









Climate Case Study #5 - Racially-motivated Threat

How to foster respect and inclusion in your unit when...

...there has been a racially-motivated threat or incident on campus directed at the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color) community?

It is not about your unit specifically, and the relevant authorities and administrators are aware and communicating that they are taking it seriously. Some units have issued statements and updates.

The Climate Case Studies are organized around RISE’s *Eight Levers to Shift Climate for Respect and Inclusion* framework. RISE uses the eight levers above to think about the ways in which more inclusive, respectful, and civil climates might be intentionally cultivated in the higher education workplace context.

LEVER	APPROACH	WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE
<div></div> <div>ENVIRONMENT</div>	Consider the psychological and physical safety (or lack thereof) that members of your unit experience in their work environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create safe and calm physical (or virtual) spaces where members of the community can gather for support and discussion.• Reiterate building safety procedures/protocols, and do an immediate assessment to determine whether additional safety measures are needed. The U-M Division of Public Safety & Security(DPSS) is available to do building safety assessments if departments want help with this.
<div></div> <div>EXPECTATIONS</div>	Set expectations for education and communication about racism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explicitly discuss that BIPOC individuals are not expected to teach others about racial inequities at a moment of distress (or anytime).• Set the expectation that white individuals will educate themselves so they can serve as a resource and offer support.• Work toward creating a culture where conversations about race are expected.
<div></div> <div>INTERACTIONS</div>	Be sincere in your interactions. Attend to disparities in who has a voice and who does not. Recognize that people will have different needs and tolerance for interactions at this time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid communications that appear insincere, impersonal, or detached from the threat. Share a draft with a trusted colleague before circulating anything in writing.• Use “I” statements that demonstrate your shared vulnerability, concern, and uncertainty.• Explicitly prioritize the voices and needs of the people who may be most affected by the incident.• Consider whether to discuss the incident in a large meeting, or instead, through individual or small-group meetings.
<div></div> <div>LANGUAGE</div>	Be mindful of your language choices in relation to your social identities. Recognize the power of language to name and honor the pain of racism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you are a leader who enjoys the privilege of dominant social identities, do not use language that refers to the threat as being a “surprise” or being “unexpected,” as this description of the event signals a lack of awareness of the long history of racialized violence that is experienced by BIPOC and other oppressed communities.• Frame the incident in a matter-of-fact way, explaining how it and other examples are systemic and rooted in white supremacy.• Use language that acknowledges the harm that the threat does to BIPOC communities and how the experience creates a lack of psychological and physical safety for them.
<div></div> <div>MODELING</div>	Model an active commitment to anti-racism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate your investment in anti-racism by attending workshops and pursuing other educational forums.• Encourage dialogue that demonstrates the value you place on a continual process of learning and change.• Attend rallies, demonstrations, and other collective events that are generated in response to the incident.
<div></div> <div>OPPORTUNITIES</div>	Consider the ways the incident creates opportunities, e.g. to evaluate your unit’s mission and to increase your unit’s engagement and education around anti-racism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify how your unit’s work—scholarship, performance, teaching, and/or service—can combat racism. Talk now about how anti-racism fits into your unit’s mission or effort.• Organize or collaborate on an event that hosts experts on the relevant issues, such as speakers on racism, and then organize a follow-up discussion for individuals to share their thoughts and to plan for visible next steps.
<div></div> <div>ROUTINES & STRUCTURES</div>	Look toward long-lasting changes by examining routines and structures in your unit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enact anti-racist strategies to identify and dismantle biased practices in your unit. For example, make unwritten rules explicit and transparent.• Form a leadership team, comprised of willing BIPOC and non-BIPOC individuals who can help you manage and respond to difficult events. Recognize that BIPOC faculty may already be engaging in high amounts of service, including emotion-laden invisible service.• Provide individuals in your unit with training to support their anti-racist skill development and publicly recognize their efforts.
<div></div> <div>TIME</div>	Make time for discussion, healing, and movement toward justice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflect on what gets time on a meeting agenda. Do BIPOC individuals have time in which they can speak about their concerns? Can they safely present issues related to the needs of BIPOC individuals that require departmental focus? Are you offering them opportunities to share concerns with you that you can then represent anonymously?• Devote time at a unit-wide meeting to acknowledge and discuss the racial threat, followed by active steps the members of your community can take to address racism on campus.• Explicitly permit and encourage a pause of “business as usual” for everyone, including yourself, to manage personal needs related to the incident.

Additional Resources:

- [Ten Lessons for Talking about Race, Racism, and Racial Justice](#) (The Opportunity Agenda, 2020)
- [Leading After a Racial Crisis](#) (American Council on Education, 2020)
- [Race and Rhetoric: An Analysis of College Presidents’ Statements on Campus Racial Incidents](#) (Cole & Harper, Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 2017)
- [Navigating a Campus Racial Crisis: Building Capacity, Leading Through Trauma and the Recovery Process](#) (Kezar & Fries-Britt, Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 2020)

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