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**TO**: Hillel Community
**FROM**: Jackie Levey, CEO

**DATE:** November 6, 2023

**RE:** Academic-Related Bias Incidents

Rabbi Jordan Gerson and I recently met with some of our academic campus partners for additional information/clarification regarding how Washington University addresses academic-related bias incidents (incidents occurring in the classroom setting or involving a faculty member).

This memo refers to “BRSS,” Washington University’s Bias Report and Support System. Per the [BRSS website](https://students.wustl.edu/bias-report-support-system/), “Washington University in St. Louis values diversity, inclusion and human dignity, and strives to foster an environment in which all community members are respected and able to take part in academic, co-curricular and social activities.” Following these values, the university developed a system through which students, faculty, staff and community members who have experienced or witnessed incidents of bias, prejudice or discrimination involving a student can report their experiences to the university’s BRSS team.”

**If you have experienced or witnessed an incident of bias, prejudice or discrimination, our campus partners and the WashU Hillel staff strongly encourage you to submit a BRSS complaint. The Hillel team is also here for you, and we encourage you to reach out to us for support/questions. Important contacts are listed on the last page of this memo.**

Our campus partners provided the following information in response to our questions below in bold.

1. **How does the University navigate a faculty member’s freedom of expression vis-à-vis the classroom to prevent false, biased, or one-sided viewpoints being conveyed; and what is a student’s recourse should such a situation occur?**

The right of faculty members to academic freedom is vital to the university.  As stated in the university’s [Policy on Academic Freedom, Responsibility and Tenure](https://wustl.edu/about/compliance-policies/academic-policies/tenure/), faculty members’ “primary responsibility to their subject is to seek and to state the truth as they see it.” Faculty members certainly have an obligation to engage in their academic pursuits and teaching responsibilities with integrity, honesty, and competency, but they are given considerable leeway in how they design and teach their courses.  If a student has a concern about course content and materials, they are welcome to raise their concerns with the faculty member individually, the Department Chair, or the Vice Dean/School administrator responsible for undergraduate or graduate education.

1. **What if a student believes they are being singled out inappropriately by a professor because they are Jewish or due to their beliefs/views?**

Students have several different options available to them if they are concerned that they are being treated differently because of their Jewish identity or their beliefs/views.  They are welcome to submit a report to the BRSS, and a representative will help walk the student through their options, both informal and formal.  They could also contact their school’s Undergraduate Dean or the University’s Office of Institutional Equity to share their concerns or pursue any of the other options outlined in the university’s [Discrimination and Harassment](https://hr.wustl.edu/items/discrimination-harassment-policy/) policy.

1. **How are BRSS investigations handled once a form is submitted in connection with a potential bias incident involving a faculty member or academic matter?  Is the follow-up different if a student files anonymously?**

The BRSS does not conduct investigations. If a student submits a report to the BRSS and asks for follow up, the BRSS representative will listen and help the student consider their options, which may include informal interaction with the school or, in the case of discrimination or harassment, filing of a formal complaint.

If BRSS connects the student with a school administrator or if the student contacts the school directly, the school will follow up with the student. For example, in Arts & Sciences, the referrals are generally directed to the Vice Dean of Faculty Affairs, the Vice Dean of Undergraduate Affairs, and/or the Department Chair or Program Director, and one of those administrators will meet with the student. The response with the faculty member will, obviously, depend upon the nature of the situation described. Because personnel matters are confidential, the university does not disclose or discuss with students how it addresses these situations with faculty members.

If the reporting individual submits the BRSS report anonymously or if they indicate they do not want any follow-up, the BRSS includes the report in its summary of data collected by BRSS over the course of the year. Depending upon what is shared, the BRSS representative may forward the information to a campus partner, including a school. *The school may be limited in its ability to address the concerns if the reporting person is anonymous or does not wish to be identified to the faculty member. However,* *the university will strive to protect, to the greatest extent possible, the confidentiality of persons reporting to the BRSS and of those involved in the reported incident.*

Students may also contact the Office of Institutional Equity to share their concerns about discrimination or harassment.  OIE will follow up with the student and discuss the student’s options.  Depending upon the circumstances, one option may be submission of a formal complaint of discrimination or harassment against a faculty member pursuant to the university’s Discrimination and Harassment Policy, which could potentially go through a formal hearing process.

1. **How are students whose viewpoints differ from their professor protected from retaliation such as unfair grading or critique?**

Faculty members are expected to evaluate their students based upon their professional assessment of the student’s academic performance and not on matters irrelevant to that performance, including a student’s personal beliefs and viewpoints. Again, if a student believes they are being discriminated or retaliated against because of their Jewish identity or views, the same options described above are available to the student. In addition, some of the schools have processes in place if a student wishes to challenge their grade. These processes are found in each respective school’s bulletins or handbooks.

* In Arts & Sciences, the student can file a grade appeal: (<https://artsci.wustl.edu/resources/policies-procedures#anchor-group-18978>)
* Olin’s “Student Complaint and Grievances” policy can be found here: <https://olinlinks.wustl.edu/policies/>
* McKelvey’s “Undergraduate student grievances guidelines” can be found here: <https://engineering.wustl.edu/offices-services/student-services/undergraduate-student-services/policies/student-grievances-guidelines.html>
* Sam Fox’s Grievance/grade dispute policy can be found here: <https://insidesamfox.wustl.edu/items/grievance-grade-dispute-policy/>

**For additional information, please contact:**

**BRSS
(314) 935-7535**

**Office of the Provost
Jen Smith, Vice Provost for Educational Initiatives**(314) 935-3000;jensmith@wustl.edu

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Erin McGlothlin, Vice Dean of Undergraduate Affairs**(314) 935-7747**;** mcglothlin@wustl.edu

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