At the University of Washington, people of different races, colors and national origins come together to teach, work and conduct research.

Race discrimination occurs when someone is treated unfavorably based on that person’s race or because of personal characteristics associated with race, such as hair texture or certain facial features.

Race can be defined as a person’s self-identification with one or more social groups.

People can identify with more than one race.

Color discrimination is based specifically on skin color, pigmentation, complexion, shade or tone.

National origin discrimination involves treating people unfavorably because of accent or English proficiency; because they are from a particular country or part of the world; because of their ethnicity – for example, Hispanic or Latino – or because they appear to be of a certain ethnic background, even if they are not.

Discrimination based on any of these three categories is prohibited.

Discrimination can occur between two or more people with the same or different characteristics.

It’s important to note that people at the intersections of identity, for example a woman of color who does not speak English, can and do experience discrimination and harassment in interwoven, complex and unique ways.
Discrimination can occur in any employment context. For example, if a decision is made about hiring or job assignments based on these categories, or if a person is paid less for doing the same job as a coworker - that could be discrimination.

A person legally working in the United States will hold official immigration or citizenship status. Categories include:

US citizens – people who were born in the United States and those who are naturalized.

Lawful permanent residents, are non-citizens who are authorized to live permanently within the United States – they are also known as green card holders.

Citizens of other countries who hold work permits or employment-related visas.

Those with DACA status.

If a person is legally permitted to work in the U.S., the protections of federal and state discrimination laws extend to them.

Discrimination can occur in any educational context: recruiting, admissions, retention or access to resources, including scholarships, teaching and research assistantships, faculty mentoring or advising. It can also occur in athletics and housing.

Washington State law allows people to enroll in public colleges and universities regardless of their citizenship or immigration status. The University of Washington student population includes U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, international students with visas, and people with DACA status – as well as undocumented individuals. DACA grants special consideration for certain youth who came to this country as children, allowing them to remain in the United States.

All students are respected members of the community. The University does not share information about the immigration or citizenship status of its students.

The University prohibits discrimination against any of its students or its employees.
Harassment based on race, color, or national origin is a form of discrimination. Harassment is unwelcome conduct that affects the employment or academic experience, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work or learning environment.

Although there is no definitive list of behaviors that constitute harassment, examples include:

Physical contact, such as pushing, touching, blocking someone’s way or other violations of personal space

Verbal behaviors, such as jokes, slurs or other comments – either overt or implied – about a person's race, color, national origin, or accent

Non-verbal behaviors, such as gestures or staring

Visuals, including showing or viewing suggestive pictures, images or text. This includes in-person or electronic communication methods, such as text messages, social media posts, or emails.

How often does the behavior need to occur to be considered harassment? The more severe the conduct, the fewer number of times the behavior must occur. For example, a single incident – such as an overtly racist statement – could be sufficiently severe. On the other end of the spectrum, a pervasive pattern of jokes or comments can amount to harassment.

If someone was uncomfortable or offended, wouldn’t they say something?

Maybe. While they certainly can say something to the person responsible for the behavior, they are under no obligation to do so.

There are reasons why someone might not speak up:

A power imbalance might make them afraid that speaking up could adversely impact their educational opportunities or their career.

If this type of conduct is part of the environment, they may remain silent or play along just to fit in.

They may fear retaliation for raising a concern or reporting the behavior.

They may believe that nothing will be done if they report it.
If confronted, people engaging in harassing behavior might say things like “lighten up” or “I was just teasing” “if you want to make it in this job, you’re going to have to toughen up” or “don’t be so sensitive”.

Nevertheless, such behavior can have a real and adverse effect, on the person experiencing the behavior, as well as on others who may overhear or witness such conduct.

Even if there was no intent to harass or discriminate, the comments or behavior may still create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

What can we do about discrimination and harassment that is based on race, color or national origin? Each of us can make a difference. We demonstrate who we are as a community, and who we are as individuals,

When we acknowledge that each of us may sometimes behave in a manner that is unwelcome or offensive to others, either intentionally or unintentionally

When we listen, and are open to the experiences of others – especially when those experiences differ from our own

When we speak up and engage, or challenge someone who is behaving in a discriminatory or harassing manner.

When we seek guidance and support from University leaders, supervisors, peers and others with the ability to put a stop to discriminatory and harassing behavior.

These conversations or self-reflections can be difficult, awkward, and challenging. However, they are a critical way that we – individually and collectively – can address harassment and discrimination based on race, color and national origin.

Individual action can make a real difference. Some situations, however, demand the University’s intervention. The University supports a working and learning environment free from discrimination and harassment.

There are federal and state laws that prohibit discrimination and harassment based on race, color and national origin: Title Six and Title
Seven of the Civil Rights Act, and the Washington State Law Against Discrimination.

The University of Washington has incorporated the mandates of these and other federal and state laws into policies that prohibit discrimination and harassment at the University.

When employees or students have experienced discrimination or harassment, the University encourages reporting so that it can respond. The University Complaint Investigation and Resolution Office, commonly known as UCIRO, is an office dedicated to receiving reports and investigating allegations of discrimination and harassment. Reports can also be made to local or central Human Resources offices, or to student services offices.

When a report of discrimination or harassment is made to the University, an intake and assessment will determine whether a formal investigation should be launched.

If an investigation finds a person responsible for conduct that violates University policy, corrective or disciplinary action may result, including termination of employment or dismissal from educational programs. Disciplinary action is governed by the policies relevant to the individual, for example, the faculty code, student conduct code or a union contract.

At any point during or after an assessment or investigation, retaliation may be a concern. Retaliation is adverse action against an individual because they have made a report or participated in an investigation. Retaliation is prohibited by University policy.

Retaliation can include:

Unwarranted corrective action, a negative performance evaluation, or even being fired;

Unfair treatment in a class or lab, or an unwarranted poor grade or academic evaluation;

Treating the affected individual in a hostile manner - or encouraging others to do so.

Retaliation can occur in person, or involve the use of social media or other electronic communication.
Even if an investigation of the original complaint concludes that the conduct did not violate University policy, an individual can still be held accountable for retaliation.

Third parties who were not involved in the original complaint can also be found responsible for retaliatory acts.

There are resources available to support students and employees who have experienced discrimination or harassment based on their race, color or national origin. These include:

The Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, including the Ethnic Cultural Center;

The Women’s Center; and,

SafeCampus.

The University’s Addressing Discrimination website provides information on these and other resources, as well as more details about reporting options.

Discrimination and harassment based on race, color and national origin aren’t just concepts – they happen to people you know, people you pass by or sit next to in your classroom, workplace, or lab.

Together, we can all do something to address it.