

Subject: [ALL_STUDENTS] Update on Bias-Related Incident
Date: Tuesday, October 3, 2017 at 4:12:41 PM Pacific Daylight Time
From: Miriam Feldblum
To: All_Students Mailing List
Attachments: image001.png, image002.png

Dear Members of the Pomona College Community,

I am writing to follow up on the message from Dean Townes last week (see below) regarding the memes and postings that recently came to the College's attention. The IRT has completed its review and recommendations.

Reviewing the information received, the IRT found the memes were bias-related *and* protected speech. In addition, the College did not find a basis to initiate an investigation into the Facebook group or individual students for possible violations of the Student Code or our Discrimination and Harassment Policy. However, the memes are an affront to our community values and our expectations of each other as we live, learn and work together. They are, to reiterate the IRT's finding, deeply offensive, and include misogynistic, racist, Islamophobic, anti-immigrant, and anti-Semitic images and texts.

The IRT has recommended that the College undertake more proactive education to the community about what constitutes bias and/or policy violations related to speech, discrimination and harassment, and the ways to report and respond to bias. Their recommendations regarding more education are being shared with the President's Advisory Committee on Diversity and with colleagues across The Claremont Colleges.

As suggested by the IRT, I want to take this opportunity now to review when speech or images may constitute a violation of College policy:

For verbal abuse, threats, intimidation or harassment to be a violation of the Student Code, it has to meet the following conditions as outlined in the [Student Code](#):

- Verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, or harassment. An act which is speech alone shall not be considered to violate this paragraph unless it is a threat of violence; or*
- (1) the speech, considered objectively, is abusive and insulting rather than a communication of ideas,*
 - (2) the speech is directed at an individual and actually used in an abusive manner in a situation that presents an actual danger that it will cause an immediate breach of the peace by inciting a violent reaction by the individual to whom the speech is addressed and,*
 - (3) the student intends the speech to be abusive and insulting rather than a communication of ideas.*

To bring a claim under our [Discrimination and Harassment Policy](#), there are also different conditions and thresholds; and, a student, staff, or faculty member can bring a complaint directly to the College. Here is information from the [policy](#):

Prohibited harassment includes, but is not limited to, epithets, slurs, derogatory comments or jokes,

intimidation, negative stereotyping, threats, assault or any physical interference with the employee's normal work or movement. Harassment may also include written or graphic material placed on walls, bulletin boards or elsewhere on the College's premises or circulated in the workplace that denigrates, shows hostility or aversion towards an individual or group because of the characteristics identified above. Whether or not the person means to give offense or believed his or her comments or conduct were welcome is not significant. Rather, the College's Policy is violated when other workers, whether recipients or mere observers are, in fact, offended by comments or conduct based on any of the specified protected categories referenced above. Generally, to count as harassment under this Policy, such conduct must:

*be based upon one or more of the categories mentioned in the [non-discrimination policy](#);
be offensive to the individual complaining of harassment and offensive to a reasonable person;
and*

be so persistent, repetitive, pervasive, or severe that it has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's academic or professional performance or creating an intimidating, abusive or hostile educational, employment or living environment at the College.

Generally, statements and/or conduct legitimately and reasonably related to the College's mission of education do not constitute harassment.

Harassment may also occur when submission to conduct described above is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, education, living environment at the College, or participation in a College activity.

I believe it should be our expectation as Pomona College community members that we engage with each other thoughtfully, hold each other accountable and call out bigotry and bias.

Sincerely,

Dean Feldblum

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From: Ric Townes [<mailto:Ric.Townes@pomona.edu>]

Sent: Monday, September 25, 2017 2:27 PM
To: All_Students Mailing List <All_Students@listserv.pomona.edu>
Subject: [ALL_STUDENTS] Bias-related Incident

September 25, 2017

To the Pomona College Community:

A recent article in the *Claremont Independent* raised awareness on campus of a secret Facebook meme group reportedly containing deeply offensive memes (including misogynistic, racist, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic images and texts). This prompted the activation of Pomona's Bias-Related Incident Response Team (IRT) at the request of Miriam Feldblum, vice president and dean of students. I am writing to report to the community about the group's findings so far.

As stated in the [Student Handbook](#), Pomona defines incidents as bias-related when they "are expressions of hostility against another individual (or group) because of the other person's (or group's) race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, gender identity or expression and sexual orientation, or because the perpetrator perceives that the other person (or group) has one or more of these characteristics. Depending on the circumstances, a bias-related incident may not be a crime and may be protected speech. The conduct underlying some bias-related incidents may violate the College's policies, including provisions of the Student Code and the Harassment and Discrimination Policy."

Based on these criteria, the IRT has determined that the posts to the meme group rise to the level of a bias-related incident and with regard to the Student Code or other policy violation, the matter is still being reviewed. We will report to the community when that review is concluded.

We strongly condemn the reported memes for expressions of bias that are antithetical to Pomona's community values and to our commitment to an educational environment free from discrimination. As a college community, we expect respectful conduct from each other and from ourselves.

While discussing this particular incident, the IRT believed it was important to place it in the context of the social environment at Pomona and the other Claremont Colleges. Pomona College fully expects all its students, faculty and staff members to be treated with respect and common courtesy and to move around the campus free from harassment and discrimination.

I also want to take this opportunity to remind members of the Pomona community about how to make a report and about our policies and procedures for handling these types of reports.

To file a report about a possible bias-related incident, community members can submit an [online form](#). This link will take you to our policies and procedures defining a hate crime or bias-related incident and explaining what a student should do if they have been the target of such an incident. The document also explains how Pomona College will respond when it receives such a report. In addition, the [Non-Discrimination Policy](#) in the Student Handbook lays out the contacts and procedures related to harassment and discrimination complaints.

If you have any questions, concerns or comments, please contact me. The IRT team depends upon feedback from students to help us refine and improve our policies and procedures. We strive to foster a campus environment in which respect and a strong sense of community thrive.

Ric Townes, Chair

(On behalf of the Incident Response Team (IRT))