

Arab Open University

Equal Opportunity and Respect for Diversity Policy

Policy Title:	Equal Opportunity and Respect for Diversity
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Policy Review:	Quality Assurance Accreditation, Academic and Institutional Standards Committee (QAAIS)
Policy Implementation:	AOU Branches
Policy Monitoring and Compliance:	Quality Assurance and Accreditation Units at AOU Branches Students Affairs Offices Human Resources Department
Next Review Date	2024

***Note:** A policy can be reviewed before the designated review date should there be a need to.*

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The Arab Open University was established to provide education based on merit only. It observes the rights and respects the dignity of staff, students, visitors and all others with whom the University has contacts. It makes every effort to create an inclusive and diverse working, learning and social environment, free from unfair discrimination, prejudice and all forms of harassment and bullying.

Policy Statement

As a partner of OU-UK, AOU will adhere to the British Equality Act of April 2010, to be interpreted and applied within the legal framework of each AOU country and any other branch local accreditation requirements. The AOU thus commits itself to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of race and nationality, religion, gender, pregnancy and maternity, disability, age, social or economic class.

In line with the above Act, AOU adopts seven protected characteristics groups on which unfair discrimination, harassment and victimization is prohibited. These groups are described below.

1) Race and Nationality

The terms race and nationality refer to an individual's race, color, nationality and ethnicity.

- A) Color includes, for example, being black, colored or white.
- B) Nationality includes, for example, being a national or non – national or belonging to a certain tribe. People without citizenship), are included in this group.

AOU prohibits discrimination, harassment or victimization against a student (current, prospective or past), a member of staff (potential, current or past) or visitor to the University because of their race, whether perceived or actual.

2) Religion

Religion refers to:

- A) Religion (e.g. Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism).
- B) Denomination of a religion (e.g. Sunni, Shi'ite, Catholic, Protestant).

AOU prohibits discrimination, harassment or victimization against a student (current, prospective or past), a member of staff (potential, current or past) or visitor to the University because of their religions, whether perceived or actual.

3) Gender

Gender equality in the context of AOU Equal Opportunity and Respect for Diversity policy refers to:

- A) Equality of access to employment and equality of access to academic provision irrespective of gender.
- B) Equality of treatment (e.g. pay, promotion) in the work place and in relation to academic provision irrespective of gender.
- C) Freedom from harassment and intimidation.

AOU prohibits discrimination, harassment or victimization against a student (current, prospective or past), a member of staff (potential, current or past) or a visitor to the University on the grounds of their gender, whether perceived or actual.

4) Disability

The term disabled refers to a man or a woman who:

- A) Has a physical or mental impairment, with or without outward visible signs.
- B) The impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his/her ability to perform normal activities.

In this definition those who have to use a wheelchair as their method of movement (whether temporarily or permanently), and those who suffer from Depression, Dyslexia, Cancer, Multiple Sclerosis, HIV, are included. Protection for

some disabilities, like Multiple Sclerosis, HIV and Cancer, starts at diagnosis even if there are no apparent symptoms.

AOU prohibits discrimination, harassment or victimization against a student (current, prospective or past), a woman or a man member of staff (potential, current or past) or a woman or man visitor to the University on the ground of their disability, whether perceived or actual.

5) Age

Age refers to a person belonging to a particular age group, which can include people of the same age and people of a particular range of ages.

AOU prohibits discrimination, harassment or victimization against a student (current, prospective or past), a member of staff (potential, current or past) or visitor to the University because of their age, whether perceived or actual. This means, for example, that AOU will not reject a qualified job applicant because the person belongs to a certain age group, whether perceived or actual.

6) Special Treatment Based on Class

This refers to advantageous treatment of applicants for admission or employment with the University, or advantageous treatment of current members of staff and students, on the ground of kinship, or their social, political or economic background.

AOU prohibits discrimination, harassment or victimization against an applicant for admission or a job with at the University, a student (current, prospective or past), a member of staff (potential, current or past) or visitor to the University because they do not belong to a privileged social or economic class.

7) Pregnancy and Maternity

Pregnancy refers to women who are pregnant, whilst maternity covers a period of ten weeks after birth.

AOU prohibits discrimination, harassment or victimization against a student (current, prospective or past), a member of staff (potential, current or past) or visitor to the University because of pregnancy and maternity. This means, for example, that an applicant for admission to an academic programme or an applicant for a job at the University should not be excluded because she is pregnant or has recently given birth. Similarly, for example, chances for training or promotion should not be denied because of pregnancy.

Implementation

In principle and in practice, the creation of an environment throughout the AOU where equality of opportunities and respect for diversity is fostered is the responsibility of all members of the University, both staff and students. However, the President of AOU is ultimately responsible for the implementation of this policy. To meet this responsibility, he/she will ensure that the following are achieved through an action plan to ensure the following:

- All rules and regulations of the AOU are consistent with 1-7 above.
- Adequate budget is allocated and necessary administrative infrastructure is set up for the implementation of this policy throughout AOU.
- A robust monitoring mechanism to find the extent to which this policy is adhered to across all.
- AOU Branches and HQ maintain this, using annual surveys and other relevant statistical methods.
- An effective mechanism for processing grievances against any violation of 1-7 above in any AOU Branch or HQ by any student or member of staff is created and maintained (see Appendix 1).

- Appropriate training is provided to all senior staff and student representatives about this policy and its implementation.
- All AOU premises are equipped with facilities needed for the implementation of 1-7 above, for example those required by special requirements students.
- All learning resources including libraries, counseling services, ITC labs and computer equipment s support the implementation of this policy.
- All course materials, as far as possible, cater for the needs of the disabled students and they are provided with necessary assistance during registration and mid - term and final examinations in a dignified and effective manner.

Appendix: Equality Issues Related to Students

- 1) **Training:** All AOU staff normally having contact with students or are involved in admissions, assessment, tutoring and student disciplinary procedures will receive adequate training about this policy.
- 2) **Assessment:** Special arrangements which do not adversely affect the validity of examinations and assessments will be provided to special requirements students.
- 3) **Curriculum:** The AOU is committed to the promotion of equal opportunity with respect to course content, approaches to teaching and learning, assessment methods and the structure and timetabling of courses of study.
- 4) **Teaching:** It is a fundamental principle of academic freedom that reasoned argument might be employed to test and challenge views and opinions of all kinds, and in no circumstances, the exercise of this freedom should be discouraged or denied. However, all staff and students of the AOU will use non-discriminatory and non-inflammatory language in such interactions.
- 5) **Services and Facilities:** The AOU is committed to the principle of equal access to the services it provides and the facilities it offers, including sports facilities.
- 6) **Health and Safety:** AOU aims to provide its staff and students with a healthy and safe environment in which to work and live and has policies and measures in place to ensure that.
- 7) **Disciplinary Procedures:** The AOU's Disciplinary Procedures will be kept under review to ensure that they are consistent with the University's Equal Opportunity and respect for diversity policy.

8) **Harassment and Bullying:** AOU regards incidents of harassment and bullying against students and staff (women and men) seriously and may be grounds for disciplinary action including dismissal or expulsion from the university.