

Online Harassment Resource Guide

Faculty of Arts and Sciences

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The following is a selection of University resources available to faculty who may be experiencing online harassment.

Reporting Criminal Conduct

If you or those close to you are in imminent physical danger or there has been a direct threat of physical violence, you should immediately call the Harvard University Police Department at (617) 495-1212 if you are on the Harvard campus. If you are not on campus, call 911.

If there is no immediate physical threat, but you have received a credible threat to your personal safety or feel you have been criminally harassed, you may call HUPD at (617) 495-1212. You may wish to ask HUPD what is involved in seeking a Harassment Prevention Order.

States, including Massachusetts, have written criminal laws to protect their residents against harassment and intimidation. The Massachusetts criminal harassment statute makes it a crime to “willfully and maliciously engage[] in a knowing pattern of conduct or series of acts over a period of time directed at a specific person, which seriously alarms that person and would cause a reasonable person to suffer substantial emotional distress.” The Massachusetts antistalking law makes it a crime to “(1) willfully and maliciously engage[] in a knowing pattern of conduct or series of acts over a period of time directed at a specific person which seriously alarms or annoys that person and would cause a reasonable person to suffer substantial emotional distress, and (2) make[] a threat with the intent to place the person in imminent fear of death or bodily injury.” Either of these criminal offenses may be accomplished by phone or online, if the communications satisfy the elements of the crime and the conduct consists of true threats unprotected by the First Amendment.

Responding to Online Harassment

Harvard provides resource for community members who have been identified and targeted for online abuse, harassment, and intimidation, which can be found on [this](#) website.

These resources include:

- Platform specific advice for requesting the removal of abusive, harassing, or threatening posts/web content
- A sample request template for removing false statements
- Instructions for how to request the de-registering of abusive domain names
- Instructions for how to delist from University Directories

Additional resources

- You can use this step-by-step [guide](#) to remove photos or links related to yourself from Google
- Your department administrator can facilitate the removal of your contact information from the departmental webpage
- Use secure channels (e.g., Signal, Wire) for instant messaging
- Change **all** of your passwords. Make sure your passwords are complex, random or auto-generated (you may want to use a [Password Manager](#))
- If you need help with any of the above, email Ingrid Skoog at ingrid_skoog@harvard.edu or submit a ticket to ithelp@harvard.edu

Online harassment can take different forms:

- **“Trolling”** occurs when individuals deliberately follow and provoke others online, often with offensive content. While most trolling is merely a nuisance, occasionally trolling attacks can escalate to threats or to the point where numerous individuals are engaged in harassing the target and/or target’s organization.
- **“Doxing”** (sometimes **“doxxing”**) is when private identifying information that is not otherwise publicly available is published online. This information can include sharing an individual’s private email, personal phone number, home address, etc. on various platforms to frighten the individual and encourage additional harassment.
- **“Cyberbullying”** is the willful and repeated harm inflicted through using computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices.

If you are experiencing online abuse, harassment, or threats, you should take steps to **preserve evidence** of the communications.

- Save any emails, voicemails, or text messages you receive.
- Take screenshots or photos of comments on social media; because such comments can be deleted, screenshots are often useful to help document them.

While it may seem counterintuitive to hold onto messages or posts that are upsetting, it can be helpful down the line to have retained evidence of an attack, particularly one involving threats. Create a folder separate and apart from your live accounts and store copies or 6 screenshots of the abusive communications inside it. This way you can keep the evidence without having to see the communications again and again as you use these systems.

In addition to contacting law enforcement, there are **steps you can take** to manage abuse and harassment on social media. For example, consider temporarily disabling your social media profiles or switching them to private. This will ensure that only your close connections can post or comment in your feed. Other steps are described [here](#).

These situations can be very intense, alarming, and disruptive to an individual. Online targeting can also have real consequences for livelihoods and careers. If you experience an incident, or are aware of one, information on **how to report it** can be found [online](#).

If you are **contacted by media**, you can receive advice and guidance from FAS Communications. Contact Anna Cowenhoven, Dean of Communications and Chief Communications Officer, at anna_cowenhoven@harvard.edu.

Managing Unwanted Calls

If you are receiving unwanted calls, one strategy to manage them is to **pre-screen all calls**. Allow calls to go to voicemail, and follow up any legitimate business, ideally within 24 hours.

You can also **remove contact information** from the Harvard directory. To update your privacy settings, which control what data are visible in the directory (e.g., phone number, email address), contact your departmental directory contact. If you are unsure who your directory contact is, check with your department administrator or local HR contact as they are typically aware of who manages directory information in each school or unit.

Additional Resources

Harvard University Support Resources <https://www.harvard.edu/support-resources/>

Harvard guide for protecting against online abuse and harassment: resources for the Harvard community https://harvard.service-now.com/ithelp?id=kb_article&sys_id=7d83e28693818a104cf93f9a7bba10f1

HUIT guide for reporting an incident of online threat or abuse <https://security.harvard.edu/report-incident>

HSPH Digital Safety Kit <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/chc/resources/digital-safety-kit/>

[Harvard Information Security and Data Privacy https://privsec.harvard.edu/](https://privsec.harvard.edu/)

Questions

Below are the Associate Deans for faculty affairs in the divisions of the Arts and Humanities, Social Science, Science, and the Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. The Associate Deans are an invaluable resource for any questions related to faculty appointments and promotions, leaves, and other issues affecting faculty. They can connect you with resources in FAS and across the University and provide advice for navigating challenging situations.

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