



# Racism at the University of Melbourne Report

## Edition 2

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UMSU People of Colour Officer (2022)

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UMSU People of Colour Officer (2023)



**Through collaboration,  
education, and  
activism, we will  
strive to build a  
university community  
that embraces and  
celebrates the diverse  
backgrounds and  
contributions of all  
its members.**

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# 1. Acknowledgement of Country

This report was written on the stolen lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations. I'd like to pay deepest respect to elders past, present, and emerging and acknowledge that sovereignty of this land was never ceded.

I would like to extend my solidarity to all First Nations students who have participated in this survey and whose experiences are in this report.

As settlers on stolen land, we must stand with First Nations people and center them in our anti-racism work, there cannot be racial justice without First Nations justice.

## 2. Definitions

### **BIPOC:**

Bla(c)k, Indigenous, and People of Colour, refers to people of a non-white background

### **UMSU:**

University of Melbourne Student Union.

### **Unimelb:**

The University of Melbourne

## 3. Content Warning

This report goes into details on experiences of **racism, white supremacy, eugenics, colonization, anti-bla(c)kness, bullying** and **Asian hate**.

Please take care when reading the **incidents section** in this report.

## 4. Officer's Statement

The People of Colour department at UMSU was established in 2016, and its first officers began their roles in 2017. It is the most recent department to be formed within UMSU and is celebrating its sixth anniversary this year. The department originated from the POC collective under the welfare department, as it was necessary to provide a dedicated space for BIPOC students to exist and have advocates representing their interests. Over the course of just six years, the department has experienced tremendous growth in its activities. It currently oversees five regular collectives, organizes anti-racism workshops, collaborates with the university on campaigns, offers grants to BIPOC innovators, launch an annual BIPOC magazine, and arranges special events to acknowledge and celebrate the community.

As an officer last year my role was one of the hardest and most rewarding things I have ever done. From bearing the weight of holding space for students who want to feel safe and have a sense of community, to lobbying the University to cater to its diverse student community, being the PoC officer was not an easy task. The reality is that we are overworked, underpaid, and exhausted, yet we continue to show up.

Continuously fighting for change within the union and outside is a constant battle. I have joined UMSU as a committee member under the People of Colour department in 2021, this year I am the President of the union, and while I would have loved to say that I have seen tremendous change, it has rather been slow. As we anticipate the University's anti-racism plan, I am determined to utilize my position as President to push

for meaningful and tangible change within the Union, University and beyond.

This report aims to summarize the feedback received from a survey conducted in 2022 that focused on the experiences of discrimination and microaggressions faced by students at the University of Melbourne. This report carries within it pain, exhaustion, and experiences that BIPOC students should not have to endure. The results of this report form the basis of the recommendations to the University of Melbourne and UMSU.

We understand that the fight for change is ongoing, and we are prepared to use every available resource and platform to drive the necessary transformations and ensure that the voices and experiences of BIPOC students are heard and respected. Through collaboration, education, and activism, we will strive to build a university community that embraces and celebrates the diverse backgrounds and contributions of all its members.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the People of Colour Committee of 2022, who without the incredible work from last year would not have been possible. Mohamed Hadi, who was the first person to publish the Racism at the University of Melbourne Report, who have been a friend, mentor and comrade. The BIPOC officers, councilors, committee members who have come before me and those who will come after me. My friends who have stood beside me as I carried out my work last year and continue to do so this year.

**In Solidarity,  
Hibatallah (Hiba) Adam**

**All students who participated in the report have been reached out to and offered support in relation to their experiences.**

# 5. The Incidents

**Disclaimer:** These incidents and experiences reported by students are taken as truthful, the POC department doesn't have the resources to investigate each story, neither does it want to, any investigation of these events will re-traumatize and bring significant burden on students' and the officer's mental health, which is not the objective of this report. All students who participated in the report have been reached out to and offered support in relation to their experiences.

The experiences on this report have been collected from a survey run between 12th of October to the 11th of November 2022. These incidents have been put in as they were submitted, at various stages of the survey students were asked specific questions about their experiences in academic settings, events, etc. these will be indicated by a subheading before each submission.

No edits have been made to any submission unless it's a spelling/grammatical error or one that is identifying of the author.

There were 49 responses altogether.

# 5. The Incidents

## 5.1. When students were asked about any experiences of discrimination in academic settings, this is what they had to say:

- ▶ “In Critical Analytical Skills, a class that is compulsory in a Politics Major, we were asked to bring in an unusual piece of data. The tutor wanted to show that research and data could be found in many different ways. I brought a piece of art that was used in a Native Title Case and an associated documentary. I presented mine last and on each student’s data before me the tutor would suggest pros and cons of the data. The cons pretty much boiled down to it is not traditional data and so could be dismissed. That was until I presented mine where, as part of the cons, she said that Indigenous Art could be seen as ‘primitive’ and ‘nonsensical’ to people.  
  
Other than that, I am frequently asked to support tutors’ teaching by being a source of Indigenous information during tutorials which is no fun because I’m not getting paid to do so.  
  
One last example is during an Indigenous Studies class, I was talking about how when I fight back against casual racism I’m seen as an angry Blak man. I used the example that white people can say things like ‘sexual abuse to children is part of Indigenous culture’ without being seen as uncivil but when I reply with outrage ‘fuck off cunt’ then I am categorised as an angry Blak man. One of the other students (a white woman) felt the need to agree with my point and give her point of view by saying ‘yeah that’s so true because when you said that I did see you as an angry Blak man.’ I commend the tutor of that class though because she did check up on me after.”
- ▶ “My English is not best so sometimes I have a feeling of my class mates are much better at speaking and the tutor likes them more”
- ▶ “In one of my classes, an argument was brought forward which validated those of Holocaust deniers and questioned whether this catastrophic historical event has in fact occurred. As a descendant of Holocaust survivors I was left feeling shocked and incredibly hurt by the way in which this class was conducted and the backing my University academics in the class for the argument put forward. I spoke up about my discomfort but found that I was made to feel inadequate and marginalised for my feelings. I felt really alone.”
- ▶ “Sometimes when I say something, my tutor brushes over it, then when another person speaks, they go into extensive conversations about it. Other peers have spoken over me as well. Also, once I was talking about transformative justice options for Palestine in a criminology subject, and someone interrupted me to justify Israel bombing Gaza (completely unrelated to what I was discussing).”
- ▶ “I often find that its well-meaning white people who claim to champion minority voices that are the main culprits of speaking over non-white people. I don’t share traditional views that a “person of colour” is supposed to share in the current political climate, and this leads to myself being viewed as a ‘race traitor’ or somebody who is ‘siding with my oppressors’. I find this to be the most despicable thing I hear at university amongst my peers.”
- ▶ “Some classmates (usually Australian) do not listen to my opinions in class and instead dismiss them”
- ▶ “I have felt a discrepancy between how some of my tutors treat me and other students. It goes from blatant hatred (don’t want to talk to me, brushes me off, replies with passive aggressive emails, is curt with me in class) to general ‘weirdness’ when I talk about my culture/language I speak. I feel this from other peers as well (the weirdness) - when i say where I’m from, where I’ve lived, what language I speak, they look at me weird, but get excited when someone talks about their association to Europe. I have felt disrespected from my peers and my teachers throughout my whole undergraduate degree.”
- ▶ “Once I was in a group of people at a tute, and they were predominately white. I was answering one girls question and she showed no enthusiasm towards me. Then in the same moment another girl after me answered her question, phrased differently and the questioner actively interacted with her, all within the same table. I felt like my voice didn’t matter. In the same tute, a tutor asked the girl next to me how to pronounce her name correctly and when she came to mine, she didn’t even ask me how to pronounce it and she mispronounced it. I’m shy so I didn’t correct her but I concluded it was because I wear a headscarf and I’m visibly not white, while the girl next to me was POC but not Muslim”



**“STOP USING SLURS  
FOR MY PEOPLE IT  
MAKES ME FEEL LIKE  
SHIT AND I CANT  
FOCUS IN CLASS.  
IF YOURE GOING  
TO TEACH BLACK  
KNOWLEGES THEN  
DO IT RIGHT AND  
IN A CULTURALLY  
SAFE WAYYYYYY”**

# 5. The Incidents

## 5.2. When students were asked if they experienced lecturers, tutors, or other students making insensitive comments or jokes at their expense:

**“I am originally from Senegal. My tutor think that we are very backwards and only the western thinkings are correct. She makes stereotypical comments about our people are backwards and uneducated.”**

- ▶ “Someone at Unimelb love letters posted about entering Islam which is the religion I follow. A few people under the comments were being sarcastic about it”
- ▶ “I was talking at the University of Melbourne’s official discord channel, and a random stranger ID “fizz” attack me in a personal message. He started by attacking my identity as a musician and anime cosplayer, then start to attack my country, China and certain ideology related to it, though I have never said anything related to politics. He is basically attacking random Asian people with silly political jokes, judging and attacking their personal files with unacceptable language. UMSU should do something against discrimination against certain races on any school-related forums.”
- ▶ “The French club was horrible, they didnt ask my name and did not even bother to present themselves, they talked over me, barely listened, and asked questions and allowed everyone to answer and skipped me numerous times. I was the only poc and it was a horrible experience”
- ▶ “A”n old friend of mine (who is also an ethnic minority, Asian) said racial slurs against black people casually but because I’m also from another ethnic group (Asian, Persian). But I’m not sure if that’s extreme enough for me to report as racism.”
- ▶ “I think a separate review into the associated colleges of the university needs to be conducted because racism is really rampant there. It’s not surprising seeing as most students who go to college are white private school kids and we all know what private schools are like. As a non-white person I never felt comfortable when I lived at college and was marginalized probably once a day.”
- ▶ “Many people have automatically assumed I’m an international student or that I just moved to Australia because of my appearance (of south asian descent)”

**“Asian fetishisation has been happening a lot in many cultural clubs and I am getting sick of (usually white men) people coming to clubs for the sole purpose of picking up women.”**

# 5. The Incidents

## 5.3. Students were asked if they have had any experiences of microaggressions or discrimination in academic settings or while using university services, this is what they had to say:

- ▶ “On 10th September at 5:05PM, location is Melbourne Town Hall. I was on the road and saw unimelb holding a graduation ceremony for Business faculty. I am also a graduate student at the end of this year, but never went to any graduation ceremony, so I entered the main gate of this building, and stand near the gate waiting for my friend who is also an Asian, to come out of the bathroom.

During that waiting time I did not do anything, just stand. (My friend went into the toilet, and he thought it was an open toilet, and he went in and out without anyone telling him not to go in nor a sign). The security saw me and I said hi to him. After that he directly said GET OUT!!GET OUT OF HERE NOW!!! Then I stood outside the door and he kept yelling me to stay away from the gate and get out even I already stand outside that building. I was firstly quite puzzled then angry, I ask him why you speak so rude to me? I apologize for entering this building but your attitude was disrespectful from the start. He said GET OUT, and I do not want to listen to you, do not care anything of you. He looks healthy and does not have any mental illness, at the very start he saw me, he pointed at the door and told me very rudely to get out. No respect at all, if he can be just a bit polite, maybe just say you can not come in now, I will definitely say sorry to him and leave, but he kept telling me to get out and he called his supervisor.

That man’s attitude was even worse, he didn’t want to solve the problem, kept yelling to me He is Right!! STOP!!! don’t wanna listen to what you gonna explain, I’m not interested in what you think!! After that I was crying..I thought he would listen to my explanation and work things out better, but he was more aggressive. It was a very sad day, and I was even very sad for many days to come. They even asked the staff who was in charge of the school ceremony that day to accuse me, but I would like to say that I have always been a very polite person, and I would never abuse someone for no reason”

- ▶ “I did take up the issue of the university not doing anything for international students with my academic advisor but nothing was done or even discussed”
- ▶ “The university’s IT systems (including UMSU event registration pages) make it mandatory to provide a first and last name. This causes issues with people who use only one name (more common in Asian cultures) or do not wish to disclose a surname. This also amounts to excessive data collection where it is not really necessary (such as cultural or informal events organised by UMSU). I would like to see this addressed.”
- ▶ “Insensitivity when discussing cultural artefacts and artwork from different culture, lacking interest or knowledge when what was being discussed wasn’t Western/Eurocentric”

- ▶ “Lecturers don’t always back us up. I called out a reading out for being racist and taken through a white lens, then a white boy just started spouting white fragility. It made me feel culturally unsafe and like I couldn’t participate in class”
- ▶ “I don’t know, I feel like tutorials and labs aren’t as welcoming as I thought they’d be. It’s quite hard to make friends, in my maths tutorial, all the white girls literally stuck together and became a group while I didn’t really have anyone apart from another girl who started showing up.”

**“my tutor said that she didn’t believe white privilege was real. and when we explained to her how our experiences differs from her, she ignored it”**

# 5. The Incidents

## 5.4. When students were asked whether international students are treated fairly, this is what they had to say:

- ▶ “We’re cash cows and nothing more”
- ▶ “fr fr. BSL is such a shit show, they are ignored and treated as a hinderance by teachers and student. There is generally just such a short fuse with teachers dealing with communication barriers”
- ▶ “As an English major, it is often expected that students have knowledge of certain parts of European history, e.g. Anne Boleyn, and as an international student from a non-British SETTLER colony, I didn’t learn those parts of history, and I feel that it is unfair to expect so of students, especially because lecturers are sometimes surprised that we didn’t receive such education, as if British history should be treated as universal education.”
- ▶ “While I myself have not experienced any direct display of racism, i do know of other instances where friends were subjected to bias due to their race”
- ▶ “I think the University treats international students relatively fairly however, it’d be nice if the university could advocate for international student rights more. Such as through making sure international students know their working rights but also advocating for international students to be able to access public transport concessions with the government as they contribute so much to the city and university but cannot access this basic concession which other states in Australia have.”
- ▶ “Very profitable for university, I am unaware of what supports there are. I have never seen discrimination in class.”
- ▶ “Not enough support for domestic students in how to work with students from different backgrounds respectfully”
- ▶ “There is a fair recognition in the University of the a number of international students. However faculty and staff are still overwhelmingly white in comparison to the extent of diversity in the student body.”
- ▶ “I am not an international student, but I feel that a lot of things are catered towards domestic students and not accommodated for international students.”
- ▶ “International students school fees are way too expensive compared to domestic students. We are treated as cash cows”
- ▶ “I’m not an international student, so I do not know exactly how they are treated. However I have heard from friends that they cannot extend/defer/accelerate their course as easily as domestic students. Not 100 percent sure though.”
- ▶ “I have friends that are international students and they tell me all the time how hard it is to finish reading something in English, for example in an exam. It takes them more time to process the language compared to domestic kids and I feel really bad for them. Can’t anything be done for that?”
- ▶ “Under loading is very restricted for international students who had to work to pay for their expenses but domestic students are allowed to do so without any excuse”
- ▶ “As an English major, it is often expected that students have knowledge of certain parts of European history, e.g. Anne Boleyn, and as an international student from a non-British SETTLER colony, I didn’t learn those parts of history, and I feel that it is unfair to expect so of students, especially because lecturers are sometimes surprised that we didn’t receive such education, as if British history should be treated as universal education.”
- ▶ “There is an international student in one of my (LOTE) language classes, and all the teachers are openly hostile towards him on zoom”

**“We are never treated properly. We are treated as cash cows!”**

**“I pay much more but some things like internships or experiences are only for local students. I understand some restrictions are by visa but it feels very unfair to be like this.”**

# 5. The Incidents

## 5.5. When students were asked if they would feel comfortable talking to UMSU about racist incidents, this is what they had to say:

- ▶ “Indigenous students are lucky because we have Murrup Barak which is staffed by Indigenous people so it is a lot easier to find a unimelb staff member that you feel comfortable talking about these things”
- ▶ “I would never go to anyone about anything related to racism unless it was systemic rather than one-off incidents”
- ▶ “Over half of my teachers are white, and even though they are not outwardly and intentionally racist, they also might not be the most informed or most aware people, and when these issues are brought up, (although I have never done so) I feel like I would be overlooked and disrespected if I have a problem, whereas I feel like UMSU has more POC representation and has better policy to make sure students feel heard and represented.”
- ▶ “It depends on the staff, sometimes I am ok to talk. For UMSU I feel they are sometimes not genuine. I share my problems and same with my tutors sometimes, they say our thoughts are sexist or backwards. It makes me feel more unsafe after.”
- ▶ “Unaware of who to talk to or which resources to access but I’m sure through a quick search I could find them.”
- ▶ “UMSU has previously disregarded my attempts to discuss my experiences with them and completely ignored an email I sent them for support”
- ▶ “No clear information as to who to contact at UMSU or how to approach them. This information should be widely disseminated through the newsletter and elsewhere.”
- ▶ “I don’t think there are a lot of POC staff, so wouldn’t feel comfortable talking to them about it. Especially psychology services.”
- ▶ “UMSU has people of color who look like me which makes it easier for me to reach out to them”
- ▶ “These resources were never made clear to us, so the uni doesn’t feel approachable for when we face these problems.”
- ▶ “UMSU is a student body of diverse people, and I feel like I have interacted with a lot of people from the group so I’m comfortable sharing. But not with professors or staff at uni, I just don’t feel safe”
- ▶ “I’m not sure where to report an old friend of mine saying racial slurs against another ethnic group but which is not mine.”
- ▶ “UMSU has a variety of resources on their website and emphasize on inclusion and diversity. On the other hand, staff at the university often lack personal relationships with students and therefore students feel they cannot confide in them on any level.”
- ▶ “I firstly hate telling other people about my issues. Secondly, I’m not confident that the University will take tangible action if I report racism. Moreover, although UMSU seems to be more kind than the University, I am also not sure whether UMSU will be willing or able to take suitable and useful action to reduce racism.”



**“LMAO what are you going to do about this? there are literally buildings named after eugenics professors at unimelb.”**

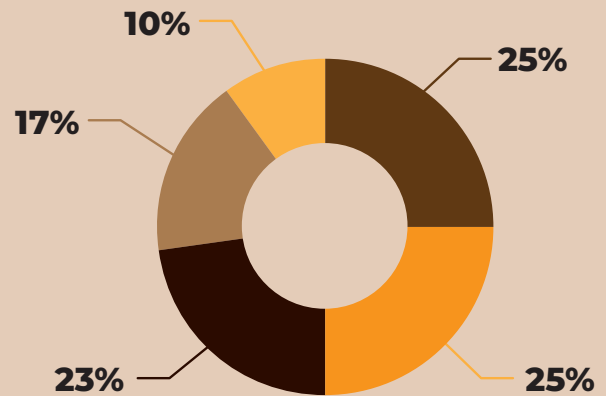
# 6. The Figures

The 2022 survey had 49 respondents in total, with 78% being undergraduate students and 22% being graduate students. Out of the 49 respondents 52% were domestic students and 44% were on-shore international students and 4% were off-shore international students.

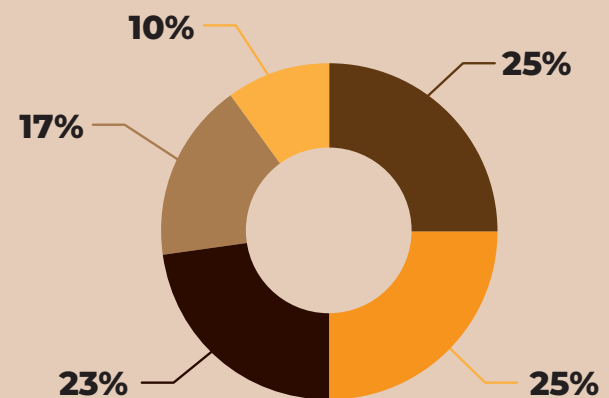
The survey contained a series of questions to where students respond on a scale of always to never and if they strongly agree to strongly disagree. In addition, if they faced specific experiences of microaggressions, both in academic and general settings.

**Disclaimer:** some questions were excluded due to either insufficient responses or they did not provide any useful information.

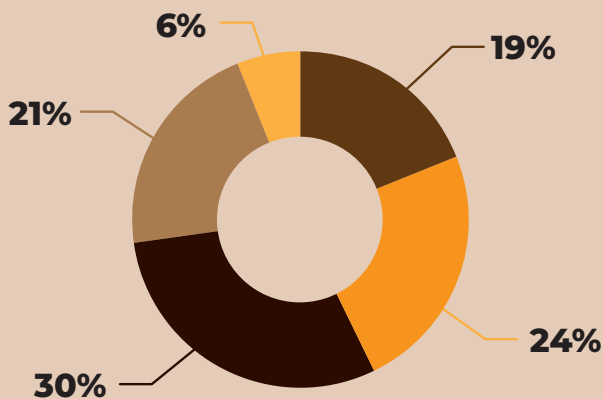
**Statement: In my classes, I feel comfortable as a non-white student**



**Statement: In my tutorials, labs, workshops or lectures I feel spoken over**

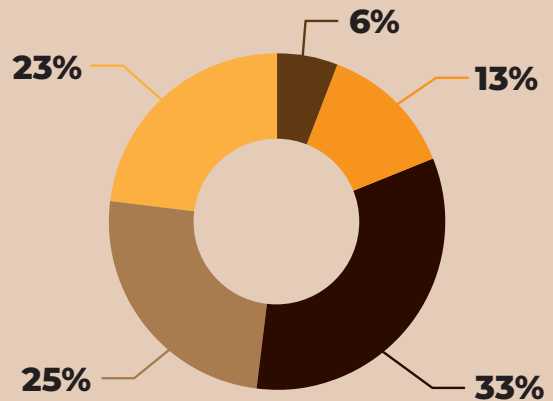


**Statement: In my classes, the subject content caters to people of different backgrounds/cultures**

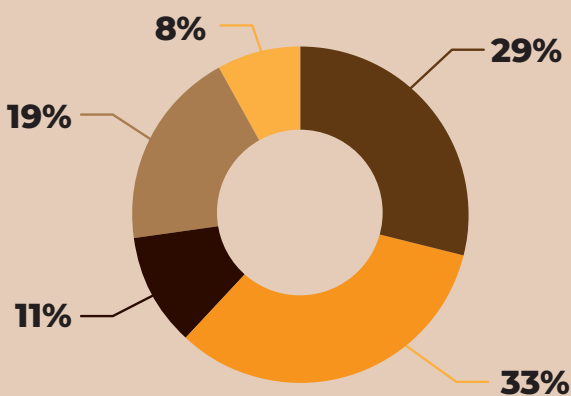


*Subject content diversity refers to reading lists, resources and course syllabus covering relevant aspects of different cultures. This is especially relevant in the Faculty of Arts, for example, an Art History subject should cover art from different cultures and not just focus on European art history.*

**Statement: I have felt that I am treated differently to my white counterparts at university due to my background**



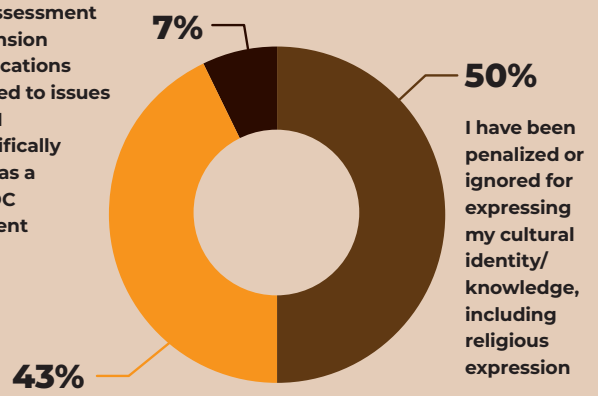
**Statement: I feel confident using university services\* as a non-white student**



\* University services refers to CAPS, Stop 1, Academic services etc.

**Question: Please tick all that apply**

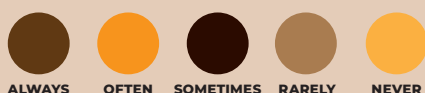
The examiner was unreasonably strict on assessment extension applications related to issues that I specifically face as a BIPOC student



I have been graded more harshly/given harsher criticisms in my assessment

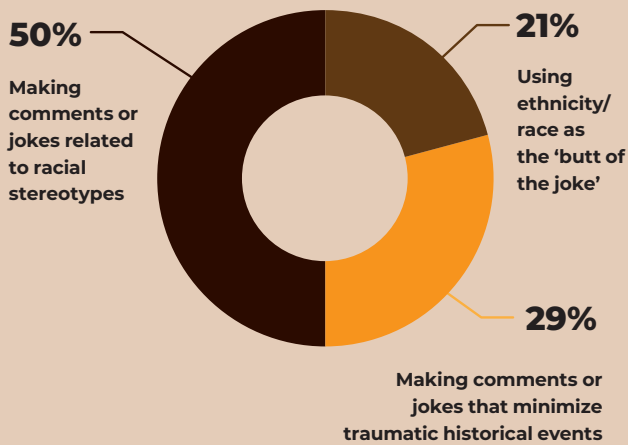
I have been penalized or ignored for expressing my cultural identity/knowledge, including religious expression

*The majority of respondents share the experiences of being penalized for using their cultural knowledge in classes and have been graded more harshly because of their identity.*

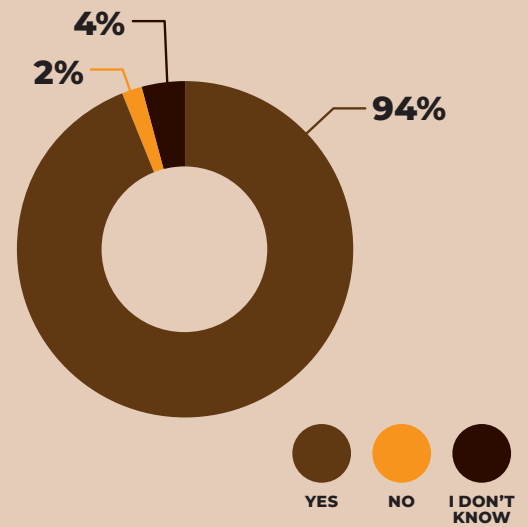


# 6. The Figures

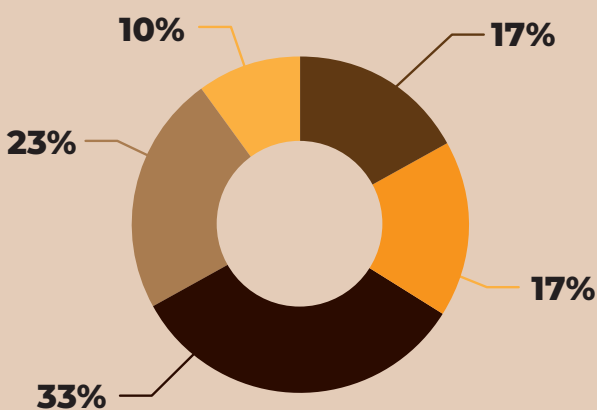
**Question: I have experienced lecturers, tutors or other students making insensitive comments or jokes at the expense of non-white students**



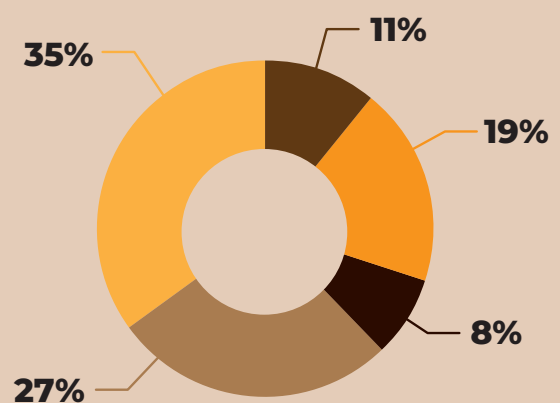
**Question: Do staff have a responsibility to intervene when instances of Racism occur?**



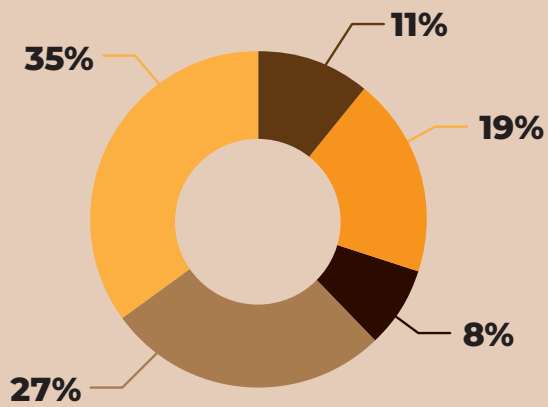
**Question: Do you think the University treats International students fairly?**



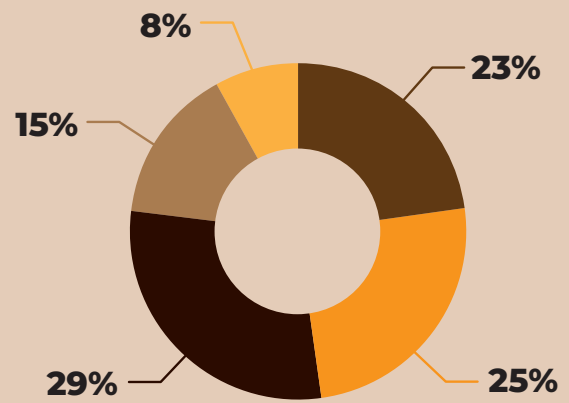
**Statement: As a student I know where to go to report discrimination**



**Statement: I can talk to university staff about any of these experiences**



**Statement: I can talk to UMSU about any of these experiences**



# 7. Recommendations

In 2021 when the below recommendations were made, they were accompanied by the following statement:

*“We recognize that change cannot come overnight, however, we believe that with a good implementation of these recommendations as well as a constructive relationship between the POC department and the university is an adequate start, at the end of the day we want to help students access education in a safe manner for them.”*

It is important to acknowledge that unfortunately not much if anything has changed. The university has released a 4-part anti-racism action commitment, which outlines very general objectives that university wants to aspire to, however, we haven't seen much progress in moving towards these objectives since their release in March 2023.

Therefore, our recommendations for 2021 still stand. We urge the University to act fast, while change does not come overnight, BIPOC students cannot continue this fight on their own.

1. Adopt an explicit and firm anti-racism policy at unimelb, for all staff and students, with their input incorporated into the policies.
2. Create an accessible reporting form on the safer community program page explicitly for instances of racism with the option of the complaint to be anonymized, this should be available to students across all faculties.
3. Establish a formal procedure to be used across the university when instances of racism are reported, including an acknowledgment that the report has been received.
4. Employ an anti-racism specialist to implement any recommendations mentioned in this report and respond to reported instances of racism on campus.
5. Launch a review of subjects offered at the university, especially in the Faculty of Arts, to create content and syllabus that caters to different cultures and gives students a more global lens to their degrees, instead of a Eurocentric one.
6. Create a framework for academic staff that ensures that students' knowledge of their own culture is appreciated rather than penalised in assessments and in class discussions.
7. Implementing and delivering adequate response and intervention training for academic staff to understand how racism can manifest in classrooms and intervention procedure for when these incidents occur.
8. Delivering a specialized counselling service for BIPOC students, as part of the Counselling and Psychological services, these counsellors can help students who experienced racism or provide tailored advice for students who share the cultural understanding.
9. Delivering anti-racism training for academic staff, with a focus on unconscious bias and microaggressions delivered by external anti-racism specialists. This training should be guided by students' experiences of racism mentioned in this report and future ones.
10. Convene regular meetings with the POC and Indigenous officers at UMSU to incorporate student representatives in issues and policies that affect BIPOC students.
11. Invite the POC and Indigenous officers to the Diversity & Inclusion committee meetings or distribute the meeting minutes of the diversity and inclusion committee with the officers to understand which stage the committee is at in terms of anti-racism plan implementation, and how can the department contribute.

Since the 2021 report UMSU has made strides towards accountability and ensuring that the report is reflected upon. The following has been implemented:

1. An organization-wide anti-racism working group has been started by the People of Colour Department that aims to address the recommendations that were put forward by the 2021 report
2. UMSU Advocacy & Legal services use the Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS) with students who need services delivered in languages other than English when using UMSU services. Additionally, a survey will be run to gauge the need for interpreted materials on the UMSU website.
3. As of 2023 UMSU is currently undergoing an audit focused on diversity and inclusion, aiming to enhance its organizational culture by fostering greater inclusivity, accessibility, and diversity.

The following recommendations are from the 2021 remain pending:

1. Create a more accessible method to report racism and escalate matters, sending students back and forth to different places in UMSU, the mechanism of reporting should be very accessible rather bureaucratic.
2. To conduct anti-racism and sensitivity training for all officers and councilors, this training should also cover ways to include and centre BIPOC students in the departments' work where this is relevant.
3. Similar surveys should be conducted in residential colleges and through the GSA as well, and work with the relevant bodies to do so.

## Reporting Racism



To report racism at the University of Melbourne, visit [umsu.unimelb.edu.au/communities/poc/report-racism](https://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/communities/poc/report-racism) or scan the QR code.

## Resources

**UMSU Advocacy:** Graduate, undergraduate, domestic and international students are welcome to use this free and confidential advocacy service. Visit: [umsu.unimelb.edu.au/support/advocacy](https://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/support/advocacy)

**Multicultural Futures:** MHAS's person centred, and holistic approach has the capacity to provide support to people from CALD backgrounds on 08 9336 8282. Visit: [multiculturalfutures.org.au/services/mental-health-wellbeing](https://multiculturalfutures.org.au/services/mental-health-wellbeing)

**Headspace:** Headspace is a dedicated mental health support resource for young people aged 18-25. You can chat with a counsellor for free on 1800 650 890 or connect with them via online chat and email. Visit: [headspace.org.au](https://headspace.org.au)

**Beyond Blue:** Offers 24/7 telephone support and specializing in issues such as depression, anxiety and suicide. Visit: [beyondblue.org.au](https://beyondblue.org.au)

**Lifeline:** Mental health and wellbeing. Lifeline offer free counselling via phone call on 13 11 14, or via text and online chat. Visit: [lifeline.org.au](https://lifeline.org.au)

# Racism at the University of Melbourne Report

## Edition 2

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