

# TIPS FOR FACILITATING DISCUSSION SESSIONS

## SUGGESTED TIME:

An hour minimum; 90 minutes even better for more reflective, in-depth conversation.

## SUGGESTED GROUP SIZE:

10-15 is ideal, but 20-25 people will also work. Best to allow more time the bigger the group.

## BACKGROUND/SETUP (SUGGESTED 15-20 MINUTES):

At the beginning of the session, use the attached slides and/or this [interactive video](#) to help explain why bias busting matters and to provide attendees with introductory information on how bias works. You might also have attendees read one or more of the following short articles before the session.

- [Rise Above the Hate-Filled Banter: Realize, Recognize, and Respond to Bias in Our Systems and Ourselves](#)
- [Silent Technical Privilege](#)
- [Consciously Overcoming Unconscious Bias](#)

## BIAS-BUSTING PRACTICE (SUGGESTED 15 MINUTES):

Distribute the scenario grid and the attached "Questions and Considerations for Bias-Busting Discussions." Have attendees break into groups of 3-5 people, choose a scenario and discuss different ways they might intervene. Have them record possible actions they discuss and any questions they may have.

## WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSION (SUGGESTED 30 MINUTES):

Bring small groups back together as a whole group to discuss the possible solutions and remaining questions they have. If more than one group discussed the same scenario, it's helpful for them to report out at same time with one group starting and another adding on or chiming in. Others not in those groups should also chime in with their own questions or additional ideas for action.

## WRAP-UP:

Thank everyone for participating. Give them the online link to these grids in case they want to use them in other contexts.

# INTERRUPTING BIAS IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS

What (if anything) would you do or say?  
*Feel free to alter the scenario or CREATE YOUR OWN!*

You overhear a student (or faculty member) complain that Serena is too abrasive. Nobody is going to want to work with her unless she learns to tone it down a bit.

An underrepresented student comes to you and complains that some students have made general demeaning comments related to gender, race, and/or other groups during lab. The student is uncomfortable but doesn't want you to intervene directly as people might find out who reported it.

While standing at the buffet at a department-catered event, you overhear someone ask a colleague of color for more coffee.

In the capstone course, a student group decides to "divide and conquer." They suggest that the lone woman in the group take the role of communicating with the client.

In lecture, the instructor announces to the class that he is going to use cosmetic and fashion examples to create an inclusive climate for women.

During a meeting, a faculty member says, "Yeah, we really do need to bring in more female students and faculty. They just bring a different perspective and skill set. And hey, it would make this a more civilized place – we men just behave better when women are around."

You recommend a student for a research experience with one of your colleagues, and get the response, "I'm not sure she's the right fit. But I think she'd make a great TA."

This class typically includes spirited, sometimes hostile, discussion and debate. The instructor notices that Janelle is consistently quiet during these discussions and has suggested that maybe she's just not cut out for CS.

You hear someone say that there's been a push to hire more women (or other underrepresented groups) and that they are being hired over men or other groups, even when not as qualified.

# QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR BIAS-BUSTING DISCUSSIONS

## SHOULD YOU INTERVENE? SOME BENEFITS AND COSTS

There can be benefits and costs to intervening, especially when considering clear status and power differences in relationships. For example, it can be more costly to confront someone more powerful. There might be less cost when intervening with a student than with a professor who outranks you, so different strategies may be needed in these different situations.

Not intervening can lead to “rumination” (repeatedly reflecting on and regretting the inaction), which can have physical, emotional, and job-related effects for bystanders.

Benefits of intervening include reducing the harm experienced, reducing future bias, promoting equity, shifting norms, and increasing the bystander’s self-esteem and positive affect.



### BEFORE YOU ACT, ASSESS THE SITUATION BY ASKING YOURSELF:

- Is it bias?
- Is it important to address?
- Should I interrupt now?
- Should I take the person aside later or address this issue at a later time?
- Is acting too costly for me or someone else?
- What is stopping me from intervening?
- What could you, anyone in the scenario, or the organization do to prevent future instances?



### CONSIDER HOW YOUR RELATIONSHIPS AND ROLES AFFECT HOW YOU INTERVENE:

- What kind of relationship do I have with the people in the scenario? Do I know them well or not and how does that influence what I could or could not say/do?
- How does my role or status in my team or in my organization influence what I could or could not say/do?
- How might my gender, race (or other identities) influence what I could or could not say/do?



### SOME POSSIBLE WAYS TO INTERVENE:

- Ask a question.
- Avoid accusations and instead invite clarification (E.g., “what do you mean by that?”).
- Arouse dissonance: people don’t like to be inconsistent. E.g., “I’m surprised you would say something like that, considering how supportive you are of women in computing.”
- “Pivot”: this is a way of not confronting directly, but letting people know they made a mistake in a socially graceful way. E.g., If someone thinks that a colleague is a clerical worker, walk up and say, “Hi, have you met our new assistant professor?” Or If someone is interrupting someone, say “I think Jamie had a thought she wanted to finish?”
- Use humor (when appropriate for the situation or your relationship with a colleague/student).

It’s important to practice confronting bias. Bystanders are more likely to say or do something to confront bias when they have done so. Most people do not have experience or training on confronting bias.