
Middlesex University
**Changing
the Culture
Initiative**
#SAFE campaign



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Overview

#SAFE is about capturing the actions, strategies, tactics and behaviours which certain groups of people deploy in order to be safe, stay safe and feel safe on campus, on public transport, out and about, and online.

The aim of the campaign is:

- to raise awareness of the experiences of minoritised and marginalised groups by giving them a voice;
- to promote positive behaviours (both in physical and online spaces), helping to educate the University community on what behaviours are not acceptable;
- to empower students to make choices about how to engage safely in physical and online spaces.

The term 'safe' here can have several meanings:

- It can mean to be free from any form of harm or harassment, be it physical, verbal, emotional etc.
- It can refer to freedom of expression and being able to be oneself and express oneself without judgement.
- It could also be about the safety of our future in relation to, for example, the pandemic, global politics, climate change etc.

We are keen to capture the experiences of all groups of people, defined by, for example, age, gender, disability, faith, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, physical health, mental health.



Background

Since its inception in 2017, Middlesex University's Changing the Culture Initiative (CCI) has been working with students, staff and external partners on a number of campaigns to support its objective of positively shifting attitudes, values and behaviours and creating more inclusive and tolerant communities in the context of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Campaigns include: No Home For Hate (2017-18); Building Bridges (2018-19) and; Agents of Change (2019-21).

Empowering students to tell their story and positioning the student voice to communicate to the wider university community is a key aspect of CCI's approach.

CCI is also committed to exploring ways to facilitate CV-building opportunities which will help students stand out and get on when they leave Middlesex.

Examples of this include where students' work has been disseminated in university-wide communications, showcased at local community events, publicised in university sector reports or featured in online multi-media learning resources. This has resulted in further work for students, frequently with our expanding network of community partners.

Previous projects have seen students tackle a wide range of issues, for example, bullying, gender inequality, domestic abuse, suicide, racism, online hate.

These issues are evidently important to our student community and the power of the students' work has often been tied to enabling students to be able to tell their story and focus on issues pertinent to them.

The CCI campaign outlined here continues in a similar vein, offering students the opportunity to work on issues that they are interested in and which affects them and their community.



How to get involved

Work on a CCI campaign as part of your degree programme

A key aspect of our work at CCI is to explore ways to embed the Changing the Culture agenda in academic programmes across Middlesex University, at all our campuses (UK, Dubai, Mauritius) and in programmes with our collaborative partners.

What this means is that we are continually finding ways for students to work on CCI initiatives as part of their degree course so that whatever they deliver in response to a CCI campaign is also accredited and goes towards their final degree classification. We work with academics to adapt our campaigns to fit in with what their students are studying, making sure that the CCI projects align with the students' degree programme.

Examples of this include:

- students on an events management module design an event for a calendar campaign e.g. International Women's Day or Black History Month;
- psychology students deliver a survey to find out about attitudes towards sexual violence;
- film students produce short films to encourage reporting of hate to the University;
- photography students deliver imagery to promote good behaviours;
- graphic design students design templates for safeguarding training materials.

Talk to your tutor

If you're interested in working on CCI's #SAFE Campaign, the first step is to check in with your programme tutor.

You should read through the remainder of this document and think about the type of project you would like to work on and how this could relate to your degree programme.

Ask your tutor if there is any space within your degree structure - these things usually need to be planned well in advance so do bear that in mind. And, unfortunately, for some degree programmes, it won't be possible.

Defining your project

Objectives

Your project should fulfil these clear objectives:

- To empower – your project should first and foremost enable an individual or group to tell their story and, by harnessing their voice, capture their experience.
- To educate – your project should enhance understanding and knowledge about the experiences and behaviours of an individual or group. You may also choose an audience or audiences to educate.
- To inspire – your project should identify issues and motivate its audience to recognise them as a problem and the need for change. In projects with a campaign focus (as opposed to a research focus), such changes should serve as your call to action.

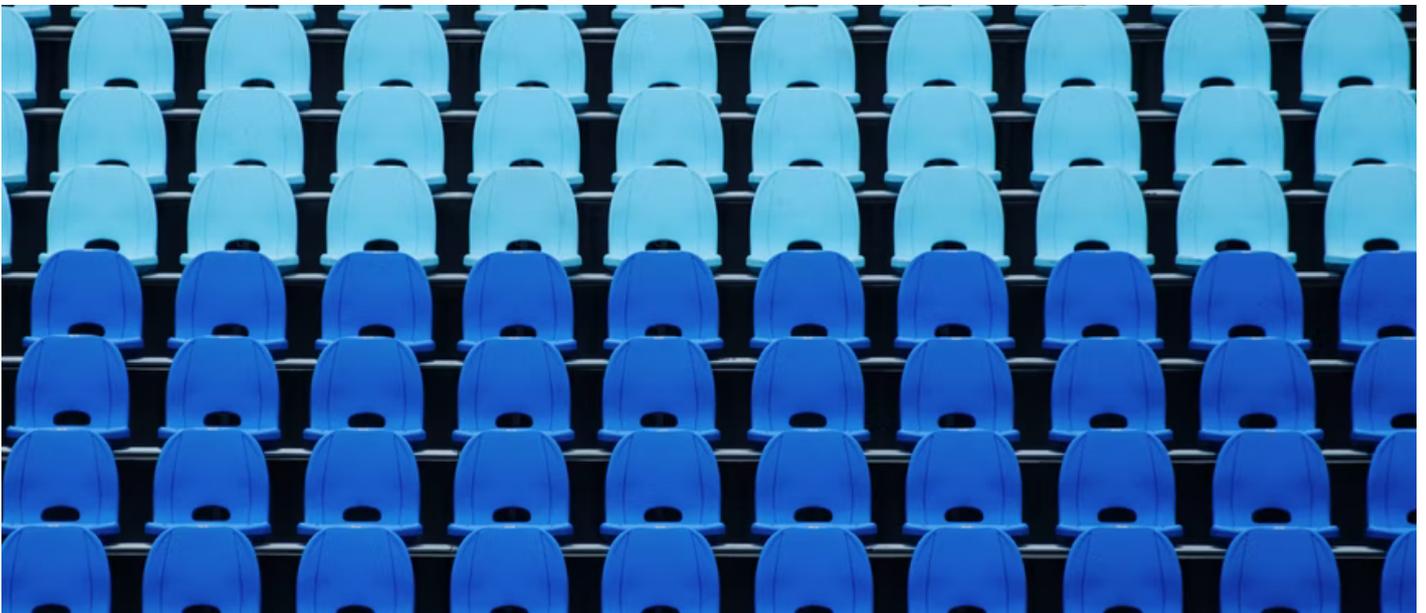
Alignment with calendar dates

You could think about how your project ties in with events such as International Women's Day, LGBTQ+ History Month, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Black History Month, Hate Crime Awareness Week or Holocaust Memorial Day.

Audience

Who is your audience? You will need to define who your project is intended for and why. Here are some ideas:

- Perpetrators of hate speech (to challenge behaviours)
- Victims of crime (to encourage reporting)
- Bystanders of hate crime (to educate on intervening safely)
- Skilled mentors (to help train on certain issues)
- Charitable donors (to help raise money)
- School children (to warn of online vulnerabilities)



Campaign projects

For projects with a campaign focus (e.g. a film, a poster, an event) there should be a call to action. This could be around expected behaviours for a positive community or encouraging checking/challenging behaviours and language, actively participating in a tolerant community, promoting positive behaviours and engendering a confident and safe “call it out” approach to unacceptable behaviours. You are not limited to these.

You should also think about different elements of the campaign:

- hard hitting messages can be arresting and awareness raising;
- positive messaging can be used to be promote community and tolerance;
- clear signposting in your campaign can help people to know how to take action and stand up for equality, diversity and inclusion.

Research-based projects

For research-based projects (e.g. a literature review, a survey, an analysis), we want to encourage you to think about what is required to drive culture change forward, in addition to identifying issues, barriers and problems.

It's important that, when mapping out future culture change, you demonstrate awareness and understanding of work which is already underway - this includes at the University but also externally. For example, what has the University, government, police or NHS done or doing to address such issues?

Ethics / Permission

An ethical approach to working with participants is expected in line with MU ethics guidance and subject-specific codes of practice. There may also be additional considerations in relation to Covid-19 restrictions.

Where possible CCI would like to utilise student outputs, for example, in university-wide messaging, training resources, conference presentations, sector publications, showcasing with our local partners.

We want to give you as much coverage as possible, but we will ask you first.

For your part, please make sure that all participants have consented for your work to potentially be disseminated in various formats and contexts. It is advisable to speak to your relevant tutor regarding the above.

Project ideas

Below are some general ideas for projects. We've also expanded on four areas of focus in the following pages. This is by no means an exhaustive list. Ultimately, we want you to work on issues that you are passionate about.



Things people do to keep themselves safe online and the different ways they respond to hate and harmful messages.



Exploring safety on our streets. How do people move around a space they feel safe in compared with a space in which they don't?



Attitudes towards those whose role is to protect us. Does the presence of the police make us feel safe or are they seen as a threat?



What is the impact of not being able to freely express oneself? How do people feel about having to change their behaviour - anger, resentment, apathy, defiance?



How the experiences of one group in society may be notably different from the experiences of another group.



Exploring the impact of Covid-19. How has the pandemic affected people's feelings of safety?

Focus #1: What does 'safe' mean for Muslim and Jewish people?

The rise of Antisemitism and Islamophobia in the UK is well-documented, leaving many Jewish and Muslim people reportedly feeling under threat.

Your project could enable better understanding of the contexts where Jewish and Muslim people, and their communities, are or/and feel unsafe. This, in part, will support work of the University to create a more positive university experience for our Jewish and Muslim students. This focus sits within the aim of CCI to raise awareness and build an understanding of what Antisemitism and Islamophobia look like in order to better tackle these issues.

We also want to gain a better understanding of the actions that Jewish and Muslim people take to keep safe, such as avoiding certain social media platforms, avoiding disclosing their faith/identity in certain contexts, employing security for protection.

This topic could apply to a number of faith communities and minoritised and marginalised groups and we welcome projects which explore what other groups do to keep safe.

Your project could look at the experiences of one group, or look at several groups as a way of comparing, contrasting and highlighting the importance of working together to tackle hate.



Focus #2: Being 'safe' as a person of colour

Negative racial stereotypes and bias can directly and indirectly impact on feelings of safety, both in the literal meaning of being free from harm, but also in the sense of being free to be whoever a person wants to be.

Your project could capture how such stereotypes and bias impact on how certain people behave. You may wish to look at differences in terms of how people respond. For example, one person may conform to certain norms and “rules” in order to “fit in” and “get on” in, perhaps behaving and dressing in a certain way so as not to “draw attention to themselves”, whilst, for someone else within the same community, they may respond in a completely different way.

One area you may wish to explore is the impact of the police and 'stop and search' on people of colour, and other contexts where people of colour may be more subjected to interrogation, suspicion and accusations, for example, being followed around a shop floor or refused entry into a bar.

This focus follows on from previous CCI projects with the Met Police, the Violent Crime Prevention Board and others.



Focus #3: Responding to hostility towards trans people

Trans people are more likely to be at the receiving end of hate speech and acts of hate. For example, nearly 7 in 10 young trans people have been subjected to death threats at school. The recorded figures between 2016 and 2019 saw transphobic hate crime rise by 81%. This coincided with an increase in transphobic rhetoric in the UK press and online.

In addition, the trans community feel an increased vulnerability due to a lack of protection in legal systems and a feeling that their right to self-determination is under threat in some contexts.

Your project could help bring into focus these experiences and encourage a better understanding of the need to tackle such incidents of hate and better protect and support trans people.



Trans people face hostile environments in various contexts. The volatile debate about the usage of toilets provides a good example of this. Campaigners TransActual state that “campaigning to prevent trans people from using the toilets that match their gender identity and presentation is to attempt to facilitate violence by proxy against trans people by forcing them to out themselves every time they use the toilet or put themselves in dangerous situations where they are likely to be attacked or raped.” Trans experiences go far beyond the “toilet” issue, but this does highlight issues around feeling and staying safe.

Your project could capture how trans people respond to such hostile environments. For example, there has been much attention on polarising women’s rights and trans rights that have left some trans people feeling more marginalised and more vulnerable to transphobia.

Focus #4: Are women safe on our streets?

Discussions about women's safety have featured heavily in UK media, most notably following the murders of Sarah Everard and Ashling Murphy as well as highly publicised incidents of drink spiking.

Women are routinely told to do a variety of things to keep safe, actions which curtail freedom of expression and freedom of movement. These seem even more unjust when compared with their male counterparts where messaging doesn't appear to address any of their behaviours.

We are particularly interested in projects which capture the different things that women have to do to keep themselves safe. This, in part, is to act as a vehicle to educate the University, and specifically men, about the experiences of women and the things that could be done to create safer environments.

There is no one "correct" answer in terms of staying safe, and women will deploy different tactics to reduce the risk of harm. For example, whilst one women may choose never to give out their personal phone number to avoid the risk of harassment; another may deduce that, in the moment, it is safer to give someone their number so as to minimise the risk of a response which could put their safety at risk. We are particularly interested in capturing these differences.

This focus aligns with work of CCI in the fields of violence against women, including sexual violence and domestic abuse. We would also welcome projects which address gender-based violence and experiences of people in the LGBTQI community.

