



Community Guidelines

I. Academic Community (Page 25 of *MFA Handbook*)

The students, faculty, and administration of the MFA Program for Writers are committed to creating and sustaining an inclusive, generously supportive environment. We value and actively seek to increase diversity in our student body and faculty as well as in our teaching and texts. All voices are welcome and honored here.

As a community of writers, we acknowledge the power of language and our responsibility to use that power prudently as serious practitioners of this craft. We endeavor to be mindful and respectful of all perspectives and experiences in both our personal interactions and in creative and critical work. We strive to empower all writers and to amplify voices that have historically been muted. We are enriched by our vibrant differences and united in our common passion for our art.

II. Title IX Policy (Pages 40-44 of *MFA Handbook*)

Our Community Guidelines encourage faculty and students to foster an environment of open and respectful engagement. Those Guidelines recognize that our words, actions, and mannerisms may sometimes give offense and provide guidance toward direct communication and internal resolution.

Allegations of discrimination or harassment on the basis of protected class status and allegations of retaliation fall under the auspices of **Title IX** policy and procedures and as such must be reported to and addressed through the College. To ensure compliance with federal and state civil rights laws and regulations, and to affirm its commitment to promoting the goals of fairness and equity in all aspects of the educational program or activity, Warren Wilson College has developed internal policies and procedures that provide a prompt, fair, and impartial process for those involved in such allegations. Warren Wilson College values and upholds the equal dignity of all members of its community and strives to balance the rights of the parties in the grievance process during what is often a difficult time for all those involved.

The summary below excerpts the College's **Title IX Policy Handbook**, available in the student and faculty access areas of the Program. This handbook outlines the "one policy, two procedures" approach toward informal and formal resolution of allegations regarding equal opportunity, harassment, and discrimination. What follows are key statements on policy and an outline of Title IX reporting structure and grievance processes. Please refer to the Title IX Policy Handbook for comprehensive details.

Policy on Nondiscrimination

Warren Wilson College is committed to providing an educational environment that is free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. The program does not discriminate, in hiring, admissions or matriculation, on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, political affiliation, or any other protected category under applicable local, state, or federal law, including protections for those opposing discrimination or participating in any grievance process on campus, with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and/or other human/civil rights agencies. The College and the MFA Program strive to ensure that all individuals are safe, included, and respected in their learning environments.

Any member of the MFA or larger WWC community whose acts deny, deprive, or limit the educational or employment access, benefits, and/or opportunities of any member of this community, guest, or visitor on the basis of that person's actual or perceived membership in the protected classes listed above is in violation of Warren Wilson College Nondiscrimination Policy.

Inclusion Related to Gender Identity/Expression

Warren Wilson College strives to ensure that all individuals are safe, included, and respected in their working and learning environments, regardless of their gender identity or expression, including intersex, transgender, agender, and gender diverse students and employees. Discrimination on the basis of gender identity or expression is not tolerated by Warren Wilson College.

In upholding the principles of equity and inclusion, Warren Wilson College supports the full integration and healthy development of those who are transgender, transitioning, or gender diverse, and seeks to eliminate any stigma related to gender identity and expression. If a member of the Warren Wilson College community feels they have been subjected to discrimination under this Policy, they should follow the appropriate reporting/Formal Complaint process described below.

Disability Discrimination and Accommodation Policy

Warren Wilson College is committed to full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibit discrimination against qualified persons with disabilities, as well as other federal, state, and local laws and regulations pertaining to individuals with disabilities.

The ADA also protects individuals who have a record of a substantially limiting impairment or who are regarded as disabled by Warren Wilson College, regardless of whether they currently have a disability. A substantial impairment is one that significantly limits or restricts a major life activity such as hearing, seeing, speaking, breathing, performing manual tasks, walking, or caring for oneself.

Warren Wilson College is committed to providing qualified students with disabilities with reasonable accommodations and support needed to ensure equal access to Warren Wilson College's academic programs, facilities, and activities. All accommodations are made on an individualized basis. A student requesting any accommodation should first contact the Director of Disability/Access Services, who coordinates services for students with disabilities.

The Director of Disability/Access Services reviews documentation provided by the student and, in consultation with the student, determines which accommodations are appropriate for the student's particular needs and academic program(s) in accordance with the College's applicable policies.

Grievances related to disability status and/or accommodations will be addressed using the procedures in Appendix F of the policy handbook.

Discriminatory Harassment Policy

The sections below describe the specific forms of legally prohibited harassment that are also prohibited under Warren Wilson College Policy. When speech or conduct is protected by academic freedom and/or the First Amendment, it will not be considered a violation of Warren Wilson College Policy, though supportive measures will be offered to those impacted. All offense definitions encompass actual and/or attempted offenses.

Discriminatory Harassment

Discriminatory harassment—defined as unwelcome conduct by any member or group of the community on the basis of actual or perceived characteristic protected by policy or law—is a form of prohibited discrimination under Warren Wilson College policy. The Program, in conjunction with the College, will act to remedy all forms of harassment when reported, whether or not the harassment rises to the level of creating a “hostile environment.” A hostile environment is one that unreasonably interferes with, limits, or effectively denies an individual’s educational or employment access, benefits, or opportunities. This discriminatory effect results from harassing verbal, written, graphic, and/or physical conduct that is severe or pervasive *and* objectively offensive.

The Program reserves the right to address offensive conduct and/or harassment that 1) does not rise to the level of creating a hostile environment, or 2) that is of a generic nature and not based on a protected status. Addressing such conduct will not result in the imposition of discipline under Warren Wilson College policy, but may be addressed through respectful conversation, remedial actions, education, effective Alternative Resolution, and/or other informal resolution mechanisms.

Sexual Harassment

The Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR), the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and the State of North Carolina regard Sexual Harassment, a specific form of discriminatory harassment, as an unlawful discriminatory practice.

Acts of sexual harassment may be committed by any person upon any other person, regardless of the sex, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity of those involved. Sexual Harassment, as an umbrella category, includes the offenses of quid pro quo harassment, sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking, and is defined as unwelcome conduct determined by a reasonable person to be so severe and pervasive and objectively offensive that it effectively denies a complainant access to their education. (See Section 17.B. and Appendix A of the Title IX handbook for greater detail.)

Online Harassment and Misconduct

Members of the community are encouraged to be good digital citizens and to refrain from online misconduct, such as feeding anonymous gossip sites, sharing inappropriate content via social media, unwelcome sexual or sex-based messaging, distributing or threatening to distribute nude or semi-nude photos or recordings, breaches of privacy, or otherwise using the ease of transmission and/or anonymity of the Internet or other technology to harm another member of our MFA or wider Warren Wilson College community.

Note: Title IX Policy continues on Page 42 of the *MFA Handbook*.

III. Community Guidelines on Problematic Content (Pages 74-76 of *MFA Handbook*)

The MFA Program for Writers values diversity and the wide variety of human experience in reading, writing, and conversation. We are committed to honest dialogue at our residencies and in our correspondence about the effects of both published work and works in progress. But some words or behavior may offend others. A sincere commitment to diversity and inclusion requires the willingness to engage in difficult conversations when one or more members of the community are offended. The following is intended as guidance for these interactions.

Problematic Content

What is objectionable to one member of the community may not be to another. We support every community member's right to express objection, and we believe every community member should be open to listening to those who are offended. Such conversations are often difficult; it may be useful to keep the following in mind.

- Words and texts resonate differently to different people.
- For a variety of reasons, a community member might choose to include a piece of writing in a class, lecture, reading, or workshop even though they are aware that it might cause offense to some readers or listeners. In such cases, placing the writing in context, and explaining why it has been included, can help to keep the focus on the valid reasons for presenting the work.
- Work containing graphic or explicit descriptions of violence or abuse has the potential to prompt a traumatic response from a reader or audience member. When such work is presented, it can be a sign of consideration for the audience to provide a content warning.
- If objectionable material is presented without explanation, a reader or listener should feel free to raise the issue (at the moment or later), remain silent (no one is *required* to share their opinions regarding content they find offensive), or remove themselves from the situation (which could mean leaving the room).
- Judging the intention of work in progress can be especially challenging, as such work is by definition not fully formed; its tone and purpose are evolving. With that in mind:
 - Begin as a generous reader. Ask questions with concern, rather than assuming a writer meant to offend.
 - In preparing for discussion, be alert to content that may be objectionable to some readers, and prepare to discuss the passage in an open, respectful way.
 - In discussion, raise the difficulty with the content, while also recognizing that, in the end, it is the writer's privilege to make the final decisions about their writing.

If You Have Been Offended or Witness Objectionable Behavior

- If possible, speak to the person who behaved objectionably. Silence is often interpreted to mean *everything is fine*. This might be easiest when you can speak to that person alone. Choose a neutral space where you feel comfortable. You may choose to be accompanied by a fellow student or faculty/staff member.
- When speaking out, be clear about how words, actions, or mannerisms gave offense.
- Try to avoid attacking the individual. We all misspeak; it doesn't mean we are bad people.
- At any point (before, after, or instead of talking to the person who gave offense), the incident can be brought to the attention of the Program Director, a member of the Academic Board, or the Academic Board's Representative for Diversity and Inclusion. The Director, Board, and Board Representative bear responsibility for maintaining a climate in which students, faculty and staff members may do their best work.
- If someone has demonstrated a pattern of biased and/or prejudiced behavior, we urge you to bring the matter to the attention of the Program Director, a member of the Academic Board, or the Academic Board's Representative for Diversity and Inclusion.
- No community member is *required* to speak out. There are valid reasons for choosing not to.
- If *for any reason* you do not want to or feel you cannot raise the issue with the person who offended you, ask for support from a friend or colleague.
- An offended individual does not need to apologize to the person who gave offense. Rather than say, "I'm sorry to bring this up," you might say, "I don't know what you intended, but your words were hurtful because..."
- While discussing the problem with friends or close colleagues is natural, this rarely *solves* an issue. Be mindful of the outcome you're seeking. If you're in need of empathy and understanding, a friend, taken into confidence, can offer that. If you want the person who offended you to understand the offense, or to change, a different action is needed.

If You Are Told You Have Caused Offense

- It's natural to want to defend or explain your words or actions. First, though, be a good listener. Do not speak until the person who approached you is finished. This is an opportunity to see from their perspective.
- The person who raises an issue may not want to take part in a long discussion and is under no obligation to do so. If you don't understand the comment, you can ask for clarification; if you feel the matter warrants further discussion, ask if the person who approached you is open to that. Respect their answer. Should you offer an apology, try not to over-apologize.
- Consider the power dynamics in this conversation; it likely took great courage for the person to speak to you. They are probably as anxious as you are. A good practice is to thank the person for bringing this to your attention.

- Even if you feel you've been misunderstood, it is a sign of consideration to listen and try to understand the thoughts and feelings of the person offended.
- Let the person know that you were unaware of the effect of your words or actions, that they've given you something to think about, and that this will inform your actions in the future.
- Don't make jokes or be dismissive. The fact that the matter was important to a fellow writer should make it worth your serious attention.
- Faculty are especially encouraged to follow these guidelines—to acknowledge their power and to model respectful behavior.