



## **QUALITY ASSURANCE UNIT (QAU)**

Senate Decision 228/31-01-2020

### **POLICY ON ADDRESSING ISSUES OF BULLYING, VICTIMIZATION, HARASSMENT AND OTHER FORMS OF NEGATIVE CONDUCT**

#### **Introduction**

All members of the University of Thessaly community (faculty, researchers, students and administrative staff) must be aware that no form of discrimination on the grounds of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religious or other beliefs, disability, age, or sexual orientation is tolerated by the Institution and that the principle of equal treatment must be safeguarded.

No form of direct or indirect discrimination, victimization, bullying, or sexual harassment is tolerated by the Institution. In the workplace, all categories of members of the University of Thessaly community are required to conduct themselves with due respect and in the absence of any form of victimization, bullying, discrimination or harassment.

The purpose of this University of Thessaly policy is to promote the development of a working environment in which harassment and bullying are prohibited and where students, as well as all categories of teaching and administrative staff, can be assured that their concerns will be addressed with fairness and responsibility by the Institution.

#### **Identification of Negative Social Behaviors**

Phenomena of negative social behaviors are observed not only in schools, but also in higher education institutions and professional environments. These phenomena are frequently associated with bullying, victimization and/or harassment. Bullying is generally defined as the intentional and systematic infliction of distress or fear, often triggered by specific characteristics perceived as weaknesses and targets an individual's sense of safety and dignity. It is rooted in power imbalances and often creates a hostile, demeaning, humiliating or offensive environment.

Victimization refers to the impact experienced by individuals subjected to physical and/or psychological harm as a result of bullying behaviors. Harassment constitutes actions that cause discomfort to the targeted individual and may represent a seemingly mild form of bullying; nevertheless, it can induce significant distress.

In the university context, particular vigilance is required to address such behaviors. For instance, heightened competitiveness or aggressiveness among certain individuals may manifest in physical or psychological forms, underscoring the need for proactive measures and institutional safeguards.

**The main triggers of bullying that require particular attention and protection are the following:**

- Age differences: For example, an individual who is significantly older or younger than their peers (e.g. a first-year student in a senior laboratory or an older student among age-typical peers) may be targeted.
- Disabilities/Special educational needs (mobility, cognitive, learning, sensory, developmental): Students with disabilities or special educational needs may be targeted, sometimes in subtle ways (e.g., isolation), which can have serious psychological consequences for these individuals.
- Gender differences: Sexual harassment, typically from males toward females (students toward female students or, more severely, professors toward female students), represents a potential form of bullying. Even when subtle, such bullying can have serious repercussions, potentially leading to disciplinary or legal consequences.
- Institutional role or hierarchical position: For example, misuse of authority by a professor toward a student or by a student representing a large group of peers toward other students or faculty. Abuse of a hierarchically superior position among administrative staff or teaching staff is also included. These examples do not exclude cases where a lower-ranked individual exhibits antisocial behavior toward a higher-ranked individual.
- Gender expression differences: Cases in which an individual does not express, to the perceived satisfaction of the bully, the traits traditionally associated with their biological sex.
- Appearance differences: For instance, individuals who are very short, very tall, overweight or whose biological sex does not conform to stereotypical dress norms may be targeted.
- Racial and/or socio-cultural differences: Individuals originating from foreign countries (often from refugee or migrant families) may become targets of such behaviors.
- Pregnancy/motherhood: Female students or staff members who are pregnant or have children (and related family responsibilities) may face a lack of understanding, isolation or negative comments from peers or staff due to perceived lower performance or specific needs.
- Marital status/cohabitation: Married students or those in formal cohabitation may encounter similar challenges due to family responsibilities.
- Membership in special interest groups: Individuals who belong to specific groups (e.g. political parties, religious organizations, hunting clubs etc.) characterized by particular value systems or conversely are highly isolated, may also be targeted.

### **Strategic Framework for Addressing Negative Behaviors**

The overall framework for addressing various forms of bullying is based on fostering a spirit of prevention as well as prompt intervention when such behaviors occur within the university community (students, faculty, staff). All categories of university personnel (teaching, research and administrative staff) have a primary duty to monitor their behavior both among themselves and toward students, and to report any observed incidents of bullying to the appropriate authorities

(Department Administration and/or the Office of Academic Affairs and Student Welfare of the Institution).

From an institutional perspective, the relevant provisions of the Civil Service Code, the Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Civil Code remain continuously applicable in the academic context. Each Department also has a Student Affairs Committee and an assigned faculty advisor for each student, who, among other responsibilities, are tasked with identifying students' specific needs and problems, including bullying. The instructor responsible for each course also has the duty to intervene immediately in cases of bullying among students or involving other parties.

Procedurally, every student has the right to submit a written report if they experience bullying, detailing the incident, the time and place it occurred and any witnesses or supporting evidence. Based on such a written report or complaint from the complainant, further investigation and remedial measures may be initiated.

Similarly, all other categories of teaching, research and administrative staff may encounter bullying, harassment or victimization, either among themselves or from students. The reporting and complaint procedures are the same for all.

**The primary procedures for investigating bullying incidents are:**

- A) Hearing (with minutes being kept)
- B) Written reports
- C) Hierarchical intervention (by the immediately superior authority, provided that no member is involved in the incident in any way).

For further instructions, see the end of the document.

**Strategies for Addressing Negative Behaviors**

Core values protected at the University of Thessaly, aimed at safeguarding the commitment of students and staff, directly or indirectly, to the broader concept of quality (which includes the complete elimination of bullying and inappropriate behavior), include:

- Rights and dignity of every student or staff member
- Cultivation of mutual trust and a spirit of collaboration among all
- Academic freedom of expression
- Support for diversity
- Quality of the academic environment, harmonizing scientific pursuit with social behavior
- Promotion of professionalism, responsibility and quality relationships among staff, among students and between staff and students
- Integrity and transparency in decision-making and in the implementation of procedures
- Prudence and law-abiding behavior
- Equal opportunities, accessibility and meritocracy
- Socialization
- Cultivation of individual responsibility as well as collective spirit
- Healthy competition

## **Tactics Implemented to Achieve the Above General Objectives**

- Special attention to both perpetrators and victims of bullying
- Targeted and systematic scientific research on bullying issues
- Continuous dissemination of information to all regarding laws and regulations (rights and obligations)
- Freedom of speech and encouragement of targeted hearings and written reports to the Student Affairs Committee and faculty advisors
- Identification and understanding of needs prior to any evaluation, judgment or decision
- Preservation of quiet and respect during lectures
- Adherence to deadlines and schedules for both staff and students
- Courtesy in communication and discouragement of verbal aggression
- Support for students in their current and future academic or professional orientation and career development
- Protection of personal data and respect for individual reputation and personality
- Systematic emphasis on scientific excellence
- Provision of academic, professional, intellectual and broader stimuli to students
- Preservation of professional confidentiality
- Informing staff and students about bullying issues
- Maintenance of optimal infrastructure, critical adoption of new technologies and ensuring secure access to them
- Systematic evaluation of performance for all with objective criteria and feedback mechanisms
- Representation and participatory involvement of students in decision-making
- Processing and utilization of individual and collective experience regarding behavior, relationships and academic matters
- Specifically for individuals with disabilities, the guidelines of the “PROSVASI” service must be applied. In particular, instructors have a personal responsibility to follow the recommended assessment methods for these students, as advised by the “PROSVASI” service.

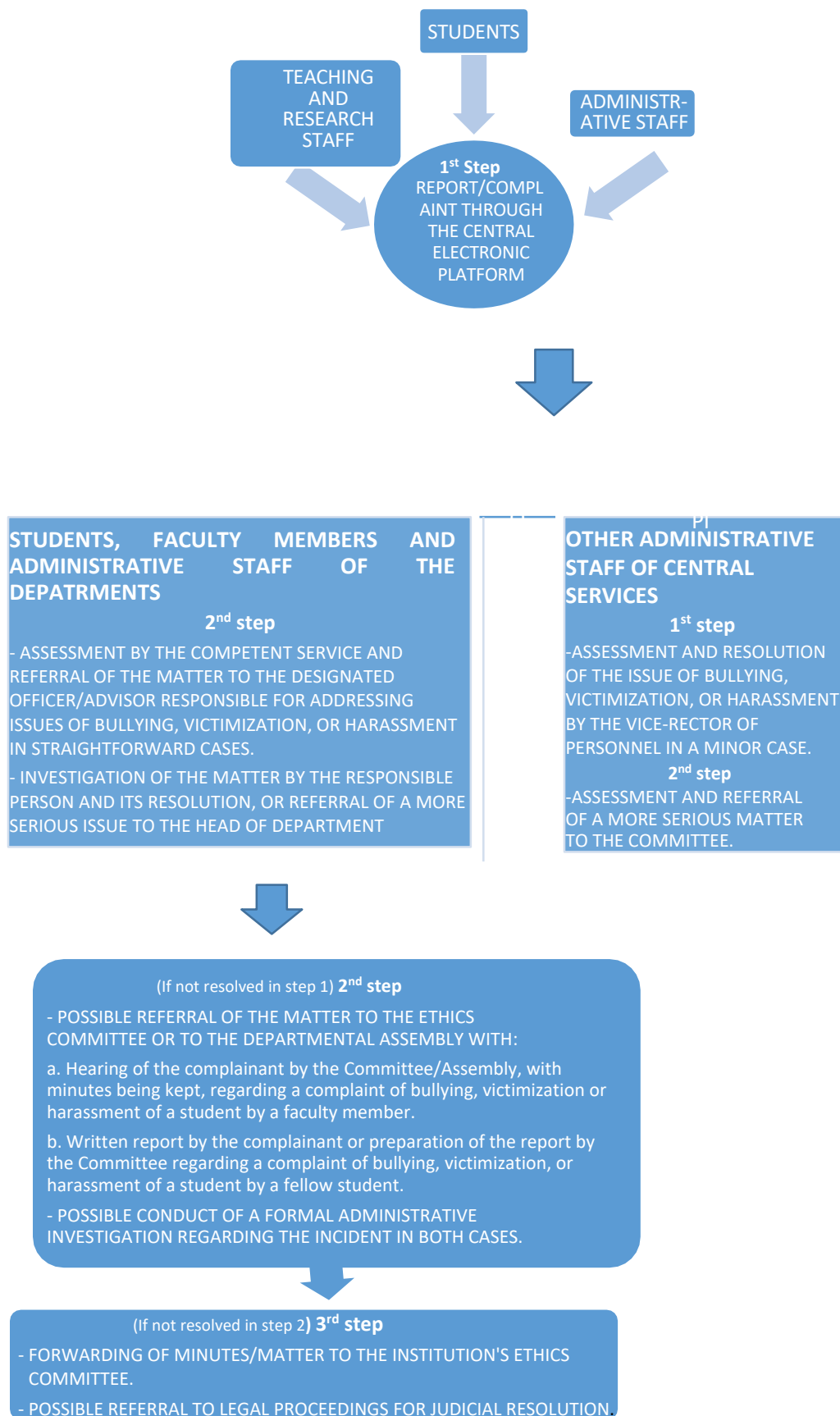
## **Additional Procedures**

Bullying and/or harassment in higher education are, at least from one perspective, more difficult to address than in schools, because students are legally adults and the capacity (as well as the authority) for pedagogical intervention by staff is more limited. Furthermore, bullying practices are often particularly subtle (e.g. isolation, systematic discouragement of individuals etc.), making their identification and recognition more challenging, even though their effects and consequences can still be serious. Additionally, what constitutes “bullying” in a specific situation and what are the “tolerable” limits and legally prescribed scope and methods of intervention, require further discussion.

Therefore, the prevention and management of such issues require constant vigilance. Specific regulations (based also on the findings of relevant research) that establish standards of behavior, detailed restrictions and procedures for addressing incidents, and legal consequences need to be implemented (both administratively and legislatively). Finally, efforts are made to inform students and staff through workshops and seminars, in order to raise awareness, remind

everyone of their obligations and rights and cultivate a shared spirit of prevention and combating all forms of negative behavior.

The following diagram illustrates the process for resolving issues related to bullying, victimization, harassment and other negative behaviors.



Throughout the entire process, all parties involved are informed that, in case the matter is not resolved through the above procedures or in case of criminal liability, the competent means for its resolution is the judicial process.

**Editorial Team :**

- *Professor Nikolaos Diggelidis*
- *Professor Eirini Dermitzaki*
- *Professor Eleni Andreou*
- *Professor Dimitrios Bogdanos*
- *Associate Professor Theodoros Metaxas*
- *Professor Ioannis Theodorakis, QAU President*