



BENTLEY
UNIVERSITY

Fall 2020 Bias Incident Response Team Report

Produced by The Bias Incident Response Team



Letter from the BIRT Core Team

Members of the Bentley Community,

Launched in the Fall of 2017, the Bentley Bias Incident Response Team (BIRT) was created to help the university respond to bias related incidents on Bentley's campus. A bias incident is characterized as a behavior or act – verbal, written, or physical – which is personally directed against or targets an individual based on perceived or actual characteristics such as race, color, religious belief, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national or ethnic origin, disability, veteran status, or age.

The BIRT consists of staff and faculty members representing a cross section of the campus, including the Office of Diversity & Inclusion, Student Affairs, Academic Affairs and Human Resources. This team ensures that individuals affected by bias or a bias-related incident have appropriate resources. This can include educational conversations, connections to official reporting structures, or assistance in accessing academic and counseling support services. The BIRT does not investigate incidents nor does it have the authority to discipline any member of the community. The role of BIRT is to be a resource for the reporting party who decides how the process moves forward

As the university continues to work towards greater equity and accountability, the Bias Incident Response Team has committed to increasing transparency about our reports and responses. Starting this semester we will issue regular reports detailing the number and type of reports received. Identifying information is removed to ensure privacy of the reporting parties.

For more information about the Bias Incident Response Team, our policies and procedures and how to file a BIRT report please visit our [website](#). If you have any questions about BIRT, please contact Matt Banks (matthewbanks@bentley.edu), the Assistant Director for Diversity & Inclusion. The BIRT Core Team encourages anyone experiencing bias to submit a report.

In solidarity,

The BIRT Core Team

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BIRT Reports by the Numbers

(Fall 2020)

Total Number of BIRT Reports and Discrete Incidents

Total Number of Reports	Number of Discrete Incidents ¹
12	11

¹ BIRT defines a discrete incidents as singular incidents that are reported. This semester, for instance, two reports were filed by different individuals for a singular discrete incident, two reports were filed by the same person for the same incident as new information was made available and one report involved two incidents that BIRT responded to in different ways. The following summaries will focus primarily on the number of discrete incidents unless otherwise stated.

Summary of Reporting Parties

Reporting Party	Number of Incidents
Student	7
Staff	3
Faculty	0
External Community Member ²	1

² An external community member is an individual not currently enrolled at or employed by Bentley University.

Summary of Affected Individual

Affected Individual	Number of Incidents
Self	4
Someone Else	7

Primary Identity Involved in Bias Incident

Primary Identity Involved in Incident	Number of Incidents
Race	6
Ethnicity or National Origin	4
Religion	0
Age	0
Disability	0
Sex	0
Gender Identity or Expression	1
Sexual Orientation	1
Marital Status	0
Veteran Status	0
Other	0

Location of Incidents

Location of Incident	Number of Incident
Residence Hall	0
Classroom	5
Administrative Office	1
University Sponsored Event	1
Student Organization	0
Student Assignment of Project Group	1
Social Media or Other Virtual Space	2
Other	1

Summary of Type of Incidents

Type of Incident	Number of Incidents
Personal Encounter	0
Overheard Remark	1
Classroom Incident	4
Social Media or Email	3
Sexual Harassment	1
University Operations	1
Not BIRT Related	1

Historical Overview of BIRT Reports

Semester ³	Total Number of Reports for the Semester
Fall 2017	17
Spring 2018	11
Fall 2018	11
Spring 2019	7
Fall 2019	6
Spring 2020	3
Fall 2020	12

³ Fall semesters are defined as June 1st through December 31st. Spring Semesters are defined as January 1st through May 31st.

Summary of BIRT Reports and Responses

Bias Incident Themes

The BIRT received reports of eleven distinct bias or bias-related incidents during the Fall of 2020. The reports received included a wide range of incident types and locations. Incidents included reports about statements made on social media, interactions in virtual class sessions or meetings, and allegations of harassment during service interactions with different offices. Two broad themes emerged from these reports.

First, a significant number of reports focused on race, ethnicity, or national origin. These incidents involved microaggressions, assumptions about national identity, statements linking ethnicity to COVID-19, and disparate treatment during or ability to access university services. Each of these incidents were addressed in different ways, particularly as BIRT began to develop a new response structure in relation to classroom incidents.

The second theme was an increase in reports involving classroom interactions. These incidents occurred during classroom interactions and group projects and included both graduate and undergraduate classes. All of the incidents reported took place in virtual settings.

BIRT Responses

The Bias Incident Response Team responds to every report received. While the response varies by incident, a member of the BIRT emails the reporting party within 24 hours to offer to meet to discuss the incident. If the reporting party agrees to meet, one or more members of the BIRT team will connect as a convenient time for the reporting party to review the report, offer support and resources, and review possibilities for next steps. Ultimately, the response BIRT pursues is dictated by the individual who created the BIRT report.

Examples of responses to reports include:

- BIRT member met with individuals involved in the incident for an educational discussion about the impact of language and social media
- BIRT member reached out to a faculty member to alert them to the report and to offer resources on dealing with difficult moments in the classroom.
- BIRT member connected the reporting party with Academic Services for advising on handling a classroom situation.
- BIRT member provided coaching to reporting party on ways to navigate a conversation with their supervisor about an incident.
- BIRT member coordinated with the Student Equity and Inclusion team to provide assistance in helping the reporting party resolve concerns about an interaction on social media.
- BIRT referred reporting party to Title IX for resolution under the Sexual Harassment policy.
- BIRT member referred reporting party to potential funding sources to help the student create a project to raise awareness about the bias they experienced

These examples represent a sample of specific responses BIRT undertook. It is important to note that the incidents in this report represent only those incidents where individuals felt comfortable or empowered to report. Recent incidents exposed by the Black@Bentley and Sexism.at.Bentley Instagram accounts show there are incidents that are not reported through BIRT or other channels. While we are encouraged by the steady increase in the use of the BIRT system, we hope that by beginning to share this kind of summary of incidents, themes and responses that more community members will feel comfortable coming forward to report incidents when they occur.

New BIRT Procedures and Actions

BIRT meets to review incident reports at the end of each semester and considers possible changes to the process. These reviews have led to the creation of new policies and the alteration of certain procedures. This report reflects one addition that resulted from a call for more transparency in the process from individuals reporting incidents.

In reviewing the incidents this semester we have identified two areas for enhancement. Reporting parties often share that they are reluctant to report an incident, especially if the incident involves an interaction in the classroom. Students who experience bias or a bias-related incident in class, either involving another student or a faculty member, fear they will be retaliated against and that their grade will be impacted. As a result the reporting party asks BIRT not to inform the faculty member that an incident has taken place in their class. This does not help the faculty member to raise their awareness of how bias occurs in the classroom and prevents opportunities for faculty to adapt teaching practices to create more inclusive classroom environments. The BIRT centers the needs of the reporting party, so it will continue to allow the reporting party to decide if a faculty member is notified of the event at the time of the report. However, moving forward the BIRT will notify all faculty members of incidents reported in their classes once the semester has ended and grades have been submitted. In addition, BIRT will compile all stories of classroom related bias incidents and share these with the Provost.

An additional area identified by BIRT for enhancement is the utilization of the BIRT system by faculty members. More than half of the reports received by BIRT come from someone reporting on behalf of the individual impacted by the bias incident. However, very few of these reports come from faculty. Given the number of reports that occurred in the classroom this semester, the BIRT will be exploring ways to increase faculty reporting to ensure all members of the community feel confident in accessing BIRT as a resource.

Resources

Below, you will find a list of additional campus resources students, faculty and staff may utilize or refer individuals to. These offices are just a few of the resources the BIRT team helps connect affected individuals to when responding to bias-related incidents. In addition, the BIRT has provided resources to prevent and combat bias.

Campus Resources

Counseling Center

The Counseling Center is available for all students who are struggling and seeking mental health support. Through the use of secure and confidential telehealth software, Counseling Center staff will connect with students online to assess and determine the best course of action to help them. If appropriate, staff can schedule students for short-term teletherapy. Should it be determined that more long-term, intensive, specialized or local support is necessary, we will assist with connecting students with those resources.

Title IX

The Title IX Office responds to and investigates reports that are rooted in forms of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation on the basis of an individual's sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression.

Ombuds Office

The Ombuds Office provides a safe, confidential, informal and impartial place for faculty, staff and students to discuss concerns and actual or potential conflicts and to address them in a positive and constructive way.

Deans' Offices

The [Dean of Business](#) and the [Dean of Arts & Sciences](#), along with the [University Provost](#), oversee the academic programs and integrity of the university. Students experiencing bias related issues in the classroom or academic support services can contact the Deans to discuss and address the issues.

Human Resources

The work of the Human Resources team supports the mission of the University by providing services and programs that attract, develop and retain a highly qualified and diverse workforce. Whether you are faculty, administrative staff, a retiree, or a prospective employee, the welcoming team in HR is committed to providing you with timely and professional service and strategic solutions. The core values of the Bentley Beliefs guide our interactions with the whole Bentley community and we are dedicated to treating

all with respect and dignity. Information about the university's discrimination, harassment, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy can be found [here](#).

Office of Diversity & Inclusion

The Office of Diversity & Inclusion is responsible for fostering an inclusive community by leveraging interactions between offices, educating the entire community and working to increase the diversity at all levels of the University. While the office coordinates university-wide, diversity-related programs and initiatives, many other departments, centers, offices, and organizations at Bentley contribute to improving the diversity climate through varied and persistent efforts.

Student Equity & Inclusion

The Student Equity and Inclusion team provides support, advocacy, and care to students throughout their Bentley experience as they explore their identities. We aim to equip all students with the knowledge, awareness and skills needed to be successful in an increasingly diverse campus and world. The offices under Student Equity & Inclusion are the Multicultural Center, Gender and Sexuality Student Programs, the Center for International Students and Scholars (CISS), Spiritual Life Office and Student Success.

Resources to Fight Bias

Given the large number of reported classroom incidents this semester, we want to promote the [Bentley University Inclusive Teaching & Scholarship SharePoint site](#). This site includes several resources for faculty members to utilize in creating inclusive classroom spaces.

[Speak Up: Responding to Everyday Bigotry](#). This online resource from the Southern Poverty Law Center includes resources on how to respond to biased language in a variety of situations from conversations with family, to interactions during customer service interactions, and presentations in the workplace.



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BENTLEY UNIVERSITY is more than just one of the nation's top business schools. It is a lifelong-learning community that creates successful leaders who make business a force for positive change. With a combination of business and the arts and sciences and a flexible, personalized approach to education, Bentley provides students with critical thinking and practical skills that prepare them to lead successful, rewarding careers. Founded in 1917, the university enrolls 4,200 undergraduate and 1,000 graduate and PhD students and is set on 163 acres in Waltham, Massachusetts, 10 miles west of Boston. For more information, visit [bentley.edu](https://www.bentley.edu).