Social Media Support, Safety and Guidance for Penn State Graduate Students Serving as Instructors-of-Record or Teaching Assistants

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Introduction

Social media is increasingly integral to the daily operations of the University, its pedagogical and research activities, and as a general means of engagement with internal and external communities. It is a resource that enables Penn State instructors to more fully participate and lead in a global society. Yet, as a University, we recognize that this critical arena may sometimes present challenges to the well-being and perhaps even safety of our graduate student instructors-of-record (GSIR) and teaching assistants (TAs). With this in mind, we have worked to identify and develop resources of support and guidance for how best to manage concerns often related to the use of social media. This handbook is a reproduction of the Faculty Support Safety Guidance document developed by the University of Iowa, a best practice resource, that has been modified for use at Penn State by the Graduate School in collaboration with the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs.¹

The handbook is designed to assist the Penn State community in responding to situations in which GSIR and TAs are targeted by individuals or groups outside of the University based on the content of the GSIR's and TA's scholarship, teaching, opinions, clinical care, and/or service. It addresses potential concerns in such situations and informs the colleges and campuses about resources available to assist individual graduate students serving as GSIR and TAs, academic unit executive officers, and other administrators.

The foundation for this guide is the University's unwavering support for academic freedom and freedom of expression. Academic freedom for GSIR and TAs in teaching and research is essential to the University's educational mission. As described in policy², the University protects academic freedom, even with regard to controversial issues or ideas that may provoke disagreement in the public. Likewise, as citizens, graduate students enjoy strong protection for freedom of speech. Rooted in the Constitution, free expression is necessary for the robust intellectual exchange on which the University's teaching and research missions depend. Thus, the targeting of scholars for their ideas or views may not only threaten harm to those individuals, but also strikes at the University's academic core. Through this handbook and other means, the University seeks to offer guidance and support for GSIR and TAs against the intimidation, harassment or injury that public discourse and the expression of unpopular ideas may generate.

This guide is "content neutral," meaning that it is designed to offer support for GSIR and TAs across a wide spectrum of views and areas of research. For example, it may be useful for GSIR and TAs who come under attack for their conclusions related to social issues, as well as for GSIR and TAs whose scientific methods are deemed controversial, such as the use of stem cells or animals in research.

This guide focuses on threats, intimidation or harassment against GSIR and TAs from individuals unconnected to the University. For information about policies and procedures governing harassment committed by Penn State employees, students, and/or third parties interacting with Penn State employees or students on campus, please see Penn State policies, AD85 (Sexual and/or Gender-Based Harassment and Misconduct (Including Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, Dating Violence, Domestic Violence, Stalking, and Related Inappropriate Conduct) and AD91 (Discrimination and Harassment and Related Inappropriate Conduct). For more information and guidance, contact Penn State's Affirmative Action Office.

Other <u>Penn State policies may be applicable</u>. Individual colleges, campuses and departments may also have protocols in place to address violence or harassment in the workplace.

¹ Permission for the reproduction and revision of Faculty Support Safety Guidance was granted by the University of Iowa.

² Policy <u>AC64 Academic Freedom</u>

ROLES, ACTIONS AND RESOURCES - AN OVERVIEW

In matters of safety and security, individual GSIR and TAs and faculty members are encouraged to make use of University, college and campus resources to assist them in responding to an immediate situation, as well as to address any concerns that arise in the longer term. Numerous resources are also available to support academic unit executive officers and academic administrators in responding to external attacks against Penn State GSIR and TAs when appropriate. Knowing about relevant resources and guidance in advance of a crisis will help our colleges and campuses respond more effectively when a situation requires immediate action.

Each situation is different, and we only offer guidance and resources, not prescribed procedure. The following chart offers suggestions for individuals at various levels in the University, including:

- Graduate Student Instructors of Record and Teaching Assistants
- Academic Unit Administrator for Graduate Education (e.g., associate dean of graduate education, dean or chancellor)
- College or Campus Strategic Communications Director
- Unit Executive (Dean, Chancellor)

Individual Graduate Student Instructor of Record or Teaching Assistant

Ensure your safety. Identify your primary concerns and seek out assistance. The following suggestions may be of use in your personal safety planning.

- If you believe your physical safety is at risk, immediately notify the police force in your home jurisdiction or call 911. For safety concerns on campus, contact University Police or your local campus security office.
- Notify your graduate program head or Director of Graduate Studies / Professor-in-Charge and, if
 necessary, your college or campus academic unit administrator for graduate education, of the situation.
 See the "Graduate Student Instructor of Record and Teaching Assistant Safety and Support Checklist for
 Academic Unit Administrator for Graduate Education" (Appendix B) for ways in which your academic
 unit might be able to support you. You do not need to manage this experience on your own.
- Consult directly or work with your academic unit administrator for graduate education to contact the
 Penn State <u>Behavioral Threat Management Team (BTMT)</u>. The BTMT is dedicated to the early
 identification, assessment, and management of incidents and behaviors that threaten the safety and
 well-being of the university community. BTMT staff members are trained to assess these kinds of
 situations and assist with coordinated responses, as needed. For example, the BTMT can coordinate
 with the Penn State <u>University Police and Public Safety</u>, provide tips about classroom safety and other
 on-campus safety resources.
- Consult with the University's Office of Social Media and Office of Strategic Communications. Guidance is available by email at socialmediaoffice@psu.edu. For more urgent matters, call the Office of Strategic Communications at 814-865-7517
- Consult the <u>University Police and Public Safety website</u> for more information regarding on-campus safety, and local community police departments regarding off-campus safety.

- If you believe the attackers know where you live and you are concerned about safety in your home, create a safety plan. Penn State University Police and Public Safety can assist you in assessing risk and planning accordingly.
- If you are experiencing gender-based harassment and/or harassment that is sexual in nature, consult the
 Office of Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response or the Penn State University Affirmative Action
 Office to ensure that you are fully aware of your rights and resources. You can use the form here to
 report an incident of bias or discrimination.
- Do not delete any messages, but you may want to disengage from reading all emails in your inbox, listening to all voice messages, etc. Preserved messages may be of use in identifying the harassers and pressing any relevant charges. Create a log to document and archive all threatening emails, tweets, Facebook posts, and phone messages. Consider asking a friend to monitor social and other media on your behalf and to keep you apprised of any developments or threats.
- Report harassing social media content to the social media platform. If the content is in violation of the
 platform's terms of service, it will be deleted and the author may be disciplined (e.g., suspended,
 banned, etc.). Document and screenshot all offending content before reporting it to the platform so that
 the content is archived.
 - Save screenshots of harassing or threatening social media posts to preserve as evidence in case the author deletes the original post.
- Be cautious about responding to threatening emails, tweets, blog comments, etc. In most cases, it will be in your best interest not to respond. Although responding may seem like the right thing to do, it may only provide harassers with additional material and serve to prolong social media harassment. The University's Office of Social Media can help you determine whether and how to respond. If you choose not to respond, you may also want to encourage your friends and colleagues to do the same. Review "Managing Harassment" (Appendix A).
- Protect your cyber-identity (e.g., cell phone, network access, social media).
 - Penn State Office of Information Security can be of assistance. See <u>Penn State Office of</u>
 Information Security for guidance.
- Consult with your academic unit administrator for graduate education and your unit executive
 (dean/chancellor) for assistance in responding to the situation. For example, you may want to consider
 preparing a concise message to articulate your position in your own words and distribute to colleagues
 as a form of reputation management. Should you get media requests related to the incident, the Office
 of Strategic Communications can be of assistance in deciding whether/how to respond.
- Reach out to friends and develop a support system. Counseling and Psychological Services provides resources available to all graduate students. If there is an emergency situation after hours, contact the 24/7 Penn State Crisis Line at 1-877-229-6400.
- Know that you are not alone as an academic who has experienced this type of harassment. Several
 scholars have written about the coordinated and systemic patterns of attack against scholars and faculty
 members. Connect with others who have gone through similar situations to decrease your isolation and
 learn from their experience. For more information, contact the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty
 Affairs at vpfa@psu.edu.

• Consult with your adviser and graduate program head if you feel this attack has affected your progress toward degree.

Academic Unit Administrator for Graduate Education

- Contact the GSIR or TA as soon as you become aware of threatening or intimidating behavior against them. Meet with them to offer support in the initial days of the incident and review the "Graduate Student Instructor of Record and Teaching Assistant Safety and Support Checklist for Academic Unit Administrators for Graduate Education" (Appendix B) to ensure the GSIR or TA is aware of campus resources.
- Before all else, work with the GSIR or TA to address their on-campus and off-campus safety and security
 concerns. Be aware that the identity of the GSIR or TA may influence their individualized needs (e.g.,
 parental status, graduate program, minoritized identity). Refer the GSIR or TA to appropriate campus
 resources or, with the GSIR's or TA's consent, reach out to such resources as appropriate to address
 whatever issues the GSIR or TA identifies.
- It is possible that social media and phone intimidation and harassment will be received by multiple offices. Inform the unit administrative staff on a need-to-know basis. Ensure that unit staff members whose responsibilities may include answering harassing phone calls are supported and informed about strategies for being on the front line (e.g., a script or template response, instructions for preserving phone messages to aid future investigations). The communications director for the college or campus can help with messaging.
- Stay in communication with the dean/chancellor's office 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 request via subpoena or other legal process.
- Consider the well-being of the rest of the unit faculty, staff, and students (e.g., co-authors, graduate assistants, front-line staff). Consult with the threatened GSIR or TA about what and how to share information with the department. If possible, bring people together to discuss the situation, the department's actions, and available support resources.
- Facilitate the physical movement of assigned classrooms and/or workspace if feasible, and if the affected GSIR or TA requests it.
- Facilitate the removal of the GSIR or TA's direct contact information from department or college webpages and the University directory, in collaboration with human resources and the college/campus communications office if the affected GSIR or TA requests it.
- If the attacks are identity-based (e.g., harassment based on gender, race, sexual identity, country of origin), consult with the Affirmative Action Office and Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity to counsel the GSIR or TA about their options and explore additional support and resources for the GSIR or TA and others in the unit who share their identity (e.g., students, colleagues, staff).
- After addressing the GSIR and TA's safety and security concerns, keep in mind the potential effect of this event on their academic career and time to degree. Connecting the GSIR or TA with other scholars who

- have experienced similar attacks may be useful to contextualize the events within their broader academic goals and experiences.
- Discuss issues of academic freedom in regular forums (e.g., faculty meetings, student seminars), including attention to ways that external forces may attempt to silence scholars through social media attacks and the resources available to respond when or if attacks occur.
- If you become the target of the harassment, consult with the dean's/chancellor's office and refer to the strategies recommended for faculty members (<u>Social Media Support an Resources for Penn State</u>
 Faculty) to ensure your own safety.

Academic Administration: Chancellor/Dean

- While our first instinct may be to respond and defend with a rebuttal online, it's important to
 understand that engaging in a dialogue on social media can sometimes make matters worse. Each
 situation should be evaluated on its own. Consult with the campus/college communicator and the Office
 of Strategic Communications before responding.
- If a response is warranted, the leadership message should defend academic freedom, the importance of student safety, and the development of learning environments in which difficult issues are discussed and dissected. Work with the campus/college Director of Communication and/or Office of Strategic Communications to develop a message that emphasizes <u>University values</u>, draws on best-practice examples from other campuses, and addresses potential concerns of multiple constituents (e.g., faculty, alumni, legislators, donors, students).
- Consider developing and/or publicizing academic protocols for dealing with internal threats and harassment (e.g., from students, patients). Provide training opportunities and resources for academic faculty, students, and staff. For more information, see Penn State <u>AD85, the University's Anti-Harassment policy.</u>
- If the issue is growing and is likely to have an impact on your unit's or the University's broader reputation or is likely to generate media attention, call the Office of Strategic Communications at 814-865-7517 to discuss the matter and communications strategy to mitigate its impact.
- If a crisis emerges, consult with the targeted individual to share how you would like to publicly handle the crisis and discuss any concerns they might have. Involve the individual's academic unit administrator for graduate education in crisis management conversations to ensure that efforts are coordinated.
- Support the academic unit administrator for graduate education in working with the targeted individual
 by offering assistance and resources. See the Graduate Student Instructor of Record and Teaching
 Assistant Safety and Support Checklist for Academic Unit Administrators for Graduate Education
 (Appendix B) to ensure that the targeted GSIR's and TA's immediate and longer-term needs are
 addressed.
- Inform the dean's/chancellor's office staff on a need-to-know basis. It is likely that social media and phone harassment will be directed at multiple offices. Informing all relevant individuals in the dean's office will strengthen the college's ability to engage in a coordinated response. Ensure that dean's/chancellor's office staff members whose responsibilities may include answering harassing phone

- calls are supported and informed about strategies for being on the front line (e.g., a script or template response, instructions for preserving phone messages to aid future investigations).
- Consider informing other offices/staff members who may field phone calls, including the Development, Alumni Relations, Admissions, Career Services, etc., so they can respond with the appropriate messages.
- Depending on the nature of the attacks, be aware that students, staff, and faculty who share the identity and/or research area under attack (e.g., LGBTQ students, if the GSIR's or TA's sexual identity is under attack; students of color, if the GSIR's or TA's racial/ethnic identity is the focus; international students, if the GSIR's or TA's country of origin is the focus) may also be experiencing trauma because of this incident. Consult with the Affirmative Action Office and Office of the Vice Provost of Educational Equity, the Penn State University Employee Assistance Program, the Multicultural Resource Center, Paul Robeson Cultural Center, the Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity, the Gender Equity Center, and/or Counseling and Psychological Services to arrange for support services for students and staff in the college/campus.

Campus/College Strategic Communications Director

- Inform the dean/chancellor if you become aware that a GSIR's or TA's name has shown up in a social media post that may contain a threat or intimidating/harassing content. Keep the dean/chancellor informed of ongoing mentions throughout the crisis management process.
- In close consultation with the Office of Strategic Communications, provide support for the GSIR or TA being targeted, including tips on if and how they should respond, managing their professional and personal reputation, and reviewing Managing Harassment (Appendix A). Discuss all media inquiries with the Office of Strategic Communications.
- Work with the dean's/chancellor's office and other campus spokespeople to coordinate information sharing on a need-to-know basis and to coordinate a consistent message (e.g., phone scripts for frontline staff answering aggressive callers).
- Consult with academic faculty, staff, students, and administrators about the potential impact of speaking with the media. Have faculty staff, students, and administrators refer media inquiries to the college/campus communications office or the University's Office of Strategic Communications.
- Provide assistance to the unit executive with crafting a leadership message that defends academic freedom, emphasizes University values, and addresses potential concerns of multiple constituents (e.g., faculty, alumni, legislators, donors, students).

Central Administration

Office of the Provost

• Establish open communication with the affected GSIR's or TA's dean/chancellor and request updates, as needed, on the situation.

- Reach out to the targeted GSIR or TA, reiterating the University's commitment to academic freedom as appropriate, and encouraging the GSIR or TA to consult with their department chair for support and assistance.
- Provide tools and training for the academic unit administrator for graduate education to use when developing immediate- and longer-term response plans.
- In consultation with the Office of the President and Office of Strategic Communications, issue a statement (as appropriate) asserting the importance of academic freedom and committing to the safety and well-being of GSIRs and TAs. The statement should emphasize the University's mission and values rather than comment on the GSIR or TA's scholarship.

Office of the President

 Maintain consistent communication with the Office of the Provost and work together, as appropriate, to issue a statement asserting the importance of free speech, academic freedom, and the safety of University GSIRs and TAs.

Office of Educational Equity

- Provide resources and support to the GSIR and TA and department when the attack includes
 personalized attacks on the GSIR's or TA's identity and/or diversity-related scholarship or teaching.
- Coordinate or provide student support services, especially for students whose identities and/or interests are similar to the targeted GSIR or TA.
- Establish consistent communication with the Office of Provost and consult on issuing a statement of support, as appropriate.

The Graduate School

• Provide support and assistance to the individual GSIR or TA, faculty members, academic administration, and the broader unit via collaboration with the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, Penn State BTMT and CAPS.

RESOURCES

The following offices are available to assist during crisis management and also to provide longer-term guidance and programs.

Campus Safety Resources

University Police Victim Resource Officer — University Police can provide you with advice and help you to find the programs and services that might be of assistance to you. Contact: Det. Vicki Litzinger- 814-863-0823.

<u>Centre Safe (formerly "Centre County Women's Resource Center")</u> — Provides services for people who have experienced domestic and/or sexual violence. Phone: (814) 234-5050.

Penn State University Central Administration

Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost

201 Old Main University Park, PA 16802 Phone: 814-865-2505

https://provost.psu.edu/contact/

The Graduate School

211 Kern Graduate Building Phone: 814-865-2516

Email: graddeansoffice@psu.edu

Office of General Counsel

The Pennsylvania State University 227 West Beaver Avenue Suite 507 State College, PA 16801

Email: <u>eus18@psu.edu</u> Phone: 814-867-4088

Penn State Communication Resources

Office of Strategic Communications

401 James Elliott Building 120 South Burrowes Street State College, PA 16801 Phone: 814-865-7517

https://strategiccommunications.psu.edu/contact

Office of Social Media

Phone: 814-865-7517

Email: socialmediaoffice@psu.edu

Penn State Student Affairs Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services

501 Student Health Center University Park, PA 16802 Immediate Assistance 24 Hours a Day

24/7 Penn State Crisis Line: 877-229-6400
24/7 Crisis Text Line: Text "LIONS" to 741741

Phone: 814-863-0395

Email: :

Web: https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling

Multicultural Resource Center

220 Grange Building
University Park, PA 16802
Email: MRC@psu.edu
Phone 814-865-1773

Web: http://equity.psu.edu/mrc

Paul Robeson Cultural Center

21 HUB-Robeson Center University Park, PA 16802 Phone: 814-865-3776

Email: prcc@psu.edu

Web: https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/cultural

Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity

LL011 HUB-Robeson Center University Park, PA 16802 Phone: 814-863-1248 Email: lgbtq@psu.edu

Web: https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/csgd

Gender Equity Center

204 Boucke Building University Park, PA 16802 Phone: 814-863-2027

Email: genderequity@psu.edu

Web: https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/genderequity

APPENDIX A: MANAGING HARASSMENT*

According to a <u>2017 survey by the Pew Research Center</u>, 41 percent of adults report being the subject of harassing behavior online, and 66 percent have witnessed harassing behavior directed at others. Responding to online harassment can be challenging, even scary if the harassment becomes threatening. The University's Office of Strategic Communications recommends the following options.

- 1. **Ignore them.** The goal of social media agitators (commonly referred to as trolls) is to elicit a response. The good news is that even the most persistent trolls typically move on if you ignore them long enough.
- 2. **Block them.** Several social media platforms allow you to selectively prevent others from following you, seeing your posts, or commenting on your content. Please note that when you block someone, they are typically notified of the block and may choose to criticize you on their own channels.
- 3. **Respond.** If someone is sharing misinformation about you or your work, consider sharing a brief response to correct the falsehoods. This will likely result in additional posts from the harassing party, but it does give you a platform to set the record straight. It's highly recommended that you consult with the Office of Strategic Communications in determining whether to respond and the best avenue for doing so. For instance, responding to Twitter attacks with a reply on Twitter may not be the best strategy.
- 4. **Record and report.** If you feel at all threatened, contact the proper authorities and keep a record of the hostile or threatening posts. Take and save screenshots in case you need to file a police report or take legal action.

For more information or questions concerning your experience on social media, please contact:

- Christie Clancy, manager, social media, at 814-865-3477 or cmc214@psu.edu, or
- Wyatt DuBois, assistant director, news and media relations, at 814-865-3202 or wyatt@psu.edu.

^{*}Managing Harassment, https://osc.uiowa.edu/managing-harassment, retrieved from University of Iowa (September 17, 2019) and modified for use by the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, Penn State University.

APPENDIX B: GRADUATE STUDENT INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD AND TEACHING ASSISTANT SAFETY AND SUPPORT CHECKLIST FOR ACADEMIC UNIT ADMINISTRATORS FOR GRADUATE EDUCATION

This checklist helps academic unit administrator for graduate education and other administrators to address possible concerns and provide resources in the immediate and longer-term aftermath of a crisis in which a graduate student instructor-of-record (GSIR) or teaching assistant (TA) is targeted for their ideas or views. The academic unit administrator for graduate education and/or their designee may use this checklist when meeting with the GSIR or TA to gather information and create a safety plan. It may be useful to capture as much information as possible during these interactions to limit the number of times the GSIR or TA has to retell the story. If it is not possible for the academic unit administrator for graduate education or designee to engage in this type of meeting, please refer the GSIR or TA to the dean/chancellor's office for follow-up.

What is the nature of the harassment? When did it begin? How has it changed since it began?					
In what environment(s) is the harassment o	occurring (check all that apply)?				
□ Email	☐ Voice messages left on campus phones				
☐ Social media	☐ On-campus stalking				
☐ In the classroom ☐ In the office	☐ Via media requests				
	☐ Harassment of family members/children				
	□ Other				
☐ At home					
What is the GSIR or TA's greatest concern?					

Resources and Referrals

Depending on the type and location of the threat, and the identity of the GSIR or TA, offer unit support to implement the following, as directed by the graduate student instructor-of-record (GSIR) or teaching assistant (TA):

Engage with the Behavioral Threat Management Team (BTMT) about oncampus safety resources. The BTMT is available to do an initial assessment over the phone or in person with the academic unit administrator for graduate education or individual GSIR or TA.	Behavioral Threat Management Team
Report harassing social media content to the social media platform. If the content is in violation of the platform's terms of service, it will be deleted and the author may be disciplined (e.g., suspended, banned) Document and screenshot all offending content before reporting it to the platform so that the content is archived.	Each platform has various ways to report violations of their terms.
A representative of University Police and Public Safety serves as a member of the Behavioral Threat Management Team and can also be contacted directly to arrange for safety planning and/or to investigate violent threats.	University Police and Public Safety
If needed and if feasible, arrange for relocation of the classroom(s) and office of the GSIR or TA, including technology (e.g., computer, printer, internet). Remove the new room numbers from public listings (e.g., directory).	Academic administration
If the threats are of a sexual nature or gender-based, consult the Affirmative Action Office	Affirmative Action Office

Refer media inquiries to the Office of Strategic Communications. Reporters may call for a comment or interview. Deciding whether to talk with the press is a personal decision for the GSIR or TA; however, consulting with media experts can assist in the decision-making process. Media training may be available.	Office of Strategic Communications
Provide information about relevant academic policies that address specific concerns expressed by the GSIR or TA.	Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs
Support GSIRs or TAs who feel their social identity is a component of the attack (e.g., students of color, LGBTQ students, country of origin). Provide resources and support for others in the department (e.g., students, staff, faculty) who share the identity of the GSIR or TA and who may also feel threatened.	Educational Equity and/or Affirmative Action Office
Provide information about available campus resources to address stress management and counseling services.	Employee Assistance Program Health Advocate