

# Threatening Communications that Target Faculty

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[Background](#)

# University responses to external harassment and threatening communications

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# Background

1. The prevalence and forms of external harassment and threatening communications appear to be increasing (including with rise of social media)
2. These attacks can be personally difficult, undermining wellbeing of university faculty and staff.
3. These attacks can have *systematic and unequal effects* (including by race, gender and area of work) that can undermine diversity, equity and inclusion and produce chilling effects that challenge university commitments to freedom of inquiry.
4. The university currently lacks systematic means of tracking incidents. (IMPROVE)
5. The university could do more to strengthen and coordinate responses at the unit level and in coordinating the various institutional actors involved. (IMPROVE)

# Improved Tracking

The university bias reporting mechanism has been updated.

Ongoing work: Incorporating questions relating to external harassment into existing widespread survey mechanisms (e.g. Faculty Work-Life Balance Survey)

# Guidance to Affected Faculty/Staff

## Examples

trolling attacks through social media;  
the release of private personal information online;  
harassing email or phone calls to Cornell or to personal accounts.

## Obligation to Do Something About It

Cornell's Core Values <https://www.cornell.edu/about/values.cfm>  
include a commitment to “free and open inquiry and

# First things First

If you or others around you believe yourselves to be in imminent danger, call 9-1-1 immediately.

Contact your unit supervisor (Chair, Director, Dean, or Department Manager) to guide you through additional steps.

Log the incident through the university bias mechanism at:

<https://diversity.cornell.edu/our-commitments/bias-reporting-cornell>.

# Tips

These attacks can be intense and disruptive, but they rarely escalate and are not usually sustained.

You can request that your contact information and web profile be temporarily removed or hidden from university webpages and directories.

Responding to harassing messages tends to prolong and inflame incidents.

Try to preserve as evidence all messages, emails, postings or voicemails you receive.

# More Tips

Consider scheduling a privacy consultation with the Cornell University Library at: <https://www.library.cornell.edu/services/privacy>.

In cases where such attacks receive public attention. Your unit's communications director can provide guidance on whether (and how) such requests should be responded to.

If you believe the incident will disrupt class experiences, speak with your Chair/Director/Dean about alternative instruction arrangements.

While such attacks rarely escalate, it is normal to feel emotions ranging from fear, anxiety and anger to isolation and depression. Talk with your Chair/Director/Dean and colleagues around you about these feelings, along with professional resources ranging from the Office of Faculty Development and Diversity to the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program.



# Guidance to Chairs/Deans/Managers

At the start:

If the faculty/staff member may be in imminent danger, call 9-1-1 immediately.

Provide the faculty/staff member a copy of “Threatening Communications and External Harassment: Resources for Faculty and Staff”.

Arrange to meet with the faculty/staff member as soon as possible.

Work with the faculty/staff member to log the incident through the university bias mechanism

# Connect the Faculty/Staff Person With Key Offices

## **Cornell University Police Department**

for matters concerning safety and potential criminal investigations)

## **CIT or your unit IT leadership**

for matters concerning adjustment to university email, phone systems, or websites including assignment of filters, proxies, and monitors

## **University Communications and your unit Communications Director**

for matters concerning public messaging or media inquiries

## **Office of Faculty Development and Diversity**

for matters concerning professional challenges, personal wellbeing and support, etc

## **Cornell University Library**

for consultation and guidance on steps to mitigate privacy and harassment risks

# More Tips for Chairs/Directors/Deans/Managers

1. Ask the faculty/staff member how widely they would like information about the experience shared within the unit.
2. In cases where incidents have attracted public or media attention, consider whether a unit-wide or more public statement of support is needed and advisable
3. Consider the concerns of secondary actors who may also feel threatened or unsettled by such communications (especially where these become matters of public controversy).
4. Continue to check in with the faculty/staff member – both during and beyond the period of immediate harassment.

# Next Steps

- ‘User testing’ protocols with chairs/directors and faculty/staff who have experienced such incidents in past
- Developing/refining preventive steps guide (from existing materials)
- Establishing these things on public website (hosted by Office of Diversity and Workforce Inclusion)
- Incorporating these elements into new faculty/staff orientation and periodic chair/director trainings with OFDD

# Caveats

- Materials/protocol as described are directed towards faculty/staff, not currently students
- This is directed at harassment and threatening communications by individuals external to the Cornell community (or unknown)
- All incidents are different, and require the specific and skillful judgment of the various actors involved
- As conditions evolve and more information is gathered, we may revisit these responses and ask if others are necessary.