

## Chapter 6

# Eliminating Bullying in the University: The University of Wisconsin-Madison's Hostile & Intimidating Behavior Policy

*Jennifer Sheridan, Russell Dimond, Tammera Klumpanyan,  
Heather M. Daniels, Michael Bernard-Donals, Russell Kutz  
and Amy E. Wendt*

### Abstract

In the early 2010s, the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) became increasingly concerned about incidents of academic workplace “bullying” on the campus, and in 2014–2016 created policies designed to address such behavior at the University. The new policies and accompanying initiatives were implemented in 2017, defining a new term to describe these behaviors as “hostile and intimidating behavior” (HIB). We use data from three sources to explore the outcomes of the new HIB policies and initiatives to date. Evaluation data from training sessions show the importance of educating the campus community about HIB, providing evidence that the training sessions increase HIB knowledge. Data from two campus-wide surveys measure incidence of HIB for different groups on campus (e.g., analysis by gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, rank, job duty, and/or the intersection of these characteristics), as well as changes in the knowledge about HIB as reported by faculty and staff. These data show that UW-Madison faculty and staff are increasing their knowledge of HIB as a problem and also increasing their knowledge about what to do about it. Underrepresented groups who more commonly experience HIB agree that this culture is improving. At the same time, we are seeing slow and uneven progress in reduction of actual incidence of HIB

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at UW-Madison. We close with some “lessons learned” about instituting such a sweeping, campus-wide effort to reduce HIB, in the hopes that other campuses can learn from our experience.

*Keywords:* Bullying; academic bullying; workplace bullying; academia; higher education; climate surveys; academic policy; harassment; incivility

## Introduction

Academic “bullying” is a form of harassment and intimidation that has been shown to create a hostile working environment for faculty, staff, and student targets of the bullying (Akella, 2020; Prevost and Hunt, 2018). The types of behaviors that many studies define as “bullying” include negative acts such as spreading gossip or rumors, withholding information, or yelling. This behavior must typically be repeated and persistent, creating a “hostile work environment,” in order to be defined as “bullying.”

Academic bullying is related to other forms of harassing behaviors in the workplace such as sexual harassment and discrimination, but at UW-Madison we treat it as distinct due to the legal landscape in the United States around these different types of harassing behaviors. Sexual harassment refers to a broad category of behaviors that can include hostile working environments, quid-pro-quo harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, stalking, and other forms of harassment and intimidation related to targeting of a victim as a sexual object (Bondes-tam and Lundqvist, 2020). These kinds of harassment are not only prohibited by state and federal laws in the United States, but in academia are specifically governed by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Discrimination – differential treatment based on any protected status including sex or gender, racial/ethnic background, sexual orientation, veteran status, religion, age, disability, and others – is similarly covered by both federal and state employment laws (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). Bullying, in contrast, is not typically an “illegal” workplace behavior (e.g., Chew, 2010; Ballard and Eastal, 2018; Hodgins, MacCurtain, and Mannix-McNamara, 2020). It is not “illegal” to yell at someone, consistently leave them off of meeting invitations, or advise students not to work with a particular professor, unless of course those actions can be proven to have occurred due to the specific situations of sexual harassment or discrimination. Bullying behaviors are rarely punishable under existing harassment and discrimination laws and yet are no less harmful.

Power dynamics are a hallmark of this type of behavior, in that the party with less power and status is typically unable to defend themselves (Salin, 2001; Hodgins and Mannix McNamara, 2019; Hodgins, MacCurtain, and Mannix-McNamara, 2020). The environment created by bullying thus defined can lead to reduced productivity (Lampman et al., 2016; Cassell, 2011; Fogg, 2008), physical symptoms including both mental and physical health symptoms (Cassell, 2011; Keim and McDermott, 2010; Lampman et al., 2016), lawsuits and scandal (Cassell, 2011; Lampman, 2012), and attrition from the university (Faria, Mixon,

and Salter, 2012). Research shows that in academia, targets of academic bullying are disproportionately members of underrepresented identities (Striebing, 2022a, 2022c), including women (Lampman, 2012; Schraudner, Striebing, and Hochfeld, 2019), persons of color (Lampman, 2012), sexual minorities (Misawa, 2015), and persons with disabilities (Leymann, 1993, as cited in Hecker, 2007).

Given the well-known gaps in work satisfaction and attrition in academia of these very groups (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education [COACHE], 2014; Stewart and Valian, 2018; Striebing, 2022b; WISELI, 2020), it is imperative to address academic bullying if we hope to recruit, retain, and enhance the productivity and careers of persons currently underrepresented in academia. Correlating the data on differing rates of satisfaction among faculty members based on status and background with that identifying the physical and psychological costs of bullying in the workplace, it is possible to hypothesize that one significant reason why universities have not been more successful in their efforts to recruit and retain a more diverse workforce is due to their failure to address bullying. It is also possible that universities may be able to reduce costs associated with faculty and staff turnover and mental health – not just financial costs but also costs to the well-being of its people – by making efforts to reduce bullying among its employees.

## **Policy Action to Reduce Academic Bullying at the University of Wisconsin-Madison**

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison), incidences of academic bullying have been publicized in local media for several decades (e.g., UW-Madison Oral History Project, 2003; Wisconsin State Journal, 2019). Campus organizations such as the Ombuds Office, the Employee Assistance office, and the Office of Equity and Diversity consistently reported that bullying behaviors were a sizeable proportion of the employee complaints that they uncovered (UW-Madison Ombuds Office, 2017). It was acknowledged by these groups that bullying behavior was difficult to eradicate with the existing policies and practices of our university because human resources issues were often confidential and therefore employees who engaged in this behavior could be moved from unit to unit with no knowledge of the bullying behavior following the individual. Furthermore, without good campus policies and procedures around these issues, retaliation against persons who reported this behavior were common, potentially leading to under-reporting of bullying behavior (Schraudner, Striebing, and Hochfeld, 2019; Ballard and East-eal, 2018). Finally, a sense of resignation that no progress could be made in this area due to the tenure protections of faculty members hindered efforts to address the issue. No consistent measurement of the incidence of bullying behavior on the UW-Madison campus had ever been undertaken, so the prevalence of the behavior was unknown.

In the early 2010s, the UW-Madison became increasingly concerned about incidents of academic bullying on the campus, especially in relation to the loss of treasured faculty and staff who are members of underrepresented groups. Begun by an ad hoc working group led by the deans of two colleges at the university in

2013, the effort culminated in the creation by shared governance groups of official policies and initiatives designed to address bullying behavior among faculty and staff at the University. In 2014–2016, these policies were formally approved by all three major governance groups<sup>1</sup> at the University. The new policies were passed first by the Faculty Senate in November of 2014, then by the Academic Staff Assembly in December 2014, and finally by the University Staff in December 2016. Recognizing that policy in itself is insufficient (Hodgins, MacCurtain, & Mannix-McNamara, 2020), in the 2015–2016 academic year, a committee comprised of faculty and staff met to determine how to implement the policies and to build a set of initiatives around the policies that would help the campus community understand the nature of hostile and intimidating behavior (HIB), its effects, and its prevention. The committee presented its recommendations in the fall of 2016 (UW-Madison, 2016) and the provost’s office began the implementation process shortly thereafter.

The new policies and initiatives were designed to create institutional transformation around the complex (Greenhalgh and Papoutsis, 2018), multilevel issue of academic bullying by addressing it from multiple levels (Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace, 2018; Anicha et al., 2017) – at the structural level through institutional policy and resources; at the cultural level through training and education programs; and at the individual level through invitations to intervene and to advocate for oneself and others on this issue. The enforcement of these policies relied on existing mechanisms for discipline, dismissal and appeal.

The implementation of the policies passed by the UW-Madison governance bodies are composed of six elements, with some small differences among the groups.

1. *Definition of “hostile and intimidating behavior.”* In order to eliminate the destructive behavior known as “bullying” in much of the literature, we needed to have a single and clear definition of this behavior in order to create consistent and uniform policies and practices, as well as define the new norms we wish to have at UW-Madison. Given that there is no universally agreed-upon definition (Hodgins and Mannix McNamara, 2017), our governance bodies created the new term “hostile and intimidating behavior (HIB),” defined as “unwelcome behavior pervasive or severe enough

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<sup>1</sup>UW-Madison has three main governance groups: A faculty senate, an academic staff assembly, and a university staff congress. “Faculty” consist of the traditional jobs of “assistant professor,” “associate professor,” and “professor”; the associate professor and professor titles have tenure. Academic staff and university staff are designations for different types of non-tenure-eligible staff positions in the university, primarily based on job duties. University staff perform jobs that are comparable to other state employees and are or were in the past represented by state employee unions (e.g., administrative support, building trades, security and public safety, and fiscal staff services). Academic staff perform jobs that are unique to the university (e.g., lecturer, researcher, or academic advisor).

that a reasonable person would find it hostile and/or intimidating and that does not further the University's academic or operational interests." On our campus, what most people refer to as "bullying" is known as "HIB." This definition is further embellished on the UW-Madison HIB website (UW-Madison, 2017).

2. *Create new procedures for reporting HIB.* The governance groups created two avenues for addressing HIB behaviors. *Informal approaches* include gathering information, consulting multiple campus resources (including HIB liaisons, see below), having the target of the behavior address the behavior in a conversation with the source of the behavior (with or without an intermediary), or bringing the matter to a superior to seek advice. *Formal approaches* involve filing a written complaint, which is investigated by various offices, and could include filing a grievance if the complaint does not address the issue.
3. *Define best practices for handling HIB as a supervisor, or as a bystander/peer.* In order to foster a new campus culture eliminating HIB, our entire workforce needs to know how best to handle these situations. Governance groups ensured that there were best practices communicated to rank and file faculty and staff, human resources (HR) representatives in the schools and colleges, department chairs and deans, and the university HR managers, to engage the entire community in shared responsibility for addressing and mitigating the occurrence of HIB.
4. *Create accessible resources including a website.* To communicate the new policies and information about best practices for addressing HIB, at minimum a website must be created to disseminate the new information to the campus community. Other resources (e.g., lists of relevant offices, easy-to-follow guidelines for addressing HIB issues that arise) also needed development as well as a communication strategy for making these resources available (UW-Madison, 2017).
5. *Create a training program about the new HIB policy and resources.* A 90-minute in-person workshop, currently also offered on a virtual platform, informs faculty and staff on what HIB is, how to distinguish it from other harmful behavior, and provides a deeper understanding of policies and procedures to address it, in an effort to promote cultural change. Twenty volunteer faculty and staff, from schools, colleges and divisions across the campus, serve as workshop facilitators.
6. *Train trusted faculty and staff liaisons from many different campus units to provide confidential advice about HIB.* A key element to adding resources to our campus so that anyone with a HIB issue can find a way to address it is to increase the number of people who are trained to give advice and help. A new set of trained, well-connected, and trusted people, "HIB Liaisons," were trained to be a new resource for people either experiencing HIB, or accused of it. In addition, HR representatives and HR managers have been trained to understand the dynamics of HIB and how to address it when consulted by faculty, staff, and administrators.

These new policies and practices are similar to approaches taken at other academic institutions (Hodgins, MacCurtain, and Mannix-McNamara, 2017, 2020) and have now been in place at the UW-Madison for approximately four years, if we consider the “start” of the policy to be the date on which the website was introduced in Summer of 2017, advertising the policies and their implementation to the entire UW-Madison community. In this paper, we wish to understand whether and how they are working in the complex system that is UW-Madison. Addressing the problem of HIB at multiple levels, we have the infrastructure in place to manage incidents of HIB; we are working to change the culture around HIB through education; and we are providing individuals with more opportunities and methods for dealing with this behavior and preventing it before it happens. Are we achieving our goals? To uncover whether we are making progress toward decreasing and ultimately eliminating the incidence of HIB on the UW-Madison campus, we examine several data sources to learn:

1. Are people at UW-Madison more aware of HIB than they used to be?
2. Do people at UW-Madison know what to do if they experience HIB, or if someone comes to them with a concern about HIB?
3. Do people from underrepresented groups who are differentially impacted by HIB feel that the campus is dealing with it appropriately?
4. Do people from underrepresented groups disproportionately experience HIB, and is that incidence increasing or decreasing since the new policies were enacted?
5. Is the overall incidence of HIB at UW-Madison increasing or decreasing?

## Data Sources

Data from three sources will help us examine these questions about culture change around HIB and incidence of HIB over time at UW-Madison.

### *Hostile and Intimidating Behavior Workshop Evaluations*

The primary way that the new UW-Madison policy will address culture change around HIB is through a 90-minute case-based workshop, available either to faculty and staff as individuals, or to department/units at UW-Madison who request a workshop (UW-Madison, 2016). A working committee composed of 11 faculty and staff created the content, and it was piloted in early 2018, with an initial version of the workshop presented to groups of campus leaders including deans, department chairs, center directors, and managers. After adjusting the content following the early sessions, the workshops were launched to the broader campus in July 2018. By fall of 2019 the workshops were offered to night shift employees and employees who speak Spanish, Tibetan, Mandarin, Hmong, and Nepali languages. By Summer 2020 (and including pilot workshops), we have delivered 64 workshops to approximately 1,444 individuals, most of whom are in the academic staff and university staff employment categories; few are faculty except for campus leaders such as department chairs. The campus has trained a group

of 20 presenters to deliver these workshops, and most workshops are run by two to three facilitators per workshop. Workshops are advertised to UW-Madison faculty and staff through the “Working at UW” campus newsletter for employees, the HIB website (UW-Madison, 2017), the employee professional development course catalog, as part of new employee orientation, programming for new department chairs, and training for supervisors.

Within 24 hours of workshop participation, attendees are emailed an online workshop evaluation form, and we have consistent data from these forms for January 2019 through October 2020. Approximately 38% (338/891) of the attendees during this period have completed this form. Data from the workshop evaluation forms can inform us whether our goal of changing the UW-Madison culture around HIB is successful, at least for the employees who have been through the training. No demographic data were collected on these forms so we are unable to examine differential responses of different groups.

### ***Study of Faculty Worklife at UW-Madison (SFW)***

At various intervals since 2003, the Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI, a campus research center) has been fielding a climate survey of UW-Madison faculty members, the *Study of Faculty Worklife (SFW) at UW-Madison* (WISELI, 2020). In 2016, WISELI asked four new questions about HIB on the survey, and followed them up with the same items in 2019. Because the HIB policies and definitions were not widely disseminated across campus until at least 2017, when the HIB website was introduced and the workshops made available, or even 2018 when the new website was advertised to the UW-Madison community (UW-Madison News, 2018), the 2016 items will provide a “baseline” for HIB incidence and awareness among faculty, against which change can be assessed in 2019 (Table 25).

The advantage of the SFW survey is that we can assess differences between groups of faculty on their responses to the HIB questions, over time. Where sample size is large enough, we can also look at identity intersections (e.g., women with disabilities vs. women without) to more clearly understand which groups are most affected by HIB, and whether we are seeing improvements after implementation of the new campus policies.

In 2016, 1,285 faculty completed the survey, for a 58.6% response rate. In 2019, 1,116 responded, for a response rate of 53.1%. See Table 26 for detailed response rate information for each demographic group in the analysis.<sup>2</sup> Note that faculty of color (those who identify as Black, Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American, Pacific Islander, or indicate a bi-racial identity) respond at higher rates than the general population, particularly men of color.

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<sup>2</sup>Detailed information about variable construction is available upon request. LGBT is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender. Our survey did not ask about other identities for sexual/gender identity minority groups.

Table 25. Timeline for HIB Policy and Measurement at UW-Madison.

Date	Event
Summer 2013	Two Deans convene an ad hoc working group to begin discussing issues of HIB at UW-Madison
November 2014	Faculty Senate passes HIB policy
December 2014	Academic Staff Assembly passes HIB policy
Fall 2015–Spring 2016	Ad Hoc Committee on Hostile and Intimidating Behavior convened to create policy implementation recommendations
Spring 2016	Faculty and Academic Staff climate surveys implemented
October 2016	Ad Hoc Committee on Hostile and Intimidating Behavior submits recommendations
December 2016	University Staff Congress passes HIB policy
July 2017	HIB website introduced
January 2018	University News advertises new website to faculty and staff
July 2018–Present	HIB workshops available to campus
Spring 2019	Faculty and Academic Staff Climate Surveys implemented

### ***Study of Academic Staff Worklife at UW-Madison (SASW)***

In 2016 and 2019, conducted in parallel with WISELI's *SFW*, the Academic Staff Executive Committee<sup>3</sup> commissioned a survey of all academic staff at UW-Madison, including items on HIB that were almost identical to the faculty survey. Because the size of the academic staff population at UW-Madison is so large, the number of responses (and therefore the ability to look at differences among different demographic groups) is much higher in the academic staff survey, even though the response rate is lower overall (see Table 26). In this group, notice that staff of color (defined in the same way as faculty, above) respond at about half the rate of their majority counterparts, with women staff of color slightly more likely to respond than men staff of color – but these rates are still much lower than their white counterparts.

### **Analytic Framework**

Analysis of the evaluation form data necessarily is at a summary level only. No questions were asked about demographic group, or even what employment category a respondent is in. In contrast, data from the *SFW* and the *Study of*

<sup>3</sup>The Academic Staff Executive Committee is the executive body for academic staff governance at UW-Madison.



Table 26. Response Rates, Climate Surveys.

Study of Faculty Worklife												
2016						2019						
All		Men		Women		All		Men		Women		
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
All	1,285	58.6	815	56.4	470	62.8	1,116	53.1	680	50.6	436	57.7
Person of color	208	71.2	131	75.3	77	65.3	190	64.6	102	60.4	88	70.4
LGBT	56	**	30	**	26	**	54	**	23	**	31	**
Disability	153	**	86	**	66	**	147	**	72	**	75	**

Study of Academic Staff Worklife												
2016						2019						
All		Men		Women		All		Men		Women		
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
All	2,350	33.2	586	19.2	1,228	31.1	2,552	25.7	653	15.1	1,607	28.7
Person of color	143	15.4	50	11.7	93	18.7	202	13.8	60	9.5	142	17.1
LGBT	147	**	52	**	95	**	239	**	77	**	162	**
Disability	276	**	92	**	184	**	435	**	117	**	318	**

\*\*Cannot calculate response rate because the number of LGBT and/or persons with disability in the faculty/staff overall is unknown.

*Academic Staff Worklife* includes demographic data based on gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and disability status. The sample sizes of these studies allow us to investigate how HIB may be affecting the worklife of some intersections of these identities, for example, men versus women of color. We look at these differences at the mean, understanding that the small sample sizes do not always allow for analyses of statistical significance in differences between and among groups.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, we take a broader approach, looking for patterns and trends to characterize the experiences of HIB among different identity groups.

We are interested in overall trends for all faculty and staff, but are especially interested in the groups that previous studies have shown may experience higher rates of academic bullying, specifically women, non-white, and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender) faculty and staff, and faculty and staff with disabilities. Further, within racial/ethnic, sexual orientation, and disability minority groups, it is important to look at gender differences, as men within these groups may have different experiences than women. Thus, our intersectional approach does not examine every intersection of these identities, but does examine the gender intersection, as that might be theorized to have large differences in experiences of bullying/HIB (Misra, Vaughan Curington, and Green, 2020).

## Results

First, we examine the extent of culture change around HIB at UW-Madison in the period from 2016 to 2019. We will examine the awareness of the issue among faculty and staff and the knowledge of what to do if HIB appears in one's workplace. We will then focus more narrowly on whether people in underrepresented groups feel there has been progress in the area of campus culture.

Workshop evaluation data show that individuals who have completed the HIB workshop have increased their awareness and knowledge of HIB as an important issue on campus. As shown in Table 27, over 65% of those who attend the workshop and fill out an evaluation form "strongly agree" that "I understand why HIB is a campus issue that we all must address." Almost 50% "strongly agree" that "the workshop increased my awareness about the frequency of HIB." Large majorities of attendees either "agree" or "strongly agree" that they have "learned how to recognize HIB," "learned the campus policy definitions of HIB," "learned how to address HIB when it happens," and "know where to find resource to help prevent and address HIB." "Learning how to address HIB when it happens" is perhaps the least well-learned skill taught in the training, with almost 15% of respondents reporting that they did not learn this skill. Certainly, these responses could reflect some social desirability effects, but because the forms are filled out in private, online, and not in the workshop itself in front of the presenters, we hope those effects are minimized.

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<sup>4</sup>We performed two-tailed *t*-tests between groups and across survey waves, with statistical significance defined as  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 27. Improved Knowledge of HIB by Workshop Attendees.

	% Strongly Disagree	% Disagree	% Agree	% Strongly Agree
I have learned how to recognize HIB	0.0	5.7	54.1	36.9
I have learned the campus policy definitions of HIB	0.0	1.6	58.2	39.3
The workshop increased my awareness about the frequency of HIB	0.0	5.7	45.1	48.4
I understand why HIB is a campus issue that we all must address	0.0	0.8	32.0	65.6
I have learned how to address HIB when it happens	2.5	12.3	50.8	33.6
I know where to find resources to help prevent and address HIB	0.8	4.1	49.2	44.3

*Note:*  $N = 338$ . Approximately 338/891 workshop attendees responded to these items between January 2018 and October 2020.

Some items in the workshop evaluation form assessed knowledge gains around HIB by comparing an attendee's self-reported knowledge of concepts before the workshop to their knowledge after the workshop. In Table 28, we see that well over half of workshop attendees are leaving the workshop with "much knowledge" about the campus definition of HIB, the prevalence of HIB on the UW-Madison campus, the campus policies that address HIB and where to find them, how to identify HIB when it occurs in the workplace, and where to go for assistance in addressing HIB. The most knowledge gains came in the area of "how/where to find the relevant campus policies about HIB."

It seems obvious that persons who have attended a 90-minute workshop about HIB should increase their knowledge and awareness in these areas. Because only 2,297 individuals out of the 17,865 faculty and staff employees at UW-Madison (Data Digest, 2020) have attended one of the HIB workshops (about 13%), it is useful to look at campus-wide data to see if the diffusion of this knowledge is spreading beyond the persons who took the workshop, to more faculty and staff on campus, resulting in greater change in the culture around HIB.

We turn to the campus climate surveys to look for change in awareness of HIB issues across the entire faculty and academic staff employment groups, as an indicator of culture change. Comparing responses to four items designed to measure

Table 28. Knowledge Gains for HIB Workshop Attendees.

	Before Workshop					After Workshop				
	No Knowledge (%)	Little Knowledge (%)	Some Knowledge (%)	Much Knowledge (%)	Mean	No Knowledge (%)	Little Knowledge (%)	Some Knowledge (%)	Much Knowledge (%)	Mean Difference
Q1	18.3	34.3	38.2	8.9	1.4	0.9	0.0	27.8	68.9	2.7
Q2	22.8	38.2	30.8	8.3	1.2	0.6	0.0	27.8	67.8	2.6
Q3	24.3	36.1	32.2	7.1	1.2	1.2	0.0	33.1	60.4	2.5
Q4	26.0	32.8	31.1	10.1	1.3	0.6	0.0	20.1	77.2	2.7
Q5	9.2	27.5	48.8	13.6	1.7	0.6	0.0	28.7	67.5	2.6
Q6	17.5	40.8	32.5	9.2	1.3	0.6	0.0	20.7	74.9	2.7

Note: N=338.

Q1: How the university defines hostile and intimidating behavior

Q2: How prevalent incidences of hostile and intimidating behavior are on the UW-Madison campus

Q3: What the campus policies are that address hostile and intimidating behavior

Q4: How/where to find the relevant campus policies about hostile and intimidating behavior

Q5: How to identify when hostile and intimidating behavior occurs in the workplace

Q6: Where to go for assistance when hostile and intimidating behavior happens to me or to someone else

knowledge and awareness of HIB issues, we see significant increases in knowledge and awareness for faculty on all four measures, and significant increases for academic staff on three of the four items.

As shown in [Table 29](#), faculty report feeling more often in 2019 that HIB is treated seriously on campus and that HIB is a common occurrence on campus than they did in 2016. In addition to the mean increases, the percentage of faculty who responded “don’t know” (DK) decreased significantly during this time frame which also indicates a knowledge gain. Importantly, faculty members’ knowledge of the steps to take if a person comes to them with concerns about HIB behavior moved from a mean that indicated “a little” or “somewhat,” to a mean that was between “somewhat” and “very” knowledgeable about the steps to take. Faculty also reported a slight increase between 2016 and 2019 in their belief that the HIB complaint process at UW-Madison is effective.

Members of the academic staff also reported gains on these indicators, although the increases were not always statistically significant ([Table 29](#)). Like faculty, they reported an increase in the seriousness with which HIB is treated on campus, and reported gains in knowledge of what to do if someone approaches them with a HIB issue. Academic staff, in fact, were much more knowledgeable on both of these items than faculty, reporting higher means and fewer “don’t know” responses. Academic staff survey participants did not change their view of how common HIB is between 2016 and 2019, nor did they change their opinion of the effectiveness of the process for resolving HIB, although more academic staff had an opinion on this later point (fewer responded “don’t know”) than in 2016.

It seems clear that we have made significant improvements in UW-Madison’s culture around HIB on our campus. More members of the faculty and academic staff think the behavior is treated seriously, more know what to do if someone comes to them with a HIB issue, and more think that the process for resolving HIB is effective. However, in addition to asking whether faculty and academic staff overall have improved their knowledge and awareness of HIB issues in the years since the new policies were enacted, it is very important to know whether members of groups that are underrepresented – those most likely to experience HIB behaviors – also sense this improvement in the culture. In [Figs. 10](#) and [11](#), we examine this question for faculty and academic staff, to understand whether women, persons of color, LGBT persons, and persons with disabilities, as well as the intersection of these last identities with gender, also sense this change in culture around HIB. The graphics display the change in means on two items from 2016 to 2019. A bar above the  $x$ -axis indicates a positive change, while a bar that is below the  $x$ -axis indicates a negative change for that group. We performed statistical tests to determine the significance of these changes. These significance indicators are not noted in the figures, but are available upon request.

Many of the members of underrepresented groups who are most impacted by HIB (women, and men and women who identify as a person of color, and/or as having a disability) also have increased their agreement that HIB is being treated seriously on campus, and that the process for resolving it is effective. These increases were statistically significant for women as well as men faculty, faculty members of color, and women and men members of the academic staff

Table 29. HIB Knowledge on UW-Madison Campus.

	All Faculty							
	2016				2019			
	N	Mean	SD	%DK	N	Mean	SD	%DK
How seriously is HIB treated on campus?	771	3.1	1.2	39.0	808	3.4*	1.1	26.8*
How common is HIB on campus?	608	2.7	1.0	51.9	620	2.9*	1.0	43.8*
How well do you know the steps to take if a person comes to you with concerns about someone who is behaving in a hostile or intimidating way?	1,099	2.9	1.0	12.9	1,020	3.2*	1.0	7.5*
How effective is the process for resolving complaints about HIB at UW-Madison?	395	2.6	1.1	68.7	426	2.8*	1.1	61.4*
All Academic Staff								
	2016				2019			
	N	Mean	SD	%DK	N	Mean	SD	%DK
	1,447	3.6	1.0	29.9	1,944	3.8*	0.9	20.9*
How seriously is HIB treated on campus?	1,042	3.2	0.9	49.4	1,278	3.2	0.9	48.0*
How common is HIB on campus?	1,895	3.1	1.0	8.1	2,364	3.4*	1.0	3.7*
How well do you know the steps to take if a person comes to you with concerns about someone who is behaving in a hostile or intimidating way?								
How effective is the process for resolving complaints about HIB at UW-Madison?	549	2.8	1.0	73.4	768	2.9	1.0	68.7*

Response categories: 0 – Not at all; 1 – A little; 2 – Somewhat; 3 – Very; 4 – Extremely. DK = “don’t know”.  
 \* Two-tailed *t*-test indicates significant change from 2016 to 2019 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

(not shown; available upon request.) Although not statistically significant, LGBT women faculty, and LGBT men staff, showed decreases in their assessment of the seriousness with which campus treats HIB.

A similar pattern is observed for the item, “How effective is the process for resolving complaints about HIB at UW-Madison?” in Fig. 11. Again, women, persons of color, and disabled persons are generally more likely to agree that the process for resolving HIB complains is effective in 2019, than they were in 2016. This is statistically significant for women faculty and staff, and men staff (but not men faculty.) Again, although not statistically significant, LGBT faculty, and to a lesser extent academic staff, are not as sanguine about the efficacy of the HIB complaint process, in that these groups feel the HIB complain process is less effective in 2019 than it was in 2016.

Next, we ask the important question of outcome – have we reduced the incidence of HIB overall, and especially among underrepresented faculty and staff, since adoption of the new policies? Here, we can also turn to our three data sources. The post-workshop evaluation survey asked participants whether they have had personal experience of HIB at UW-Madison, or whether they had observed the behavior. After completing the workshop (and thus having a clearer understanding of HIB), 58.2% of workshop participants reported experiencing HIB, and 65.6% reported observing it. This percentage is quite a bit higher than that reported in the two climate surveys for faculty and academic staff (see below), and a great deal higher than rates of bullying reported in some other surveys (e.g., Salin, 2001; Birkeland Nielsen, Matthiesen, and Einarsen, 2010; Schraudner, Striebing and Hochfeld, 2019). This could be due to a selection bias, as people might be more likely to attend a workshop if they have experienced HIB so they can learn something about how to deal with it. This might also be a function of the question wording, as the question inquires about ANY experience of

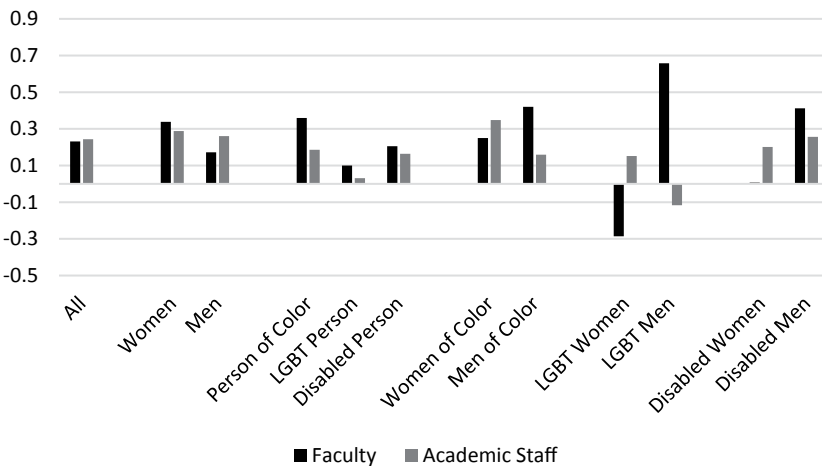


Fig. 10. How Seriously is HIB Treated on Campus? Change in Mean From 2016 to 2019.

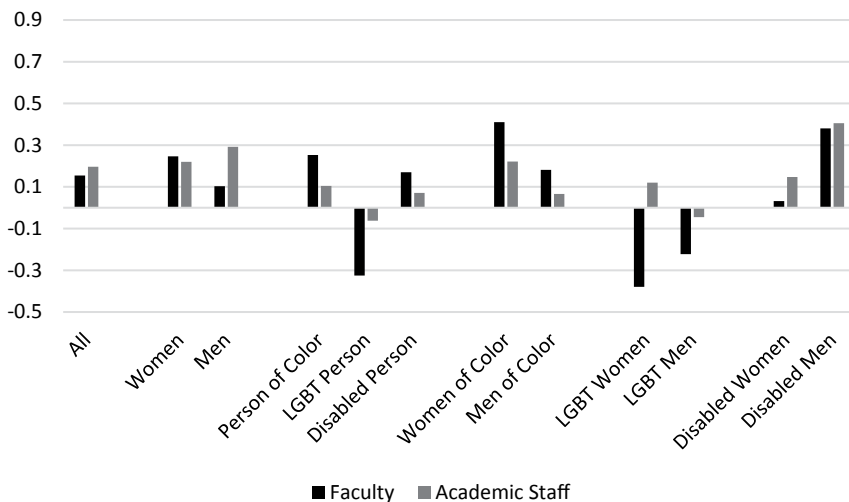


Fig. 11. How Effective is HIB Complaint Process? Change in Mean From 2016 to 2019.

HIB and does not restrict it to a two- or three-year time frame, as other surveys on our campus do (or a one-year time frame in other studies). This interpretation is further supported by some 2020 data from a subset of university staff employees, which shows that 34% of university staff have experienced at least one incidence of HIB in the past two years (EID Survey, 2020). This incidence is more similar to that for both the faculty and academic staff members who responded to the climate surveys, as shown in Figs. 12 and 13.

We report the percentage of faculty who have experienced at least one incidence of HIB in the past three years in Fig. 12. In 2016, approximately 36% of faculty reported experiencing at least one incidence of HIB in the three years prior to the survey,<sup>5</sup> and in 2019 that percentage increased to 39%. We have performed statistical comparisons across survey waves, and between and among all demographic groups, including the intersections of demographic characteristics.<sup>6</sup> For members of the faculty, we found no statistically significant changes in experience of HIB from 2016 to 2019, although it is easy to see that there is a general pattern of increase for most of the groups we analyzed, with LGBT faculty members (gay men in particular) showing the largest increases. (These increases

<sup>5</sup>The exact question provides a definition of Hostile and Intimidating Behavior, and then asks, "Given this definition, within the last three years, how often have you personally experienced hostile or intimidating behavior on the UW-Madison Campus?" Response categories are Never, 1–2 times, 3–5 times, and More than 5 times (WISELI, 2020).

<sup>6</sup>Available upon request.



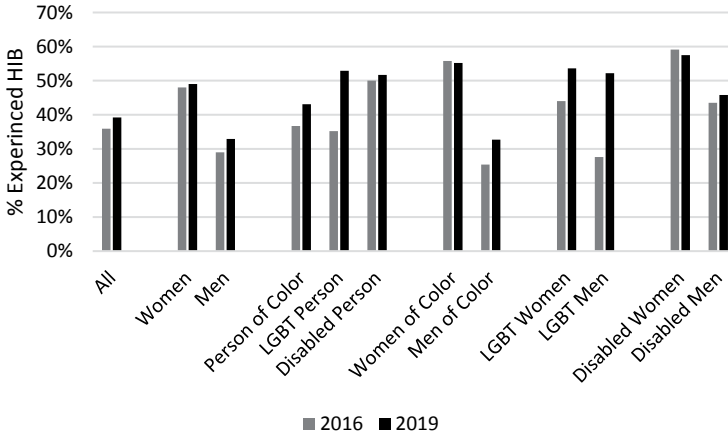


Fig. 12 Personal Experience of HIB at Least Once in Past Three Years: Faculty.

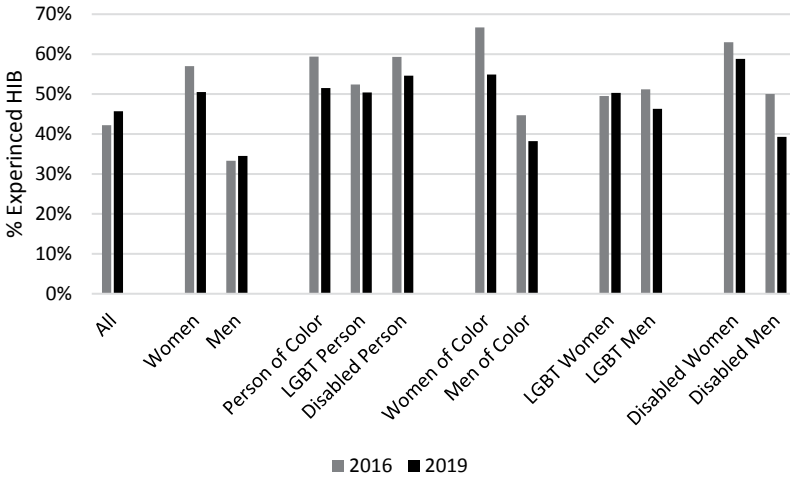


Fig. 13. Personal Experience of HIB at Least Once in Past Three Years: Academic Staff.

do not reach the level of significance due to the small sample size.) Men of color also reported increases in HIB incidence in this time frame. In Fig. 12, you can see the gaps in incidence for many demographic groups, as we expected from previous research on bullying. For example, women faculty report experiencing HIB much more often than men faculty, and these gender gaps appear among faculty of color, and among faculty with disabilities as well. Persons with disabilities consistently report more HIB than faculty overall, and this is true for both men and women faculty with disabilities.

Academic staff were asked the identical question as faculty, and for them, some different patterns emerge. As shown in [Fig. 13](#), despite the statistically significant increase in incidence of HIB overall between 2016 and 2019 (42.2% in 2016 vs. 45.7% in 2019,  $p < 0.018$ ), most of the underrepresented demographic groups we investigated actually saw a decreasing incidence of HIB. The overall increase appears to be coming primarily from white women and men, who are numerically the largest group in the sample of Academic Staff respondents ([Table 26](#)).

As with the faculty group, you can see trends of differential experience of HIB by academic staff demographic group. Women report higher levels of HIB than men, including among staff of color, and staff with disabilities. Persons of color, LGBT persons, and persons with disabilities also generally report higher levels of HIB incidence than the general population of academic staff, particularly in 2016. Among women staff, women of color and women with disabilities report the highest levels of HIB, while among men staff, it is gay men and men with disabilities with the highest levels of reported HIB, particularly in 2016.

Overall, then, if our goal is to reduce the incidence of HIB in our faculty and academic staff populations, the results appear to show a change is in process. Faculty report increases in HIB between 2016 and 2019, as do academic staff overall. But the increases in reported HIB for faculty are (except for LGBT faculty, see below) small and not statistically significant, and the most vulnerable populations of academic staff actually reported decreasing levels of HIB between 2016 and 2019. We unfortunately do not have time-series data for HIB experiences of our university staff.

Given the clear increase in awareness of HIB and generally increased faith the process for addressing HIB is effective, why is HIB incidence not decreasing? It may be that not enough time has elapsed, particularly for faculty populations. Except for campus leaders such as department chairs, faculty rarely participate in the HIB workshops we described above. The HIB website (UW-Madison, 2017), which is one of the best sources for information about HIB that is easily accessible to everyone on campus, only came online in summer 2017. The knowledge of campus policies related to HIB may be reaching the general population of faculty more slowly than that of academic and university staff. It might be the case that as this knowledge does diffuse through the faculty, many are coming to understand that some negative interpersonal interactions can be defined as HIB, and thus reporting on a survey increases as this knowledge diffuses. Another possibility could be a genuine increase in HIB – especially targeting our LGBT and male faculty of color – in the time period between 2016 and 2019. This period in the United States has been fraught with increased levels of explicit racist, homophobic acts (e.g., Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020) and university campuses are not immune from these trends; indeed, such influences are a contributing factor to the University as a complex system ([Greenhalgh and Papoutsis, 2018](#)).

Where we do see the improvements in HIB behavior at UW-Madison is for academic staff employees. Across all of the groups that have been documented in other studies to experience higher levels of HIB, all groups except white women and lesbian women showed a decrease in reported incidence of HIB over the study period (although this is not statistically significant). Gay men, women with disabilities,

and men of color had only very small decreases in reported incidence of HIB. This lends some evidence toward the explanation that the general environment in the United States in this time period contributed to more LGBT persons and men of color to experience negative behaviors in the workplace that could be described as HIB. However, the decrease in reported HIB for other groups, particularly women of color, gives some hope that the new policies are having their intended effect at UW-Madison, as academic staff are a very large group who has participated in the HIB workshops and has had the HIB policies in effect the longest.

Despite some optimism in terms of changes to campus culture around HIB as well as some positive trends (particularly among academic staff) in the experience of HIB, we are mindful that the new policy may be less effective for our LGBT colleagues. Although these trends are never statistically significant due to the small numbers of self-identifying LGBT faculty members in our survey samples, the fact that they are similar for both faculty and academic staff, as well as across a number of indicators, is cause for a more detailed review, and the UW-Madison is investigating this question in more detail in order to improve the HIB policies and procedures for all.

## **Limitations**

We must note a number of limitations to our study. First, we are primarily examining outcomes data from 2019 and 2020. While the HIB policies were first enacted (for faculty and academic staff) in 2014, the website was not introduced until 2017, and the educational efforts around them did not begin in earnest until 2018. Perhaps there has simply not been enough time between the implementation of the policies and initiatives and the current moment to see a real reduction in HIB. In fact, it is possible that we would expect to see more reporting of HIB as people at UW-Madison learn to recognize it more readily in their environments.

Another limitation to our study is our reliance on only three data sources, and imperfect ones at that (Wolpert and Rutter, 2018). In particular, there is a lack of good survey data for our large population of university staff employees. These employees are predominately hourly employees with limited privilege and power in our university (Hodgins, MacCurtain, and Mannix-McNamara, 2020), and thus might arguably experience more HIB than other employees due to status differences in their positions and those of faculty and academic staff members. Some university staff units do have regular surveys, and these units added a question about HIB to their 2020 survey, so we should have good time-series data for some members of the university staff into the future. The baseline for this survey, as mentioned above, is 34% of university staff in these units reported at least one experience of HIB in the two years prior to the survey. Although on a shorter time frame than the faculty and academic staff surveys (which inquire about incidence in the three years prior to the survey), this incidence rate is similar to that reported by faculty, and lower than that for academic staff.

Other data sources that would be worth investigating in the future are interviews or reports from the units on campus to which HIB is reported. Qualitative data would not only provide a much richer description of the behaviors occurring

and the experience of the policies at an individual level, but also provide an explanation for experiences of ineffective policies, which could lead to more targeted improvements in those policies and practices. We did not attempt to ascertain what trends in HIB incidence our campus Ombuds, Employee Assistance Office, Human Resources Workforce Relations, or other offices are seeing. These would be important resources to mine in the further evaluation of the HIB policies and procedures in the future.

The uneven, slow, incomplete transformation of UW-Madison around issues of bullying is perhaps expected, given the complex nature of both the University (and academia in general), and the problem of bullying/HIB (Greenhalgh and Papoutsis, 2018). The hierarchical organizational structure of a university distributes power unevenly, and a professional culture that rewards productivity over other considerations creates a system where bullying behaviors can flourish with little to impede them. The HIB policies as enacted by the University attempted to engage the community at multiple levels. Systems were put in place at the institutional level to track behavior across departments, trainings were implemented to increase knowledge at both the unit and individual level in an attempt to change the culture around HIB, and pathways were enacted to provide individuals with choice and options when individually dealing with the problems of HIB. Our ability to measure any change to the system with the data at hand (evaluation forms and climate surveys) is certainly limited. At the same time, in a complex system there will never be perfect or complete data; decisions must always be made in the face of incomplete or contested data (Wolpert and Rutter, 2018). In our case, the imperfect, incomplete data provide a feedback mechanism to the complex interplay of policy and practices around HIB at UW-Madison so that adjustments may be made to improve HIB processes, and therefore the working experiences of all employees at UW-Madison.

### *Lessons Learned and Future Directions*

In addition to long-term evaluation of our HIB policies and procedures at UW-Madison, we have discovered a number of “lessons learned” in our implementation of these new policies. We offer these insights for other campuses who embark on a concerted effort to eliminate the destructive presence of HIB, or “bullying,” from their own campuses.

- When we began this work, we started from an assumption that our departments and units on campus had a discipline and/or reporting process in place that could address poor workplace behavior. We had hoped to simply add new definitions of a specific type of behavior – HIB – to the existing structure so that there would be a campus-wide record of employees who engage in HIB. Instead, we found that most supervisors and department leaders did not have a good understanding of what to do when confronted with *any* poor behavior amongst their employees. We therefore recommend that there be a solid process for addressing poor behavior on campus in general, including discipline, before implementing a policy specific to HIB.

- “Bullying,” or HIB, can be difficult for people to distinguish from other kinds of poor workplace behavior. Because of the aforementioned lack of process or discipline for addressing any kind of poor workplace behavior, the new HIB policies became something of a “catch all” for any poor behavior in the workplace. This may also explain the increase in reporting that we noted for some groups. Understand and expect this tendency for an increase in reporting in the short-term and identify mutually understood and clear characteristics, as well as identification of other forms of concerning behavior (sexual harassment, protected-class discrimination, etc.) that may be addressed through other federal or local policies.
- Also in the short-term, you may encounter resistance from some who do not believe HIB is a large problem or, at the other extreme, think that such behavior is impossible to address. For example, some campus leaders at UW-Madison did not believe such behavior takes place at all, while others questioned whether we could do anything about it with policy (particularly in the case where a tenured faculty member was the bully). We have found that education and use of data with campus leadership helped to allay this resistance.
- For some people, an accusation of HIB has been used as a weapon, becoming itself a form of bullying to accuse someone else of HIB. We have seen instances of “dueling” HIB complaints. Highly skilled and trained professionals need to be available to address these situations when they arise.
- As the data showing the lack of significant HIB reduction suggests, the ability to recognize and report HIB does not presume that individuals have the confidence to interrupt it. We have found that supplemental education and resources are necessary to empower individuals interrupt HIB in their work environments.
- Any person assessing a HIB complaint must be well-trained in implicit and other forms of bias and discrimination. We have learned that the biases of complainants can come into play in their feelings of being bullied or feeling like a target of HIB. Complainants don’t always realize that they may be interpreting behavior differently based on a person’s gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, other social or demographic characteristic, or the intersection of multiple identities. Those who adjudicate a HIB case must be aware of this possibility and adjust for it in their assessment of a case.

As we continue to refine the HIB policies and initiatives on the UW-Madison campus, we will continue to monitor their effectiveness into the future. Certainly, campus climate survey data for all of our employment groups should continually be monitored for incidence of HIB. A future project could also use exit survey data to understand whether an increased attention to HIB is having a positive effect on retention of faculty members from underrepresented groups. The UW-Madison is a participant in the COACHE exit survey of faculty (COACHE, 2021). When follow-up exit surveys are completed, we can ascertain whether academic bullying, or HIB, is a declining factor causing our underrepresented faculty members to leave the UW-Madison.

The UW-Madison is approximately four years into our experiment with policy, culture, and process changes designed to eliminate HIB, or academic bullying, on

our campus. Our data show that we are making inroads in changing the campus culture around HIB, as we have demonstrated an increase in the knowledge of HIB as a problem and an increase in knowledge about what to do about it. Many, but not all, of the members from underrepresented groups who more commonly experience HIB (women, persons of color, persons with disabilities) agree that this culture is improving. We have yet to see evidence that actual incidences of HIB at UW-Madison are decreasing since the adoption of these new HIB policies and procedures. For some groups – in particular, some groups of academic staff – we see some evidence of positive change. But for others we see either no change or even slight increases in HIB reporting. We continue to be concerned about the experiences of our LGBT colleagues, of all genders, with regard to bullying and the new HIB policies. As we move forward, gaining more experience with these policies and educating more of our faculty and staff about them, we hope to improve the climate and eliminate HIB for everyone on the UW-Madison campus.

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