



الجامعة العربية المفتوحة  
Arab Open University

**Quality Assurance Department**

**'Equal Opportunity and Respect for Diversity'  
Policy of Arab Open University**

January 2011

## **Equal Opportunity and Respect for Diversity Policy of the Arab Open University**

The Arab Open University was established to provide education on the basis of merit only. It observes the rights and respects the dignity of staff, students, visitors and all others with whom the University has contact. 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.

### **Statement of AOU's 'Equal Opportunity and Respect for Diversity' Policy**

As a partner of UKOU, AOU will adhere to the British Equality Act of April 2010, to be interpreted and applied within the legal framework of each AOU country. 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.

- i. Colour includes, for example, being black and white.
- ii. Nationality includes, for example, being a Kuwaiti, Egyptian or Sudanese OR belonging to a certain 'tribe'.
- iii. "Bedouins" (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:

- i. Religion (e.g. Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism),  
or
- ii. Denomination of a religion (e.g. Sunni, Shiite).

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:

- i. Equality of access to employment and equality of access to academic provision irrespective of gender.
- ii. Equality of treatment (e.g. pay, promotion) in the work place and in relation to academic provision irrespective of gender.
- iii. 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 'disable' refers to a man or a woman who:

- i. Has a physical or mental impairment, with or without outward visible signs.
- ii. 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 normal method of transportation, and those who suffer from Depression, Diabetics, 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 on the basis of social or economic 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 her 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 Rector 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 the AOU.
- A robust monitoring mechanism to find the extent to which this policy is adhered to across all branches and HQ of AOU is created and maintained, using annual surveys and other relevant statistical methods. This includes monitoring of activities of the Mediation Committees and disseminating their reports to all other stakeholders.
- An effective mechanism for processing grievances against any violation of 1-7 above in any branch or HQ of AOU by any student or member of staff is created and maintained (see Appendix 1 and 2).
- 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 students in wheelchair.
- All learning resources including libraries, counselling services, ITC labs and computer equipments 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 final and mid term examinations in a dignified and effective manner.

## **Appendix 1: Procedure for grievance resolution**

The AOU recognizes that from time to time individual staff or student may wish to seek to have grievances relating to their employment or studentship resolved. The procedure for making their grievance known and dealt with is described in this appendix.

### **Equal Opportunity Advisory**

- The AOU will designate some members of its staff as the 'Equal Opportunity Advisors' (EOAs), one in each Branch and one in the HQ of the University. EOA is a voluntary position and carries no extra salary. Impartiality and sensitivity to plight of those who are trespassed against are essential requirement for this voluntary position.
- The AOU will provide necessary training before a staff member assumes the responsibility of acting as an EOA. The time spent by an EOA will be counted in his/her annual work plan as legitimate University activity.

### **Conflict resolution**

- EOAs will conduct an investigation into each grievance, and will discuss the matter with the line managers of the grieving parties if required by one of the parties. If the grievance is against the line manager himself/herself the EOA will discuss the matter with the immediate superior of the line manager.
- The EOA will seek the assistance of a female member of staff or a female student in the investigation of all grievances in which a female student or a female staff member grieves against sexual harassment or bullying.
- EOAs will encourage communication as a conflict resolution method so that grievances can be resolved amicably close to the level of origin as possible in the first instance.

### **Mediation**

- If required by either party to a grievance, the EOA will refer the matter to the University's Mediation Committee of the Branch or the HQ for arbitration.
- The Branch Mediation Committee will consist of the EOA involved with the case, an academic member of staff, a member of the Branch administration other than the Branch Director. In addition, in cases where a party is a student, the representative of the student body at the Branch will participate in the meeting of the committee.
- At the HQ, the Mediation Committee will be the existing Grievance Committee where the EOA involved with the case will attend as a member with voting right.
- The Mediation Committee will conduct its affairs within the rules and regulations of the AOU and within the legal system of each AOU country.
- The Mediation Committee will complete its investigations and reach its decision in reasonable time.
- This grievance procedure will be carried out in confidence and will not prejudice the current employment or future career prospects of the employee or the student's status.

- Complete record of the mediation will be kept by the EOA involved in the case, HR, and will be available to either party to the grievance for inspection.

### **Appeal**

- If either party, whether in a Branch or at HQ, is not satisfied with the decision of the Mediation Committee they have the right to appeal to the Rector. The decision of the Rector is final.
- EOAs and Mediation Committees will treat the parties involved in any grievance with dignity and due respect.

## **Appendix 2: 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 disable 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 may 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 its students 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.

### **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 respecting diversity policy.

## **9. Harassment and Bullying**

AOU regards incidents of harassment and bullying against women and men seriously and may be grounds for disciplinary action including dismissal or expulsion.

### *Acknowledgement*

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