



What You Can Do about Targeted Online Harassment

Targeted harassment of faculty members because of what they publish or say in the classroom or online is emerging as a serious threat to academic freedom. Harassment campaigns are intended to silence and intimidate those who are targeted, and they can also cause others to censor themselves. Thus, they can effectively curtail discussion of controversial topics in class, pursuit of research in certain areas, and participation of faculty in discussions of matters of public concern.

Faculty members can take steps to prepare for and respond to targeted online harassment.

Before an incident occurs:

- The senate, union, or AAUP chapter should engage with the administration to plan for cases of targeted harassment on campus.
- Institutional regulations or collective bargaining agreements should recognize that academic freedom includes the freedom of faculty members to speak as citizens. *Relying only on the First Amendment may not be sufficient.* At private institutions, the First Amendment provides no protection. At public institutions, the First Amendment may protect faculty members from adverse action by the employer for off-duty speech on matters of public concern and for work-related or classroom speech that is germane to the academic subject matter, so long as such speech is not unduly disruptive.
- Institutional regulations or collective bargaining agreements should include provisions for academic due process for suspensions and dismissals such as those found in the AAUP's *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. While institutional provisions for tenured or tenure-track faculty are frequently consistent with AAUP policies, the same is often not true for part-time faculty members or full-time faculty members on contingent appointments.
- Communications staff and other administrators who may be tasked with responding quickly when instances of targeted harassment occur need to have ready access to institutional policies on academic freedom and due process in order to represent them accurately.

If an incident occurs:

- Encourage the administration to condemn the targeted harassment and speak out in defense of the academic freedom of the targeted faculty member.
- Although the administration is certainly free to express disapproval of the faculty member's speech, the administration may need to be reminded that a number of sensationalized reports of faculty members' speech or online posts have been taken out of context. Reports may not correctly reflect the actual speech.
- Targeted faculty members and administrators at targeted institutions should contact the national AAUP at academicfreedom@aaup.org for advice. Targeted faculty members should contact the national AAUP especially if the administration has taken action against them.