

# Grossmont College Academic Senate

## **Resolution for Adopting and Maintaining Equity-Minded Communication Guidelines**

Whereas, we, as a District, are focused on building more equitable practices and supporting diversity; we recognize that it is our responsibility to ensure that our dedication to equity and diversity is reflected in every aspect of the culture and environment we create and support on our campuses in order to embody the values we have outlined truly and to which we have publicly committed ([GCCCD Mission Statements](#)),

Whereas, we understand and accept that our communication practices have a powerful impact on the culture we create—regardless of whether communications take place in physical spaces (such as in person) or virtual spaces (such as through Zoom or email);

Whereas, we are all able to support efforts at building an equitable and supportive culture by being mindful of how our words and actions impact our communities and engaging in this work in a deliberate, direct, and clear manner;

Whereas, “Racelighting,” which is defined by Dr. Luke Woods and Dr. Frank Harris III as an “act of psychological manipulation [whether intentional or unintentional] where people of color receive racial messages that distort their realities and lead them to second-guess themselves,” harms our BIPOC community members in manners that often go unacknowledged and unaddressed ([racelighting.net](#));

Whereas, maintaining a healthy and supportive work culture and environment is essential for retaining and recruiting employees and furthering our overall Equal Employment Opportunity efforts, and that toxicity should not be accepted or validated through silence as silence in the face of toxic behaviors and practices is incredibly harmful and leads to a culture where some folks are isolated as they experience repeated harm;

Resolved, that the Grossmont College Academic Senate works to promote, model, and uphold the standards set for equity-minded communication as listed below in “[Equity-Minded Communication Guidelines](#).”

# Equity-Minded Communication Guidelines

## 1) Maintain safe and supportive spaces focused on establishing partnerships and promoting growth.

- Employees of the District are expected to treat other members of the District, students, and members of the public with courtesy, honesty, professionalism, fairness, mutual respect, and civility in accordance with AP 3050 Institutional Code of Conduct ([AP 3050: Institutional Code of Ethics](#)).
- Since all communications have an impact on our work culture, it is important to make sure to frame them—even when disagreeing or engaging critically with each other’s work or ideas—as opportunities to strengthen a sense of collaboration and help each other and ourselves grow.
- When offering feedback, critique ideas and not the person saying them.
- When communicating in a public medium, it is important to offer feedback in a supportive manner to avoid anyone feeling singled out or targeted. Public spaces are often not conducive to a balanced exchange of ideas—especially when navigating power differentials. Sometimes feedback is best offered in a smaller, more supportive group to facilitate direct and more equitable communication.

## 2) Put people first.

- As we engage in our work, we should remember that our rhetoric, tone, and actions—regardless of intention—directly impact everyone around us. Because of this, we must work together to preserve each other’s sense of humanity and dignity.
- Feedback and criticism should be rooted in empathy, compassion, and kindness, as no one should be made to feel small or unwelcomed in any of our spaces—whether those spaces be physical or virtual.

## 3) Focus on uplifting and empowering members of our community.

- As members of a shared community, we are connected to and reliant on each other. Simply put, we are a team, and as such, we act to uplift each other as doing so strengthens our shared power and allows all of us to thrive.
- Making sure our communications are rooted in kindness and care for each other makes them more effective; it also builds a work environment where we can feel fulfilled and strengthens our capacity to offer grace and care to others.
- Always err on the side of inclusion when the subject matter impacts many groups on campus. For example, when discussing something as significant as Guided Pathways, arenas for feedback and input from all members of our community should be solicited and implemented.

#### **4) Be mindful of the power differentials within relationships.**

- Whether we are communicating through email, phone, or speech, there is no way to erase or make invisible power differentials. Thus, we must be mindful of our communication choices to avoid perpetuating the inequities and aggressions (micro and macro) that we seek to target through our equity work.
- When responding to communication, it is important that we aim to listen attentively and respectfully from our own social locations and allow space for equitable communication where our colleagues, especially our colleagues from historically marginalized communities, may share their perspectives and concerns without intimidation or fear of retaliation.
- In correspondence to historically marginalized faculty, staff, and administrators, we want to make sure that we are not engaged in racelighting practices. “Racelighting” is defined by Dr. Luke Woods and Dr. Frank Harris III as an “act of psychological manipulation [whether intentional or unintentional] where people of color receive racial messages that distort their realities and lead them to second-guess themselves” (from [racelighting.net](https://racelighting.net)). As a reference, the conceptual framework on racelighting is accessible below.
  - [Wood, J. L., & Harris III, F. \(2021, Feb 12\). Racelighting: A prevalent version of gaslighting facing People of Color. Diverse Issues in Higher Education.](#)
  - Additional resources can also be found at [racelighting.net](https://racelighting.net)
- It is important to understand and accept that intent differs from impact. When you do or say something, your feelings are tied to your intent. However, the impact is tied to how your words and actions make the recipient feel. Even if you have good intentions, that won’t stop the impact they have on others—and their feelings are valid. For example, not answering emails sends the message that the person and their concerns do not matter.

#### **5) Disrupt toxic behaviors and practices whenever possible.**

- As silence in the face of toxic behaviors and practices is incredibly harmful and leads to a culture where some folks are isolated as they experience repeated harm, it is crucial that we disrupt toxic behaviors and practices when we are able to identify them. In other words, toxicity should not be accepted or validated through silence.
- Communication should support our goal to create and maintain safe spaces by holding each other and ourselves accountable. We can use equitable communication practices to call people in and support their personal and professional growth by bringing attention to harmful words or behaviors, including bias, prejudice, microaggressions, and discrimination, that must be addressed.

## **6) Validate lived experiences and avoid tone policing**

- When a historically marginalized community member speaks of their experience, they speak with experiential knowledge. They, thus, should be trusted to “know” this truth and not be pressured to defend or justify their knowledge.
- It is essential that while we work together to hold each other accountable and engage in analytical work, we be mindful not to diminish, invalidate, or decontextualize the feelings and experiences of our colleagues, especially our colleagues from historically marginalized communities, by tone policing and prioritizing positivity over their needs (also known as “toxic positivity”).

Voted on and passed by the Grossmont College Academic Senate on March 20, 2023

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