Threatening Communications and External Harassment – Resources for Chairs, Deans and Directors

On occasion, faculty and staff at Cornell may receive threatening communications or harassment from individuals beyond the university community in relation to their work as educators, researchers or scholars. Examples of this can include trolling attacks through social media; the release of private personal information online; or harassing email or phone calls to Cornell or to personal accounts. While many faculty and staff go through their whole career without experiencing such incidents, the rise of the Internet and social media appear to have expanded both the number and form of these encounters. These experiences can be professionally disruptive and personally difficult, raising feelings of fear, anxiety, and isolation.

Cornell's Core Values https://www.cornell.edu/about/values.cfm include a commitment to "free and open inquiry and expression – tenets that underlie academic freedom" and striving to be a community where students, faculty, and staff can "work in an environment of respect, and feel empowered to engage in any community conversation." The University stands by these principles even in the face of external attacks and works to provide resources that can support both academic freedom and the safety of those engaging in such inquiry and expression.

If a faculty or staff member in your department receives such communications, we urge you to take the following steps:

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

· **Provide the faculty/staff member a copy of "External Harassment: Resources for Faculty and Staff" available at:** https://diversity.cornell.edu.

· **Arrange to meet with the faculty/staff member as soon as possible (whether by phone, zoom, or in person).** Check on their immediate wellbeing (including any sense of imminent threat). Acknowledge the difficulty, including emotional impact, of such experiences. Let them know that you, and the wider department/unit/university have their back, and will do everything possible to resolve and support them through this in both the shorter and longer term. Ask if it's okay to take notes on your conversation, including to help with subsequent reporting and communication/coordination with university partners; recall that the faculty/staff member may be upset and challenged to recount and record their experience in a clear and systematic way. Note that time is of the essence: both because online attacks can blow up very quickly, and because the first few hours/days are typically the most uncertain, disorienting, and anxiety provoking.

·   **Work with the faculty/staff member to log the incident through the university bias mechanism at:**

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

Help them to document the incident in as much detail as they are able to and feel comfortable providing. These details will help other actors providing support (including CUPD, unit communications directors, CIT, Office of Faculty Development and Diversity, etc.). It will also be used to build a more systematic picture of how these incidents are experienced across Cornell (including prevalence, trends, and wider patterns in which members of our community are more commonly subjected to such experiences). Remind the faculty/staff member that this information will be shared with groups providing immediate support as named above, but not otherwise shared or made public, except in summary statistics on wider patterns collated over time. (If they have already logged the incident, you may skip this step). Additional guidance on the bias reporting mechanism is provided at the end of this memo.

·   **Connect the faculty/staff member with key university partners:**

·   **Cornell University Police Department** (for matters concerning safety and potential criminal investigations): 607-255-1111 or through the RAVE Guardian app.

·   **CIT or your unit IT leadership** (for matters concerning adjustment to university email, phone systems, or websites (including assignment of filters, proxies, and monitors): 607-255-5500 and itservicedesk@cornell.edu.

·   **University Communications and your unit Communications Director** (for matters concerning public messaging or media inquiries): https://socialmedia.cornell.edu/contact/ or socialmedia@cornell.edu.

·   **Office of Faculty Development and Diversity** (for matters concerning professional challenges, personal wellbeing and support, etc.): 607-255-6867 or ofdd@cornell.edu.

-      **Cornell University Library** (for consultation and guidance on steps to mitigate privacy and harassment risks): 607-255-5760 and cul-privacy@cornell.edu

In cases where the faculty/staff member is fearful, uncertain or disoriented, offer to walk (or phone/zoom) to these offices with them, and to join for meetings according to their preference. You should think of yourself as a guide, advocate and manager through this process. Recall that the faculty/staff member will be navigating a set of institutional mechanisms they may never have encountered or thought about, at a moment of significant stress and cognitive overload. Offer to engage and coordinate with these

offices on their behalf if they would prefer. Check back regularly to explain any steps that have been taken, or whenever you (or they) have additional updates or information.

·   **Ask the faculty/staff member how widely they would like information about the experience shared within the unit (faculty/staff colleagues? graduate or undergraduate students?).** Letting others know of this experience will give them the opportunity to show support and solidarity that may be important; individuals encountering such experiences in the past have often reported strong feelings of isolation. Letting key colleagues know (collaborators, mentors, etc.) may be particularly valuable, even if the faculty/staff member would prefer this not be shared with a wider set. Chairs/Directors/Deans can play an important role in reaching out to those colleagues (or wider department), as the individual may want this support but feel reluctant, awkward, or too overwhelmed to reach out directly. You should consider too whether others may be indirectly affected by the experience. While you should encourage the faculty/staff member towards some degree of sharing for purposes of support, you should check (and go with) the individual's preferences, as beyond the recommended university mechanisms above, it is ultimately their experience to share with others (or not).

·   **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** (University Communications or your unit Communications Director is an important resource to consult here). Where deemed advisable (and with consent of the individual), such a statement should typically contain the following elements: a commitment to academic freedom; a statement recognizing the faculty/staff member's professional standing and expertise; and a statement supporting the quality and integrity of the individual's research and teaching (according to whatever may have emerged as the flashpoint or controversy). A sample statement might read as follows:
"Cornell University is committed to academic freedom. SCHOLAR NAME is an established and admired scholar in DISCIPLINARY AREA and a valued member of our department and university. As with all scholars at Cornell, SCHOLAR NAME has the right of academic freedom necessary to pursue research and teaching 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."
(Note though that in instances where issues have *not* emerged as public controversies – for example, in less-publicized trolling attacks – such statements may attract additional attention from external actors who are looking for evidence

that their activities are having an impact.) In cases that attract public controversy, inquiries and subsequent phone calls, provide clear pathways and language to front-line workers, for example: *"I appreciate your interest in this issue. Calls on this topic are being handled by the university communications office. Would you like me to transfer you there?"*.

·   **Consider the concerns of secondary actors who may also feel threatened or unsettled by such communications (especially where these become matters of public controversy).** This can include graduate or undergraduate students in research labs or classes. It may also include staff or faculty colleagues who feel indirectly threatened, especially where such harassment seems to be coded by gender, race, shared research area, or other forms of affinity. While precise guidance will vary widely by situation, being mindful of and taking steps to address potential second- and third-order effects of such instances (including long-term senses of safety, trust, and belonging) is important to the wellbeing of the unit and wider Cornell community. Chairs/Directors are encouraged to consult Deans and wider university leadership in addressing these questions.

·   **Continue to check in with the faculty/staff member – both during and beyond the period of immediate harassment.** Check on their immediate and continued wellbeing, and ask if they have appropriate support mechanisms around them (and if the answer is no, help them build or find these). Ask about potential impacts on others: partners, children, students, or anyone else who may be affected.   Ask about impacts on their professional work both here at Cornell and more widely. Recognize that these experiences can have long-lasting impacts on both trust and belonging (*do I feel at home and supported in my departmental, Cornell and wider scholarly communities?*) and scholarly performance in research, teaching and service. Consider how these experiences may impact key evaluation processes from annual reviews to promotion and tenure – for example, lowered teaching scores, reductions in grant or publishing activity, indirect effects on outside evaluators (where such cases have attracted a public profile), etc. Consider whether disruptions are sufficiently severe as to warrant extraordinary measures like specific language in tenure letter requests or tenure clock extensions (consulting senior faculty and college and/or provost office leadership as appropriate). While respecting preferences on information sharing set by the individual themselves, make sure general awareness of this information is adequately conveyed to future Chairs/Directors/Deans for ongoing awareness, management, and support where warranted. In addition to connecting with campus-wide resources noted above, Chairs/Directors should

also keep Deans (or other appropriate unit leadership) aware and informed of such situations as they arise and develop.

- **Acknowledge that threats and harassment place unfair burdens on targeted scholars.** The purpose of targeted harassment is to produce a chilling effect on some types of research, and on the capacity and effectiveness of scholars. Women, people of color, and LGBT people may be particularly likely to be targeted, adding to the unjust burdens borne by academics who are members of marginalized groups. Feelings of rage, depression, fear, and anxiety are all normal responses to being targeted. Beyond support at the unit level as indicated above, direct the faculty/staff member to resources at the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (https://fsap.cornell.edu/) and Office of Faculty Development and Diversity (https://facultydevelopment.cornell.edu/) as needed.

Cornell University
Bias incident Report Form

The University is committed to fostering a safe, respectful, and inclusive living, learning, and working environment for the entire University community. As community members, it is important to recognize our shared responsibility to each other, and to take steps to mitigate and prevent bias incidents and acts of hate or intolerance. The bias-related incident reporting system is one step toward promoting that we, as an institution, live out these values. The reporting system allows for you to safely and anonymously report an incident you may have experienced or witnessed, receive support, and explore options for resolution.

A bias incident is a**n action of mistreatment or incivility (verbal, physical, in written or digital form) taken by an alleged offender(s) and motivated in whole or part by an actual or perceived aspect of diversity/identity of the harmed or impacted party. Identity may include, but is not limited to, ability, age, ancestry or ethnicity, color, creed, gender, sex/gender identity or expression, immigration or citizenship status, marital status, national origin, neurodiversity, race, religion, religious practice, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or weight. A bias incident can be reported online at** https://www.biasconcerns.cornell.edu/

The reporting tool will allow DIWD an opportunity to track incidents where faculty are targets of bias from a non-Cornell community member. When completing the bias incident form, please ensure to complete all required fields.

More specifically:

In this field…	Enter…

Who was involved in incident?	**I do not know the individual(s) involved or they are not Cornell community members (if applicable, otherwise select the appropriate selection)**
Who is/could be affected?	**Faculty/Staff**
What is your primary concern?	**Bias**
"Involved Individuals, Organizations or Groups".	**Name of faculty/staff member impacted and select victim**
Where did this incident take place?	**Select the applicable option under ===Computer Based===**

Once a report is submitted, a member of the DIWD team will contact you to confirm the report was received and help you navigate available resources.

For questions, please contact Toral Patel, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Program Consultant with the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity at tdp38.