



WORKING

WITH

DIVERSITY

THE  
CAREER  
DEVELOPMENT  
CENTER

# WORKING WITH DIVERSITY

A resource with information about the job interview, the workplace, employee rights, and advice from MICA staff on how to navigate the professional world.

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# Diversity 101

At its basic definition, diversity is variety and difference. Among people, diversity is the background, outward and inward identifiers, and cultural influences that make a person who they are. Diversity strengthens a workplace by providing an employer, the workforce, and the consumer with innovative varying points of view that can help build a better product or service. Knowing your rights as a member of a minority or diverse identity is an important step in avoiding uncomfortable or illegal situations in the workplace as well as providing a better experience for you.

## **Applying for a Job**

Your resume and cover letter are a great way to let your potential employer know your background without having to directly point it out. You can list student organizations or professional associations you've participated in which can subtly let your employer know what you're bringing to the table.

Your interests and values are reflected in your resume, which can separate you from the rest of the pack. While including these pieces of information early on in the process could help you, some employers may not be looking for someone as involved or vocal. There are pros and cons to every decision, but it's safe to say you would want an employer that is at least understanding of your needs or lifestyle.

### **The Interview**

There are just as many employer do's and don'ts in the interview process as there are for the applicant. By law, employers are not allowed to ask you about the following things: If you are or plan to become pregnant, your age, your race, your religion, your status as a citizen, if you have any disabilities, or your relationship status. All of these considerations are your business, and your potential answers can in no way affect your chances of being hired. Not allowing this information to be asked in the interview levels the playing field for all applicants.

### **Accepting an Offer**

The mantra to repeat to yourself in accepting an offer is "read, read, read!" From health care policies to employee handbooks, binding contracts and rules get signed into your job and actions from day one. Make sure you're on the same page with your new employer and workplace.

# Race

Workplaces often employ people of many races. Despite this, you may find yourself to be in a situation where you feel uncomfortable or isolated.

Members of a racial minority are often called upon regularly to speak out for or on behalf of their race, and sometimes as the voice of a all minorities in general. When handling these types of situations, it is important to establish early on the kind of dynamic you'd like to have with your coworkers and employer. If called upon, You could be straight forward and say, "Well, I'm not sure what another person would say about this, but my opinion is..." or, if you find it's something you don't want to talk about, you can simply say something along the lines of "I'm not really one to talk about something like that" or simply, "I don't know" and change the subject.



At times, to deal with discrimination, the best way to deal with someone is to take a moment to teach them. It depends on the person and situation, but eventually those efforts add up and your environment changes for the better.

I've had people generalize and stereotype based on my race. Wearing certain clothing or expecting certain things from me, just based on my color, and those are ways people differentiate. The best thing you can do is be conscientious and teach people about yourself, personally.

**Clyde Johnson** is the Assistant Dean in the Office of Diversity and Intercultural Development. Playing such an active role in facilitating and advancing diversity on campus, Clyde speaks of the importance of diverse minds and diverse backgrounds saying, “**Diversity adds dimension, energy, and new ideas to an environment. While you’re able to have a great experience in a more monotone workplace, diversity grows people and ideas.**”



# Religion

Discrimination and accommodation are the main issues regarding religious beliefs and practices within the workplace. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers from carrying out five key actions or inactions regarding religion:

- Employers cannot require employees to “refrain from participating” in religious activity.
- Employers cannot discriminate or treat their employees differently (i.e. more or less favorably) because of their religious beliefs.
- Employers must act to end harassment of an employee regarding their religion.
- Employers must accommodate the religious practices of an employee unless it causes an undue hardship for the employer.
- An employer cannot retaliate against an employee for asserting his or her rights under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

An “undue hardship,” is any accommodation on the part of the employer that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission considers “an action requiring significant difficulty or expense as it relates to the individual business.”

**Mahnoor Ahmed** is the Assistant Director in the Office of Diversity and Intercultural Development. She manages office programs and works directly with students and identity related student organizations. Mahnoor thinks the rewards of working in a diverse setting is **“the experience of interacting with others that are different from you. That difference brings value to your professional and personal life and those interactions help you learn and grow tremendously.”**



Sometimes prejudice is blatant, sometimes it's passive. Sometimes it's for the obvious- for being female, or Muslim or bilingual. Sometimes it is for a misaligned assumption of being brown-skinned, foreign, etc.

For all of these and more, you have to persist in making sure people understand the person you are, instead of the person they are assuming you are. In a professional context, it is important to continue producing the quality of work you want to produce so that it is your work that speaks for itself. It is also important to pick battles intelligently. Not every dialogue is a win-win, but everyone needs to do their part to counter ignorance and prejudice.

# LGBTQ

Unfortunately, 29 US states can still fire you, or someone you know, within the workplace for being gay. Even in the states that cannot fire you, “Anti-discrimination employment laws vary widely ... depending on the inclusion of sexual orientation or gender identity, and whether the law protects those working in the public or private sector.”<sup>1</sup>

The Human Rights Campaign, or HRC, seeks to improve the lives of LGBTQ Americans by advocating for equal rights and benefits in the workplace, ensuring families are treated equally under the law and increasing public support among all Americans through innovative advocacy, education and outreach programs. (Mission Statement) You can find more information at their website: <http://www.hrc.org/>

When accepting a position, look for and read carefully the health care policy your employer offers. “Partner” benefits differ from “spouse” benefits in terms of equal coverage.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2012/may/08/gay-rights-united-states>

**Jill (Gilles) Stromberg** is MICA's Student Activities Program Coordinator. She attended Syracuse University and majored in illustration and minored in LGBT studies. Jill identifies as trans but has asked of her coworkers to identify her with female pronouns. She says about being trans in the working world, **“you have to be your own self-advocate.”**

For some jobs I would apply using my masculine and feminine names, or even say that I identify in the gender-queer, trans community. Being deliberate is important but being authentic is important too. You wouldn't work at place you'd feel uncomfortable in the first place. Masculinity and femininity are both somewhat authentic parts of myself. Authenticity is what's most important when you're applying for a job. Legally, you can work your gender in, that's something to think about.

Facilitation of conversations is what's most important, as opposed to being an 'educator.' Think about all accessibilities. Experience is the only thing that will really make that better.



# Gender

As an identifying woman or a person transitioning, your gender should not affect your performance or experience in the workplace. Women are not the only ones that face discrimination. Men can frequently experience similar issues in female dominated workplaces or in traditionally female positions or roles. Make sure when accepting a job that the non-discrimination policy includes “gender” and, if applicable, “gender identity.”

If you’re in the process of, have, or are considering transitioning, then reading your employer’s policies are the most important. Unfortunately, Human Resources can only do so much because of the way some employers handle Trans issues. If the non-discrimination policy at your workplace lists “gender identity,” then you should know what, specifically, is covered by the policy and what rights you have. These can vary from state to state and office to office. Check out the Human Rights Campaign “Transgender” tab on their website. <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/Workplace-Discrimination-Policies-Laws-and-Legislation> For more information, you can also go to [transworkplace.blogspot.com](http://transworkplace.blogspot.com). This is a reputable site hosted by Dr. Jillian Todd Weiss.

Pregnancy, at most workplaces, is probably listed as a disability. Filing for time off is done through Human Resources and should be handled only through HR hands, not your boss directly. Accommodations during pregnancy are allowed. Communicate with your boss regularly about your needs and stay in close contact with your Human Resources office or supervisor if you feel you are not being given proper accommodations.

President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 into law in his first term as president, amending the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967. In all, it is now an established push to give women equal and fair pay in the workplace, putting them on the same level as their male counterparts for doing the same amount and quality of work. While the Act was a step forward, there are still problems with women getting equal pay across the board. Non-discrimination on gender is at the Federal level, making this one of the more important fights today. When accepting a position be up-front and honest, asking of your employer what you think is an acceptable salary. Don't lose yourself in the numbers though, and don't insult your employer with a price that could be out of range.

# Age & Disability

Whether you're a recent college grad or a professional past your forties, ageism can affect landing a job, performance, and morale. Employers may have legitimate questions of any worker about their ability to complete tasks or their knowledge and skill level, but there's a difference between concern and discrimination.

It might be presumed that an older worker will be a challenge to teach, may call out sick, be more of a risk for the company, or they will soon retire and ask for higher wages. Younger workers are stereotype, as well, and treated differently for being a new professional. It may be assumed that they do not have enough experience or have less to contribute. In either case, be up front with your employer. Share what your abilities are and at what level you feel you would be a valuable asset to the workplace. Older employees are just as able to think of fresh ideas and learn new technologies in the same way younger employees can add insight and experience.

Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) addresses employment rights and laws. It prohibits "discrimination on the basis of employment," which means that anyone with a disability should be provided with equal opportunities in employment that any able person has available to them.

Besides making the proper accommodations, employers and coworkers should not single out anyone who has a disability in the workplace. Contact your boss or Human Resources to record and stop any inappropriate treatment or failure to make appropriate accommodations.



I've experienced non-acceptance but not so much with race, more with age. Older superiors, not being valued as much because of my youth. It's assumed I have less experience, less to bring to the table.

Ask questions when you're going through the interview process, how diverse is the area? How important is it to the job? The thing about diversity with culture as a whole is that people are nervous to talk about it, but I would encourage to talk about, ask the questions, have the conversation because if it means that much to you, you're not going to be able to disregard it.

**Chris Travers** is MICA's Student Development Specialist in the Office of Student Affairs. Chris thinks diversity is crucial when fostering a positive work environment. **"I think when you want to have productivity and have an affective employee, they need to be comfortable and connected to the right place. Most times if you feel better, you do better."**



# Resources & FAQ

**The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**, or your best resource for information regarding employment, federal laws, and discrimination information regarding race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, disability or national origin. <http://www.eeoc.gov/>

**American Civil Liberties Union**, as described on their website, “was founded in 1920 and is our nation’s guardian of liberty. The ACLU works in the courts, legislatures and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to all people in this country by the Constitution and laws of the United States.” <http://www.aclu.org/>

**Can My Boss Do That?**, or your best resource for information regarding employment, federal laws, and discrimination information regarding race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, disability or national origin. [www.canmybossthat.com](http://www.canmybossthat.com)

**A Guide to Disability Rights Laws** covers information regarding eleven acts about disabilities. <http://www.ada.gov/cguide.htm>

**Q: Who can I speak to with help in finding a job or internship where certain accommodations are made for me?**

A: The Career Development Center. Set up an appointment by calling 410-225-2420 or walking in to the 2nd floor of Gateway!

**Q: Where can I go to learn more about my status as a member of a minority or majority at MICA?**

A: The Office of Diversity and Intercultural Development. Call 443-552-1659 to schedule an appointment with Clyde Johnson, Assistant Dean, or Mahnoor Ahmed, Assistant Director.

**Q: Where can I go to find a job on campus or manage my work-study?**

A: Human Resources on the 3rd floor of Bunting. Walk in or call to schedule an appointment at 410-225-2363.

