



Toolkit for Institutions

This toolkit offers resources for academic institutions to protect and support researchers from campaigns of intimidation and harassment. The guides and templates included here can be reviewed and adapted for your institution's needs.

Note that the term "researcher" is intended to include a broad range of people who conduct research at universities and related institutions.



Toolkit Overview

Setting Up

This section is a starting point, laying the groundwork for the proactive measures and responses offered in subsequent sections of this toolkit.

Preparing for Attacks: These procedural suggestions will guide your institution through practical and actionable steps to prepare for incidents of researcher abuse.

Sample Policy: This sample policy can be incorporated into the university's existing manual to inform and guide preparation and response to researcher abuse.

Certificates of Confidentiality: Learn how CoCs can protect research participants against the disclosure of potentially identifiable data, including as part of lawsuits and subpoenas.

Proactive Measures

Before coordinated campaigns of intimidation and harassment against researchers occur, review the strategic plans and worksheets offered here.

Creating a Researcher Support Team: These worksheets can be used to help your institution preemptively create a response team for incidents of intimidation or harassment.

Communications Strategies: Developing a communication strategy during moments of calm will empower people within your institution to respond in a way that is intentional and purposeful.

Legal Issues and Public Records Requests: Consider potential legal aspects of abuse campaigns against researchers, including public records requests.



Responding to an Incident

This guidance offered here centers the needs of the impacted individual(s) while protecting the reputation of the institution so that you can respond to incidents of researcher abuse quickly and appropriately.

Reporting Form Template: This reporting form is tailored to capture key information related to intimidation and/or harassment of targeted scholars because of their work.

Response Procedures: This set of procedures offers step-by-step guidance for institutions responding to incidents of harassment while also centering the needs of the researcher. The checklists for administrators and researchers included in this section can be used to organize your institutional response to harassment.

All resources provided here may be used and adapted to your institution's specific needs with credit given to the Researcher Support Consortium.



Setting Up

Preparing for Attacks

Sample Policy

Certificates of Confidentiality



Preparing for Attacks

Knowledge production and provision is critical for a healthy, prosperous society. Yet researchers across disciplines are facing unprecedented levels of intimidation and harassment from actors outside of their institutions who aim to discredit, delay, or end their work altogether.

Whatever the source or tactic, this abuse represents an *occupational hazard*. It is the work itself that places researchers at risk. And it has severe consequences for researchers, for their institutions, and for society as a whole.

The following step-by-step guide will help your university prepare for incidents of abuse against researchers and scholars.

1. Review and adopt an official policy regarding external intimidation and harassment. (See our sample on page 10.)

When developing this policy and other materials, be sure to use trauma-informed language. Acknowledge that these forms of harassment are real and significant problems. They can impact morale, lead to burnout, produce self-censorship and silence, generate fear and trauma, among many other common consequences. This is as true of online abuse as it is of other types of harassment. In most cases, ignoring the problem—including “ignoring the trolls” or simply “staying off the internet”—is neither feasible for researchers nor effective in ending the harassment and its impacts.

2. Create a reporting form for researchers and scholars to report instances of external intimidation and harassment. (See our template on page 29.)

Note that just as with reporting other forms of abuse and harassment, recounting instances of external harassment can be difficult—even traumatizing—especially when the researcher is in the midst of a crisis. While researchers should be encouraged to provide as much information as is comfortable for them, especially as it supports institutional planning and response, researchers should never face undue pressure to complete reporting forms. Alternative methods of reporting, including working with a member of the institution’s Researcher Support Team (see #3 below) to gather information, should be made available.

3. Proactively create a Researcher Support Team that can activate immediately when external intimidation and harassment occurs. Include members of the following departments, as applicable:

- a. *Administration*



A member of the dean's office in each school or college should be designated as part of the university's Researcher Support Team. Designations at this level signal that the university takes the matter seriously, and designees within the dean's office can help facilitate information and communication flows across units and to university leadership.

b. *Academic Affairs*

At least one member of the Researcher Support Team should be designated to assist when professional responsibilities and development considerations arise. In some instances, researchers may need to take a step back from certain professional responsibilities, with possible implications for career advancement. Having someone who is familiar with university policies and can assist the researcher in planning (or communicating with those in other colleges or schools who will assist with planning) is essential.

c. *Academic and Staff Assistance Programs*

Including someone from the university's academic and/or staff assistance programs on the Support Team can help to ensure access to consultation and referral services for the mental health and well-being of those experiencing external intimidation and harassment.

d. *Office of Faculty Development and Diversity (or similar)*

Researchers from historically underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds are much more likely to face external intimidation and harassment—especially the most severe forms of abuse. A representative from the university's Office of Development and Diversity or equivalent administrative unit should be available to help navigate concerns that are specific to, or specifically acute for, researchers with such identities.

e. *Campus and Student Life*

The impacted individual may be a PhD student or a research assistant, so it is important to include advocates from a student affairs department. In addition, intimidation and harassment of faculty can be upsetting to students. Ensure that students have advocacy and support where appropriate.

f. *Human Resources*

Human Resources can provide support and resources to the person facing abuse while also offering support to other affected faculty and staff.

g. *Public Relations or Strategic Communications*



Offices specializing in communication can help with public messaging, media inquiries, and social media.

h. *Information Technology*

IT can help with matters concerning changes to university email, phone systems, and websites. These changes might include the use of filters, proxies, and monitors. IT may be helpful with digital security by collecting and reporting abuse to different platforms. IT may also offer to collect and retain abusive emails sent to the scholar's university account as evidence for future efforts or potential legal action. In this case, the scholar/researcher may be instructed to forward these emails to a specific person within the IT department.

i. *Security Division*

Security can help assess danger and the possibility of potential criminal investigations and serve as a liaison between the harassed individual and the police.

j. *Legal Counsel*

While university counsel does not typically provide legal advice to individual university employees, the university's counsel can collaborate on any communications that need to be issued and/or potential legal actions.

k. *Public Records*

The Public Records office can help the department and the individual scholar or researcher determine what records should be retained and what information could potentially be made public in the case of an open records request.

For more information about how to identify and organize a Researcher Support Team, please see the worksheet included in this toolkit on page 12.

4. Once your Researcher Support Team has been established:

- a. Make sure that the Support Team has reviewed your institution's policy and procedures addressing occupational abuse.
- b. Schedule regular (quarterly or biannual) workshops, meetings, and/or webinars to keep your support team up-to-date on current incidents of abuse, the landscape of harassment and intimidation, tactics of abuse, and specific ways that each department can assist in protecting researchers and their work. These meetings can also facilitate conversations about planning for upcoming challenges.
- c. Make sure you and your Researcher Support Team are familiar with the landscape of coordinated campaigns of intimidation and harassment on



researchers. Often, the group behind the attack is small but skilled at using technology to amplify their messages. Mislabelling these attacks as spontaneous expressions of outrage gives them more credibility than they deserve and can also fuel the university's fear of bad publicity.

- d. Educate departments and faculty about the role of the Researcher Support Team. Have Team contact information as well as the intimidation and harassment policy in an easy-to-access location.
5. Encourage your Communications department to proactively develop a communications response strategy so that there is no delay or question about how to respond to incidents of abuse. Extended silence or a hurried response can escalate the abuse and leave the targeted individual feeling unsupported. Responses should be intentional and strategic. (See our guide to developing a communications strategy on page 20.)
6. Encourage your Information Technology department to establish a security team that can recommend software and hardware precautions to faculty members engaging in sensitive research and fieldwork situations.
7. Encourage your faculty to present sensitive results in a collective voice (such as a research group, lab, or department) rather than as an individual. This will help protect marginalized or minority individuals in particular.
8. If you plan to release news regarding sensitive research, always inform the authors of the article in advance and give them the choice to be tagged or not, and on which social media platforms.
9. Create recommendations for faculty regarding email usage and records retention in preparation for potential open records requests, letters of inquiry, and subpoenas. Collaborate with your institution's General Counsel and Records Office regarding state and federal laws as you develop these recommendations.
10. Share information about intimidation and harassment with the researchers and faculty members in your department and proactively develop educational materials, resources, and procedures to share with them. Educate your researchers on current trends and examples of online attacks; give them resources to mitigate the risk of abuse before it happens; explain how your institution is prepared to respond to potential abuse; share your suggestions for email usage and records retention; and let them know that your institution will be behind them every step of the way.
11. While any faculty member or scholar could be a potential target, those who teach about or research sensitive or topics perceived to be political are especially vulnerable. Department chairs should help faculty anticipate risks, vocalize their support, and distribute responsibility for teaching sensitive or political classes across the department.



12. If certain groups of people are more regularly experiencing abuse, meet with them to discuss their activities and read their work. This type of engagement demonstrates that you value their contributions and also helps you to support them better.
13. Make sure the Faculty Senate and Union Contact have endorsed the [AAUP's 1940 Statement on Academic Freedom](#) and that the endorsement is properly updated.
14. Include code of conduct policies for students and employees that cover copyright protections against digital dissemination of classroom materials, and recommend to faculty that they include language on every page of their course materials that the materials are protected by copyright (© [Faculty Name] [year created]).

The University of Massachusetts Amherst recommends providing the following language to faculty for dissemination verbally, on their course website, and in their syllabus:

"My lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, videos, assignments, tests, outlines and similar materials, and all course recordings, are protected by U.S. copyright laws and by university policy. I am the exclusive owner of the copyright in materials I create.

You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own use in this class. You may also share those materials with another student who is registered and enrolled in this course.

You may NOT reproduce, distribute, upload, or display any lecture notes or recordings or course materials in any other way – whether or not a fee is charged – without my express written consent. If you do so, you may be subject to disciplinary action under [UNIVERSITY] Conduct.

Similarly, you own the copyright to your original papers and exam essays. If I am interested in posting your answers or papers on the course website, I will ask for your written permission."



Sample Policy

This sample policy can be incorporated into the university's existing manual to inform and guide preparation and response to researcher abuse.

The University is committed to protecting academic freedom and to promoting the well-being and personal safety of members of its community, including when individuals or groups from outside of the University seek to threaten, harass, or otherwise intimidate faculty, staff, or students in relation to their work as educators and researchers. We do not tolerate abuse, harassment, or other threatening behaviors—whether they take place online or offline—that aim to delay, deter, or discredit rigorous research and healthy academic debate. The University is dedicated to standing beside faculty, staff, and students in the face of such harassment. When the University becomes aware of a complaint that a member of the University community may have been subjected to or affected by abusive, harassing, or threatening behavior as a result of their work as an educator or researcher at the University, the University will take prompt action, including a review of the matter and, if needed, appropriate steps to support and protect the impacted individual(s). The course of action taken by the University will depend on the particular facts and circumstances involved.



Certificates of Confidentiality

Certificates of Confidentiality (CoCs) protect the privacy of research participants by preventing the disclosure of identifiable and sensitive research information to anyone not directly involved in the research unless the participant provides consent or in other specific circumstances.

Certificates of Confidentiality were created by Congressional act, making them a particularly strong safeguard against the disclosure of potentially identifiable data, including as part of lawsuits and subpoenas.

The definition of “identifiable, sensitive” information covered by CoCs is also particularly robust. The relevant U.S. Code (42 U.S.C. § 241(d)(4)), defines identifiable, sensitive information as “information that is about an individual and that is gathered or used during the course of research...and:

- Through which an individual is identified; or
- For which there is **at least a very small risk**, that some combination of the information, a request for the information, and other available data sources could be used to deduce the identity of an individual” (emphasis added).

The CoC protections cover all copies of information, documents, or biospecimens gathered or used by the investigator during the research, including copies that are shared for other research activities.

Obtaining a Certificate of Confidentiality

Since October 2017, NIH automatically gives CoCs to qualifying NIH-funded studies, though not to research programs more broadly. Several HHS agencies also issue CoCs. When a CoC has automatically been granted, information to this effect typically can be found in the research grant’s terms and conditions.

NIH will consider requests for CoCs for specific research projects that are not funded by NIH, if the project:

- Collects or uses identifiable, sensitive information,
- Covers a topic that is within the NIH mission or HHS health-related research mission,
- Covers research information that is collected, used, or stored in the US, and



- Is conducted in accordance with [45 CFR 46 and relevant subparts](#) (i.e, the regulations for the protection of human subjects in research), and all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Investigators conducting non-NIH funded research can apply for a CoC through the [NIH online CoC system](#).

University General Counsel offices should familiarize themselves with the applicability of, and the protections offered by, Certificates of Confidentiality.

Researchers should consider whether their research projects could qualify for Certificates of Confidentiality, inquire with program officers at federal agencies about whether a CoC will be automatically granted, and, where it is not, consider applying to NIH for a CoC before the research begins.

Resources:

- [External user guide for CoCs](#) – very thorough and walks you through the process of requesting a CoC from NIH
- [CoC podcast](#) – just under 11 minutes
- [CoC request form](#) through NIH
- [CoC FAQs](#)

[Example informed consent language](#) for research covered by a CoC



Proactive Measures

Creating a Researcher Support Team

Communications Strategies

Legal Issues and Public Records Requests



Creating a Researcher Support Team

The worksheets on the following pages can be used to help your institution create a Researcher Support Team to address incidents of researcher harassment and intimidation. These worksheets list various departments that can offer support to targeted individuals, along with their suggested roles. Select the support options that are applicable for your institution and build your response team accordingly.

Wherever possible, identify an individual or a specific position within the department to join your response team to spearhead that area of support and to act as a liaison to others within the department. If necessary, a single individual can be the liaison to more than one department.

Use the first section of the worksheet ("Researcher Support Team Roles and Responsibilities") to review potential support options, choose the actions that apply to your institution, and list the personnel and procedures that will constitute your response protocol. Then, use the second section of the worksheet ("Researcher Support Team Charter") to record the mission, members, and responsibilities of your response team. Make sure to keep these forms updated with the latest information.



Researcher Support Team Roles and Responsibilities Worksheet

Department/Role	Ways to Offer Support	Contact Person and Information/Notes
Academic Affairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Provide trainings and materials on how to manage harassment and intimidation <input type="checkbox"/> Write and distribute policies on harassment and intimidation <input type="checkbox"/> Help with course releases as appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Advocate for students who have been affected by harassment and intimidation <input type="checkbox"/> Help with conflict management among faculty or between faculty and students <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a faculty advocate who can attend meetings with the harassed individual to provide support	
Academic and Staff Assistance Program	<input type="checkbox"/> Provide consultation services for the mental health and well-being of the targeted person and other affected faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Serve as an advocate for affected person within the university <input type="checkbox"/> Refer affected person to community and national organizations that can help them protect their mental health <input type="checkbox"/> Provide support groups for those affected <input type="checkbox"/> Provide workshops on self-care and other skills needed by affected person	
Campus and Student Life	<input type="checkbox"/> Reach out to students whom the attack may impact to ensure that they have advocacy and support	



Counseling and Psychological Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Provide consultation services for the mental health and well-being of the targeted person and other affected researchers<input type="checkbox"/> Serve as an advocate for affected person within the university<input type="checkbox"/> Refer affected person to community and national organizations that can help them protect their mental health<input type="checkbox"/> Provide support groups for those affected<input type="checkbox"/> Provide workshops on self-care and other skills needed by affected person	
Dean / Department Chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Provide education and information on intimidation and harassment, including information on current trends and resources for mitigating the risk of abuse and responding to abuse<input type="checkbox"/> Anticipate risks for more vulnerable researchers while also showing an interest in their work<input type="checkbox"/> Meet with the person being harassed and assure them they have wider university support<input type="checkbox"/> Check-in regularly with targeted individuals to ensure they have the support they need<input type="checkbox"/> If desired by the targeted person, help them prepare a brief message about their situation for circulation within the university<input type="checkbox"/> If desired by the targeted person, prepare a holding statement of support<input type="checkbox"/> Connect the targeted individual with colleagues who have had similar experiences	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Help the harassed person file a harassment report<input type="checkbox"/> Identify alternative classroom and office spaces if necessary<input type="checkbox"/> Create contingency plans in case the abuse persists long enough to affect researchers professional obligations, such as teaching<input type="checkbox"/> Connect the person to other departments (e.g., IT, Human Resources) and offer to coordinate efforts with other offices as needed	
Dean of Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Address potential student misconduct, discrimination, and harassment<input type="checkbox"/> Provide education and information to students on intimidation and harassment including information on current trends and resources for mitigating the risk of abuse and responding to abuse	
General Counsel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Proactively work with communications team to develop ready-to-go public communications and statements of support<input type="checkbox"/> Be prepared to review public communications<input type="checkbox"/> Work with public records regarding state and federal laws regarding record retention and open records requests<input type="checkbox"/> Provide legal consultation<input type="checkbox"/> Help the person acquire outside counsel if they desire to take proactive civil legal action or other legal action outside the scope of the general counsel	



Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Help the affected person document intimidation and harassment<input type="checkbox"/> Help the person plan a strategy for how to respond to harassment<input type="checkbox"/> Provide support in discussing intimidation and harassment with the person's department chair and/or dean<input type="checkbox"/> Assist in facilitating connections between colleagues who have had similar experiences<input type="checkbox"/> Investigate harassment and intimidation complaints by conducting relevant interviews and reviewing evidence	
Information Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Help change and monitor university email accounts and phone systems<input type="checkbox"/> Remove personal information from university websites, social media, and public-facing directories<input type="checkbox"/> Help to protect and make private any related course material and syllabi<input type="checkbox"/> Help the person change their social media privacy settings and passwords<input type="checkbox"/> Provide consultation on digital security<input type="checkbox"/> Assign a point person to monitor harassing messages for escalating threats and for evidence that could be used in a criminal investigations<input type="checkbox"/> Assist in reporting harassment and intimidation to relevant platforms<input type="checkbox"/> Help the individual document the harassment	
Office of Faculty Development and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Proactively help faculty at a high risk of experiencing harassment anticipate risks while also showing an interest in	



Diversity	<p>their work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Provide trainings and materials on how to manage harassment and intimidation 	
Office of Inclusion and Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Address harassment or abuse related to a person's racial, ethnic, gender, or LGBTQIA+ status <input type="checkbox"/> Provide support to others who share a demographic identity similar to that of the targeted individual 	
Provost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Provide messaging surrounding the importance of academic freedom to the university's mission and the university's commitment to supporting targeted individuals <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate the importance and need for free inquiry within the university <input type="checkbox"/> If desired by the harassed person, prepare a holding statement of support 	
Public Records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Help individuals determine what records could legally be required to be made public upon request <input type="checkbox"/> Provide recommendations regarding email usage and records retention 	
Public Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Develop communication strategies for responding to harassment and intimidation <input type="checkbox"/> Help with public messaging, media inquiries, and social media <input type="checkbox"/> Release public statements in support of the harassed individual <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare staff to respond to harassing phone calls and other inquiries by providing them with pre-crafted scripts 	



	<p>to use on phone calls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Help the harassed person develop a personal communication strategy for how to respond to harassment<input type="checkbox"/> Serve as a liaison between the person and any interested media	
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Assess threat level<input type="checkbox"/> Assess the potential for a criminal investigation<input type="checkbox"/> Serve as a liaison between the harassed person and local police<input type="checkbox"/> Provide escort services as needed	



Researcher Support Team Charter

(Name of Institution)

Mission Statement:

Meeting Schedule and Team Responsibilities:

Researcher Support Team Composition:

Department	Roles & Responsibilities	Contact Information



Communications Strategies

When researchers are intimidated and harassed because of their work, it is critical that their institutions stand beside them. Researcher abuse occurs online and off, and although attacks may appear to target the individual on a personal level, it is important to remember that *it is the researcher's work that puts them at risk*.

Preparation and Messaging

Developing a communications strategy proactively and prior to a crisis can empower people within your institution to respond in a way that is intentional and purposeful. Facilitate conversations within your communications, security, information technology, and public relations teams (and others as needed) to plan for incidents of targeted harassment. Consider creating an overall process for addressing such incidents, customizing strategic approaches based on the target, tactics, mode of delivery, and other characteristics. In some cases, responding within a few hours of an attack with a statement of support and a provision of facts is critical to stave off the spread of non-credible information. In other instances, waiting a day to respond and using strategic silence may allow time for the campaign to fizzle out on its own. A key component of your communications plan should include actions to be taken, people to be involved, and processes/decision flows to follow.

To reemphasize: much of the work to make a response efficacious should be done ahead of time to ensure the right stakeholders are educated on best practices for supporting the targeted person(s) and on policies and protocols relevant to initiating strategic communications. Do not take for granted that people on your team understand the nuances of the threat landscape, nor the best approaches to supporting people who are experiencing potentially traumatic events.

Once you have identified both the best processes and strategic approaches for your institution you may also consider developing messages in advance. It is helpful to think about these things outside of a crisis context, and it is useful to ensure this language is approved by relevant stakeholders, such as your legal team, in advance so that you can act nimbly during moments of crisis. A public or institution-wide statement may reaffirm the researcher's expertise, promote your institution's values and commitment to upholding research standards and/or academic freedom, and issue a unilateral condemnation of harassment and intimidation. Avoid using technical or abstract language or repeating damaging content. If a correction is needed, do so in a "truth sandwich" by presenting a true statement first, then addressing non-credible information, and ending with another truth.



When an incident arises that requires a response, share the message via formal channels such as your institution's platforms rather than in response to an inquiry or comment. Once a response is issued, refrain from engaging further. Concurrently, connect your communications or public relations lead with the targeted person(s) and their supervisor(s). Discuss the proposed response strategy with the researcher, making sure to build moments of acknowledgment and affirmative consent into the process. This means supporting the targeted person both in words and action, reiterating that what they're experiencing is not fair and that you are here to support them and relieve some of the administrative burden of responding. This also means that the response strategy should be done in partnership with the targeted person; they should have several opportunities to affirm they are on board with proposed strategies. Such inclusion is important not just because non-consensual communication can further harm the targeted person, but also because the abuse is more likely to be mitigated when you work together to maintain a united front. Whenever appropriate, include the researcher in the decision-making process.

If your institution decides to engage with a broader audience, such as news media, policy makers, patient groups, or the general public, focus on connecting with those who are likely to be open to your point of view or who have not yet formed an opinion about the issue. Avoid engaging with those who advocate for extreme views. If your institution or the targeted individual is considering engagement with the media, be sure to conduct due diligence on the relevant outlet(s) and journalist(s). In cases where the targeted person has decided to provide comment or participate in an interview, you may want to consider sharing best practices for how to successfully navigate media inquiries (e.g., discuss concepts like "off the record").

You may wish to proactively expand the information available on your website to increase transparency, share relevant data and information, and provide context for the research. These pages can be referred to when engaging with broader audiences or responding to sincere interest. You may consider search engine optimization (SEO) strategies so that all relevant sites merge when a person searches for information on a particular topic. In cases where you are helping potentially vulnerable researchers promote their work, it may be useful to create materials at the outset that could be used in the event that they become targets for harassment. Above all, affirm the researcher and their work; remember that this type of abuse can cause extreme distress, with negative effects on mental and physical health.

When crafting language to share on institutional platforms, consider these statements used by other institutions:



The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

"The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is committed to academic freedom. [SCHOLAR NAME] is an established and admired scholar in [DISCIPLINARY AREA] and a valued member of our university. As with all of our scholars at the University of Illinois, [SCHOLAR NAME] has the right of academic freedom necessary to pursue scholarship and research on important subjects and to reach conclusions even if some might disagree with those conclusions. Exploring challenging and important questions is exactly what scholars in a world-class university should be doing."

University of Massachusetts Amherst

"Faculty members at the University of Massachusetts Amherst share their expertise on a broad spectrum of disciplines that enrich the educational experience of students, who benefit from discussion and debate of divergent views and are encouraged to develop their own ideas and beliefs. [TARGETED INDIVIDUAL] is an established and respected scholar in their discipline and a valued member of our university. As with all our scholars at the University of Massachusetts, [TARGETED INDIVIDUAL] has the right of academic freedom necessary to pursue scholarship, research and teaching on important subjects. Healthy debate and disagreement are a celebrated cornerstone of academic freedom. Bullying and harassment of faculty members who exercise their academic freedom, however is not, and we condemn it in the strongest of terms."

Knight First Amendment Institute

From the executive director: "It's remarkable and very troubling that a congressional panel that purports to be investigating censorship is engaged in the intimidation of researchers. There's nothing at all nefarious about researchers studying online speech and sharing their conclusions with social media platforms—and this activity is indisputably protected by the First Amendment. The panel should withdraw its sweeping demands, which undermine the very freedoms it says it is trying to protect."

From the litigation director: "Independent research relating to online speech is immensely important right now because new communications platforms have transformed the digital public sphere in ways the public urgently needs to understand. Given the stakes, it's vital that public and legislative debate be informed by actual facts and a genuine understanding of how these platforms are shaping society. Rather than intimidate and punish the researchers engaged in this work, Congress should establish new legal protections to ensure that researchers can do their important work without interference."



Media Engagement

1. In cases where intimidation and harassment have attracted the attention of the public or the media, consult with your PR department to prepare a statement of support or use one that has proactively been developed. Communication strategies are most effective when the targeted individual and the institution work together, so make sure that the individual is in contact with the PR department and only releases a statement with mutual consent.

A public statement should include a commitment to academic freedom, a recognition of the harassed individual's expertise, and language supporting the individual's research and teaching. More information on developing a communications strategy, including example statements, can be found in this toolkit.

2. Make sure the person knows they are not expected to communicate with any media outlets that contact them about the abuse. Provide them with a contact person in communications to help them craft a response strategy.
3. Do not debate or comment on incorrect or misconstrued content from the harassed individual's speech because doing so may legitimize unflattering or untrue narratives.
4. Prepare staff to respond to harassing phone calls and other inquiries. Provide them with pre-crafted language like the below script used by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign:

"I appreciate your interest in this issue. Calls on this topic are being handled by Public Affairs. Would you like me to transfer you to that office?"

5. When a person is targeted because of their research, consider providing additional details about the research on a relevant webpage or other channels (e.g., a distributable fact sheet). Doing so provides reasonable members of the public who might otherwise become involved in a harassment campaign with additional details that might dissuade them.

Internal Communication

1. Within the university, communicate the importance and need for freedom of inquiry and express the university's mission and the importance of civil conversation and employee safety. This communication might take the form of workplace meetings, newsletter bulletins, blog posts, and discussions with students and staff. Keep in mind that any internal communication might be shared more broadly than originally intended.



3. If the person being harassed is an instructor, determine if and when the situation will be addressed with students. Keep in mind that if attacks are public and/or threatening, students may feel uncomfortable coming to class. Also, consider how harassment and intimidation might affect other people in the department and university. Create a contingency plan in case the abuse persists long enough to affect the targeted person's ability to carry out their professional obligations (e.g., teaching). Contingency options for those that have instructional obligations might include moving the course to an asynchronous format. The university's counseling center or the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity can help facilitate any support required by students, staff, and faculty impacted by the abuse.
4. Depending on the nature of the harassment and intimidation, those who share an identity similar to that of the targeted individual may need support. The university's counseling center or the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity can help facilitate such support.
5. In addition to faculty, staff, and students, it is possible that co-authors, collaborators, or others outside the university may be affected by the harassment and intimidation. It may be helpful to consult relevant organizations and professional associations within the researcher's discipline.



Legal Issues and Public Records Requests

Legal Issues

1. If applicable, make sure the person knows they have the right to legal consultation with the university's general counsel. Make sure it is clear that they may receive legal advice from general counsel, but that some legal action may require a privately retained attorney.
2. If a person seeks to take proactive civil legal action (such as in a case of defamation), they may need to engage with private counsel. Defamation cases are difficult to prove and require thorough investigation beyond the scope of many universities' legal and administrative departments. Help to adjust the targeted person's expectations and, if needed, assist them in identifying qualified outside counsel.

Public Records Requests

1. Work with your institution's Office of Public Records and Legal Counsel to develop educational materials that can be distributed to faculty, researchers, and scholars. Include advice on email usage and records retention and how to prepare for possible requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Public universities are considered state governmental bodies and are therefore subject to open records requests. Note that each state has different open records laws governing public access to state and local government records, so make sure to reference the relevant laws in your state.

In your guide, include details such as:

- a. General information about FOIA requests and relevant laws in your state
- b. What to do if/when a request is received
- c. Whom to alert within the university
- d. Timeline and process for responding to a request
- e. Types of information that may be included in requests, such as emails, research documentation and data, or telephone and text records
- f. How to determine which records are encompassed by the request. There are limited exemptions for what is considered a public record. [This list](#) is a good



place to start. Include a list of common exemptions that would be relevant to your institution, such as personal records, home addresses, personal email addresses, and home phone numbers of employees and their family members. Advise faculty that information will not be withheld or redacted unless they specifically request it.

2. Develop a guide for faculty email usage and records retention. Encourage faculty to use university email accounts for work-related emails and to keep personal emails separate. Note that forwarding university email to personal email accounts may introduce risk and liability. Include information on how long deleted emails remain on the university's servers.
3. Distribute FOIA educational materials and email usage and record retention guidance to relevant university members.
4. When Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests are received:
 - a. Work with general counsel by explaining the larger context surrounding the request. Consider whether it is appropriate to ask for clarification on the scope of the request. Assuming requests are in good faith without an appropriate assessment of the threat landscape may be risky.
 - b. Allow the impacted researcher(s) to review anything that your institution plans to share so that they can offer suggestions for protecting colleagues and other collaborators. Including researchers in discussions about response efforts and communication plans reinforces trust within teams.
 - c. When institutions respond to requests by turning over more information than is requested (i.e. without going through a process of clarification or discernment), they may see more follow-up and inadvertently increase risks to targeted person(s).
 - d. Inform communications staff so that they can create messaging to prepare for the possibility of increased intimidation or harassment following request. It is essential for communications staff to understand the consequences of researcher abuse and the larger context surrounding the specific incident before formulating a communications strategy.



Responding to an Incident

Reporting Form Template

Response Procedures

Additional Considerations



Reporting Form Template

On the following page is a sample reporting form that can be modified to include your institution's name and information. It can be used as a PDF or adapted to allow online entry and submission. When distributing this reporting form to your colleagues, it may be useful to append a list of relevant contacts and resources available to those experiencing harassment and abuse related to their work with your institution.



External Intimidation, Abuse, and Harassment Reporting Form

Please use this form to report instances of intimidation, abuse, and/or harassment directed at you by individuals or groups from outside of the university community and that are in reference to your work at this institution.

Such abuse and harassment may occur online (e.g., doxing, social media trolling, abusive emails), offline (e.g., threatening phone calls, physical disturbances, legal threats), or both.

If you or the individual experiencing the harassment are in imminent physical danger or if there has been a direct threat of physical violence, call 9-1-1 immediately.

Please provide as much information as you can in the fields below. The more information we have, the more quickly and effectively we can respond. However, we also understand that some information may be difficult or overwhelming to share. If you have relevant information that you do not feel comfortable entering in this form, please note that below.

Your full name:

Are you a:

☐ Student

☐ PostDoc

☐ Faculty

☐ Staff

☐ Other: _____

Your position/title:

Your phone number:



Your email address:

Date(s) of harassment:

Is the harassment ongoing?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

In what setting(s) or in what form is the harassment occurring? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Social media (list which platforms)

- ☐ Email (list which accounts (e.g., personal, university))

- ☐ Media coverage
- ☐ In the classroom
- ☐ In the office
- ☐ At home
- ☐ Voice messages
- ☐ Campus stalking
- ☐ Via legal threats or court proceedings
- ☐ Via information requests (e.g., FOIA requests, legislative inquiries)
- ☐ Via harassment of family members, colleagues, or others close to you
- ☐ Other: _____



Please provide a detailed description of the harassment/concern. When did it begin? How has it evolved?

Is the harassment coming from known individuals? If so, who are they?

To whom, if anyone, have you reported this harassment?

To your knowledge, what action(s), if any, have been taken at this point (by yourself or others)?

Do you have any of the following safety concerns? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ I have received direct threats of physical or sexual violence
- ☐ I have had personally identifying information shared with the public (e.g., phone number, address)



- ☐ Someone is threatening to disrupt and/or calling for disruptions to my classes, events, or other engagements
- ☐ One or more of my personal or university accounts has been hacked, or hacking attempts have been made
- ☐ Someone is impersonating me
- ☐ Other safety concerns: _____

If you are comfortable sharing, please use this space to identify what concerns you most about these incident(s). Is there anything specific you would like us to assist you with at this time?

Is there anything else we should know?

If relevant, include evidence of the intimidation, abuse, or harassment (e.g., emails, texts, screenshots).

It is strongly advised that you track and retain records of harassment to inform and support future responses. In some circumstances, the university may be able to support you in tracking and gathering this information. As we evaluate the details of your case, you may choose to enlist the help of a trusted friend or colleague to assist you in monitoring and collecting evidence of abuse. You may also forward any abusive emails directed to your university account to the individual(s) or (department(s) designated by your institution.



Response Procedures

1. Assess safety concerns as a first step

- a. **If the person is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 and contact campus police.**
- b. Even if the person is not in immediate danger, offer to connect them with campus police or security and encourage them to file a report.
- c. In some states, stalking, harassing, and physical threats can be punishable by law. If you suspect criminal behavior, offer to help the researcher connect with local police.
- d. Online attacks can spill offline and may affect students or classes. If the harassment and intimidation might disrupt job responsibilities or the classroom experience, the dean's office can facilitate the temporary relocation of the targeted researcher's office space or classroom.

2. Offer ongoing emotional support

- a. Keep in mind that not all media outlets adhere to the same standards of reporting; some may publish content meant to provoke outrage and strong emotions. No matter where the abuse is coming from or in what form, it is not the researcher's fault.
- b. Meet with the person being harassed as soon as possible. Use this time to assure them they have wider university support and that they are not the only one who has been targeted by this kind of abuse. Remind them that the intimidation and harassment are not their fault and let them know that they have options to handle the situation. Ask if you can take notes during this meeting to aid in future reporting and communication with university partners.
- c. Share your institution's policy on intimidation and harassment and explain that your institution will stand behind its community members and the integrity of their work. Let the researcher know that your institution upholds the mission of academic freedom by promoting inquiry and the search for truth and by advancing knowledge and understanding through research and scholarship like their own. Express to them that you value their contribution and that you support their work.
- d. Let the researcher know that their job is not in jeopardy based on public reaction to their work. Let them know that you are aware that their productivity might be



impacted due to the emotional strain of the abuse and the time-consuming task of managing abusive messages.

- e. Check in with the individual on a regular basis to ask how they are doing and to make sure that their needs are being met. Make sure to include them in response strategies whenever possible. This will help them manage and feel more in control of an overwhelming experience. Once the abuse has subsided, ask them for feedback on support efforts. Use this information to improve future responses to harassment and intimidation.

3. Collect information about the abuse

- a. If the researcher has not filed an official report with the university, walk them through the form and help them submit it. Help them document the incident in as much detail as they feel comfortable. Ask them if they have any supporting documents or screenshots to attach to the form. A detailed report will ensure that the affected individual will not have to repeat the story to every person involved, which can be traumatizing. Additionally, the report can help other departments provide specialized support and offer the university a comprehensive picture of harassment and intimidation experienced throughout the academic community.
- b. Encourage the individual to document the harassment through screenshots and other means to build a body of evidence for potential action within the university and/or by police. It can be overwhelming and emotionally exhausting for the target of an attack to weather the onslaught of comments and communications, let alone save and organize them for administrative use. Encourage the researcher to turn off notifications on their phone and to create a filter on their email inbox to automatically sort incoming messages. It can also be helpful for the targeted individual to enlist the help of a trusted friend to monitor and preserve emails, social media accounts, and voicemail messages on their behalf. University emails may be forwarded to a specified individual within the IT department for collection and retention.
- c. Collect information such as:
 - i. Date and time of harassment
 - ii. Identity of all targets
 - iii. Identity of all perpetrators
 - iv. Harassment medium (e.g., social media, email, etc.)
 - v. Whether the harassment has migrated offline or to other channels
 - vi. Evidence of the harassment (e.g., screen shots, images, URLs)



- vii. Any additional information including hashtags, email addresses, phone numbers connected to the harassment
- viii. How the targeted individual has responded so far (e.g., reporting the harassment to the police, to a social media site, directly responding, ignoring, etc).

[This resource](#) commissioned by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media offers more information about monitoring and systematically recording digital threats.

4. Activate the Researcher Support Team

- a. Communicate with your Researcher Support Team to report the current incident of abuse. The harassed person may not have considered all of their options at this point, so you can walk them through aspects of your collaborative response strategy and review who within the institution can assist them with their specific needs. Explain that key people and departments at the institution can help them with different areas of concern, such as IT/technology, the office of faculty affairs, mental health services, public affairs and communications, or human resources. Connect the individual to key people within the Support Team and offer to bridge communications with the dean, provost, and/or supervisor, including the individual in all areas of communication and planning where appropriate.
- b. In addition to connecting the person to the university's Researcher Support Team, send a brief communication to all leadership within the school or department in which the intimidation or harassment occurred, notifying leadership of the incident and requesting they not respond to any media inquiries until a communication plan is implemented.

5. In all cases of occupational abuse, and especially in cases of online harassment:

- a. Provide the individual with digital security resources to help them report the abuse to relevant online platforms, lock down accounts, change social media accounts to engage private settings, block perpetrators in email and social media accounts, and take other necessary safety measures. [PEN America](#) has developed and regularly updates resources on digital hygiene best practices.
- b. Be a bridge to IT. Enlist the help of IT to lock down email, set up new accounts, and assist with email forwarding and inbox filters. IT can also help to pull any personal information off websites, directories, and public-facing syllabi.
- c. Determine who in IT will be handling harassing emails and encourage the targeted individual to forward such emails as attachments.
- d. Some people who face online abuse choose to ignore it, while others decide to respond to certain people or groups. Whatever tactic the individual decides to



take, encourage them to develop a communications strategy early on and to coordinate with the university's communications or public relations department. Responses that are intentional and strategic are typically most effective.

6. Make sure the person is aware that emails, texts, and other writings may be considered public records and therefore subject to public records requests. The Public Record's office can help individuals determine what records fall within the definition of "any writing containing information relating to the conduct of public's business" and could therefore be made public.

Tips for Supporting the Researcher/Scholar

1. In addition to offering emotional support and suggestions for practical action, share our RSC [resource for researchers](#) experiencing occupational abuse with the individual. This guide includes information on mitigating risk, coping during and after an attack, communications response strategies, and more. Let the affected researcher know that they can read and digest these resources in their own time and that the university will play an active role in protecting them.
2. Whenever possible, include the researcher in your response strategy. This will give them a sense of control and will signal your institution's commitment to supporting employees who face occupational abuse .
3. Social support is key to dealing with abuse and harassment. Ask the person if they have a support network and if not, designate a colleague to regularly check in with them.
4. When someone is facing an online attack, it can be helpful for them to connect with others who have had a similar experience. Identify faculty or other members of the university community willing to share their experiences and stories. The organization [Faculty First Responders](#) can also put the affected person in contact with a network of supporters who have experienced and responded to harassment and intimidation.
5. Colleagues at the university can sometimes help with bystander intervention strategies such as publicly defending the harassed person. However, colleagues should be aware that this may expose them to their own campaign of harassment and intimidation, and they should only do so with the targeted person's affirmative consent.
6. If available, encourage the individual to contact a university faculty advocate who can attend meetings with them to provide support.
7. Offer to connect the individual with mental health resources available through the university or within the larger community.
8. Check in with the person regularly to ensure they have the resources they require.



9. Consider the possible impact of harassment and intimidation on the person's academic career. Be aware that the risks associated with intimidation and harassment may differ in relation to the affected person's employment status and career level. Junior or non-permanent researchers may have more to lose if their work is publicly scrutinized or if they abandon an important line of research. It may be helpful to consult with Academic Affairs personnel on mitigating the possible negative effects on the person's professional obligations. It may also be helpful to consider how to strategize around the long-term impact on the person's reputation, for example when soliciting external reviewers for tenure and promotion.



Checklist for Administrators Supporting Researchers/Scholars

When supporting a researcher or scholar who is under attack as a result of their work, be sure to tell them that their research is important, that you value their insights, and that the abuse is not their fault. Communicate that you and your institution will stand beside them and support them.

- ☐ Assess safety concerns. If the person is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.
- ☐ Connect the individual with campus police or security.
- ☐ Determine if the person's classroom or office space needs to be temporarily relocated due to safety concerns.
- ☐ Meet with the affected person as soon as possible and offer emotional support. Share your institution's policy on harassment and intimidation and communicate that your institution will stand beside them.
- ☐ Collect information about the incident(s) and help the individual fill out an official reporting form.
- ☐ [Download our toolkit](#) for institutions and review our comprehensive list of procedures.
- ☐ Share our [resource for researchers](#) under attack, found in our resource library.
- ☐ Activate the Researcher Support Team and act as a liaison between the individual and key members of the team such as IT/technology, Office of Faculty Affairs or Assistance, Communications or Public Relations, Campus Mental Health Services, and Human Resources. Make sure that members of the team are aware of the incident and are prepared to assist.
- ☐ Send a brief communication to leadership within your school or department, notifying them that an incident occurred and requesting that they not respond to any media inquiries until a communication plan is implemented.
- ☐ Encourage the individual to lock down email and social media accounts, enlisting the help of IT/technology and referring to PEN America's [digital security resource](#).
- ☐ Offer to connect the individual with mental health services and, if possible, with others who have experienced a similar situation.



- ☐ Check in with members of the Researcher Support Team frequently to ensure that the individual's needs are being met. Be sure to include the affected person in all communications and planning efforts.
- ☐ Continue to check in with the affected individual regularly and include them in any plans or responses whenever possible.



Checklist for Researchers Facing Intimidation and Harassment

Please refer to our comprehensive [resource](#) for ways to mitigate risk, manage abuse, connect with community partners, develop a strategic response strategy, and maintain your mental and physical health. You may find answers to questions not addressed here in our full [resource library](#).

- ☐ If there is an immediate physical threat or if you are in danger, call 9-1-1.
- ☐ Connect with campus security or police and explain the situation.
- ☐ Contact your departmental chair and alert them of the incident. If they have not reviewed our [toolkit for institutions](#), ask them to download it.
- ☐ Fill out an official reporting form with the appropriate institutional office, adding all relevant details and attaching screenshots or copies of abusive emails, comments, or posts. It is recommended that you retain copies of all evidence for future response efforts and/or legal action.
- ☐ Lock down your email and social media accounts using current best practices for digital security. PEN America offers [step-by-step guidance](#) for major social media platforms and has a variety of additional resources to help you [secure your online presence](#). Your institution's IT/technology department can help with university email concerns. You may also ask them to remove your personal information from all public-facing websites, directories, and syllabi.
- ☐ Reach out for support. Occupational abuse is becoming increasingly common and no one deserves to be publicly shamed or harassed because of their work.
 - ☐ Connect with a mental health specialist. Your institution may be able to provide you with suggestions and there may be benefits available through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
 - ☐ Ask a trusted friend to monitor your emails, social media, and other digital accounts on your behalf. Ask them to preserve messages for potential use as evidence and to let you know about anything that requires your attention.
 - ☐ Talk with your family and friends about this situation and ask them for their understanding and support.
- ☐ Prioritize your mental and physical well-being by taking time off, spending time in nature, enjoying the company of friends and family, engaging in your favorite activities, and making sure to exercise, eat well, and get plenty of rest.



Other things to know:

- ☐ You can reach out to the university's general counsel for legal consultation. Note that most academic institutions will not be able to assist you with proactive civil legal action (such as a defamation case). If you wish to pursue proactive legal action, you will likely need to retain private counsel.
- ☐ If you've received an open records request (also known as a Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, request), connect with your department chair or relevant supervisor right away. Requests are time-sensitive, and you will likely need to connect with your institution's Public Records Office and/or general counsel. You can only produce records that you currently have and there are exemptions to what you must produce, ([listed here](#)). You only need to provide records that have been explicitly requested and limiting the scope of proffered materials may protect others and keep harassment from escalating. If the scope of the request is unclear, encourage your institution's general counsel to ask for clarification while they offer the minimum required information in good faith.
- ☐ If the harassment is related to a student or to the classroom, report the incident to the appropriate department, such as the Dean of Students office. You own all copyrights to the course materials that you create, including syllabi, study guides, lectures, and notes. Only you and anyone you grant explicit permission to can reproduce, distribute, upload, or display the course materials you create. If your materials have been uploaded to a third-party website, you can send a copyright takedown notice, as described in [Section 512 of Title 17 of the U.S. Code](#).
- ☐ If the harassment pertains to identity issues, report the incident to your institution's Title IX Office or Office of Equity and Inclusion.