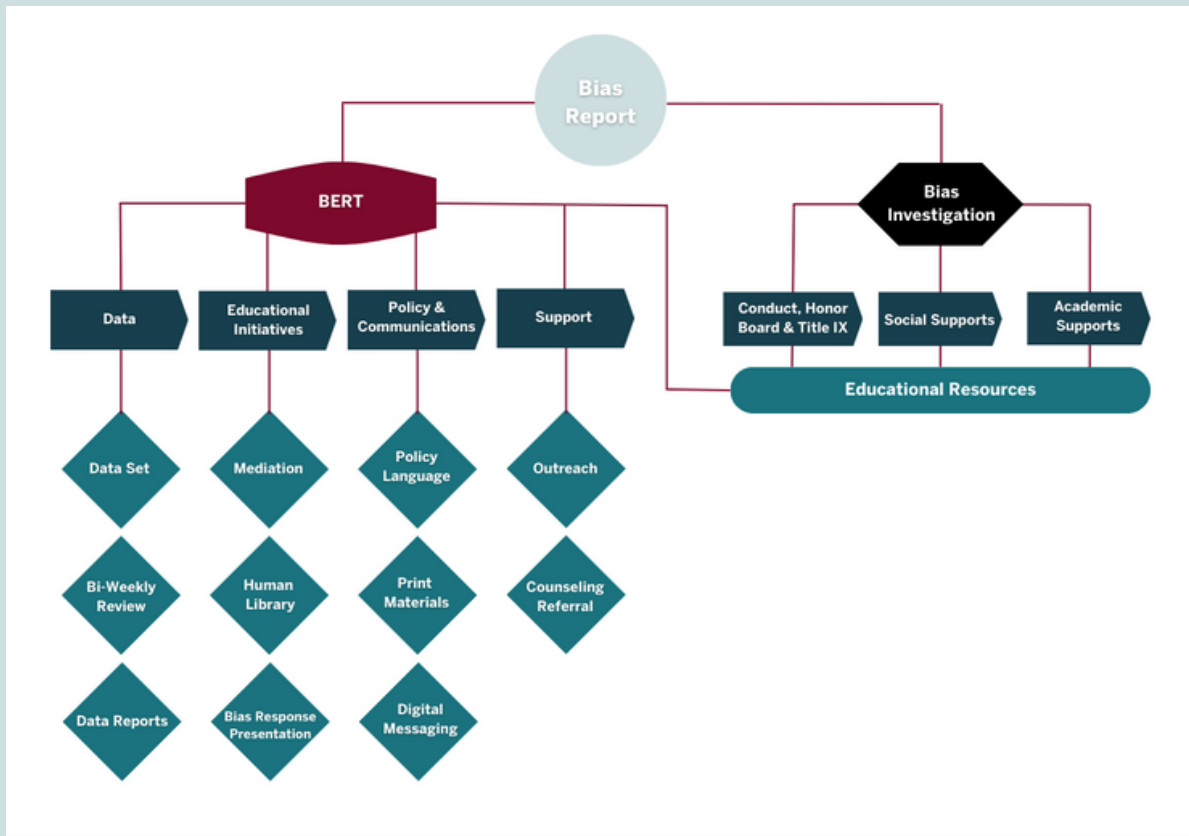
Outcomes





BERT Process

The diagram shows how a bias report gets addressed by both the appropriate department and BERT. Important to note, BERT receives reports with no personally identifying information attached. Our team takes responsibility for data collection and collaborations with other departments to ensure follow through and outcome reporting. BERT also focuses attention on educational initiatives and policy review.



BIAS EDUCATION RESPONSE TEAM (BERT) PURPOSE

- collect, review, and report data
- support students impacted by bias
- review and monitor policy
- compile and share educational resources
- implement educational initiatives in response to data

Reducing Conflict, Encouraging Dialogue

PEN America workshop provides faculty and staff with tools for dialogue across differences and de-escalating conflicts around free speech and inclusion.

Campuses across the country have been struggling with free speech issues, especially those involving inclusion, cancel culture, hurtful speech, safety, and academic freedom. Washington College is no exception.

The difficulty of these issues was brought home last fall when a speaker who had previously expressed controversial views about the LGBTQ+ community was invited to speak on campus about an unrelated topic. Many students, faculty, and staff were angered and hurt that he had been invited.

The College made it clear that while it did not endorse the person's views, there was intrinsic value in civic discourse. The community was asked to voice their opinions and objections in peaceful and civil ways. However, a handful of protesters disrupted the event, and the speaker left without finishing his speech. The ensuing debate on campus raised difficult questions about how an institution that is open to legitimate intellectual debate can create an environment that encourages discourse with room for disagreement.

"Conflicts regarding freedom of expression in higher education have been in the news for some time," said Sean Meehan, co-director of the Cromwell Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). In June 2023, long before the controversial visit, the center had already contacted PEN America, a nonprofit organization dedicated to free expression, about leading a workshop on the topic.

In January, about 115 members of the faculty, staff, and administration attended an all-day workshop led by PEN America on how free speech and principles of inclusion and safety can work in practical, real-world terms. Sessions on navigating tense moments, facilitating classroom engagement, and free speech and academic freedom were conducted by facilitators Neijma Celestine-Donner and Lara Schwartz. Topics discussed included knowing how to lay the groundwork for controversial speech and how to react to such incidents.

Reducing Conflict, Encouraging Dialogue cont.

“We reached out to PEN America, specifically, because we were impressed with their orientation toward campus free expression and inclusivity,” said Emily Steinmetz, co-director for Cromwell CTL. She said the workshop aimed to establish a shared understanding of academic freedom and to help all attendees identify their own unique roles in cultivating a campus culture that values everyone and enables engaging with diverse ideas.

Attendees were given tools for responding to tense moments, including de-escalation strategies, establishing ground rules for discussions, and knowing when to call someone in to reflect on their words or actions and when to call them out.

Celestine-Donner distinguished between punitive and restorative responses and emphasized that restoring the trust and well-being of members of a community is more productive than becoming overly concerned with punishing someone for causing offense. A key strategy is to help students understand the difference between being uncomfortable with ideas versus feeling truly unsafe. Students—especially first-year students fresh out of high school—should be educated on the rules and norms of speech, Schwartz said. Both facilitators endorsed having future free speech workshops for students to learn what it is and how it can protect and work for them.

Meehan said the key takeaways from the workshop included the importance of establishing early and ongoing principles and conversations about protecting free expression while valuing an inclusive community, standing by those values in challenging situations, and recognizing that protecting free expression is where interactions around controversial topics begin, not end.

“We have the tools and skills for addressing these issues and for better understanding our conflicts,” Meehan said. “They are thoroughly academic tools and skills, it turns out, things we are already good at doing: asking questions, thinking critically, reading thoughtfully, revising our views and assumptions, communicating effectively to multiple audiences. I think we can put these tools to work as we strengthen a more expressive, inclusive community here at Washington College.” –MacKenzie Brady '21

Report Bias

Keep on Reporting and Supporting!

A bias report can be submitted in many ways:

- Contact Public Safety (410)778-7810 or report anonymously
- Tell a member of BERT, an RA, or other trusted college leader
- Fill out a CARE report
- Chestertown Anonymous Tips (410) 778-3744



Public Safety Anonymous Reports

**Every individual in our community
has value and is worthy of dignity.**

**When you hear of a troubling incident, remember that you are
a part of a caring community that takes bias seriously and
has a strong, responsive protocol in place.**

Meet BERT

Tricia Connor Biles – Assistant Dean in Student Affairs , Chair

Obella Obbo – Intercultural Affairs

Greg Krikorian – Title IX/Conduct/Residential Life

Ryan Colman – Public Safety

Alexandra Calder – Athletics

Hillary Bitting – Marketing & Communications

Antoine Jordan – Student Engagement

Kate Laking – Human Resources

Nick Garcia – Faculty Representative

Lillian Shimon – Student Representative

Piper Sartison – Student Representative