

SPECIAL REPORT

of the

STATUS OF MINORITIES COUNCIL

concerning

**POLICY ON DISCRIMINATORY REMARKS,
TREATMENT AND BEHAVIOR**

Presented at the
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**Special Report from
Faculty Senate Council on the Status of Minorities
March 27, 1989**

It has come to the attention of the Council on the Status of Minorities that some discriminatory incidents have occurred in University classrooms. While these particular incidents may well have been inadvertent, they sparked the realization that the University has no policy against discriminatory remarks, treatment, and behavior. To rectify this, we have prepared the following motions, accompanied by

- I. Summary Policy Statement;**
- II. Definition of Stereotyping, Prejudice and Discrimination;**
- III. Examples Involving Faculty; and**
- IV. Brief History of Campus Efforts against Discrimination.**

MOVED: That the Faculty Senate recommends adoption of the following policy statement
31-89 (including Parts I, II, and IV against discriminatory remarks, treatment, and behavior in the classroom.

MOVED: For the purposes of monitoring the implementation of this policy, the Faculty Senate
32-89 requests the Provost's Office to present a progress report to the Faculty Senate within six months. Procedures for enforcing the policy would rest with the normal supervisory roles established by the University.

I. Summary Policy Statement: Policy Against Discriminatory Remarks, Treatment, and Behavior

The University of Massachusetts opposes discrimination of all forms, defined as overt, observable category-based responses to an individual or group based on stereotyping, prejudice, or other factors that primarily emphasize that this individual is from a "different" group. Discriminatory responses typically involve racial and ethnic groups, gender groups, physical ability groups, sexual preference groups, age groups, and the like. Discrimination involving category-based responses is unacceptable in any interactions between faculty, staff, and students, either between groups or within groups. The policy is consistent with the overall mission of the University to create and maintain a multicultural environment, and with existing codes of ethics and conduct for faculty, staff, and students. Implementation of the policy is the responsibility of the entire campus, through educational means that discourage and eliminate category-based responses, while preserving freedom of expression and constitutional protection for freedom of speech and of the press. Enforcement of the policy will rest within the appropriate disciplinary and supervisory roles established by the University. The policy is consistent with and extends existing prohibitions against racial harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination based on handicap status, and Affirmative Action policies and procedures.

II. Definition of Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination

Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination all are category-based responses to another individual, responses that emphasize the person's membership in a group of which the actor is not a member. Such outgroups may include racial and ethnic groups, gender groups, physical ability groups, sexual preference groups, age groups, religious groups, and more. The critical feature is the response to another primarily as being from a different group to the exclusion of other potentially individuating information.

Such category-based responses may include beliefs that overgeneralize about the outgroup (stereotyping), negative feelings about the outgroup (prejudice), or negative behavior toward the outgroup (discrimination). These three types of response are often correlated, but they need not be. Thus, one may respond in a discriminatory way, without any major feelings of prejudice. The University cannot forbid stereotyping and prejudice per se because they are thoughts and feelings. However, the University can oppose discrimination that is apparently based on stereotyping and prejudice. Discriminatory behavior is an overt category-based response that can be monitored and proscribed.

Category-based responses, by their nature, shortchange the individual's own unique characteristics. Social categories contain many separate individuals who differ considerably from each other. On most dimensions, there is more variability within any given group than between any two groups. This means that even if one believes in average differences between groups (beliefs which may themselves be correct or incorrect), the distribution of attributes in the two groups will usually overlap more than it differs. One may believe that there are specifiable group differences, and these beliefs may be accurate or erroneous, agreed or disputed by any given group member. Accordingly, the unique characteristics of a given group, quite possibly valued by many members of the group, must be balanced with the great individual variability between individuals within any given group, both on the characteristic in question and on their attitude toward it. Accordingly, it is important to respect people's individuality, as well as their legitimate perspectives as members of diverse social groups. Unwarranted and unwelcome assumptions about group differences do a distinct disservice to individual members, as well as to the person acting on them, and to the University community.

Category-based responses often take the form of specifically negative beliefs, feelings, and actions. This is what the lay person usually means by racism, sexism, and the like. In addition, however, category-based responses may take the form of exaggerated, extreme responses, either disproportionately positive or disproportionately negative, to an outgroup member. Overpraising a person's moderate achievements can be just as discriminatory as undervaluing them. Finally, stereotypic positive responses may be category-based as well.

Category-based responses can include, but are not limited to, (a) verbal behavior, such as category-based threats, jokes, invidious overgeneralizations, or constraining comments; (b) nonverbal behavior indicating category-based unfriendliness, distance, condescension, inappropriate curiosity, or overt hostility; (c) category-based exclusion from activities available to others in the normal course of events; (d) actual or threatened physical harassment on the basis of category.

The key in each case is whether the response is based predominantly on the target's social category, rather than on the person as a unique individual.

III. Examples of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination Involving Faculty

Certain types of behavior may not be recognized as discriminatory because they are subtle or because discrimination is not intended. To aid faculty members in interpreting the policy against discriminatory remarks, treatment, and behavior, we provide examples below of behavior that was experienced as discriminatory.

Examples reported by racial and ethnic minority students

“In a seminar in which I was the only member of my ethnic heritage, the professor deviated from the lesson long enough to make a sarcastic remark about an author who was also from my background. He then smirked and a ripple of laughter from the class followed.”

“My academic advisor offered no constructive suggestions regarding courses to prepare me for graduate school. The person made discouraging comments about my future in grad school and acted very surprised that I would even be considering such issues.”

“My advisor asked me (during registration) ‘Are you on probation yet?’”

“Whenever I go to see faculty members, I get the uncomfortable feeling that they want to get rid of me as fast as possible.”

“A faculty member said that my friends and I (all from a minority group) should sit away from each other or he would never learn our names.”

“A professor told me when I came to his office for assistance: ‘I really don’t think you have what it takes.’ We had not even interacted enough for him to have any basis for this statement.”

“My professor singles me out as the spokesperson for the minority point of view, as though all members of minority groups and all members of my own particular group felt the same way about things.”

“The instructor in one of my classes is always asking me if I understand the material and offers to help me even though I don’t need it.”

“In my writing class, where I was the only black student, the professor singled out my paper as ‘illiterate’ in front of the other students. I felt he could have said the paper was badly written or something like that, instead of attaching a racial stereotype to it.”

“I feel my teachers expect less of me than they expect of the other students or of themselves.”

“I was the only person of color in a class that broke up into small groups to do the final project. Even though I was doing really well in the class, no one invited me to join their group. I don’t know if it was me or them, but I feel the professor should have been aware of the potential problem with this process.”

“In my lit class, a lot of the readings had racial slurs in them, words like ‘nigger’ and ‘jewboy’ and ‘spic.’ Sometimes the professor and other students would use these terms in the discussion. I don’t think they meant anything by it, but it made minorities in the class really uncomfortable. It’s one thing if we use these terms, but it’s something else if the professor lets other students use them without even commenting.”

“Sometimes polarized issues come up in class, like Affirmative Action. If the professor and the majority of students take one position, it’s very hard for people to disagree, especially when they are minorities. This happened recently in one of my classes. I think the teacher was insensitive to us.”

Examples reported by faculty

“When we hired a black woman as an instructor in our (foreign language) department, a professor from another department asked me if she could speak the language.”

“One of my colleagues repeatedly offends female graduate students by complimenting or otherwise commenting on their dress. He is not aware that by acting this way, he is reaffirming a structure of superiority of men over women and misusing his position as a professor.”

“When I lecture on topics in mainstream economics, students diligently take notes. But if I turn my attention to racism or sexism, and the economics of gender or race, they often stop taking notes.”

“Some white male students deliberately try to create a distraction when I lecture on racism or sexism.”

“My department chair congratulated me (a person from a minority group) on a recent article, which was nice, until the person added ‘and it was even in a peer-reviewed journal,’ as if I typically held to lower standards than other faculty.”

“Whenever I tell people that I am a university professor, they sometimes ask if I teach freshmen, as though people of my race were not competent to teach upper-level courses.”

“As a black faculty member, I am often asked if I am in the Afro-American Studies Department. It’s as if people assume I wouldn’t have been hired for any other reason.”

“The (all-white, majority-group) personnel committee told me ‘This is a professional meeting, and we expect you to behave professionally.’”

“When the black secretary in our department wore a turban to work, one of my colleagues addressed her as Ms. Je mimah.”

These are not isolated examples. According to Project PULSE Surveys conducted in 1986 and 1987, 14% of the minority students and 51% of the women students surveyed said they personally had experienced various kinds of discriminatory behavior, particularly in the form of stereotypic or negative remarks about their group, coming from instructors or other staff members. Even more had experienced this kind of behavior from other students: 62% of the minorities and 91% of the women. The students' behavior is influenced by faculty role models and by institutional standards, so it is crucial to implement a Policy that states the institution's position on these matters.

IV. Brief History of Campus Efforts Against Discrimination

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst historically has encouraged civil behavior and discipline in all segments of campus, including policies dating back to 1879, which held students responsible for their actions and behaviors. Recent attempts to improve civility on campus and to eliminate discriminatory actions and behaviors based on racial/ethnic grouping, gender, sexual orientation, and physical ability date back to December 1979, when Chancellor Henry Koffler appointed a "Commission on Civility in Human Relations." The charge to the Commission was ". . . to assist me and other members of the academic community to foster a high level of discourse and behavior on this campus regarding civility, mutual concern and responsibility, appropriate to the academic community. To this end, I am asking you to identify incidents and expressions of racism, sexism, and anti-semitism, and other inhumane actions and attitudes; to engage, when requested, in fact finding in response to allegations of such actions; to provide me with a continuing assessment of the prevailing civic morality on this campus; and to assist in the formulation of campus policies and public statements, which I hope that all segments of the University community will see fit to address and follow, opposing anti-social attitudes and actions. I shall ask you to recommend actions to improve the climate of decency on this campus, with the understanding that, when appropriate, such recommendations will be referred to the relevant governance bodies for review. Finally, I ask that you, both as individual members of the academic community and as a group, do everything in your power to help me make the entire campus aware of the need to respect the dignity and rights of others." The first meeting of the Commission occurred on February 29, 1980, with 18 members representing various segments of the University community.

* **May 8, 1980:** A "Code of Professional Ethics for the Faculty" was amended, and included the statement "As members of the faculty, professors respect the rights of others, regardless of sex, race, age, physical and language handicap, prior civil disability, sexual and religious preference, marital and socio-economic status, or national origin, citizenship, and allegiance. Professors avoid such extraneous considerations in the evaluation of peers, students, or in the assignment of duties and responsibilities in the University. Professors promote the ideals of a learning environment that fosters individual rights and encourages mutual respect."

* **Fall, 1980:** In-house training sessions for Collegian staff implemented, with the assistance of Professor Howard Ziff, to encourage increased sensitivity to general civility, without infringing on freedom of the press and freedom of speech.

* **June, 1981:** Microcollege on civility convened, to plan the "Year Toward Civility."

* The “Year Toward Civility” conducted in academic year 1981-82. The goals of the year were: “By the end of next academic year: (1) all individuals on campus (students, staff, and faculty) will understand that it is a University community actively engaged in confronting problems of incivility as they are expressed in racism, sexism, and anti-semitism; (2) as many people as possible, if not all members of the campus community will have participated in some activity or project which deals with issues of racism, sexism, and anti-semitism; (3) throughout the year, there will be an ongoing process which highlights what is already in place, and where necessary creates new programs which analyze and address the issues of racism, sexism and anti-semitism; and (4) efforts will be initiated which institutionalize and expand our efforts to create a civil and humane University Community.”

* July 1, 1982: Creation of the Office of Human Relations, reporting directly to the Chancellor’s Office.

* Fall, 1982: Sexual Harassment Policy adopted by campus.

* Spring, 1988: Specific reference in Code of Student Conduct to racial and sexual harassment prohibition.

* Spring, 1988: Affirmative Action Plan includes for the first time a policy prohibiting harassment based on race, color, sex, national origin, age, disability, or other protected status. It defines harassment as verbal or physical conduct interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

* Fall, 1988: New Affirmative Action Plan will include for the first time a statement against the use of discriminatory language in campus publications.

* October, 1988: The Graduate Student Senate, the Provost’s Office, the Residential Academic Programs, and the Social Issues Training Project at the School of Education produce “Racial and Cultural Diversity, Curricular Content and Classroom Dynamics: A Manual for College Teachers,” which brings together essays, case studies, and interventions designed to illuminate the social and cultural dimensions of college teaching.

Throughout the past eight years, numerous training sessions, discussions, and forums have been held to look at one or more areas of discriminatory behavior, attitudes and practices. Although the original goals of the Commission on Civility in Human Relations included addressing racism, sexism and other “isms” in both subtle and not so subtle forms, no definite statement from the University has been made that prohibits such attitudes, practices and behaviors by faculty, students, and staff, no matter how difficult it may be to enforce. Despite the activity over all the years, there is still a problem. This Policy is one effort among many designed to combat the continuing problem.