

Bias Response Team Report to RWU Community Spring 2009 (reporting on fall 08 data)

The Bias Response Team, a university committee comprised of students, faculty and staff, will be reporting each semester on the bias related incidences that occur in the prior semester. Our goal is to educate, increase knowledge about bias incidences and to be transparent about what happens in our community. During the fall 2008 semester eight bias incidents were reported to Public Safety. Each was investigated fully and where appropriate was adjudicated through our student conduct system. The university protocol requires clear reporting even when it is unclear if an offensive message was meant to be hurtful or not. As an educational institution we realize that students may feel that it is okay to joke around using words or symbols that are offensive, but when it involves discrimination it is important that we as a community learn what is acceptable and what is not.

Bias incidents, as defined by the Office of Student Affairs Bias Response Team, is any "behavior which constitutes an expression of hostility against the person or property of another because of the targeted person's race, religion, ethnicity/national origin, gender or sexual orientation."

Most bias incidents occur in residence halls and usually involve students leaving offensive messages on doors and or dry-erase boards attached to residence hall room doors, according to Public Safety reports. These messages, whether left as a joke or with malicious intent, are handled with the same protocol.

When a bias incident is reported, the Residence Life staff procedure is to inform Public Safety. Public Safety then documents the details of the incident and takes a picture of the message. The local Police Department is notified pursuant to Rhode Island General Laws. The Coordinator of Residence Education (CORE) will speak to the victim to offer support and resources.

Although the author of the incidents may have intended the act as a joke, bias remarks on residence hall room doors, walls or dry-erase boards are something that should not be tolerated and must be documented. Any community member walking by could have seen and taken offense to the remarks. If the Student Affairs and Public Safety staff were to do nothing and say "it appeared to be a joke, let's not investigate" then we would be violating the law and the core values with which this institution of higher learning was founded. By keeping silent, it says that the University does not care about its students and community members; by reporting, investigating and letting all students know this behavior is not acceptable we empower all of us to be equal citizens in our community.

The following is a summary of reported bias incidences from the Fall 2008 semester:

- Written harassment based on sexual orientation and religion that occurred on a car outside Stonewall, September
- Verbal harassment based on religion in smoking gazebo between Maple and Cedar, September

- Written harassment based on sexual orientation inside a residence room in Maple Hall, October
- Written sexual harassment on a vehicle, October
- Verbal harassment racially motivated in Cedar Hall, October
- Written harassment based on sexual orientation in Willow Hall, November
- Verbal harassment based on sexual orientation at Almeida Courts, November

One goal of the Bias Response Team is to educate and raise awareness with our community members and this year we have the following trainings/workshops scheduled:

- National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) one day workshop on Prejudice Reduction, Sept. 08
- Safe Zone Training with Youth Pride, March 09
- Hate Crime Training, Rhode Island Commission on Prejudice and Bias, May 09
- National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) three day train the trainer institute, May 09

ABOUT THE BRT

The Bias Response Team affirms the University's mission and is committed to contributing to a community that fosters a healthy and safe environment for everyone. The University has zero tolerance for acts of hate. The team is committed to preventing further acts of hate by educating the RWU community about the effects of hateful actions and the impact on all of us.

Definition of Bias Incident: An event that has the effect of demeaning or degrading an individual or a group and is motivated in whole or in part by the perpetrator's bias of a group or persons based on their race, religion, ethnicity/national origin, gender or sexual orientation.

Membership of the Bias Response Team (BRT): Associate Director of Public Safety (co-chair), Dean of Students (co-chair), staff from the Intercultural Center, Housing, Residence life, Student Conduct, Athletics, as well as appointed faculty and students representing the Student Senate, the Multicultural Student Union and the student body in general