

Resources for Responding to Harassment

The University of Florida is committed to protecting the academic freedom of our faculty, staff, and students and the personal safety of everyone in the UF community.

In recent years the country has seen a dramatic increase in harassment that targets scholars and researchers, especially online. These “trolling attacks” may present challenges to the well-being and safety of our community members.

UF has resources available to support faculty and staff responding to an immediate situation, as well as in addressing long-term effects of harassment. Each situation is different and may require unique responses. The following guidance should be followed as appropriate to each situation and is not a prescribed procedure.

What to do if you are the target of harassment

Seek assistance:

- If you believe your physical safety is at risk, immediately notify the police in your home jurisdiction or call 911. For safety concerns on campus, contact the University of Florida Police Department (UFPD) at 352-392-1111 (non-emergencies) or 9-1-1 (for emergencies).
 - Inform UFPD and local police if you believe the individuals targeting you know where you live and/or you are concerned about safety in your home.
 - Inform UFPD if you are concerned about the safety of your office location. In addition, the GatorSafe app is a good public safety resource.
- If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination based on your identity, please also contact [UFHR Employee Relations](#) at 352-392-1072. Although only certain characteristics are protected by law from harassment or discrimination (e.g., race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations, genetic information and veteran status), UFHR Employee Relations can provide support and resources. If you are experiencing gender- or sex-based harassment, and/or harassment that is sexual in nature, please contact the [Title IX Coordinator](#) with the Office of Accessibility and Gender Equity by calling 352-273-1094.
- Notify your department Chair/Director and HR Liaison for your unit or College.
 - Let your Chair/Director know if you would like to have your contact information and profile temporarily removed or hidden from department/unit web pages and/or from the university directory.
 - Let your Chair/Director know if you would like colleagues to be directed not to share your contact information. For example, front desk staff can be given a script letting them know how to respond if a request for your contact information comes to them.

- If teaching is part of your assignment, trolling attacks may affect your students or classes. Work with your Chair/Director to develop a plan to address specific concerns related to your students or classes. Chairs and Directors shall coordinate with College administration.
- Let your Chair/Director know if you need help documenting disturbing communications.
- [Find your HR Liaison](#)
- [Access the Employee Assistance Program](#)
- Contact your IT support team for assistance assessing your cybersecurity risks, and for guidance on how to address any security risks that may be exploited.

Document & do not engage:

- Try to preserve all messages, emails, postings, or voicemails you receive as evidence. Save screenshots of harassing or threatening social media posts in case the author deletes the original post. Your Chair/Director can help you seek assistance from your IT support team or identify a trusted individual to sort disturbing communications if you don't want to see them.
- Be cautious about responding to threatening emails, tweets, blog comments, etc. Responding to harassing messages tends to prolong and inflame incidents. Consider suspending social media activity for a few days.
- Media outlets may contact you; you do not need to respond. Consult with the UF Office of Strategic Communications about how to handle any requests you receive. The office can be reached at (352) 846-3903.
- Share details of the situation on a need-to-know basis with awareness that print and electronic communications are durable and may be subject to public records requests.

Acknowledge the emotional impact:

- These attacks are often intense but are not usually sustained.
- Reach out to friends and develop a support system.
- The [UF Employee Assistance Program](#) offers free confidential, short-term counseling to faculty and staff and their families. This includes any graduate assistants or postdocs in your lab who may have also been impacted.

Address potential long-term impacts:

- Consult with your department Chair/Director and/or your Dean if you feel this attack has affected your progress toward tenure, promotion, or reappointment. Additionally, the University Ombudsman can be reached at 352-392-1309

Administrative/Leadership Actions

Open communications with the targeted individual

- A faculty or staff member may contact you if they are the target of harassment, or you may become aware of the situation by other means. If the individual is not the one who contacted you, contact the affected individual immediately and provide them with this guide. It is important that the individual facing harassment has control of the response.
- Be aware that being the target of harassment can have a paralyzing effect. Proactively offering options for assistance may be more supportive than waiting for the affected individual to make requests.
- Assess the individual's on-campus and off-campus safety and security concerns. Be aware that the identity of the individual may influence their individualized needs.
 - If there is an immediate physical threat, call 9-1-1 or contact UFPD at 352-392-1111.
 - UFPD can help you in assessing the safety of assigned classrooms and workspaces.
 - Facilitate the physical movement of assigned classrooms and/or workspace if feasible, necessary, and requested by the affected individual.
- Facilitate the removal of the individual's direct contact information from department or college webpages (your HR liaison can assist) and the university directory, if the affected individual requests it. Be aware that UFPD can assist if the faculty member would like their information hidden from the university directory temporarily.
- Ask whether the affected individual needs assistance documenting the harassment.

Mobilize resources & notify relevant staff

- If UFPD has not been contacted for the purposes of safety planning, have the individual do so immediately. Offer to assist with this process. UFPD has a process in place to engage with UFIT when necessary. If appropriate contact local police.
- Notify your college Dean, the Office of the Provost, unit HR Liaison, and [UFHR Employee Relations](#) of the situation.
 - Stay in communication to ensure a coordinated response. Share details of the situation on a need-to-know basis and be mindful that all email communication may be subject to public records requests or required through a subpoena.
- Contact your IT support team if the individual has requested assistance sorting and documenting harassing messages. If your unit receives IT support from UFIT, [submit a UF Help Desk ticket](#) to request support.
- It is possible that social media and phone intimidation and harassment will be received by multiple offices. Inform the relevant unit administrative staff on a need-to-know basis. Provide [instructions for preserving phone messages](#) to aid future investigations.

Extend support to the affected community

- Consider the well-being of the rest of the unit faculty, staff, and students. Consult with the threatened individual about what information to share with the unit and how to do

so. If possible, bring people together to discuss the situation, the department's actions, and available support resources.

- If the attacks are identity-based, consult with [UFHR Employee Relations](#), the [Title IX Coordinator](#) and [Chief Diversity Officer](#) to counsel the individual about their options and explore additional support and resources for the individual and others in the unit who share their identity. Please be aware that only certain identity characteristics are protected from harassment and discrimination by law (e.g., race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations, genetic information and veteran status) and other identity characteristics do not have legal protection. Additionally, depending on the particulars, you may have mandatory reporting requirements.

Address potential long-term concerns:

- For faculty: If the individual has expressed concern over how the harassment has affected their progress toward tenure, promotion, or reappointment, contact the Associate Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs for guidance (352-392-4792).
- For staff: If the individual has expressed concern over how the harassment has affected or will affect their performance evaluations, contact UFHR [Employee Relations](#) for guidance. (352-392-1072)
- If the affected individual is willing, connect them with colleagues who have experienced similar attacks and have agreed to be contacted to help contextualize the events within their broader career goals and experiences.

Actions for Supporting a Targeted Colleague

- Assess immediate physical danger. If there is an immediate physical threat, call 9-1-1 or contact UFPD at 352-392-1111.
- Provide the affected person with this faculty action guide. It is important that the affected individual be in control of the response.
- Identify ways to show support. Even when online harassment ends, its effects can linger. Offer to serve as a sounding board, resource, or representative for the affected individual if they need it and remind them (as appropriate) of the available resources for personal support.
- While publicly defending a colleague (for example, on social media) can be a generous and supportive gesture, we recommend against it because it may inflame the original harassment situation and/or result in others becoming the target of harassment

Campus Resources Directory

- [UF Police Department](#)
- [Options for Reporting Concerns and Filing Complaints](#) – Overview of reporting options at UF
- [Chief Diversity Officer – Resources and support](#)
- [Office for Accessibility and Gender Equity](#) (Title IX Office) – Report incidents of gender-based discrimination, harassment, or violence. This includes sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sex discrimination (discrimination on the basis of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation), sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, retaliation, and stalking.
 - [Sexual Harassment](#) – Understand the policy and procedures associated with sexual harassment – UFHR
- [UFHR Employee Relations](#)
- [Helping Employees in Distress](#)
- [UF Employee Assistance Program](#)
- Resources for off campus sites can be found by contacting the appropriate [HR Liaison](#).
- [UMatter](#)
- Lake, Peter. F. [“How to Protect Faculty Members From Outside Attacks,”](#) *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 7, 2022.
- Shaw, Susan M. [“When I was Trolled, My Institution Got it Right,”](#) *Inside Higher Ed*, December 8, 2020.
- PEN America. [“Campus Free Speech Guide.”](#) Which includes section on “How to Support Faculty and Staff Who Experience Online Harassment” and the “Online Harassment Field Manual.”
- Scott, Joan Wallach. “Targeted Harassment of Faculty: What Higher Education Administrators Can Do,” [Association of American Colleges and Universities, Spring 2018, Vol. 104, No. 2](#): 50-55.