

Anti-Racist Code of Conduct
Department of Communication
University of Utah

This Anti-Racist Code of Conduct—passed in a faculty vote, without votes in opposition, in November 2020—in the Department of Communication is the result of the department’s Anti-Racist Taskforce (ART) established in summer 2020 by Interim Chair, Dr. Kevin Coe, at the request of Communication graduate students invested in anti-racist scholar-activism:

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Code of Conduct

The Department of Communication Anti-Racist Code of Conduct (ARCC) is an undertaking by faculty, staff, and students in the Department of Communication (hereafter, Department). The ARCC was developed to complement University Policy 1-012: University Non-Discrimination Policy against bias, discrimination, and racism and the College of Humanities’ Commitment to Inclusivity.

Discrimination, as defined by University Rule 1-012, refers to “treating someone differently, i.e., disadvantaging the person, on the basis of being a member of a protected class described in University Policy 1-012 when:

- a) such conduct adversely affects a term or condition of an individual’s employment, education, living environment, or participation in a University Program or Activity; or
- b) a person’s membership in a protected class is used as the basis for or a factor in decisions adversely affecting that individual’s employment, education, living environment, or other participation in a University Program or Activity.”

In addition to committing to a University environment that is *safe and free* from discrimination, Department members adhering to this Code will actively practice the anti-racism measures described here.

- 1) Faculty, staff, and students in the Department create and contribute to a departmental culture in which members are active bystanders who identify and interrupt racism in all forms.
 - a. We work intentionally to eradicate speech or actions that stereotype, inferentially identify, culturally discriminate against, or harm people of color.
 - b. We disrupt and dismantle racist learning and work environments created through White normativity and discriminatory actions such as microaggressions, microassaults, and microinsults.
 - c. We interrupt and/or intervene in racist incidents in all university spaces that are utilized and inhabited by Department members, including physical spaces (offices, classrooms, bathrooms, conference rooms, lunch rooms) and online forums.
- 2) Recognizing that racism often occurs in tandem with other systems of oppression (e.g., sexism, classism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, among others), faculty, staff, and students in the Department commit to a departmental culture that engages in anti-racism with an intersectional approach.

Evidence that our Code of Conduct is communally recognized and endorsed will include the following:

1. Widely available and engaged Anti-Racist Training for Department members at consistent and ongoing intervals that promotes regular conversations about Anti-Racist work in the Department (e.g., reading groups, research projects, colloquia, brown bags, invited speakers).
2. Replicating the current University level anonymous or confidential reporting mechanism available via the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action and the Office for Inclusive Excellence at the Department level, specifically by the Associate Chair of the Department of Communication.
3. Regular examination of data to track equity gaps for faculty, staff, and students.
4. Curriculum reform efforts to centralize work by scholars of color at the graduate and undergraduate levels.
5. Include Anti-Racist Code of Conduct in syllabi.
6. Consistent use and updating of the Anti-Racist Strategic Plan (forthcoming).

Background to Department Anti-Racism Code of Conduct

The Anti-Racist Task Force was created in the summer of 2020 to create an anti-racist culture in the Department of Communication at the University of Utah. Interim Chair Kevin Coe charged the Task Force with responding to a letter sent by graduate students in the Department of Communication to 2019-2020 co-Chairs Ann Darling, Marouf Hasian, and Mark Bergstrom and Incoming Interim Chair Coe and Graduate Director and Associate Chair Helene Shugart. Among other requests, that letter demanded that the Department: (1) release an anti-racist statement in support of Black lives; (2) establish an anti-racist code of conduct; (3) establish a graduate

student award honoring a student conducting activist and community-oriented work; and (4) create a strategic plan to recruit and retain Black students, staff, faculty and administration.

This ARCC responds to the second request. It accomplishes five things:

1. Differentiates between racist, not racist, and anti-racist academic cultures.
2. Defines the goal of creating an anti-racist Department climate via norms, policies, and praxis.
3. Describes what the ARCC helps Department members do.
4. Establishes institutional anti-racist Departmental structures.
5. Discusses options available to students, staff, and faculty to gain relief after incidents that are inconsistent with the goals of the ARCC.

Key Conceptualizations

A **racist** department culture is one in which members of color regularly experience incidents and patterns of racialized prejudice, discrimination, stereotypes, and exclusion that are enacted by members of the Department and facilitated by departmental and institutional norms and policy.

A department culture that aims to be **non racist** is one in which Department members of color still regularly experience incidents and patterns of racialized prejudice, discrimination, stereotypes, and exclusion that are facilitated by departmental and institutional norms and policy. However, the key difference is that some members of the department who individually refrain from racist behavior do not confront those who choose to regularly partake in racist behaviors and enact racist policy. In the absence of confrontation and transparency in Departmental culture, these individuals miss opportunities to meaningfully intervene during incidents of racism, despite good intentions.

An **anti-racist** department is one in which members, both White and of color, actively contribute to a culture in which racism is openly confronted and challenged. While members of color might still experience incidents of racial discrimination, an anti-racist department acknowledges and confronts those incidents as part of a larger pattern of racism, and provides support for the members who were negatively affected. An anti-racist department culture is characterized by the following:

- Offers professional development opportunities that highlight the importance of self-awareness and social responsibility in relation to race, racism, and Whiteness as intersectional issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Highlights and promotes the work of departmental members of color and White departmental members who engage in scholarship and/or activism about social responsibility in relation to race, racism, and Whiteness as intersectional issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Supports departmental members of color through material means whenever possible and following guidance from university leadership.

- Provides both internal and external mechanisms of accountability to redress racial and racist incidents experienced by people of color within the Department.
- Continually commits to an anti-racist praxis by engaging in regular departmental-level reflexivity to interrogate how the department upholds White normativity.

Goal of an Anti-Racist Code of Conduct

The primary goal of an Anti-Racist Code of Conduct is to help the department transition from a racist versus non-racist culture toward an anti-racist culture. A secondary goal of this Code is to support students, faculty, and staff members in the department who experience racial trauma as a result of White normativity and discriminatory actions such as microaggressions, microassaults, and microinsults. A third goal of this Code is to make clear what constitutes racially conscious, appropriate, and respectful treatment of people of color so as to guide thinking and actions in service of creating a departmental culture that is more humanizing and supportive and less injurious. The overarching hope is that this Code will facilitate creating a departmental culture which is not driven by White normativity and in which incidents of discrimination such as microaggressions, microassaults, and microinsults are diminished if not eliminated; and these incidents are understood and responded to so that those impacted by them can gain redress, both formally and informally.

The ARCC is closely aligned with existing University policies regarding discrimination and anti-racism (see University Policy 1-012, “University Non-discrimination Policy”). The ARCC supplements these policies by imposing an affirmative obligation on all Departmental members to engage in anti-racist actions and support anti-racist Department institutions and norms.”

How the Anti-Racist Code of Conduct Can Help

To describe the positive things the ARCC can do, this document provides the following anonymized examples of incidents in the department, and how an Anti-Racist Code of Conduct would prevent such incidents, facilitate agency of the reporting individuals in responding to the incident, and help remedy the incidents’ effects.

Example 1. Multiple graduate students of color complain that a White instructor in the Department regularly gives them lower grades than their White graduate student counterparts.

Code of Conduct Usefulness: It can alert instructors to be conscious of their awarding of grades and self-reflect on their pattern of giving higher grades to White students and lower grades to students of color. The ARCC can also give a graduate student of color who receives what they feel to be an unfair grade a legitimate, departmental avenue for reporting this.

Example 2. A White instructor in the Department trivializes the work of a scholar of color, then makes an inappropriate joke about their physical appearance. When questioned by a graduate student, the instructor disregards the relevance of racial identity in a comment about physical appearance. Ultimately, the power imbalance prevents a fuller conversation that might improve the situation and future occurrences.

Code of Conduct Usefulness: The ARCC can empower the graduate student to be able to say that mocking a scholar of color's physical appearance violates the code. With the ARCC, other graduate students might feel they, too, are supported by the Department and act as active public supporters of the student who responded to the instructor's words. Further, the ARCC may enable students to make informed decisions about taking classes with instructors who have displayed a history and/or pattern of racial bias and discrimination after such an incident without fearing repercussions.

Example 3. A White instructor in the Department spreads rumors about a person of color in the Department. They tell many people both in and outside of the Department about the person's faults and that they do not like them. When the person of color is under consideration for a professional accolade, people on a committee who have talked with the gossiping White instructor acknowledge that the person of color has a bad reputation and vote against the person of color's professional advancement.

Code of Conduct Usefulness: The ARCC can remind the White instructor that communication about people of color is often commonplace racism disparaging and untruthful by White people toward people of color, and is unacceptable. The ARCC can also provide a formal avenue through which the person of color is able to seek redress.

Example 4. A person of color in the Department asks a committee to consider a graduate student of color for a departmental accolade and supports that recommendation with substantial evidence. A White member of the committee objects publicly, suggesting such an accolade would unfairly benefit that student over other students with similar qualifications. The rest of the committee is silent and does not support that person of color. The graduate student of color does not receive an accolade.

Code of Conduct Usefulness: The ARCC can help the person recommending an award to draw attention to the code as departmental policy. It might also help the White committee member understand the larger implications of their actions as it concerns people of color and recognize how difficult it is for people of color to receive accolades in the face of White normativity that assumes, meritocratically, that everyone is working on a level playing field, that that playing field is fair, and that fairness can be understood outside of a condition of unequal power relations.

Example 5. Faculty of color in the Department spend a disproportionate amount of time than their White counterparts mentoring and advising graduate students (who identify as both people of color and White) who struggle with the Department's current reliance on White normativity (e.g., color blindness, racial stereotypes, etc.) utilized to dismiss the significance of racial identities, trivialize research about race, and minimize the presence of racism and xenophobia in the Department.

Code of Conduct Usefulness: The ARCC upholds anti-racism as a departmental value, and thus can help create an understanding that addressing graduate students' concerns about racism and White normativity is part of the anti-racist praxis that is a shared responsibility among all members of the Department.

Example 6. A graduate student of color in the Department receives racialized comments in student course feedback.

Code of Conduct Usefulness: The ARCC can alert the department to be conscious of racial bias in student evaluations of teaching. It can also be leveraged to provide support to the instructor of color who received racialized comments.

Example 7. An undergraduate student of color experiences isolation in courses. Their ideas about race are often ignored by instructors, and they encounter little to no course material about race and racism in their Department courses.

Code of Conduct Usefulness: The ARCC can help the student approach Department instructors and leadership to express their negative experiences as a student of color. The student can use the ARCC to request that more Department undergraduate classes purposefully engage in topics related to race and racism across areas of emphasis as a way to engage in anti-racist, rather than non-racist, teaching practices.

Possible Institutional Anti-Racist Structures and Actions

The University's Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion has developed an anti-racist call to action with a range of components and resources.¹ There are clear ways that our Department can and should partner with and benefit from the work of this Office. For example, the first bullet point on its action plan states that the University will engage in "revolutionizing practices that establish a culture of belonging and expand the university's actions towards a diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus. We will start by examining [our] policies and practices related to hiring, retention, staff wellness, and support." An ARCC would support a constant cycle of examining departmental policies and practices that present barriers to access and success for students, faculty and staff of color.

Awareness of and attention to how incidents of racism are resolved is a primary outcome of the Anti-Racist Code of Conduct that supports the action plan of the Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Specifically, there might be a mechanism of disclosure within the Department, parallel to that provided by the Office of Inclusive Excellence or the Office of Equal Opportunity, that provides both confidential and anonymous reporting options for the people who are harmed. It might be the responsibility of the Associate Chair(s) to review the details of the report and work with the person who has been harmed to follow-up on how redress or progress unfolds.

Additional methods of support within the Department may be used apart from or in conjunction with the ARCC. For example, in instances of racism from an instructor to a student, mediation can help the reporting individual to advocate for changed course content that does not violate the ARCC or some other anti-racist change in support of a fair grade. Departmental leadership can serve as mediators. In other cases, a necessary anti-racist action is the prevention of institutional backlash. Preventing institutional penalty and punishment of staff, faculty, students,

¹ <https://diversity.utah.edu/call-to-action/#edi>

and administration who have been harmed by racism is necessary to establish and cultivate an anti-racist department culture.

To cultivate an anti-racist department culture, there might be an annual review of anonymous ARCC reports and Bias Incident Reports from the University's Office for Inclusive Excellence pertinent to the Department of Communication.

Avenues for Resolving Outcomes of Racist Incidents

There are currently several ways an individual can respond to microaggressions, microassaults, and microinsults, and other racist forms of harm they have experienced. Reporting an incident to the Department, via the process provided for in the Anti-Racist Code of Conduct, is one avenue, but it is by no means the only option. The below options are available to any person who has been harmed by racism in the Department of Communication:

- One option is to bypass the Department reporting structure if the person harmed feels uncomfortable and/or unsafe reporting their experiences to the Department's Associate Chair(s). To do so, the person harmed can report directly to the university's Office for Inclusive Excellence or Office of Equal Opportunity. These reports can be made confidentially.
- Another option is to report the incident to the Department's Chair and/or Associate Chairs as conduct inconsistent with the ARCC. These reports can be made anonymously or confidentially.
 - Department leadership must create a summary of reports, including the type of incident experienced and courses of action taken, to be reviewed by faculty annually.
 - When reports are made confidentially and the reporting individual is known to departmental leadership, leadership will work with that individual to determine their preferred course of action. Examples of preferred courses of action might include:
 - The reporting individual may ask for Departmental leadership to directly intervene with the person alleged to have created the context for grievance.
 - The reporting individual may ask for a mediated conversation(s).
 - Departmental leadership will follow up with the reporting individual within two weeks of the report and agree to follow-up intervals in accordance with the reporting individual's preferences.
- Another option is to file a complaint of discrimination with the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, if they experienced racial discrimination (such as racial harassment).²

² <https://oeo.utah.edu/>

- Those harmed may choose multiple of the above options, for example choosing to report to the Office for Inclusive Excellence, the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, and the Department's Chair or Associate Chair(s).
- After hearing what a Departmental member has experienced, the Chair may report this information to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action as discrimination against a protected class if they believe it is an experience of racial discrimination. The Chair should prioritize the agency and desires of the person who has been harmed throughout these processes whenever possible.

Beyond reporting, those harmed may make use of University support services already in place. Specifically, if they feel they need short-term or long-term personal counseling, they can contact the University Counseling Center.³ They can also inform the Chair of the Department of Communication without filing a formal report.

³ <https://counselingcenter.utah.edu/>