

## SBS Resources for Responding to Harassment of UMass Faculty for their Research, Teaching, and Public Engagement

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The University of Massachusetts Amherst upholds and defends the scholarly expertise that faculty bring to their research and to their classroom. The recognition and defense of academic freedom is more important now than ever before.

Deepening political polarization and the role of social media in quickly spreading disinformation and inflammatory rhetoric<sup>1</sup> has led to increased incidence of public harassment and defamation of faculty for their research, scholarly public engagement and positions taken in the classroom.<sup>2</sup>

**Are you being targeted? Consider the following resources:**

- [What Should You Do First?](#)
- [What You Should Know](#)
- [Longer Term Prevention and Preparation](#)

**Are you the Chair of a faculty member who is being attacked? Click [here](#) for guidance.**

### What Should You Do First?

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Is there an immediate physical threat? Call 9-1-1.

Contact your Departmental Chair and inform them of the situation.

- Ask them to download the [Chair's Toolkit](#).
- Work with them to describe the situation in this [form](#). You may include any supporting documents, screenshots, relevant to your experience. This will prevent you from having to repeat the story to multiple reporting levels.

If the threat is not immediate but you believe it to be criminal:

- Under MA law, threatening, stalking and harassing behavior, including over electronic communication and social media, is punishable by law.
- File a report with the UMass Amherst Police Department (UMPD). They maintain confidentiality and can help the faculty member coordinate with other campus organizations, obtain a temporary restraining order through the courts, etc.
  - 413-545-2121 (Non-emergency)
  - 413-545-3111 (Emergency)
  - [umpd@admin.umass.edu](mailto:umpd@admin.umass.edu)

If deemed necessary, the Dean's Office can facilitate the physical relocation of assigned classrooms and/or office space.

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<sup>1</sup> Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146-1151.

<sup>2</sup> AAUP, see [onefacultyoneresistance.org/faculty-attack-fighting-targeted-harassment/](https://onefacultyoneresistance.org/faculty-attack-fighting-targeted-harassment/).

## What You Should Know

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These experiences can be frightening and anxiety provoking. You are not the only one that this has happened to and these situations usually pass quickly. There are options for how to handle it.

### Reach out for Support

After immediately contacting your chair, consider reaching out to trusted colleagues and friends for a support network. This is an increasingly common experience and it is not something to feel shame about. No one deserves to be publicly harassed for their work.

- Consider disengaging from the harassment by asking a friend to monitor emails, social media, voice messages, etc. on your behalf. These messages should be preserved for potential evidence.
- It might be helpful for you to talk to other faculty who have gone through similar situations. Contact Jennifer Lundquist, SBS Senior Associate Dean for Research and Faculty Development ([lundquist@sbs.umass.edu](mailto:lundquist@sbs.umass.edu)).
- You can also reach out to one of [MSP's Faculty Advocates](#), who can attend meetings with you and provide support.
- Access mental health counseling at the [Faculty and Staff Assistance Program](#).

### Know that Your Academic Freedom is Protected

UMass respects the disciplinary expertise of our faculty, and will defend their right to carry out their scholarly research and their instruction in the classroom. Furthermore, your personal safety will always be protected.

- Employment cannot be jeopardized on the basis of public reaction to a faculty member's scholarly research or reasonable classroom instruction.
  - The only exception, as laid out by the AAUP, would be in rare instances in which faculty *“(a) demonstrated incompetence or dishonesty in teaching or research, (b) substantial and manifest neglect of duty, and (c) personal conduct which sub-stantially impairs the individual's fulfillment of his [or her] institutional responsibilities.”* Note that this exception is a very high bar to meet, and cannot be met by singular comments made on social media or a single lecture.
- See UMass [Faculty Senate Principles on Academic Freedom](#).
- See [Article 8: Academic Freedom](#) in the contract.
- See [Chancellor's Defense of Academic Freedom](#) Statement.

### Options for Responding to Harassment | De-escalation

It is generally best not to engage with harassers, who are not looking for constructive debate. In a [Pew Hispanic Poll](#), 83% of those who refused to engage said that it was an effective strategy in ending the situation.

- Block harassers in email and social media accounts.
- Use the “report incident” feature (most social media platforms have this) that allows you to report abuse and tell them about user behavior or content that violate their terms of use. For abusive emails, contact the company to report a user violation of their email user agreement.
- Forward all harassing emails as attachments to [itprotect@umass.edu](mailto:itprotect@umass.edu).
- Temporarily remove all personal and contact information from your University webpage bio(s) and UMass People Finder.
  - To be removed from the UMass directory, contact Matthew Dalton, Chief Information Security Officer ([matthew.dalton@umass.edu](mailto:matthew.dalton@umass.edu); 413-545-4475).
  - To remove your information from the departmental website and other affiliated websites, the webpage manager must be contacted. They are usually staff in the department and sometimes at the college.
- Temporarily privatize social media accounts.

## Options for Responding to Harassment | Crafting a Statement

Most situations diffuse quickly. But in cases where the situation gains momentum or builds to such a degree as to threaten your professional reputation, a public statement or response to individual inquiries can be issued.

- These will often have to be subject to University General Counsel approval first and it is important to act quickly
  - A template: [to be adapted to individual cases]  
*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. \_\_\_\_\_ 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, \_\_\_\_\_ 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."*
  - See examples of past statements from UMass and from other public institutions [here](#).
  - Contact Ed Blaguszewski ([edblag@umass.edu](mailto:edblag@umass.edu); 413-545-0444), Executive Director of Strategic Communications, in the Office of News and Public media for protocol. He will help assess the situation and coordinate a standardized response to press inquiries.
- As a form of reputation management, sometimes faculty prepare a brief message explaining their position and circulate it among their departmental and disciplinary colleagues.

## Options for Responding to Harassment | Engaging Directly

We usually recommend against this, as it tends to inflame the situation. However, some faculty choose to engage directly with online harassers and that is their right.

- Some faculty choose to engage directly with online harassers and that is their right. Responding calmly with facts sometimes works. Humor and kindness are also effective in disarming online trolls because that is not the reaction they wish to provoke.
- Some faculty publicly repost the abusive messages they have received to gain social media sympathy and help in defending themselves. Exercise caution in giving this advice though. It can simply perpetuate social media abuse against the abusers, no matter how deserving you feel it might be.
- See PEN America's [suggestions](#).

## Seeking Legal Advice

You have the right to free legal consultation with MSP's lawyer and/or the University's General Counsel Office.

- MSP: [msp@umass.edu](mailto:msp@umass.edu)<sup>3</sup>
- General Counsel: [gleone@umassp.edu](mailto:gleone@umassp.edu) and [umassp.edu/general-counsel/legal-advice-request](http://umassp.edu/general-counsel/legal-advice-request).
- All employees of the university have the right to General Counsel's legal services.

## Legal Action

If you are sued for a matter that falls within the scope of your university work, you are legally indemnified by the university and will be defended.

It is important to understand what is and is not covered by academic freedom protection. Please be aware that the University will always defend your right to pursue scholarly research and teaching. However, Academic Freedom generally does not extend to *proactive* civil legal action on your behalf, such as the University mounting a defamation case (libel or slander) or demanding retractions from outlets or individuals. Defamation is notoriously difficult to prove. The University is constrained by its status as a state institution and related first amendment considerations.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that graduate employees can seek free legal consultation through the [Graduate Student Senate](#).

- If you wish to sue for defamation, University and Union Counsel can give legal advice, but in most cases, you will need to hire a private attorney.
- AAUP will sometimes intervene on behalf of faculty in cases where administrations (usually privates) have unjustly taken punitive action against a harassed faculty member.
  - Such incidents can be reported here: [academicfreedom@aaup.org](mailto:academicfreedom@aaup.org)

### **Public Record Requests**

As a state university, the University of Massachusetts Amherst must respond to public record requests. In the case of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, you are responsible for providing the requested records to the UMass FOIA Office in 10 business days.

- This can include email, texts, files, etc. including from non-UMass accounts or devices. What matters is not the medium but whether the content relates to UMass work.
- Contact Christine Wilda, Associate Chancellor for Compliance, who can help the with this process ([recordsadmin@umass.edu](mailto:recordsadmin@umass.edu); 413 545 2148).
- See [here](#) for more details.

### **If the harassment is related to a student or the classroom**

Report student *misconduct, discrimination, or harassment* to the Dean of Students Office ([umass.edu/dean\\_students/report-incident](http://umass.edu/dean_students/report-incident); 413-545-2684).

### *Intellectual Property Rights to your Classroom Materials*

- You own all copyrights to the course materials you create, including lectures, lecture notes, materials, syllabi, study guides, and all web-ready content.
- Only you, and anyone to whom you explicitly grant permission, may reproduce, distribute, upload, or display course materials created by you. See the UMass Intellectual Property Policy (T96-040) [here](#).
- If your material has been uploaded to a third-party website, you can send a copyright takedown notice (17 USC 512). See MSP's advice on how to protect classroom materials [here](#).

### **If the harassment is related to identity bias**

If the situation involves *bias* related to your racial/ethnic/gender/LGBTQ+ identity, contact:

- Contact the Office of Equity and Inclusion ([umass.edu/diversity/incident-report-form](http://umass.edu/diversity/incident-report-form)).
- The Center for Women and Community has a 24-hour assault hotline at 413-545-0800 and toll-free line at 888-337-0800.

### **If the harassment is related to a UMass employee**

If the situation involves employee misconduct, discrimination, or harassment, the Equal Employment Opportunity Office should be brought in ([equalopportunityconcerns@admin.umass.edu](mailto:equalopportunityconcerns@admin.umass.edu); 413-545-3464).

## Longer Term Prevention and Preparation

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### Preventative Faculty Email Usage

Please understand your obligations regarding public record requests and IT discovery processes so that you can make educated decisions about email use and retention.

- See [here](#).
- UMass IT strongly recommends that faculty use only UMass Exchange/Office365 or UMass Gmail for work-related emails and that they keep personal emails separate from business emails. The use of a personal email account for university business or the forwarding of one's university email to a personal account *"introduces risk and personal liability for faculty and staff, and may be a violation of federal law and campus policy"* (UMass Information Security).

### Preventative Classroom Material Protection

- See MSP's suggestions [here](#).

### Additional Resources and Articles

- See additional resources and articles [here](#).