

Best Practices:

Bias Incident and Hate Crime Reporting, Investigation and Resolution

Executive Summary

This best practice guide defines bias incidents and hate crimes, discusses their impact on students and campus communities, and outlines institutions' legal obligations under federal law. It then provides best practices for bias incident reporting, investigation and resolution with examples from campuses around the U.S.

Strategies highlighted include:

- Accessible and well-publicized reporting processes
 - Comprehensive support for victims
 - Systemic and impartial investigation by qualified and well-trained professionals
 - Transparent, FERPA-compliant communication with the campus community
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Introduction

Bias incidents and hate crimes, actions driven by prejudices based on a person's or community's real or perceived race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability or gender identity, instill fear, limit feelings of safety, and may have long-term impacts on the psychological and physical health of those targeted. On a college or university campus, acts motivated by bias or hate may adversely impact a students' academic success or the sense of belonging, cause or exacerbate divisions between communities, erode trust in campus institutions and university leadership, and contribute to an unsafe and unwelcoming environment. Left unaddressed, incidents that target individuals or groups based on their identity undermine an institution's academic mission by eroding students' willingness to openly contribute to the diversity of voices and perspectives essential for learning. A campus with a strong system for reporting, investigating and communicating about hate incidents sends a clear message that the safety and well-being of its community are a top priority.

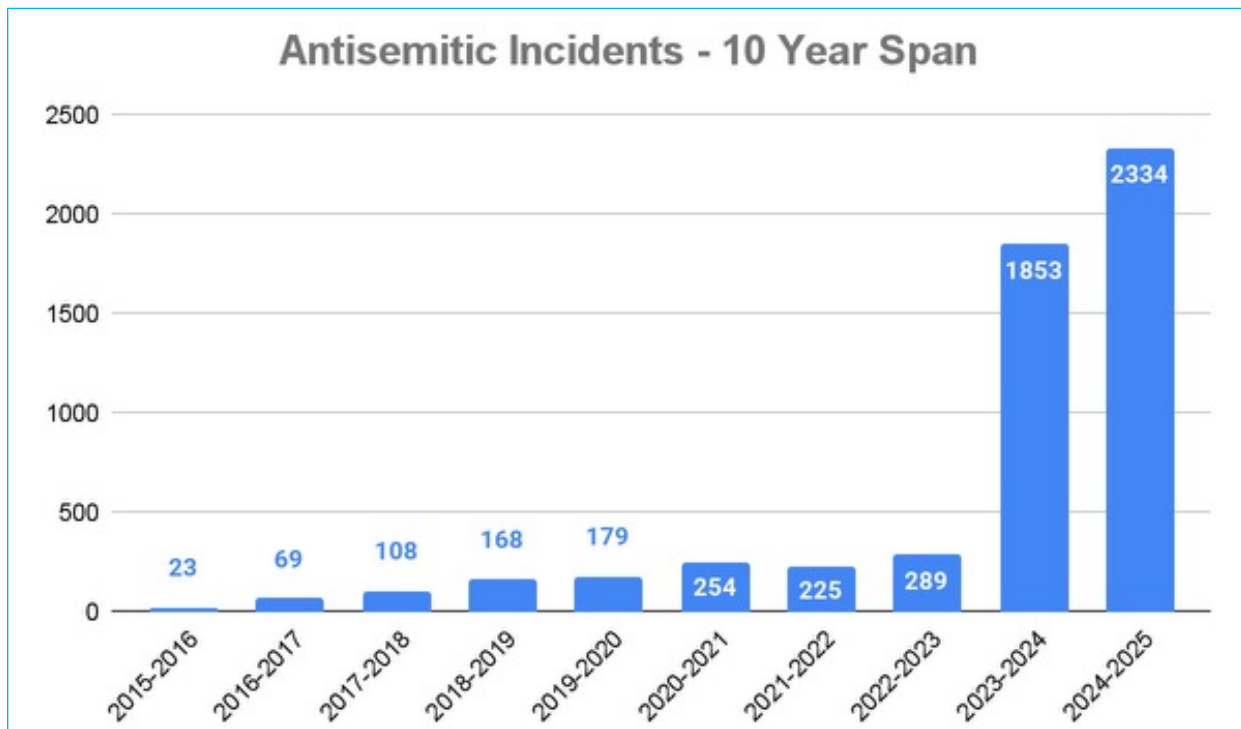
Bias Incidents and Hate Crimes

Bias incidents and hate crimes are motivated by prejudice against a person or group based on the characteristics mentioned above, regardless of whether the targets actually identify with one of these groups or if the perpetrator merely perceives them to be part of a group. A hate crime is a criminal act and is punishable under law.¹ A bias incident is a hostile act such as a derogatory comment or offensive gesture, which may or may not violate an institutional policy, but does not violate the law. As a result, when a bias incident is committed on or adjacent to campus, targeted students cannot seek redress through the courts. Instead, they must rely on effective responses from their institution, which hinges on an effective system of reporting and investigation.

Incidents Targeting the Jewish Community

Though hate crimes decreased 1.5% nationally in 2024 from the prior year according to the FBI's 2024 Reported Crimes in the Nation Statistics, crimes targeting the Jewish community increased by 5.8% (2,080 incidents).² Jews comprise only 2% of the U.S. population yet were the target of 69% of all reported religion-based hate crimes.³

Over the past 10 years, Hillel has documented a disturbing rise in antisemitic acts targeting Jewish students on campuses in the U.S., with a sharp increase of more than 4,200 incidents after the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.⁴ These hateful acts include slurs, graffiti, harassment, bullying, vandalism, threats of violence and assault, and happen both on and adjacent to campus and online.



¹ <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/learn-about-hate-crimes#hatecrime>

² <https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/fbi-releases-2024-reported-crimes-in-the-nation-statistics>

³ <https://www.jewishfederations.org/blog/all/fbi-data-497668>

⁴ Hillel International, July 2025

Colleges and universities are required under federal law to collect and report data on bias incidents and hate crimes, to provide appropriate and effective support to victims, and to ameliorate any resultant hostile environments. In this document, CCI provides **best practices** for campus administrators to **implement an effective, centralized mechanism for students to report bias incidents and hate crimes** to the administration. **CCI seeks to ensure that all students who have been targeted by, or who have witnessed, a bias incident or hate crime know how to file a report and that campuses have processes in place that instill confidence, provide transparency, align with legal mandates, bring about appropriate and timely resolutions and help maintain or restore an environment conducive to student success and the institution's academic mission.** This guide does not address processes required by Offices of Equal Opportunity, the Clery Act and Title IX, or reporting by offices of campus safety to compliance units within an institution.

Why is bias incident and hate crime reporting essential?

Colleges and universities that have a robust system for reporting bias incidents and hate crimes send a clear message that they value the wellbeing of their community members and that such actions violate campus values and/or policies and will not be tolerated. Reporting processes allow students to inform their institution of hateful actions committed against them and to receive the support and assistance they want or need. Data collected through reporting allows administrators and law enforcement to fully understand the scope of a particular incident and to track disturbing trends, allocate appropriate and sufficient resources to address and prevent bias acts, and educate the campus community about the harm caused to targeted communities and to the campus as a whole.

A 2021 ADL study reported that 43% of Jewish students had witnessed or experienced acts of antisemitism within the last year, but only 41% knew how to report those incidents.⁵ A subsequent survey conducted in Fall 2024 revealed the number of Jewish students who had witnessed or experienced antisemitic acts had risen to 83% while 88% had opted not to report them.⁶ When asked why they chose not to report, students' most common responses were a lack of trust in the institution's systems or processes, or because they were concerned they would not be taken seriously or believed.⁷ These responses underscore the importance of effective incident reporting systems and investigation practices to ensure that the environment in which Jewish and all students learn is safe and supportive.

Legal Obligations of Colleges and Universities

The Clery Act

The [Clery Act](#) requires colleges and universities that receive federal funding to report campus crime data, support victims, and publicly outline their campus safety policies and procedures.⁸ Crimes covered by the Clery Act include, but are not limited to, homicide, sexual assault, robbery, arson, hate crimes, domestic violence, stalking, and weapons law violations. Failure to report crime data can result in fines of up to \$69,733 per violation.

Clery Act crime reporting is required for crimes committed on campus, including in student housing, on public property within campus boundaries, on public property immediately adjacent to campus, certain non-campus buildings, and on properties that are used for educational purposes or are otherwise frequently used by students, including off-campus Hillel buildings.

⁵ <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/adl-hillel-campus-antisemitism-survey-2021>

⁶ <http://adl.org/resources/report/campus-antisemitism-one-year-after-hamas-terrorist-attacks>

⁷ <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/campus-antisemitism-study-campus-climate-and-after-hamas-terrorist-attacks>

⁸ <https://www.clerycenter.org/the-clery-act>

FERPA

Bias incident and hate crime investigations must comply with the regulations and requirements of the [Family Education Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#).⁹ FERPA is a federal law that protects the privacy of students' educational records by imposing upon institutions a legal responsibility to keep them confidential. If a student is over age 18, an institution cannot legally release their records without the student's consent. For students under 18, access to records is limited to the student's parents or guardians. While institutions may not be allowed by law to share certain details of a hate crime or bias incident investigation with the public, **they still need to provide the incident reporter with assurances that the incident is being investigated, resolved, or otherwise handled.** There are numerous ways in which administrators can update the reporter and the broader campus community about the progress of an investigation without violating FERPA protections. Doing so is important because it provides needed transparency and can improve reporting rates by assuring the campus community that their concerns are taken seriously.

There are a few narrow exemptions that may limit FERPA's privacy mandate that should be considered when updating the campus community about an incident. They include cases where there is an articulable threat to health and safety, such as a student who creates a "hit list" of Zionist students,¹⁰ physical assaults Jewish students, or damages Hillel property.¹¹ While it is not clear whether this exemption would apply after an incident has concluded, a second exemption for disclosures, which resides within the Higher Education Act (HEA), certainly would. HEA requires institutions to "upon written request, disclose to the alleged victim of violence ... the report on the results of a disciplinary proceeding against the [respondent]."¹² Given HEA's scope, any time a Title VI violation rises to the level of a violent crime, this exemption would apply. Additionally, FERPA itself provides allowances for similar disclosures related to disciplinary hearings following violent crimes, including some broader exemptions that allow disclosure beyond just the initial reporter.¹³

Campuses must weigh the privacy imperatives embedded in FERPA against the potential implications for student safety and campus climate when preparing communications about reported incidents. While, for example, an institution cannot identify by name an individual who is alleged to have committed a bias incident, it can release communications acknowledging an ongoing investigation, what the alleged incident entailed, and that, regardless of the investigation's outcome, the institution's values do not align with the alleged incident. These types of statements provide assurance to the community and encourage future reporting.

Incident Reporting

Colleges and universities should have an accessible reporting form that is easy to find on the institution's website, readable, and contains clear, user-friendly directions and proper tools to accommodate people with disabilities. It should also be widely - and frequently - publicized to the campus community.

The reporting form should contain prompts for the following information:

- What happened, when it happened and where
- Who was involved
 - Anonymous reporting should be allowed, but reporters should be advised that anonymity may decrease the likelihood that the incident will be resolved
- Uploading pictures and/or videos of the incident
- Types of support requested

⁹ *Complying With FERPA and State Laws* § 11.02

¹⁰ See e.g. *Risica ex rel. Risica v. Dumas*, 466 F. Supp. 2d 434

¹¹ See DOJ Press release on Cornell University Kosher dining hall threat

¹² 20 U.S.C. § 1094(a)(26)

¹³ *Baxter v. W. Wash. Univ.*, 20 Wn. App. 2d 646

Supporting Victims of Bias Incidents and Hate Crimes

Students, faculty, and community members who were the target of a bias incident or hate crime may want or need support including counseling, physical or mental healthcare, or other services. Making these resources known and available to individuals when they file a report will help them access what they are seeking.

A good way to help individuals access these resources is to include them on the incident reporting form, either as a direct request for referral by the reporter, or in the form of a list of suggested services. Resources to consider including are:

- College or university counseling center
- University hospital, health center, or other local healthcare provider
- Title IX office or coordinator
- Office of Student Affairs
- Behavioral Intervention Team
- Campus Police
- Housing and Residence Office
- Title VI Office

Your college or university may offer additional resources not listed above. It is best to include all resources that may be useful to individuals filing a report.

Incident Investigations

All reported incidents should be investigated fully and impartially by the university and law enforcement (in applicable cases). Investigations are necessary to gauge the validity of the report and will help determine what course of corrective and/or punitive action is needed.

Below are several considerations to keep in mind during an investigation:

- Witnesses may be hesitant or afraid to come forward with information. Make sure to conduct interviews in a safe and secure location and to provide an opportunity for them to remain anonymous if they wish to do so.
- Provide FERPA-compliant information and updates on the investigation process when possible. This may include notice of when an investigation has been opened and closed, a timetable for an investigation, and/or a progress update to the reporter and to the broader campus community. Transparency about the investigation improves trust in the reporting system, makes the reporter and their community feel valued, and increases the likelihood that future bias incidents and hate crimes will be reported.

As an added layer of transparency, institutions may consider creating a webpage that explains the role of the bias response team, the procedures the team will follow to investigate an incident, and what is reasonable for the community to expect in terms of the investigation and communication.

Resolution

After a thorough investigation has been conducted, it is important to resolve the matter and bring closure. Resolution should be reached as soon as possible to ensure that community members feel safe and valued.

Here are some things to keep in mind when resolving investigations:

- Punitive measures should be applied in a consistent and content neutral manner at all times.
- Bias incidents may be an opportunity for learning. While punitive measures may be necessary in some cases, they may not address prejudices or perceptions. Education that explores the root causes of hate and bias, that promotes empathy, respect, and understanding of diverse perspectives, and that implements restorative practices designed to promote healing helps the target, the respondent, and the community regain a sense of community and may prevent future incidents of a similar nature from occurring.
- Acts of bias and bigotry may come from a place of ignorance rather than hate. Incidents motivated by ignorance may require different responses than those driven by hate. Educational interventions, restorative justice processes or other responses focused on healing and repair may be more effective and appropriate when the respondent does not realize the harm their act has caused to their fellow community members.
- Resolutions should be publicly communicated in a manner that is consistent with FERPA and other legal requirements and should be accompanied by a statement from the administration that declares that the incident was not aligned with institutional values, and that shares next steps (e.g. new programming, support services, educational opportunities, etc.). This will build trust with the community and can serve as a teaching opportunity to inform others of biases and how to confront and overcome them.

Transparency in Communication

To ensure accountability and better inform the campus community, it is important that institutions are transparent in communicating about bias incidents and hate crimes.

Transparent communication:

- Informs the public of the incident
- Explains why the incident may be a bias incident or hate crime
- Provides updates on the investigation/resolution process
- Provides details of the resolution and explains why the university came to its conclusion (consistent with FERPA and other legal requirements)

Transparency can improve trust within the community. Additionally, it holds the university accountable and helps to ensure the review of the highest number of cases possible.

Examples

The University of Michigan

The University of Michigan's incident report form follows best practices because:

- A link to the form is accessible from the university's main landing page.
- The form is clear and easy to use. Large, bold, black text against a white background makes it easy to read.
- It includes a button to exit the site for additional ease of use and privacy.

Report Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination and Harassment

U-M ASTRONOMY WILL LEAD ITS FIRST SATELLITE MISSION

The first space mission led by the University of Michigan Department of Astronomy is scheduled to launch in 2029. The mission is called STARR—Starlight Acquisition and Reflection toward Interferometry—and will showcase the viability of a new technique for studying exoplanets, or planets outside of our solar system. [Learn more about this mission](#)

Report a Concern

I am: (required)

☐ Faculty

☐ Staff

☐ Student

☐ Other

I am reporting: (required)

☐ My own experience and I understand EORT will follow up with me and may need to take additional steps to follow up on the concerns

☐ For someone else or as a required reporter

☐ Anonymously and I understand reporting this way may limit the university's ability to follow up appropriately

Name (required)

Email (required)

Please enter the email address in the format: example@domain.com

Phone

Please use this format: (888) 888-8888

Preferred Contact Method

☐ U-M Email

☐ Non U-M Email

[EXIT THIS SITE](#)

[Click here to view The University of Michigan's form \(pictured above\)](#)

Indiana University

Indiana University's investigation process aligns with best practices because it relies on a dedicated team that investigates all reports and provides transparency into the response and resolution processes. A dedicated page on the university website explains the roles of the bias response team, what procedures the team will follow, and what is reasonable for the community to expect.

What You Can Expect

A campus team of trained university officials privately reviews all submitted bias incident reports with responses typically 1-2 business days of reporting an incident.

The university's response includes:	Possible outcomes include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Conversation(s) centered around the incident and impacted person(s)Refer reporter to appropriate campus offices that can effectively respondRefer impacted to support resourcesIncident assessment, response planOngoing support and check-ins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">1-on-1 ongoing supportEngage person(s) impacting othersEngage leaders to address systemic issuesMediation and facilitated dialogue

[Report a Bias Incident](#)

Faculty and staff who experience bias incidents

Contact the [Office for Institutional Equity](#) if you are a faculty or staff member who has experienced a bias incident.

What Is the Bias Incident Process?

- 1 IU member experiences, witnesses, or becomes aware of a bias incident and reports it.
- 2 Within 1-2 days, IU officials contact involved parties.
- 3 IU officials meet with those affected, collect information, offer support, and discuss next steps.
- 4 IU officials activate response plan with ongoing support.

[View a larger version of the Bias Incident Process](#)

Role of the Bias Response Team

Indiana University fosters campus communities where all are welcomed, valued, respected, and belong. In furthering this mission, IU's bias response officials provide support resources to impacted parties, promote education and dialogue, and affirm the university's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

What We Do:	What We Don't Do:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Conversation(s) centered around the incident and impacted person(s)Refer to support services or offices who can appropriately respondLog all reported incidents and track for trendsNotify campus leaders of ongoing bias incidents and trendsEducate and consult the campus community about biasInform the campus community about our work through informational meetings and annual reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Take disciplinary actionConduct formal investigationsImpinge on free speech rights and academic freedom

[Click here to view Indiana University's bias incident reporting and response webpage](#)

Additionally, Indiana University sends out an annual FERPA-compliant report which includes aggregated data on bias incidents, the actions taken by the university, and any changes or initiatives the university is undertaking to prevent future incidents. As part of their preventive efforts, they provide community-wide education and resources to address the root causes of bias incidents.

Syracuse University

Syracuse University's form is easy to use, allows for anonymous entries, and provides access to a robust complement of supportive services through links and phone numbers. Supportive services are categorized as confidential and non-confidential and include resource centers that provide support to specific communities including Disability Cultural Center, LGBTQ+ Resource Center, and Muslim Student Life Program.

STOP Bias is a University-wide initiative through Community Standards that educates the campus community about bias. We provide resources to report and receive support for bias-motivated incidents.

By [recognizing](#), [reporting](#), and [preventing](#) bias-related incidents, we can foster an even more inclusive campus community where all members feel welcomed and supported.

If you have been the target of bias (or have witnessed or heard about a bias-motivated incident), please report the incident below.

This form is NOT for emergencies that present an immediate threat.
If you require emergency assistance, please call the Department of Public Safety at 315-443-2224, #78, or 911.

Your confidentiality and trust are very important to us. We will make every effort to respect your privacy. Please be aware, however, in certain circumstances involving safety or potential criminal action, we may not be able to guarantee complete anonymity. Regardless of the situation, matters are generally handled discreetly and in conformity with university privacy policies. Information about individuals or situations will only be shared with individuals with a legitimate need to know.

While anonymous reports are acceptable, it may limit our ability to obtain the information we need to respond to an incident and/or to provide campus community support to you or others who experienced the incident. Anyone reporting an incident through this form is encouraged to provide a phone number and/or an email address so that we may contact you.

Please note, reports to STOP Bias are not included in the Department of Public Safety's bias incident report unless the reporter chooses to refer the incident to the Department of Public Safety or the nature of the incident requires DPS involvement.

Important University Policies:

- [Student Conduct Code](#)
- [Anti-Harassment Policy](#)
- [Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunity Statement](#)

To report an incident directly to the Department of Public Safety, please refer to the options on the [Report a Crime](#) page.

You can disclose your experience to any of the following **confidential support** resources, and they will assist you:

- [Barnes Center at the Arch](#) (Counseling Center and Health Services) - 315.443.8000
- [Hendricks Chapel](#) (All Chaplains) - 315.443.2901
- [University Ombuds](#) (Faculty/Staff/Graduate Students Only) - 315.443.1087
- [The Trevor Project](#) (Off-Campus - Non-SU) - 212.695.8650

Please note that all other resources on campus are considered mandated reporters, but we will keep all information as private as possible.

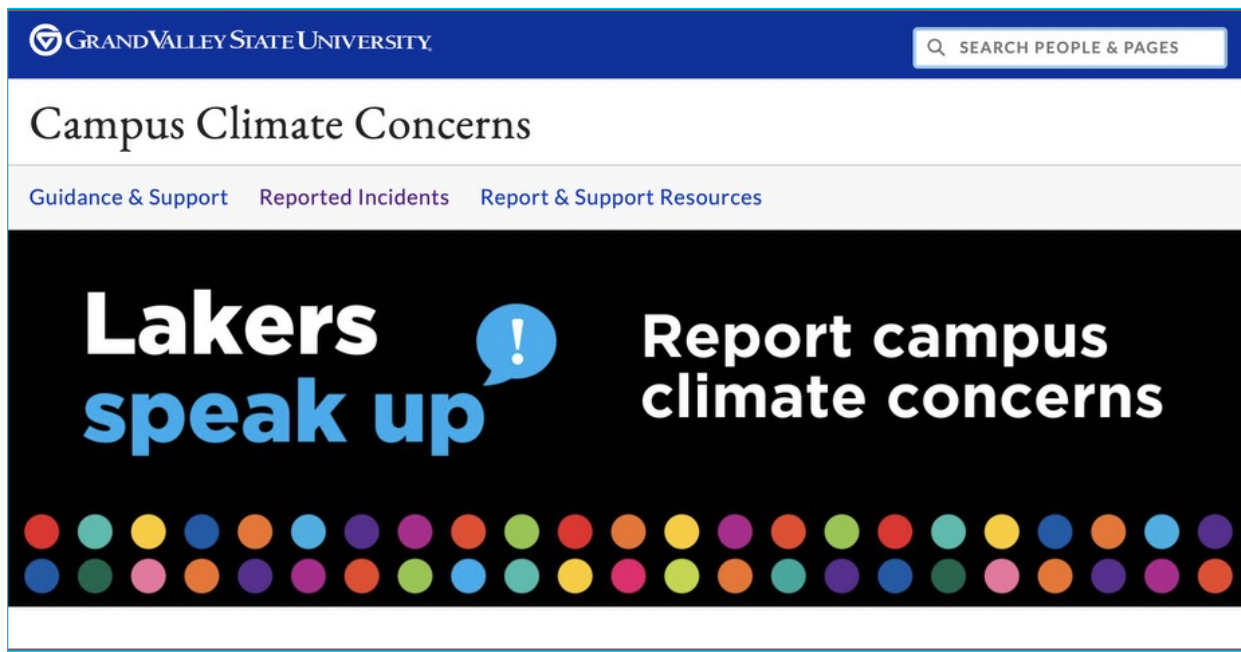
Private Reporting

- [Center for Disability Resources](#)
- [Community Standards](#) (STOP Bias)
- [Dean of Students](#)
- [Student Outreach and Support](#)
- [Student Title IX Case Management](#)
- [Department of Public Safety](#)
- [Office of Equal Opportunity, Inclusion, and Resolution Services \(EOIRS\)](#) (for matters involving faculty/staff)

Additional Support (Non-Confidential)

- [Intercultural Collective](#)
- [Barner-McDuffie House](#)
- [Belonging and Student Success](#)
- [Center for International Services](#)
- [Disability Cultural Center](#)
- [Kessler Scholars](#) (First Generation Programs)
- [LGBTQ+ Resource Center](#)
- [Native Student Programs](#) (113 Euclid)
- [Muslim Student Life](#)
- [Office of People and Culture \(OPC\)](#)
- [La Casita Cultural Center](#)
- [Community Folk Art Center](#)
- [National Veterans Resource Center \(NVRC\)](#)
- [Syracuse Hillel](#)

[Click here to view the form on Syracuse University's website](#)



[Click here to view Grand Valley State's Campus Climate Concerns landing page](#)

GVSU provides one landing page with information about how to report a concern or incident. This page includes information about accessing resources to support student wellbeing, filing a bias incident report, and ways to engage in conflict resolution on campus. It also defines bias incidents and hate crimes under federal, state, or local law. The institution shares detailed information about why and how students should report incidents and what will happen once they do which provides transparency.

GVSU also provides regular public updates and shares data about incidents on campus each semester. Campus leadership is clear about the relationship between university values and its expectations for expressive activity and limitations to free speech protected under the First Amendment.

Support and Consultation for Your Campus

The CCI team is available to consult and provide resources to assist your campus in improving your bias incident and hate crime reporting system. Services available include:

- Review of your campus' bias incident reporting form
- Legal policy review (CCI cohort campuses only)
- Sharing resources from other campuses
- Incident prevention and campus safety strategies

For more information or to set up a consultation, contact CCI at cci@hillel.org

About the Hillel Campus Climate Initiative

CCI is a collaboration between Hillel International, higher education administrators and campus-based Hillel professionals that fosters a positive, affirming campus climate where Jewish students feel comfortable expressing their identity and values, free from antisemitism, harassment, and marginalization. If you have questions or wish to consult with the CCI team, please contact us at cci@hillel.org.