

Bias Incidents and Bystander Intervention at UNH

Results from the 2015 Faculty Climate Survey



Search committee reenactment scenario during UNH ADVANCE's GEAR UP workshop.

Introduction: Bias Incidents

Bias incidents are a problem in the workplace. Bias incidents include pejorative language, jokes, unfair treatment, or even outright bullying directed at colleagues because of their gender, disability status, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity. Some biases are implicit, and reflect unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that shape our perceptions, evaluations, and actions. In universities, bias incidents can create hostile work climates, and hinder attempts to recruit and retain faculty from underrepresented groups. In 2015, UNH ADVANCE conducted a Faculty Climate Survey and measured the prevalence and impact of bias incidents on campus.

In this UNH survey:

- 33% of faculty respondents indicated that they had heard their colleagues make insensitive or disparaging comments about someone because of their gender, disability status, sexual orientation, or race/ethnicity.
- 22% of faculty respondents indicated they heard a colleague imply that faculty from underrepresented groups (based on gender, disability status, sexual orientation, or race/ethnicity) were not as strong in their field.
- 45% of faculty respondents stated that in the past year, they had the chance to support someone who raised issues about the unequal treatment of underrepresented groups (based on gender, disability status, sexual orientation, or race/ethnicity).



Who Recognizes Bias?

In order to tackle the problem of bias, faculty first must be able to recognize it. In the UNH ADVANCE Faculty Climate Survey, members of underrepresented groups reported witnessing more bias incidents. That is, women, faculty of color, and LGBTQ+ faculty, were more likely to observe bias on campus. In addition, faculty who had participated in GEAR UP (a bias training awareness workshop) reported witnessing significantly higher levels of bias incidents. This is an important finding for UNH ADVANCE, as it indicates that bias awareness workshops can have an impact – they can raise awareness and help faculty recognize bias incidents in the workplace. Twenty-one percent of faculty respondents stated they had participated in such bias-related workshops.

Who Intervenes?

Recognizing bias incidents is a crucial first step. The second step is intervention. Once faculty recognize bias incidents, they must decide whether or not to confront bias. The form of intervention can vary from verbally objecting to insensitive or disparaging comments, to supporting someone raising issues about the treatment of underrepresented minorities. In the UNH ADVANCE Faculty Climate Survey, 70% of faculty who witnessed at least one of the above bias incidents reported intervening at least once. Thus, if faculty learn to recognize bias, the vast majority of them will intervene.



70% of faculty respondents who witnessed at least one bias incident reported intervening at least once.

Some faculty were more likely to intervene than others. Given the potential costs of intervention, not surprisingly full professors were more likely to intervene than associate or assistant professors. Intervention was also lower in colleges where women faculty were underrepresented. Interestingly enough, faculty who reported that they fit in well with their departments were significantly less likely to intervene. That is, department in-group members were less likely to intervene than out-group members, even after witnessing bias incidents. This is unfortunate, as faculty who are better integrated into informal networks could be powerful adversaries against bias.

Why Does It Matter?

Witnessing bias has a significant, negative impact on UNH faculty job satisfaction.

Bias incidents can create hostile work climates, and hinder attempts to boost the number of underrepresented groups into faculty ranks. Witnessing bias had a direct, negative effect on climate (a key predictor of job satisfaction and intention to quit). However, when faculty thought that their colleagues would intervene and confront bias, the size of this impact decreased. When faculty perceived that their colleagues would confront bias incidents, the incident itself took less of a toll on their job satisfaction.

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