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SB101-21/22-Resolution Encouraging University of Montana Academic Departments to Implement Content Warnings in Classes

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1 **The Associated Students of the University of Montana**
2 **Resolution Encouraging University of Montana Academic Departments to Implement**
3 **Content Warnings in Classes**

4 **March 29, 2022**

5 **SB101-21/22**

6 **Authored by: Amelia Hawes, ASUM Senator; Madison McKenzie, ASUM Senator;**
7 **Sponsored by: Hailey Hargrove, Curry Health Wellness Team Health Promotion**
8 **Specialist; Jorgia Hawthorne, ASUM Senator; Danielle Pease, Chair of the Equitable**
9 **Education Committee;**

10
11 Whereas, The Associated Students of the University of Montana (“ASUM”) represents the
12 students of the University of Montana (“UM”) and serves as an advocate for their mental,
13 emotional, and physical wellbeing;

14
15 Whereas, On November 17, 2021, ASUM passed SB47-21/22, “Resolution Encouraging Faculty
16 to Include Mental Health, Wellness, and Basic Needs Resources in Syllabi” to promote further
17 support for students struggling with mental health, overall wellness, and fulfillment of basic
18 needs¹;

19
20 Whereas, ASUM named Accessibility as one of its Core Values during the 21/22 session²;

21
22 Whereas, Experiences of trauma, victimization, and posttraumatic stress disorder (“PTSD”) are
23 pervasive among college students;

24
25 Whereas, One study from 2018 evaluating rates of exposure to potentially traumatic events
26 (“PTE”) and prevalence of PTSD among college students found that 70% of participants in the
27 study had been exposed to at least one PTE in their lifetime, and 25.3% of that group met criteria
28 for probable PTSD³;

29
30 Whereas, Survey results indicated that 76.1% of male and 95.1% of female UM faculty members
31 reported that their mental/emotional well-being is worse now than in semesters previous to the
32 COVID-19 pandemic⁴;

33
¹ Glueckert, M. M., Lock, C. S., & Cowley, K. (2021). SB47-21/22: Resolution Encouraging Faculty to Include Mental Health, Wellness, and Basic Needs Resources in Syllabi. *Senate Resolutions, 2007-Present*. 927. https://scholarworks.umt.edu/asum_resolutions/927

² Glueckert, M. M. & Heaton, E. (2021). SB53-21/22: Resolution Amending the ASUM Core Values. *Senate Resolutions, 2007-Present*. 924. https://scholarworks.umt.edu/asum_resolutions/924

³ Cusack, S. E., Hicks, T. A., Bourdon, J., Sheerin, C. M., Overstreet, C. M., Kendler, K. S., Dick, D. M., & Amstadter, A. B. (2019). Prevalence and predictors of PTSD among a college sample. *Journal of American College Health : J of ACH* vol. 67,2: 123-131. doi:10.1080/07448481.2018.1462824

⁴ Appendix 1.

34 Whereas, Trauma and PTSD among college students have been associated with poor academic
35 performance, substance abuse, and dropping out of school⁵⁶;

36

37 Whereas, A characteristic symptom of PTSD as outlined in the DSM-5 is:

38

39 *Intense or prolonged psychological distress at exposure to internal or external*
40 *cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s) [associated*
41 *with an individual's PTSD].⁷;*

42

43 Whereas, This reaction, commonly referred to as being “triggered”, is both psychological and
44 physiological, involving a relapse to the autonomic stress reaction an individual with PTSD
45 experienced during a traumatic event(s) which may create the sense that the individual is reliving
46 the event(s)⁸;

47

48 Whereas, The term “triggered” has been applied more widely to describe emotional arousal in
49 response to triggering stimuli in people diagnosed with substance use disorders, eating disorders,
50 anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder (“OCD”), and more⁹¹⁰;

51

52 Whereas, Becoming triggered can lead to relapse with self-destructive and socially destructive
53 coping mechanisms such as substance abuse, violence, and self-harm, and can cause dissociation,
54 feelings of numbness, depression, anxiety and/or panic attacks, suicidality, avoidance of
55 reminders of trauma, angry outbursts, hyperarousal, intrusive thoughts, exaggerated startle
56 responses, concentration problems, sleep disturbances, social isolation, and more¹¹¹²¹³;

57

58 Whereas, The impacts of being triggered can profoundly affect individuals’ personal
59 relationships, academic/professional pursuits, and ability to perform daily tasks¹⁴;

60

61 Whereas, Students may be triggered by course content which relates to trauma or mental health
62 struggles they have, especially if no warning about potential triggers is given before students are
63 asked to engage with this content;

⁵ Bachrach, R. L. & Read, J. P. (2012). The role of posttraumatic stress and problem alcohol involvement in university academic performance. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 68(7):843–859. doi:10.1002/jclp.21874.

⁶ Arnekrans, A. K., Calmes, S. A., Laux, J. M., Roseman, C. P., Piazza, N. J., Reynolds, J. L., Harmening, D., & Scott, H. L. (2018). College students’ experiences of childhood developmental traumatic stress: resilience, first-year academic performance, and substance use. *Journal of College Counseling*, 21(1), 2–14. doi:10.1002/jocc.12083

⁷ Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US). (2014). Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US). (Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 57.) Exhibit 1.3-4, DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria for PTSD.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/box/part1_ch3.box16/

⁸ Laguardia, F., Michalsen, V., & Rider-Milkovich, H. (2017). Trigger Warnings: From Panic to Data. *Journal of Legal Education*, 66(4), 882–903, p.887. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26453524>

⁹ American Psychological Association. Triggers. *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. <https://dictionary.apa.org/trigger>

¹⁰ Cuncic, A. (2022). What Does It Mean to Be ‘Triggered’ Types of Triggering Events and Coping Strategies. *VeryWell Mind*. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-does-it-mean-to-be-triggered-4175432>

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² The Mayo Clinic. (2018). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355967>

¹³ Laguardia, Michalsen, & Rider-Milkovich, p.883, p.887.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

64
65 Whereas, There are currently no explicit, detailed, or university-wide policies in place at UM to
66 ensure that classes are emotionally safe environments for students who struggle with mental
67 health and/or have experienced trauma and victimization;
68
69 Whereas, The absence of any substantial UM policy or widespread provision of training for
70 trauma attentiveness in work with students has created emotionally unsafe learning spaces that
71 carry the risk of re-traumatizing students, triggering symptoms of PTSD, or generally acting as a
72 detriment to the emotional wellbeing and academic pursuits of students;
73
74 Whereas, When emotionally unsafe learning spaces aggravate or catalyze mental health struggles
75 for students, this also impacts faculty and staff, who are often asked to provide emotional support
76 and referrals to resources for struggling students;
77
78 Whereas, Common experiences that inflict trauma and give rise to PTSD include but are not
79 limited to experiencing or witnessing one or more of the following traumatic life events: sexual
80 assault and harassment, losing a loved one to suicide, self-harm, attempting suicide, eating
81 disorders, childhood and/or adult abuse or neglect at the hands of family members, romantic
82 partners, or friends, substance abuse and addiction, accidents (vehicle collisions, sports injuries,
83 falls, natural disasters, or various physical injuries), religious trauma, living with a disability,
84 being threatened with violence, surviving war, terrorism, and genocide, and experiencing or
85 witnessing racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and other forms of xenophobia
86 and systemic violence¹⁵;
87
88 Whereas, Higher education is a realm in which students are often asked to grapple with subjects
89 such as those listed above which may be triggering;
90
91 Whereas, Although engaging with potentially triggering subject matter in an academic setting
92 can be challenging and painful, teaching such material is widely regarded as necessary to the
93 personal and academic growth of students;
94
95 Whereas, Survivors are incredibly resilient;
96
97 Whereas, Although their experiences may be traumatic, students should not feel discouraged
98 from sharing about them because including these stories in the classroom brings depth, nuance,
99 and personal relevance to aspects of the human experience explored in course material;
100
101 Whereas, Censorship of subject matter because it is potentially triggering would restrict the
102 freedom of educators to delve into topics of profound social and scientific importance, the
103 understanding of which may help students become more informed and productive members of
104 society through fostering personal growth and self-reflection, teaching vulnerability, and forming
105 deeper bonds with peers and instructors;
106

¹⁵ Mayo Clinic. (2022). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Diseases and Conditions.
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355967>

107 Whereas, Content warnings are not a form of censorship, but rather help people prepare
108 themselves to engage with difficult topics and/or allow individuals to remove themselves from
109 an environment that may be emotionally unsafe and detrimental to their learning and emotional
110 wellbeing;

111
112 Whereas, Issuing a content warning to students well in advance of assigning potentially
113 triggering material gives students the opportunity to set up the resources and coping mechanisms
114 such as therapy that they need in order to navigate these difficult conversations while
115 maintaining their personal wellbeing;

116
117 Whereas, By giving students time to prepare themselves and access the resources they need, the
118 fallout of emotionally heavy course material may become easier for students who struggle with
119 mental health to navigate;

120
121 Whereas, This could potentially reduce the burden placed on faculty to serve as emotional
122 support systems for triggered students, and overall make students more willing to come to class
123 and participate more often, thereby making classroom environments more positive and
124 conducive to learning;

125
126 Whereas, UM recently published a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (“DEI”) plan to promote
127 actionable ways to address injustice on campus and establish accountable parties for upholding
128 the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion;

129
130 Whereas, The pervasiveness of mental health struggles and PTSD among college students, staff,
131 and faculty and the impact that PTSD and mental health struggles have on people’s personal
132 lives and academic/professional pursuits make mental health a dimension of DEI and
133 accessibility;

134
135 Whereas, Enduring racism and xenophobia is continuously traumatizing and shapes the lives of
136 racially and ethnically minoritized people, including and especially those who are a part of the
137 UM community;

138
139 Whereas, Establishing support for students who live with intergenerational trauma and the
140 trauma of racism and xenophobia is a responsibility of UM leadership and should be treated as
141 part of DEI;

142
143 Whereas, In order to foster a safe and inclusive environment for students as promised by UM
144 through the DEI plan, the University must promote trauma attentiveness and expand support for
145 mental health for students, staff, and faculty;

146
147 Therefore, Let It Be Resolved, That ASUM encourages UM Deans to ask department chairs to
148 establish as a standard practice within their departments the provision of content warnings before
149 displaying content or facilitating conversations around potentially triggering subjects;

150
151 Therefore, Let It Be Further Resolved, That ASUM encourages faculty to notify students that
152 material to be distributed and discussed as part of a class may be triggering at minimum noted

153 with a warning in the syllabi under the course calendar when the material will be presented, **and**
154 with written (email) notification one (1) day, but preferably by one (1) week or longer, prior to
155 the assignment of this material;

156
157 Therefore, Let It Be Further Resolved, That an example of an effective content warning is a
158 spoken statement, email message, and/or Moodle post such as the following statement from the
159 University of Waterloo:

160
161 *Next class our discussion will touch on the sexual assault that is depicted in the second*
162 *last chapter of The White Hotel. This content is disturbing, so I encourage you to prepare*
163 *yourself emotionally beforehand. If you believe that you will find the discussion to be*
164 *traumatizing, you may choose not to participate in the discussion or to leave the*
165 *classroom. You will still, however, be responsible for material that you miss, so if you*
166 *leave the room for a significant time, please arrange to get notes from another student or*
167 *see me individually.*¹⁶;

168
169 Therefore, Let It Be Further Resolved, That a working group be established to develop specific,
170 detailed guidelines and training around the administration of content warnings in classes,
171 including developing guidelines around what specific topics need content warnings in classes,
172 what can be done to accommodate students who need to step out of class due to triggering
173 content, and guidelines on how to deliver content warnings;

174
175 Therefore, Let It Be Further Resolved, That this working group shall center the resilience and
176 strength of survivors in the formation of policy and shall prioritize helping students manage
177 symptoms rather than assuming they need protection from triggering content;

178
179 Therefore, Let It Be Further Resolved, That in the interest of developing policy that is
180 comprehensive, nuanced, and agreeable to faculty and students alike, this working group shall be
181 composed of faculty and staff, campus mental health professionals and advocates, and student
182 representatives such as ASUM Senators and Students-At-Large (“SALs”);

183
184 Therefore, Let It Be Further Resolved, That faculty are encouraged to work with students who
185 find it necessary to abstain from in-class discussions that may be triggering and find
186 accommodations, in the same way they do with other requirements under the Americans with
187 Disabilities Act (“ADA”);

188
189 Therefore, Let It Be Further Resolved, That ASUM encourages the Office for Disability Equity
190 (“ODE”) to develop policy recommendations for faculty to accommodate students on the basis
191 of mental health and triggering course content;

192
193 Therefore, Let It Be Further Resolved, That ASUM encourages UM to establish mental health
194 and trauma, including and especially intergenerational trauma and trauma from systemic
195 marginalization and oppression, as a dimension of DEI;

196

¹⁶ Centre for Teaching Excellence. University of Waterloo. Trigger Warnings. <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/trigger#:~:text=A%20trigger%20warning%20is%20a,clip%2C%20or%20piece%20of%20text>

197 Therefore, Let It Be Further Resolved, That this Resolution be sent to Kimber McKay, Chair of
198 the Faculty Senate; Kelly Webster, UM Chief of Staff; Reed Humphrey, Interim Provost of the
199 University of Montana; Nathan Lindsay, Chair of the Instructional Planning Group and Vice
200 Provost for Academic Affairs; Laurie Baefsky, Dean of College of the Arts and Media; Matthew
201 Semanoff, Interim Dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences; Adrea Lawrence, Dean of
202 the Phyllis J. Washington College of Education; Suzanne Tilleman, Dean of the College of
203 Business; Alan Townsend, Dean of the W.A. Franke College of Forestry & Conservation;
204 Elizabeth Putnam, Dean of the College of Health; Sara Rinfret, Interim Dean of the Alexander
205 Blewett III School of Law; Ashby Kinch, Interim Dean of the Graduate School; Timothy
206 Nichols, Dean of the Davidson Honors College; Thomas Gallagher, Dean of Missoula College;
207 Amy Capolupo, Director of the Office for Disability Equity.
208
209

210 Passed by Committee: April 5, 2022


211
212 Passed by ASUM Senate: April 6, 2022

213
214
215 

216 Elizabeth Bowles,
217 Chair of Relations and Affairs

218
219 

220 O'Shay Birdinground,
221 Chair of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



Mary Melissa Glueckert,
Chair of the Senate

Appendix 1

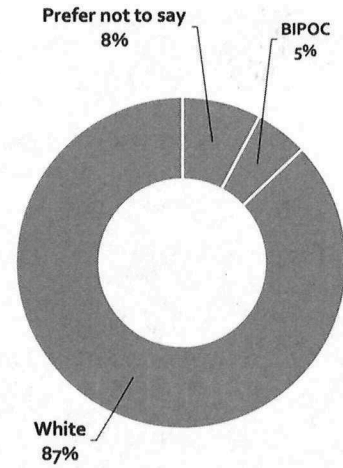
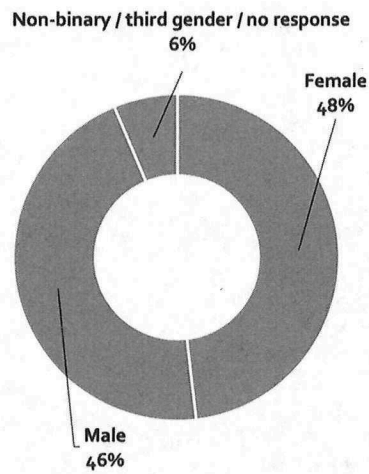
Pandemic Stress among UM Faculty

Insights from the faculty
workload survey

Your line
resides
primarily in:

College	Count	Percentage
Humanities and Sciences	74	38.7
College of Health	37	19.4
Forestry	19	9.9
College of the Arts and Media	18	9.4
Missoula College	11	5.8
College of Education	10	5.2
College of Business	9	4.7
School of Law	6	3.1
Mansfield Library	5	2.6
Other	2	1
Total	191	100.0

How would you describe yourself?



Compared to semesters previous to the COVID-19 pandemic, how would you rate your mental/emotional well-being now?

