



Campus Bias Response

A Briefing for Senior Campus Leadership

Student Affairs Forum

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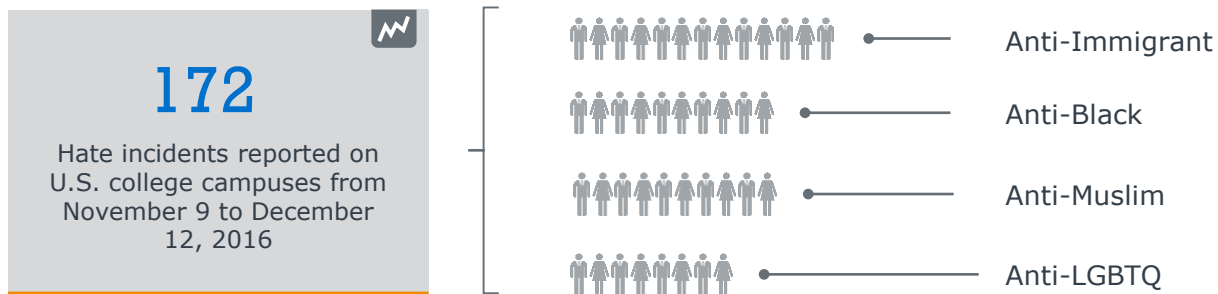
The Growing Focus on Campus Climate

Why Institutional Leaders Are Spending More Time on Climate Issues

Addressing incidents and perceptions of bias on campus is a critical issue that can impact student wellness, institutional reputation, and the educational experience. However, it's a complex issue to address. Many institutional attempts and responses have come under scrutiny in the past year, leaving administrators wondering how to appropriately balance protecting free speech with addressing student concerns about bias and safety.

Growing Volume and Diversity of Bias-Related Incidents on Campus

Eighty-nine percent of university Provosts and Presidents reported personally spending more time on campus climate issues in the past year, particularly as the volume and complexity of issues on campus have risen.



Serious Potential Consequences for Mishandled Responses

The surge in bias-related incidents on campus is made more troubling for campus leaders due to the heavy external scrutiny campuses are under to respond "appropriately," and the potentially grave consequences if they make a misstep. Interested parties - including students, parents, alumni, government, and external organizations - are watching closely and prepared to act when they deem necessary. Their reactions to these incidents can have serious financial, reputational, and enrollment-related impacts on the institution.

A few trends are particularly concerning when considering the repercussions of mismanaging bias incidents.

Lawsuits



In July 2014, the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education \(FIRE\)](#) launched the Stand Up For Speech litigation project, a national effort to eliminate unconstitutional speech codes through targeted First Amendment lawsuits.

Reputational Consequences



In the wake of a high profile bias incident, many institutions have seen drops in applications and enrollments, as well as in fundraising pledges, making clear that prospective families and alumni are both critical parties in these efforts.

Legislation



Some state legislatures have enacted or are considering bills that limit restrictions on free speech on campus, which could tie administrators' hands in responding to bias on campus.

Source: *SPLC Hatewatch*, Southern Poverty Law Center, December 16, 2016, retrieved from <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/12/16/update-1094-bias-related-incidents-month-following-election>; EAB interviews and analysis.

The Rise of the Bias Response Team (BRT)

What Institutional Leaders Need to Know About These Controversial Teams

Currently, many colleges and universities use BRTs to manage and respond to bias incidents on campus. While these teams have existed on some campuses for many years, they have come under increased scrutiny and pressure due to recent debates and heightened tensions on campuses and across the country regarding free speech.

The scope, activities, and impact of these teams vary widely, as do their reception on campus, based on a wide range of factors including institution type, student population, team structure, and team authority.

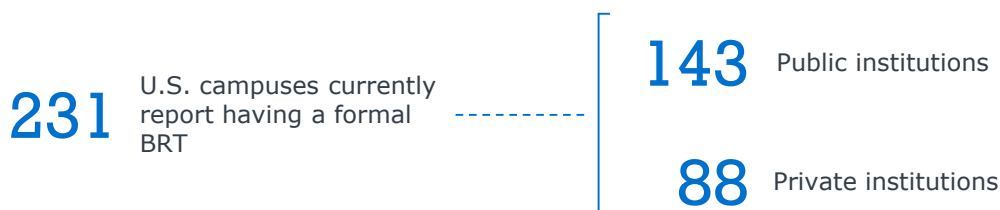
Bias Response Teams at a Glance

We have received a lot of inbound questions from EAB member institutions about on the role of BRTs on campus and around the country. Below, we answer some of the most frequently asked questions.

What is a BRT?

- A cross-campus team of individuals to whom members of the campus community can report instances of bias they experience or witness on campus.
- Also sometimes called:
 - A Bias Assessment and Response Team (BART)
 - A Bias Education and Response Team (BERT)
 - A Bias Incident Response Team (BIRT)
 - A Campus Climate Response Team (CCRT)

How common are BRTs?



BRTs are most often established on campus in response to a high profile incident or series of incidents. They function as a channel for students to report their experiences or concerns, a way to collect and monitor campus climate data and trends, and send a signal that the administration takes these incidents seriously.

Who usually sits on a BRT?

- Sixty-three percent of BRTs include a Student Conduct Administrator on the team
- Forty-two percent of BRTs include a member of campus police or other campus security official
- Other common team members include:
 - Faculty
 - Dean of Students Office
 - Representatives from Multicultural or Diversity Affairs
 - Media Relations Personnel
 - Student Affairs Staff
 - Chaplain/Spiritual Services

Source: Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, "Bias Response Team Report 2017," 2017, retrieved from <https://www.thefire.org/first-amendment-library/special-collections/fire-guides/report-on-bias-reporting-systems-2017/>; EAB interviews and analysis.

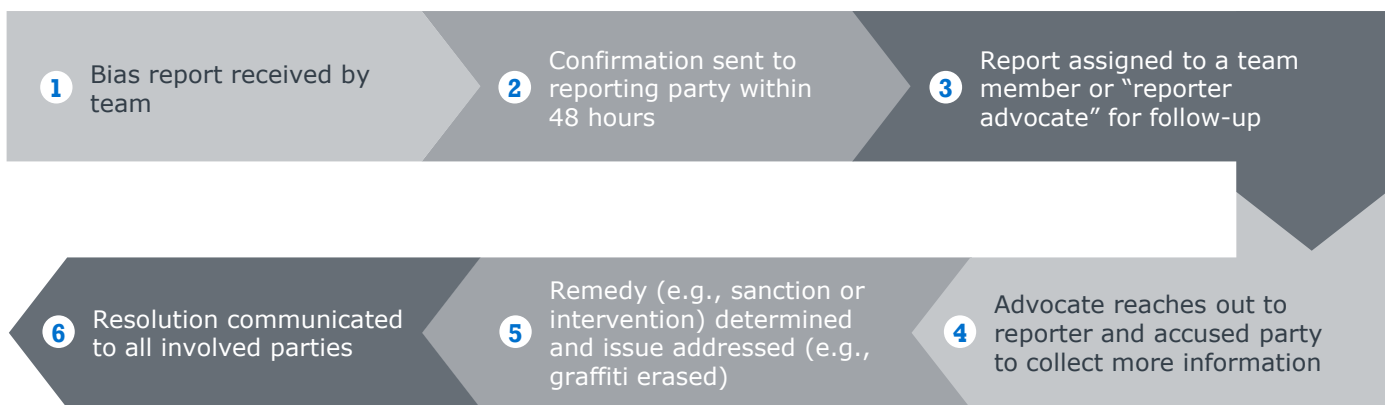
What Is the Role of the BRT on Campus?

The scope, activities, and impact of BRTs vary widely from campus to campus, but they generally fall into one of two categories:

- Those that **respond to and resolve individual cases** of bias, i.e. provide support to the reporter and potentially issue consequences to the student or group reported (see **Model #1** below)
- Those that receive reports for the exclusive purpose of **collecting data** to inform broad campus climate efforts (see **Model #2** below)

Model #1: An Incident Response Team

Primary Goal: Response and Intervention



Model #2: A Campus Climate Team

Primary Goal: Campus Climate Monitoring and Trend Analysis



Common Team Activities and Remedies

BRTs may engage in any combination of the activities below. The team your institution develops - and where it falls on the spectrum between the two models above - will dictate its primary functions.

- Receiving bias reports
- Connecting reporters with necessary resources
- Investigating incidents and sanctioning offenders
- Community education and outreach
- Prevention and education
- Trend analysis and climate monitoring

Why BRTs Are So Controversial in the Current Climate

Conflicting Responses to Campus Teams from Diverse Constituents

Across the past 12 months, BRTs have seen flashpoints at some colleges. EAB research has uncovered a spectrum of attitudes toward BRTs on campus among institutional leaders, as well as from external stakeholders. On one end of the spectrum are those who see them as an important vehicle for those on campus who experience or witness bias to have a clear pathway to report their experiences. Even within this faction, though, there is disagreement over the role BRTs should play, if any, in sanctioning reported “offenders.” Many want to see justice served to those they perceive as having committed a harmful or hateful act, while others want to focus on the education and messaging directed at the broader campus community after an incident has occurred.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who fear the impact these teams could have on free speech and open dialogue on campus. For example, a teacher who is reported for leading a discussion on a certain topic in class may refrain from doing so in the future, robbing future students of a valuable learning opportunity.

While organizations like FIRE are fairly consistent team detractors, keep in mind that other campus constituents – students, parents, alumni, faculty, staff, and others – may fall on either side of this debate.

BRT Supporters

Primary Concerns

- Clear pathway for victims to report incidents of bias
- Need to monitor campus climate and identify opportunities for outreach, education, and improvement
- Need to punish students perpetrating hateful or biased acts
- Sending a clear signal that bias incidents are taken seriously



BRT Detractors

Primary Concerns

- Stifling of free speech and open dialogue on campus
- Team becomes “free speech police,” encouraging silence on campus
- Bias towards voicing of one prevailing viewpoint on campus
- Hampering of learning opportunities
- Potential repercussions – disciplinary or otherwise – for those exercising right to free speech

▶ Determining Your Institution’s Next Steps

- Your institution must decide whether a formal team is the right fit for your goals, campus activity, student population, and institutional priorities. While the components of an effective approach may vary from campus to campus, there are some guiding principles that should direct efforts at all institutions.
- EAB’s **Campus Bias Response Briefing: A Guide for Student Affairs Leaders** outlines four key lessons learned around BRTs, meant to support institutional efforts - whether that means launching a team, or looking to audit an established team.

Glossary

Select Terms and Organizations You Need to Know

Bias Incident

A behavior or act—verbal, written or physical—which is personally directed against or targets an individual or group based on perceived or actual characteristics such as race, color, religious belief, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national or ethnic origin, disability, veteran status, or age. *N.B. The expression of an idea or point of view some may find offensive or charged is not necessarily a bias-related incident. This is not the same as a hate crime – see below.*

Hate Crime

A hate crime is committed when a person commits a specified offense and (1) either intentionally selects the person against whom the offense is committed or intended to be committed, or (2) intentionally commits the act or acts because of a belief or perception of the person's or group's race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, religion, religious practice, age, disability, or sexual orientation, regardless of whether the belief or perception is correct. *N.B. All hate crimes are bias incidents, but not all bias incidents are hate crimes*

Free Speech Zone

Generally, areas set aside in public places for the purpose of political protesting. Some universities have established free speech zones, limiting student protests and demonstrations to certain select areas of the campus. Some college administrators believe free-speech zones are a way to prevent student activism from disturbing the primary function of a university — the teaching of students in classrooms — while others see them as stifling free speech.

Safe Space

A safe space was originally intended to indicate that a teacher, educational institution, or student body did not tolerate anti-LGBT violence, harassment or hate speech, thereby creating a safe place for all LGBT students. The term has been extended to refer to an autonomous space for any group of individuals who feel marginalized to come together to communicate regarding their experiences with marginalization, typically on a university campus. Critics claim safe spaces hinder the exposure of sensitive material that needs to be discussed and explained in an educational environment.



Organizations

Antifa

A radical political movement of autonomous anti-fascist groups. They are associated with left wing to far-left political ideology, though they focus more on fighting far-right ideology directly than on encouraging pro-left policy. The group is characterized by its preparedness to oppose fascism by direct action, including violence. They are widely associated with the violent protests and clashes on Berkeley's campus in February of 2017.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE)

A non-profit group whose goal is "to defend and sustain individual rights at America's colleges and universities." A prominent and vocal advocate on issues including freedom of speech, due process for students, religious liberty, "free speech" codes, and allocation of funding for student organizations. One of FIRE's main activities has been criticism of university administrators whose activities have, in FIRE's view, violated the free speech or due process rights of college and university students and professors under the First Amendment. FIRE lists over 170 such instances on its website.

Reading List

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work for **you.**SM



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