

# Busting Bias

## Dealing with bias-related incidents is everyone's responsibility

By Guy Robertson

and kilts identify people of different nationalities and religions. Our accents identify us as Eastern European, British, Jamaican, or any one of a thousand cultures. Our sexual preferences, dietary customs, table manners, and reading habits can single us out. Some of us are physically challenged. Some are older or younger than others. In fact, each of us is a mixture of numerous characteristics, and while every person is unique, everyone is part of a specific group.

So many differences, so little time to appreciate the meaning and worth of each tradition, style, and look. Unfortunately there are some people who dislike anyone who differs from them. Fear and distrust of another's racial or religious group, culture, gender, sexuality, or physical type can lead to bias-related incidents.

Are there ever occasions where poking fun at some-

one's background is acceptable or appropriate? Some of us will say no. There should be zero tolerance for any reference to a person's race, culture, or lifestyle. Others will acknowledge that in certain circumstances, jokes about a person's city of origin can be harmless. For example, our national media regularly criti-

cize Toronto for no other reason than its size and influence in national affairs. Torontonians experience a lot of teasing across Canada. In the U.S., residents of New York and Los Angeles expect to hear taunts from anyone who doesn't come from their home towns. In Britain, London is the target of endless jibes. Sports fans all over the world regularly defame rival cities. It's the specific situation that matters in these cases. When everyone present understands that no harm is intended, making fun of a city and its hockey or football team is probably acceptable in many instances.

Other situations pose difficult questions. Recently gay people reclaimed the term "queer," which was once a nasty slur. Now we see Queer Studies programs in universities, Queer magazines and newsletters, Queer film festivals, and Queer chatrooms. What was once an insult is now acceptable, at least to a section of the gay community. But is it appropriate for us to use "queer" in all social situations? Probably not.

And what about Jewish jokes told by Jews? Newfie jokes told by Newfoundlanders? Such humour often has deep roots in its respective culture. You should learn to recognize a comment or joke when its intention and effect are harmless. But it can be difficult to determine what's acceptable in every situation. Sensitivity and concern for another person's feelings are what you need in order to avoid causing offence and bias-related incidents.

What if you are the target of bias? If you believe that you're involved in a bias-related incident UBC encourages you to talk to a UBC staff member about the incident. UBC staff can provide you with support, and direct you to the appropriate resources to discuss the incident and review your options. They can assist you in making a record of the date and time of the incident, the name(s) of any witness(es), and your account of what happened.

Look in the mirror. Skin colour, hair texture, the shape of your eyes—these features can distinguish you from other people. In some situations you're part of the majority. At other times you're a member of a visible minority.

Clothes can make us stand out as much as skin colour. Turbans, yarmulkes, veils, saris

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**Bigotry has a narrow focus, and concentrates on the most superficial aspects of its victims.**

### Who can help?

You may also want to contact one or more of these offices, which can offer further support:

Access and Diversity	604-822-5844
Chaplains' Association	604-224-1410
Counselling Services	604-822-3811
UBC Equity Office	604-822-6353
First Nations House of Learning	604-822-8941
UBC Ombudsonperson	604-822-4846
Pride UBC	604-822-4638
International Student Development	604-822-5021
Speakeasy	604-822-3777
RCMP (non-emergency)	604-224-1322

### What can you do to prevent bias-related incidents, and what are the best ways of dealing with them when they occur?

First, learn more about people from different cultural and social groups. Find out about their customs and attitudes. Appreciate their history and experiences with other cultures, including your own. Attending a large university will provide you many opportunities to talk to members of different groups in a comfortable social setting.

Secondly, speak up. If you consider a joke or comment to be racist, sexist or otherwise inappropriate, you have a right to say so. Try to explain why you disapprove of what has been said. Give others a chance to apologize for their insensitivity or mistake. And remember: you're not perfect. On occasion you might cause offence, and somebody will point out your mistake. In such cases, listen carefully. After all, nobody's perfect, and we have much to learn from each other.

Thirdly, discover what you have in common with members of different cultural and social groups. We're all members of the UBC community, a sound basis for new relationships with a variety of people from different backgrounds. With its international reputation and the breadth of its educational offerings, UBC attracts people from all over the world. You will have many opportunities to meet them in a variety of settings.

Finally, go back to that mirror. The person you see has a responsibility to recognize and, when necessary, report bias-related incidents. Accept the responsibility, and don't condone intolerance and discourtesy. Our community depends on your willingness to express your disapproval of bias.

*Tuum Est.*

## AMS Firstweek

Getting the most out of student life starts here

By Eric Wallace-Deering

**AMS** Firstweek is not just a series of events. It's an experience. Some might even say it's a lifestyle choice for your first week at UBC. But even that doesn't do it justice. Your friends, your social network, your community, whatever you want to call them, are what make the difference in your UBC experience. Your friends are the ones with whom you will celebrate new beginnings, accomplishments, and the near misses of successful exam procrastination. They're the ones you turn to when mid-term season hits, the depressing November rain clouds move in, and when you realize that you have a paper due tomorrow and you haven't even started yet. You and I both know you can't do Day of the Longboat, Storm the Wall, or discover the awesomeness of the PIT by yourself. The people who surround you by are the ones who are going to make your University experience all that it can be.

AMS Firstweek is here to help. Whether you are first year from some distant land and in Vancouver for the first time, or an extreme-returning student entering your sixth year after switching majors three times, we've got something for you. Firstweek is a time to meet new friends and catch up with the old ones. A time to create memories that will stick in your mind for coming years, and a chance to relive the ones you've already put there. Firstweek isn't

just about the first week of school. It's about setting up your entire year and undergrad.

We've got a lot of cool stuff that our staff has been working on this year. Things kick off with the always outrageous campus wide End of Summer Smash BBQ at Place Vanier (Monday, September 6). For the first time we are working with the Museum of Anthropolgy to bring you the MOA Mashup, a showcase of cool beats and hot tunes from local music talent IN the MOA (Thursday, September 9). Then there is the always Legen-Dary AMS Welcome Back Barbecue (Friday, September 10). During the day for the rest of the week after Imagine Day on the South Side of the Sub we'll be hosting the Firstweek Plaza. Live music, club demos, BMX stunt shows and more will be going down from 10 am to 2 pm. Remember to stop by the Firstweek booth for a chance to win some cool prizes. There are tons more events — big and small — so be sure to check the calendar of events on page 15.

AMS Firstweek is your opportunity to build and strengthen your student community. Buy a wristband for access to all events at booths in one of the residence commons-blocks on Saturday and Sunday afternoon or buy one online at [www.amsfirstweek.com](http://www.amsfirstweek.com).

**AMS Firstweek, it starts here!**



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