

News from BERT

Fall 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.

Welcome Obella Obbo



BERT is excited to welcome diversity consultant Obella Obbo '14 (he/him) to Washington College for the academic year. Through his personal DEI consulting business, called The Radical Empath, Obella uses his years of experience and his lens as a Black, queer, second-generation Ugandan-American man to decolonize toxic belief systems and reframe them to empower folks to be the most authentic versions of themselves and create an accepting community of healing. Obella brings expertise and experience as a seasoned DEI specialist, licensed therapist, and creative artist to Washington College. His focus will be on further developing the office of Student Intercultural Affairs, advancing the celebration of cultural diversity within our community, reinvigorating the Intercultural Center, and identifying ways to improve upon existing support structures for Washington Scholars, students of color, and members of our student affinity groups. Obella will also support the BERT team as a visiting member and help develop educational initiatives as part of BERT's activities for the academic year.

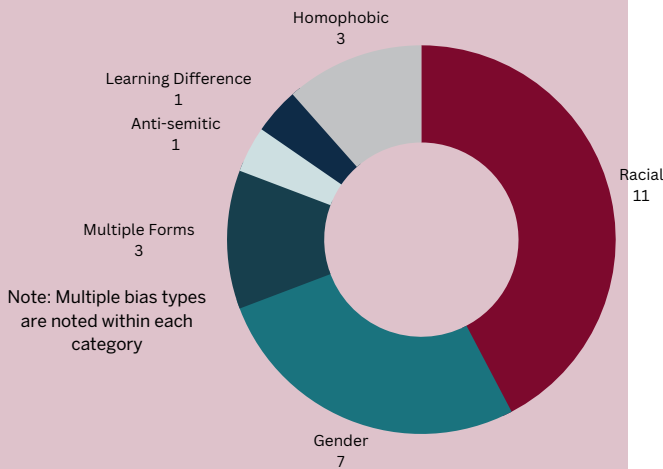


Spring 2023 BERT Data Report

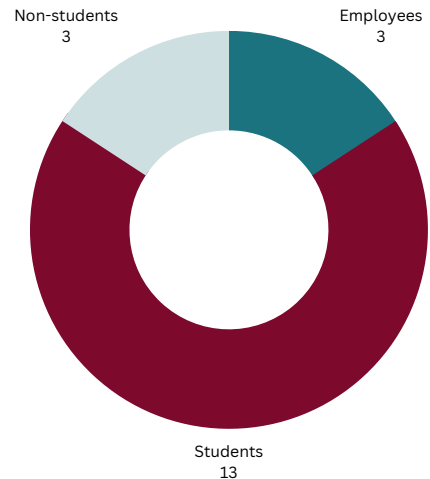
Bias report data from each semester is published at the beginning of the following semester.

Data is pulled from November 2022 – June 2023

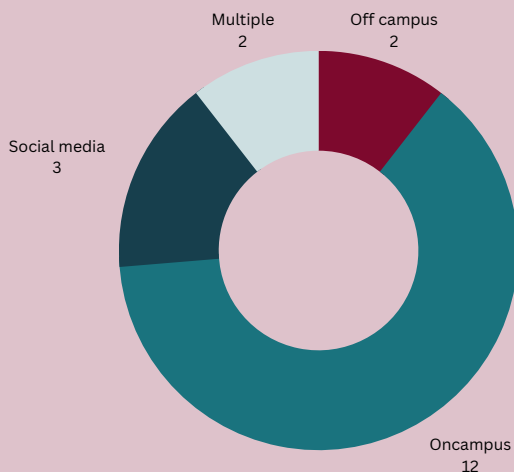
Bias Type



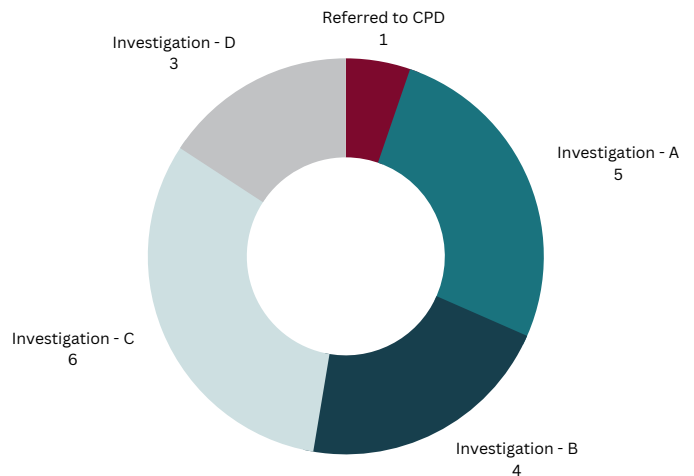
Reported Parties



Location of Bias Incidents



Outcomes*



***Key for outcomes chart:**

Investigation - A: Lead to Honor Board Case [3 led to adjudication, 2 dismissed]

Investigation - B: No further action

Investigation - C: Educational resolution

Investigation - D: Other action/process [Persona Non Grata, Title IX, HR]

We ALL Belong

This last academic year, the BERT team hosted an Inclusivity Town Hall for the campus community. This town hall's directive was to have students, faculty, and staff come together to solicit ideas on developing an inclusivity campaign. Participants were tasked with identifying the ways in which we should, as a campus community, express our values of diversity and inclusion, and in turn, create tangible signage and materials that articulate those values. With dedicated work from members in Student Affairs and Marketing, along with the input from attendees of the Inclusivity Town Hall, BERT is excited to announce that this work has evolved into the "We All Belong: Supporting Diversity & Inclusion" at Washington College Campaign. Be on the lookout for new signage, stickers, and other advertisements to make their way around campus and in the Chestertown community in the coming weeks and months. "We All Belong" hopes to give a motto that reflects our most important core values, and allows students, faculty, staff, and members of the community to project a sense of belonging to all while they're a part of our community.

Student Involvement on BERT

Student voice is essential to the work we do. The Bias Education Response Team encourages student participation on BERT. Currently we have one student representative, Anyssya Axtman-Fayrchylid - nfrancis2@washcoll.edu. We welcome more student involvement to our team. If you are interested in joining our bi-weekly meetings, please contact Tricia Biles tbiles2@washcoll.edu

Policy Work

Institutional accountability to bias response starts with policy. At the inclusivity forum many participants spoke of the importance of accountability and putting our diversity values into practice. We are proud to announce that work has been done on two policies that impact the college's practices around inclusivity and bias response.

1. All-Comers policy – This is a new policy formed in collaboration with Student Affairs and Student Government asking each club to attest to inclusive practices for membership. The process for attestation is being worked on this semester.
1. Bias Incident Policy – Our existing policy underwent a comprehensive review this summer. The Bias Education Response Team, in consultation with Dr. Knight, Associate Provost for Diversity and Inclusion, and Obella Obbo, DEI specialist from The Radical Empath, took a close look at the language and updated the policy to align with our college mission, codes of conduct, and diversity statement. The policy outlines mechanisms for addressing situations involving an objectively true or subjectively perceived bias act. It includes pertinent definitions, reporting and investigating guidelines, approaches to resolution and accountability, and references to relevant policies.

Free Expression and Bias

Recently the presence of speaker Robert George on campus sparked controversy, protest, and reports of bias. The topic of free expression on a college campus has, itself, come under fire for being used as a guise to endorse discriminatory views. We understand that Robert George has notably used rhetoric that incited dissent from the student body for this very reason. As a community, we are experiencing cultural dissonance. It is an uncomfortable space to be in where conflict, protest, disruption, dissatisfaction, and frustration dwell. In times like these, we use policy to guide our institutional response.

The opening passage of our updated policy states:

Washington College is committed to providing a dynamic and inclusive living, learning, and working environment in which every person is valued and treated with dignity, where free expression and debate are encouraged, and care for fellow community members, especially in moments of conflict, is strived for.

As we endeavor to reach our ideals, we have an opportunity to meet cultural dissonance with reflection, humility, conversation, curiosity, and engagement – and care for each other in this time of conflict.

Regarding free expression and discrimination, the policy reminds us...

Washington College protects free expression of ideas, even if they are unpopular, because this is vital in promoting learning in an educational setting. Freedom of speech can sometimes protect controversial ideas and sometimes even offensive and hurtful language; however, it does not protect personal threats, discriminatory conduct, or other acts of misconduct that violate the College codes of conduct, College policies, or federal, state, and local laws.

The intentionality of bringing a speaker to campus who has espoused anti-gay, anti-trans views, brings forth the question of care. When we know from data that bias against LGBTQ+ students is present on campus – are we caring for these already marginalized individuals by choosing this speaker to deliver a message on free expression?

Where do we go from here?

In response to recent events regarding the Robert George speaking event and subsequent student protests, BERT invites the student body to join WAC Alum, Obella Obbo '14, DEIB consultant for Student Intercultural Affairs, in a workshop on 'what comes next.' As students, as staff, as faculty, as arbiters of the socio-cultural experience at Washington College -- What do we do with the feelings left over from discord and how do we transform them from corrosive to evolving?

Where Do We Go From Here?

a conversation with Obella Obbo

Wednesday, September 27, 2023

4:30pm-5:30pm

Hynson Lounge

Refreshments will be served

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
Tyler Faulkner – Athletics
Hillary Bitting – Marketing & Communications
Antoine Jordan – Student Engagement
Kate Laking – Human Resources
Anyssya Axtman-Fayrchyld – Student Representative
Partnering with the Diversity Committee for faculty representation