

Resources to Support Academics Targeted by Online Harassment

Universities play a critical role in shaping our communities. Their influence and impact depend upon a robust exchange of ideas and the academic freedom that drives those ideas forward.

Social media, and the internet more broadly, have tremendous potential for championing that freedom – and for choking it. With growing frequency, university faculty across the ideological spectrum find themselves targeted online for their thoughts, inquiries or expressions. These virtual attacks can result in real-world harms to livelihoods and careers, not to mention individual health and safety. They also invite self-censorship, compelling instructors, academic researchers, Senate members and others to refrain from expressing vital points of view. This poses grave harm to the broader public: When professors are afraid to teach and scientists hesitate to advance groundbreaking research, societies can falter and fail.

Protecting academic freedom is at the core of UCI's mission. This guide highlights the resources available to support our academics who are confronting provocative and inflammatory online rhetoric. Facing toxic speech can be demoralizing and depleting, and we are committed to providing university faculty with assistance.

For information about UCI's dedication to free speech and academic freedom, visit:
<https://freespeech.uci.edu/index/academic-freedom/>

(This resource was developed in the tradition of similar guides issued by [Penn State](#) and [University of Iowa](#))

What To Do If You Are, or Someone You Know Is, Targeted (look for your position):

(use the Checklist on page 6 and contact information on pages 7-8 of this document)

The Individual(s) Targeted

- Physical Safety First:
 - If your physical safety is a concern, contact UCIPD and/or your local law enforcement for immediate help and for safety planning, both in the workplace and at home.
 - Tell your Department Chair about your concerns so that the Chair can help you and help marshal resources.
 - Tell Academic Personnel, by notifying either your School's Chief Personnel Officer or Assistant Dean or by contacting Academic Personnel directly.
 - Consider activating UCI's "Consultation Team," a behavioral intervention team that can advise you and your colleagues about resources.
 - You can access personal support services via Faculty/Staff Support Services or UCI's Employee Assistance Program.
- Collect and Preserve Evidence:
 - Social media and other online comments are ephemeral. Preserve them by taking screen shots that show the message, the sender/poster, the online location and the date and time.
 - If it is too difficult to do this yourself, ask someone else to help you or to do it for you.
 - Keep the screenshots in a safe location and consider organizing them in a log.
- Quieting the Noise:
 - If the harassment is coming via a particular channel, consider whether you would benefit from "muting" that channel. (For example, you might: ask someone else to vet your voicemail messages, set up an automatic rule to send all emails from a particular sender or containing a particular term to a special folder, unfollow someone on social media or disengage from social media.)
 - Take steps to protect your cyber-identity. UCI's Office of Information Technology can help.
 - *N.b.* Do not disable any accounts without first addressing how to collect and preserve evidence (see above).
- Harassment:
 - If you believe you are being targeted because you belong to a particular demographic group, consider speaking with UCI's Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity to learn about your options.

- Public Records:
 - Keep in mind that emails, texts and other writings may be “public records” subject to a California Public Records Act request. UCI’s Public Records Office can help you determine whether particular records fall within the definition of “any writing containing information relating to the conduct of the public’s business.”
- Deciding Whether to Respond:
 - Whether to respond (including how and when) is highly fact-specific.
 - Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of responding with advisors before making a decision.
 - UCI’s Strategic Communications staff are one resource to consult.
 - Consider whether, in your situation, responses from you or others who support you may:
 - ◇ Increase the offline, physical risk to you.
 - ◇ Inflame the online situation unnecessarily by further “arming” your harassers.
- Mental Health:
 - These situations are stressful. You can access mental health resources through Faculty/Staff Support Services (see contact list below) or the Employee Assistance Program (see contact list below).
- Other Considerations:
 - Use the Checklist on page 6 to work through all of your options.

The Target’s Department Chair, ORU Director or PI

- Contact the Target:
 - Reach Out: Contact the targeted academic immediately and offer support.
 - Immediate Safety Issues: Is the Target in immediate danger? Have they asked UCIPD for support or can you offer to help them do so? (Keep in mind that individuals may have different comfort levels about working with law enforcement, so you should always ask before contacting the police.)
 - Broader Safety Issues: Consider whether the Target’s workspaces (office, lab, classroom) should be temporarily moved or protected, whether the Target’s contact information should be temporarily removed from directories and whether others are at risk.
 - Longer Term: Consider the effect, if any, on the Target’s academic career. Consult with Academic Personnel on how to mitigate potential effects on the Target’s teaching or research.
 - Work through the Checklist on page 6 with the Target.

- Consider Others in the Department/ORU or Lab:
 - Others in the Department/ORU or lab (e.g., administrative staff who answer the phone) may also receive harassing messages. Inform those who need to know what to expect and how to respond by providing a script for phone calls or a template for emails and instructions about keeping phone logs and preserving documents.
 - Consider whether others in the Department could benefit from talking about what is happening. UCI's counselors can help you decide and can facilitate these resources.
 - Others who share the demographic identity of the Target may need or want particular support depending on the nature of the harassment. UCI's counselors, Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity (OEOD) and/or Office of Inclusive Excellence can facilitate this support.
- Communicate:
 - Communicate with the Dean's Office and/or Office of Research (as appropriate) and Strategic Communications so that you plan and execute a coordinated response.
 - Communicate, generally and in the midst of crises, the centrality of and rationale for academic freedom and the importance of faculty safety and civil dialogue. This could include faculty meetings, newsletters/websites and discussions with students and staff.
- Consider the Effect on You:
 - If you also become a target or suffer effects, consider taking advantage of the same resources you offer the Target.

The Dean

- Contact the Target to offer support and to discuss how you would like to respond.
- Contact the Chair to offer support and resources.
- Coordinate your response with the Chair, with Senior Administrators and with Strategic Communications.
- Communicate, generally and in the midst of crises, the centrality of academic freedom to UC's mission, the rationale for academic freedom, the importance of faculty safety, UC's commitment to learning environments that thrive on open inquiry and civil dialogue.
- Consider whether others in the Dean's Office (e.g., administrative staff who answer the phone) may also receive harassing messages. Inform those who need to know what to expect and how to respond by providing a script for phone calls or a template for emails and instructions about keeping phone logs and preserving documents.
- Consider whether others in the School (faculty, staff and students) could benefit from talking about what is happening. UCI's counselors can help you decide and can facilitate these resources.
- Others who share the demographic identity of the Target may need or want particular support depending on the nature of the harassment. UCI's counselors, Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity (OEOD) and/or Office of Inclusive Excellence can facilitate this support.

Strategic Communications

- Communicate Early: Inform the Target and the Target's Chair and Dean as soon as you learn of the harassment.
- Communicate Often: Ensure the Target and the Target's Chair and Dean are kept current as the situation unfolds and consult with them about what response you are advising.
- Communicate Together: Coordinate messaging with the Target, Chair, Dean and senior leadership.
- Offer the Target advice on social media best practices.
- Offer media training and advice to anyone who may speak with the media about the harassment.

Senior Administrators

- Provost's Office: Provide support to the Target and the Target's UCI community (Department/ORU, lab or School). Provide leadership in messaging the centrality of academic freedom to the University's mission and UCI's commitment to supporting our targeted academics.
- Academic Personnel: Provide support and advice to the Target regarding how to mitigate potential effects on the Target's teaching or research.
- Chancellor's Office: Provide support to the Target and the Target's UCI community (Department/ORU, lab or School). Provide leadership in messaging the centrality of academic freedom to the University's mission and UCI's commitment to supporting our targeted academics.
- Campus Counsel: Provide legal advice related to any matter that arises because of the harassment.
- Office of Inclusive Excellence: Offer support and guidance to individuals targeted because of their demographic identity. Offer educational resources to the Target's community.

Checklist:

This checklist will help you identify and address possible concerns raised when academics are targeted by online harassment. Use it with the instructions on the following pages of this document as a roadmap in the short and longer term as you work through the crisis.

A Step-by-Step Guide to Support Academics Targeted by Online Harassment

- ☐ Record what is happening:
 - ☐ Describe the nature of the harassment: _____
 - ☐ When did it start: _____
 - ☐ How has it developed: _____
 - ☐ Preserve screenshots/save copies of the messages.
 - ☐ Where is it happening (emails, social media (name which ones), voicemail, classroom, office, lab, home, other): _____
 - ☐ Whom is it affecting: _____
- ☐ Identify the Target's concern(s):
- ☐ Report to law enforcement and engage in safety planning for the Target and others who are affected.
- ☐ Consult with UCI's Consultation Team (behavioral intervention team).
- ☐ Consider "muting" the communication channel(s) – phone, email account, social media account – where the harassment is happening.
- ☐ Communicate and coordinate with the Target's Chair/Director/PI.
- ☐ Communicate and coordinate with the Target's Dean.
- ☐ Communicate and coordinate with the Provost's Office.
- ☐ Communicate with others in the Department/ORU or lab who may have a need to know (i.e., administrative staff who answer the phone).
- ☐ Communicate and coordinate with UCI Strategic Communications and others regarding whether, and if so how, to respond.
- ☐ Consult with the Office of Information Technology about cyber-identity protection.
- ☐ Consult with the Public Records Office about potential Public Records Act issues.
- ☐ Communicate and coordinate with Academic Personnel regarding mitigating potential effects on the Target's teaching or research.
- ☐ Consider contacting UCI's Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity to discuss and report harassment based on a particular demographic group.
- ☐ Seek support from UCI's Office of Inclusive Excellence for academics targeted based on their demographic group.
- ☐ Consider seeking personal support -- for the Target and others -- from UCI's Office of Faculty/Staff Support Services or from UCI's Employee Assistance Program, provided by ComPsych GuidanceResources.
- ☐ Consider asking the Counseling Center and/or Faculty/Staff Support Services to facilitate a discussion with people in the Department/ORU or lab who may need to talk about the situation.
- ☐ Consult with UCI's Ombuds Office for help navigating any part of the process.

Resources

If You Need:	Contact:
Public safety /safety planning:	UCI Police Department 9-1-1 – emergency (24/7) (949) 824-5223 – non-emergency (24/7) www.police.uci.edu
Personal support:	Faculty/Staff Support Services Negar Shekarabi, Psy.D., Coordinator (949) 824-5208 www.whcs.uci.edu/facultystaffsupport/
Anonymous/confidential personal support (24/7):	Employee Assistance Program, provided by ComPsych GuidanceResources (844) 824-3273 www.wellness.uci.edu/facultystaff/eap/introduction.html
Advice about media and communications :	Strategic Communications 949-824-6922 www.communications.uci.edu
Advice about cyber-identity protection:	Office of Information Technology (949) 824-2222 https://security.uci.edu
Advice about public records issues:	Public Records Office (949) 824-2312 www.pro.uci.edu
Counseling services for students:	Counseling Center 949.824.6457 www.counseling.uci.edu
Consultation Team (behavioral intervention team) advice:	Marcelle Hayashida Associate Vice Chancellor, Wellness, Health and Counseling Services (949) 824-4642 www.whcs.uci.edu/consultation-team

If You Need:	Contact:
Advice about harassment based on protected group status:	Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity (949) 824-5594 www.oeod.edu Office of Inclusive Excellence 949-824-1540 www.inclusion.uci.edu
Information about faculty academic personnel matters:	Academic Personnel (949) 824-7175 www.ap.uci.edu
Confidential navigation assistance:	UCI Office of the Ombuds (949) 824-7256 www.ombuds.uci.edu