

EXTERNAL HARASSMENT

Summary of Working Group 5/14/2021

The external harassment working group (membership: Anthony Burrow, Human Development; Nathan Matias, Communication; Eliza Bettinger, Cornell Library; Yael Levitte, Office of Faculty Development and Diversity; Angelia Winfield, Office of Diversity and Workforce Inclusion; Dave Honan, CUPD; Joel Malina, Cornell Communications; and Steve Jackson, Information Science (chair)) sought to strengthen understanding and responses to incidents of threatening communication and external harassment that affect Cornell faculty and staff. Examples of such incidents include trolling attacks through social media; the release of private personal information online; or harassing email or phone calls to Cornell or personal accounts. Such incidents undermine the wellbeing of Cornell faculty and staff, and violate Cornell commitments to free and open expression and the ability to work in an environment of equity, safety and respect.

The work of the committee was oriented to two primary goals:

First, to improve university understanding of these incidents through more systematic reporting mechanisms and coordination between the various university entities involved. This includes a more systematic portrait of patterns in these incidents, and which members of our community are most likely to be targeted in this way. To that end, the university bias reporting system has been retrofitted to collect individual incident reports and be able to anonymously report back overall patterns.

Second, to strengthen the speed, quality and coordination of support available to individuals who have been targeted by such attacks. This includes through the timely dissemination of resources to targeted individuals, which will also be made more widely and proactively available via mechanisms like new faculty orientation, and better awareness and support for unit leadership (including chairs, directors, deans, and staff supervisors) who play an important role in supporting targeted individuals. Two documents reflecting these efforts – “Threatening Communications and External Harassment: Resources for Faculty and Staff” and “Threatening Communications and External Harassment: Resources for Chairs, Deans, and Directors” will be incorporated into new faculty orientation and periodic sessions for chairs and directors organized by the OFDD, and will be made available online through the website of the Office of Diversity and Workforce Inclusion at diversity.cornell.edu and the Dean of faculty website.

The Working Group has completed its work for now, but recommends that future faculty senate groups consider these three issues: creating guidelines for dealing with external harassment of students; incorporating questions on external harassment into other widespread survey mechanisms (for example, the faculty and staff work-life balance survey); and, strengthening preventive guidance and support available to faculty and staff, both in general and in advance of particular moments or events that may be likely to occasion incidents of external harassment (for example, an online ‘hygiene check’ prior to publication of a New York Times op ed, controversial study, etc.).