

## Responding to Unsafe Situations Related to Discrimination

*Members of this psychology community should feel safe and valued for who they are. When we have moments when we don't feel safe, we deserve support. The purpose of this document is to help you navigate the process of seeking support when you don't feel safe.*

This document includes example scenarios of experiences of discrimination, possible options for taking action in response to those experiences, and the likely outcomes of each option. Remember, if you experience something discriminatory, you get to make the decision of how to proceed based on your own needs, desires, comfort, and safety. You decide whether you would like to take action and how you would like to do so. The purpose of this document is to help you feel empowered in that decision and supported by the department and university.

### Example Scenarios of Experiences of Discrimination

**1. A faculty member expresses prejudice towards you, another person, or a group of people.**

*Example: In a lecture about gender differences in performance, a female student provides a hypothesis that the gender differences might be due to social disadvantages for women. The male professor dismisses her hypothesis and loudly announces that he “doesn’t believe sexism exists anymore” in front of the class.*

**2. A faculty member engages in a microaggression towards you, another person, or a group of people.**

*Example: Marcel is a student who wears hearing aids and struggles at times to understand certain words if the speaker does not enunciate them clearly or loudly enough. During the lecture, Marcel asks a question. The lecturer answers, but Marcel struggles to hear her. He asks her to repeat herself. The lecturer rolls her eyes briefly before answering, exaggeratingly loudly.*

**3. A faculty member engages in a behavior that makes you uncomfortable, but whether it is reportable is less clear.**

*Example: During a lecture, the professor plays a video clip that has several racial-based jokes in them and laughs along loudly during the video.*

**4. A classmate exhibits unwanted attention towards you.**

*Example: A fellow classmate who sits near you repeatedly makes sexual jokes towards you during class despite your clear discomfort with the behavior.*

5. **A mentor displays a lack of cultural awareness or sensitivity.**

*Example: Estrella comes from a lower SES background and must maintain a full-time job while attending graduate school to pay for rent and bills. Her thesis advisor has repeatedly made comments such as, “I don’t know why anyone would work while doing grad school” or “You are not supposed to work while in graduate school.” During a private one-on-one meeting, Estrella voices stress over balancing her workload. In response, her thesis advisor says, “You should have just quit that job when I told you to.”*

6. **A staff member in your department exhibits unwanted attention towards you.**

*Example: One of the academic advisors catcalls you as you pass them in the parking garage.*

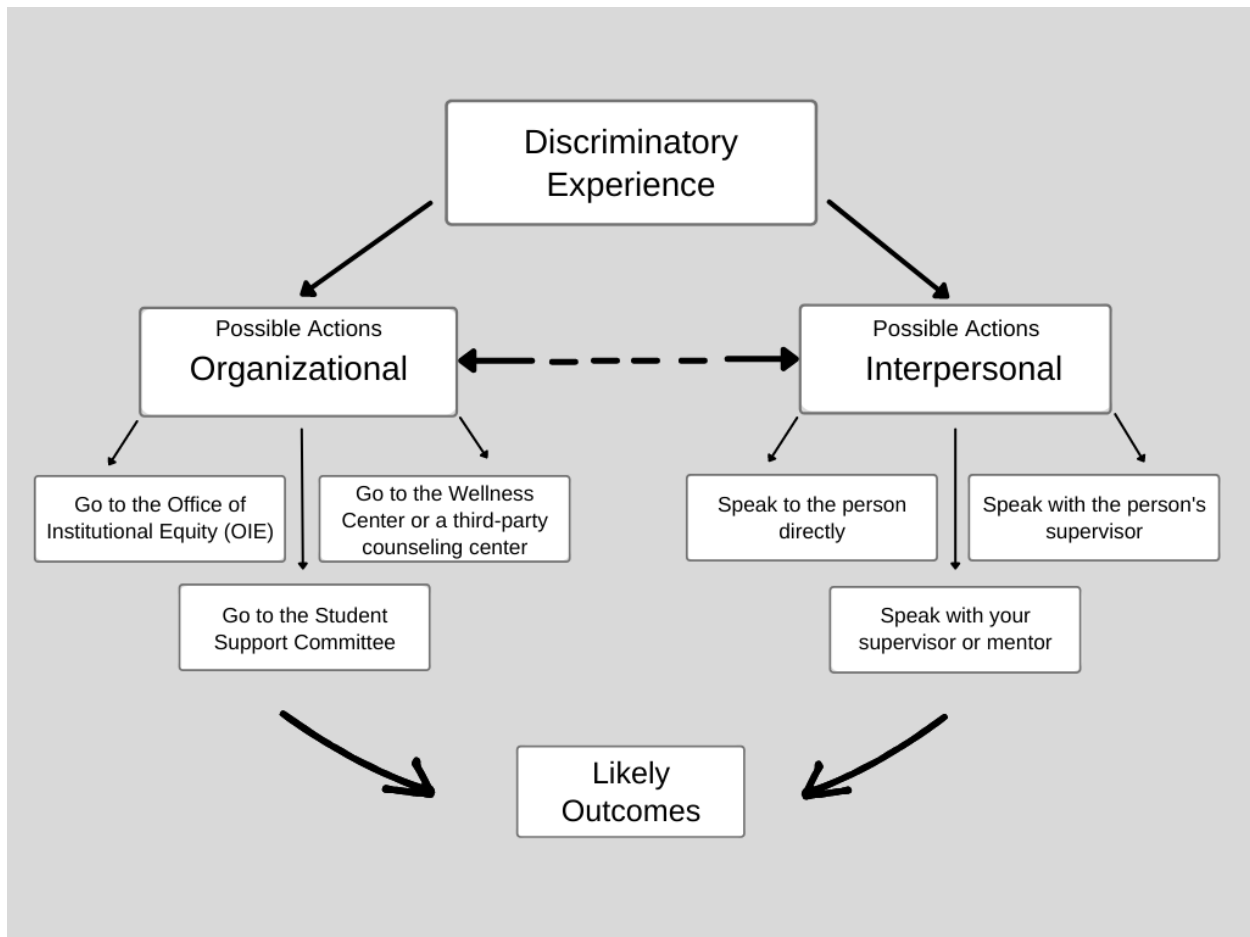
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**If you have or witness an experience like this and would like to take action, you have several options:** you could speak with person directly, discuss the situation with your mentor, report it to the person’s supervisor or the chair of the department, seek counseling from local mental health resources, or you could contact OIE. **Remember, the choice to report is yours, and you can weigh the options using the following likely outcomes.**

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**Note:** Ethical and professional guidelines set forth by APA encourages individuals to engage in direct discourse with someone who exhibits discriminatory or inappropriate behavior. We acknowledge that this is the standard by which APA proposes that professional psychologists conduct themselves. However, given the ways in which power dynamics may manifest within academia, each person is encouraged to act both professionally and in a way that feels safe given personal boundaries. The Psychology Department Diversity Committee acknowledges that every person’s lived experiences are unique and that we cannot anticipate what the best course of action is given the nuances within interpersonal dynamics.

\*If you or someone else is in imminent danger, please do what is necessary to ensure your physical safety. One option may be to reach out to campus police (719-255-3111) or dial 911.\*



*Note.* Please read through and consider all provided options in this document before choosing a course of action that would best fit you and the situation. Be aware that choosing one option does not preclude you from choosing other options. You may choose to engage in multiple options and do so in any order that best fits your situation.

### **Likely Outcomes for Each Possible Decision**

#### **Speak with the person directly**

- Speaking directly with the person whose actions resulted in discomfort for you aligns well with the expectations set forth in the APA Ethical Guidelines. In this way, having a discussion with the person individually can be a positive professional development experience, possibly for both persons. However, this is not always a course of action graduate students may feel comfortable with due to power imbalances, you may not be sure that this is the best course of action, and/or that person may not feel like a safe person to approach directly.
- Though taking constructive feedback to change is a challenge for many, in some cases, this is less directly punitive to the person and might elicit less defensiveness or negative consequences for them.

- **Likely Outcome:** If you choose to speak directly with the person, a possible outcome could be that you are able to have an informal, mutually respectful discussion that can lead to an agreed upon resolution.
- This course of action would not necessarily lead to official documentation of the event(s) that took place, the discussion, and the agreed upon solution.

### **Speak with your direct supervisor/mentor**

- Speaking with your mentor can offer you the chance to seek guidance on how to proceed from a professional role model. Seeking out guidance from your mentor could help you determine how to best proceed from the lens of a psychologist.
- **Likely Outcome:** Your mentor is likely to support you through either
  1. Offering you suggestions for how to proceed on your own
  2. Advocating for you by speaking with the person themselves or alongside you
  3. Helping you weigh the options for proceeding from a professionalism in psychology framework
- **Remember:**
  - Your mentor is a **mandatory reporter** for the university and may be required to report the incident to relevant offices, which would result in official documentation of the event.

### **Talk to the person's supervisor (chair/dean)**

- If you are not comfortable or not able to speak with your mentor or the person in question, you may seek out the person's supervisor on campus. The supervisor will differ from person to person. For instance, a faculty member's supervisor will likely be the chair of the department or the dean if the person in question is serving as chair at the time; a staff member's supervisor will be the director of the department they are employed through; and so on.
- **Likely Outcome:** Seeking out the individual's supervisor will likely lead to:
  1. That person offering you guidance on how best to proceed on your own
  2. That individual (the supervisor) reaching out to the person in question
  3. Possible disciplinary action for the person in question following an investigation
- **Remember:**
  - **All university employees are mandatory reporters** for the university and may be required to report the incident to relevant offices, which would result in official documentation of the event.
  - Further, it is likely that this person would keep their own documentation of this meeting.

**Go to the chair of the student support committee who is a member of the faculty (Rachel Thayer, currently)**

- The student support committee chair offers an additional faculty-level option that may feel more objective than seeking the individual out and/or speaking with your mentor.
- **Likely Outcome:** The student support faculty member can offer many of the same options other faculty may provide:
  1. Guidance on how you may proceed on your own
  2. Advocacy by reporting to relevant individuals and/or facilitating a meeting with the faculty member in question
- **Remember:**
  - The student support **committee chair is a** faculty member who is a **mandatory reporter** for the university and may be required to report the incident to relevant offices, which would result in official documentation of the event.
  - It is likely that this faculty member would document the meeting themselves as well.

**Go to the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE)**

- OIE offers unbiased support to UCCS students.
- The following experiences would fall directly under reportable offenses to OIE:
  - Discrimination based on any status (gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, SES, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, other belief systems, military status, or any other personal identity)
  - Microaggressions
  - Sexual misconduct
  - Exploitation
- Even if you are unsure whether your experience falls within the realm of the reporting process, it is recommended by OIE that you go to them to discuss anything that has made you uncomfortable and they will help you determine how to proceed. Even if your concern does not result in action, the office will keep a record of your concern to ensure the documentation of potential patterns found in reports from several sources over time.
- **Remember:**
  - OIE has asked that students seek them out specifically instead of going to supervisors whenever possible
  - OIE is required to be neutral in the assessment of these incidents
  - OIE is specially trained to triage with university resources and offices as needed on a case-by-case basis
- **OIE reporting options:**
  - Through their website: <https://equity.uccs.edu/>
  - Reporting form: <https://equity.uccs.edu/reporting/reporting-form>
  - Call OIE at (719) 255-4324

- Email OIE at [equity@uccs.edu](mailto:equity@uccs.edu)
- **Likely Outcome:** OIE will document the information you provide, no matter if it leads to a formal investigation. OIE documents all cases brought to them to ensure that students' experiences are accounted for and to build cases over time if a repeated offense occurs. Beyond documentation OIE may:
  1. Offer you guidance on how to proceed on your own
  2. Refer you to another office for support
  3. Begin an investigation into the incident which may include
    - a. Collaboration with the department
    - b. Interviewing other(s) involved
    - c. Suggesting actions to the department to take with the individuals in question
    - d. Formal actions through the university
- For more information on OIE practices and procedures, see:  
<https://equity.uccs.edu/sites/g/files/kjihxj1441/files/inline-files/OIE%20Resolution%20Procedures%2010.01.21.pdf>

### **Go to the Wellness Center or third-party counseling center**

- If you would prefer to not report within the department or OIE but would like to discuss what has happened to you, you may seek out confidential services at the UCCS Wellness Center
  - Wellness Center mental health services website:  
<https://recwellness.uccs.edu/mental-health-services>
  - Wellness Center mental health services phone number: 719-255-4444
- **Remember:** UCCS Wellness Center employees are university employees, and therefore are **mandated reporters** in professional relationships. Information about university experiences can only be held confidential within a **therapeutic relationship**. There are limits to that confidentiality, which can be discussed with the Wellness Center staff.
- If you are not comfortable seeking care at the Wellness Center, you can find affordable services for students at: [recwellness.uccs.edu/mental-health-services/resources/community-support-services](https://recwellness.uccs.edu/mental-health-services/resources/community-support-services)