

**MEMORANDUM**

**Date:** February 23, 2024

**Subject:** Responding to threats and harassment against faculty

**From:** **Richie Hunter, Vice President for Communications**  
**Laurie McCauley, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs**

The university is firmly committed to upholding the principles that empower faculty to freely conduct research, express their ideas, challenge prevailing notions, and engage in robust discourse without reprisal.

The following report, “Responding to Threats and Harassment of Faculty at the University of Michigan,” is the work product of an informal, internal working group charged by the Office of Public Affairs to gather information on the harassment and intimidation of faculty, to review U-M's current communications resources for responding to the problem and to recommend improvements.

The group conducted their work over the course of a year and produced 16 recommendations that range from communications-related actions to broader institutional supports. The report is preliminary and establishes a foundation for additional research and policy making regarding this important issue.

The university is working to implement more than half of the recommendations in the report, including enhancing awareness of existing resources through a [dedicated web page](#), issuing a strong [statement in support of faculty](#), and creating a coordinated response system.

The Office of the Provost has also launched an effort to survey faculty in order to better understand the prevalence and scope of this issue on the Ann Arbor campus. That survey will be conducted in partnership with the Institute of Social Research.

The remainder of the recommendations will be considered after the survey data is available.

**Correction to content in the report:**

The Dean’s Behavioral Intervention Team (DBIT) -- situated within the Dean of Students Office -- is an internal team that coordinates a comprehensive response to critical incidents involving students. Members of DBIT include representatives from Michigan Housing, DPSS, UHS, CAPS, Wolverine Wellness, OSCR, LSA, Engineering, and the Dean of Students Office. The Associate Dean of Students chairs DBIT on behalf of the Dean of Students.

# Responding to Threats and Harassment of Faculty at the University of Michigan

## Recommendations Document

Submitted August 2023 by the Work Group on Faculty Threats and Harassment,

- Laura Lee, co-chair, Director of Communications and Outreach, *Ford School of Public Policy*
- John Lofy, co-chair, Executive Director of Marketing and Communications, *College of Literature, Science, and the Arts*
- Sgt. Ryan Cavanaugh, Master Trainer in Threat Assessment and Management, *U-M Division of Public Safety and Security*
- Danielle Dimcheff, Director of Marketing and Communications, *Marsal Family School of Education*
- Christine Gerdes, Special Counsel to the Provost
- Gloria Hage, Senior Associate General Counsel
- Mary Masson, Director of Public Relations, *Michigan Medicine*
- Teresa Oesterle, Deputy Director, *U-M Division of Public Safety and Security*
- Michelle Rodgers, Chief Communications Officer, *U-M Law School*
- Ruby Tapia, Chair, Department of Women's and Gender Studies, Associate Professor of English Language and Literature and Women's and Gender Studies

## CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>2</b>
A Pressing Problem	2
Why it matters	2
<b>WORK GROUP CHARGE</b>	<b>3</b>
Membership	3
Scope and limitations	3
Parallel efforts	4
Methodology	4
<b>UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Overview</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Nature and Variety of Attacks</b>	<b>6</b>
Harassment can happen anywhere	6
Attacks vary widely in type and severity	6
Harms and Impacts	7
<b>GAPS IN THE UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSE</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Primary Recommendations</b>	<b>11</b>
Sponsor and coordinate anti-harassment efforts at the executive level	11
Expand the university's threat assessment and management capacity	12
Expand a case management approach	13
Assign a single person to be the point of contact in individual cases	14
Integrate some of these recommendations into the DEI 2.0 strategic plan	14
<b>Communications-Specific Recommendations</b>	<b>14</b>
Provide full-throated support for individual faculty and for academic freedom	14
Significantly increase the visibility of existing threat assessment services	15
Expand online resources and make existing ones easier to find	16
Review and more broadly communicate protocols for events	16
<b>Additional Recommendations</b>	<b>17</b>
Survey faculty	17
Survey schools, colleges, and units	17
Support and promote scholar networks inside and beyond the university	17
Offer training and education to appropriate people and teams	18
Establish policies and best practices for protecting classrooms and offices	18
Provide options and support for faculty to take protective action on their own	18
Conduct further benchmarking of proven approaches used at other institutions	19
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>20</b>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### A Pressing Problem

In recent years, faculty at the University of Michigan and elsewhere have been increasingly harassed, intimidated and threatened because of their research and their identity. The problem has become common and severe enough to pose an urgent threat not only to faculty themselves but to the University's core missions.

#### Key findings:

1. *Harassment, threats, and intimidation have become much more common and malevolent.* It is now a rare week that goes by without a report. Attacks often reach beyond social media to take the form of threatening letters, calls, emails, or faxes, some identifying family members by name. Hate groups appear at academic events. Outsiders, even enrolled students, disrupt class sessions.
2. *Most common targets are faculty of color, women, Jews, and/or people who identify as LGBTQ+.* Their research typically focuses on issues of race, identity, reproductive health, and/or social justice.
3. *Attacks are tied to attacks on higher education in general.* Harassment of faculty is fueled by politicians and public figures who claim higher education is [“woke.”](#) that [“the professors are the enemy.”](#) or that [tenure should be restricted or eliminated.](#)

### Why it matters

Harassment, intimidation, and threats are intended to drive certain ideas—and the people generating and articulating them—out of the public sphere. The results:

- Individual faculty members are burdened, distracted, often traumatized; their personal and professional well-being damaged.
- Academic freedom is compromised; public scholarship is discouraged and teaching hamstrung.
- Democratic engagement is threatened when academic discourse is imperiled.

### Recommendations

The University of Michigan is not doing enough to address this problem. We lag behind Big Ten peers in recognizing the issue's severity and building an effective response. As a result we are losing credibility with the faculty — even actually losing faculty.

#### Key recommendations:

- At the executive level, launch a coordinated effort to fill gaps in the University's response and develop robust improvements on the model of Big Ten and other peers.
- Expand the University's threat assessment and management capacity, particularly where it involves faculty.
- Adopt a case-management strategy to assist targeted faculty.
- Provide full-throated support for individual faculty and for academic freedom.
- Increase awareness of existing resources and responses.
- Survey faculty and units to ascertain the problem's full scope.

## **WORK GROUP CHARGE**

The Office of Public Affairs [charged this group](#) to gather information on the harassment and intimidation of faculty; to review U-M's current resources for responding to the problem; and to recommend improvements.

### **Membership**

The group comprises the marketing and communications leads from five academic units and the Health System as well as representatives of the Provost, the General Counsel, the Department of Public Safety and Security and the faculty:

- Laura Lee, co-chair, Director of Communications and Outreach, Ford School
- John Lofy, co-chair, Executive Director of Marketing and Communications, LSA
- Sgt. Ryan Cavanaugh, DPSS, Master Trainer in Threat Assessment and Management
- Danielle Dimcheff, Director of Marketing and Communications, Marsal Family School of Education
- Christine Gerdes, Special Counsel to the Provost
- Gloria Hage, Senior Associate General Counsel
- Mary Masson, Director of Public Relations, Michigan Medicine
- Teresa Oesterle, Deputy Director, DPSS
- Michelle Rodgers, Chief Communications Officer, Law School
- Ruby Tapia, Chair of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies

### **Scope and limitations**

The group was convened by the Office of Public Affairs as an extension of conversations during the Key Issues group that is regularly convened by Public Affairs. We limited our attention to the faculty because: a) they are the most common targets; and b) public engagement by faculty is an essential University mission. We know that staff and students are also targeted, and we hope our recommendations will be adapted for their support.

Our initial charge was to focus on the work of communicators, but in the course of our work we came to understand that communications alone could not fully address this problem. We learned this first as, in our regular work as communicators, we increasingly connected with colleagues in other areas such as IT and facilities who are managing other aspects of these threats, and as we benchmarked with other universities to gain an initial understanding of how they were addressing the challenge.

While it's clear that communications must be a core element of any solution, success will depend on stronger protocols and practices across many functional areas. We have noted best practices that several other Big Ten universities have undertaken and propose them as models for Michigan.

It was beyond our charge to conduct a formal survey or broad benchmarking. We know the problem is real and extensive. But more investigation is needed to gauge its full scope and impact, and to do further benchmarking with other institutions. (See recommendations below.)

We also note that any new policies or protocols will need to account for mandatory reporting requirements.

### **Parallel efforts**

We learned that other U-M teams not represented in this group are also grappling with the problems we studied. These include the ITS digital security staff, the Office of the Vice President for Research, college-level facilities teams, and more. Their efforts and perspectives will be critical to the University's overall response.

The American Association of University Professors has called on universities to address this issue, and its U-M chapter has urged the administration to provide support in this area; we intend that our work will be complementary to and coordinated with any activity that is part of that effort.

### **Methodology**

Before the group formed, members worked with many faculty who had suffered episodes of harassment. For the purposes of this report, we met again with more than a dozen who were willing to talk further. We asked them to tell us more about their experiences; about what steps had helped; and about what the University might have done to make them feel safer, more confident, and better supported.

We also spoke with leaders of schools, colleges, and departments who described the challenges that arise when members of their units, even the unit itself, are targeted.

We consulted with peer institutions and organizations with expertise in this field. The following were especially helpful:

- U-M's Knight-Wallace Fellows program for journalists.
- PEN America, which advocates for free speech among writers.
- University of Iowa Threat Assessment Team.
- Penn State University Behavioral Threat Management Team.
- University of Illinois Threat Assessment Team.

Finally, in addition to the many faculty who shared their experiences with us, several faculty members with expertise in this area reviewed an early draft and provided wise counsel to the committee. They include

- Sara Blair, Patricia S Yaeger Collegiate Professor of English Language and Literature, Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs.
- Julie Boland, Professor of Psychology & Linguistics; President, UM Chapter of AAUP.
- Elizabeth Cole, Director, National Center for Institutional Diversity (NCID); University Diversity and Social Transformation Professor of Psychology and Women's and Gender Studies.
- Leila Kavar, Associate Professor of American Culture and in the Residential College.
- Lori Pierce, Professor of Radiation Oncology; Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM**

### **Overview**

The man who invaded the San Francisco home of U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and her husband in November 2022 was carrying a “hit list” of people he intended to assault or kill. All but one were politicians or celebrities. The exception was a leading intellectual in queer studies here at the University of Michigan. Apparently she had come to the attacker’s attention thanks to social media screeds and video rants posted by far-right, anti-LGBTQ+ activists. Even after the Pelosis’ attacker was convicted and jailed, the professor remains under attack in online forums, including mainstream sites such as YouTube.

The example is especially frightening but hardly isolated. Just a few months after the Pelosi attack, a former U-M employee was arrested for threatening Jewish state and university officials with violence. Lesser but still menacing attacks have become routine. Routinely, faculty at U-M are threatened, intimidated and harassed simply for doing their work as scholars, scientists and teachers, or for their identity, or both. The targets are disproportionately people of color, Jews, women, and/or identify as LGBTQ+. In many cases their work deals with matters of social justice and reproductive health. The attacks occur online, by mail, and even in person.

Over the past few years we have seen a number of troubling examples:

- Racist slurs and images were emailed to the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies.
- Disturbing anti-LGBTQ+ voicemail messages were left at the Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.
- An intruder broke into the Institute for Research on Women and Gender after hours and defiled its offices.
- An uninvited man—not a student—entered a lecture hall during a Women’s and Gender Studies course and shouted “prayers” and slogans at the students and instructors. He had to be removed by DPSS. (This was not an isolated incident. Many courses have been moved after virtual or in-person threats were made based on course content.)
- Men wearing black balaclavas rushed into a class on Asian American identity, grabbed a microphone and started shouting into it, then ran back out through a crowded hallway.
- At a panel discussion of far-right terrorism, a dozen or so members of the Proud Boys stood in uniform at the back of the room throughout the event, alarming the presenters and audience.
- Two faculty members, a married couple, were hounded for months on social media by a former student making bizarre accusations. The harasser stopped only when the couple got a court injunction.
- A number of faculty have received hostile letters or emails that refer to their office or home addresses; some refer to their children or other relatives by name. Even in messages that make no explicit threat, the clear intent is to frighten and intimidate.
- A woman instructor in a course on gender reported that a male student brought two male guests to class; the three then stared at her and argued with her in ways that felt intimidating.

- Faculty members' names and profiles appear on "campus watch" sites maintained and promoted by right-wing organizations.

## The Nature and Variety of Attacks

Such incidents are nothing new; individual and organizational actors have always worked—openly or from the shadows—to attack not just faculty ideas, but the faculty themselves. But in recent years, the number, intensity and variety of attacks have increased. Misuses and abuses of social media, such as [brigading](#), [doxxing](#), [hashtag poisoning](#), and [many other tactics](#), have become commonplace weapons used against academics, and are now an expected consequence of some public scholarship.

To design more effective responses, we must understand the nature and variety of these incidents. Certain patterns stand out.

### Harassment can happen anywhere

Faculty are harassed online and in "the real world," in professional spaces and personal spaces, including:

- On social media
- On mainstream and fringe websites where faculty are the subjects of "exposés"
- By regular mail to homes and offices
- By email
- By phone and voicemail
- At public speeches and panel sessions
- In classrooms
- At off-campus events

### Attacks vary widely in type and severity

The lines between harassment, intimidation, and outright threats are fuzzy and often subjective. An incident that one professor might dismiss as "mere harassment" could feel deeply threatening to another. An attack that begins at a comparatively low level of intimidation can escalate, quickly or over time, to something more grave. Harassment can come from several sources at once, either inside or outside the University or both. And the types of attack vary widely.

#### Types of incidents

- *Brief, intense incidents*: Many cases are intense but brief. Typically, a faculty member is attacked in the media or social media, then barraged with hostile messages on social media platforms. In such cases, the best response is no response, and the storm usually passes.
- *Doxxing (publishing a target's contact information, or sending messages to personal addresses with malicious intent)*: The doxxer's threat may be implicit (e.g., sending hostile mail to a home address or naming family members) or explicit (e.g., making outright threats or sending menacing images such as nooses).



- *Sustained targeting by an individual or small group:* Some harassment goes on for months, even years. Typically, the determined harasser(s) nurses a grievance toward the targeted faculty member, either personal or research-related. The harasser often intentionally and maliciously misrepresents the faculty member's work or falsely accuses them of ethical misconduct. The claims are usually outrageous or incredible, and they cannot go unchallenged. Yet it can be highly difficult to debunk them, given the protections afforded by (and cumbersome reporting protocols of) social media platforms. Some faculty targeted in this way have felt they had no choice but to take their own expensive and time-consuming measures to protect themselves—filing lawsuits or exhaustive complaints with social media companies; hiring private investigators; and in at least one case moving to a new home with greater security.
- *Classroom harassment:* Outsiders, even enrolled students, have initiated ugly provocations in class sessions. At best, these incidents are frustrating and unnerving. But in an era when campus shootings have become all but routine, it can be downright terrifying to have someone attend a class, stand up and start shouting.
- *Events:* Similar provocations have occurred at academic events. Incidents such as the Proud Boys' appearance at a panel discussion, or in-person disruptions by those seeking attention on social media, not only chill free speech but raise the specter of potential violence.

These are just some of the varieties of harassment we've seen at U-M. [PEN America has a more complete list](#). The point is less to enumerate all the possible ways that faculty can be targeted than to emphasize that these incidents play out in many forms and change over time, sometimes rapidly. So our responses must be both robust and flexible.

## Harms and Impacts

### Damage to individual well-being

Such attacks are meant to drive faculty and their work off the public stage and out of the academy by making the personal cost too great to bear. Damaging individuals' well-being is a core strategy. Our review shows how effective they are at achieving that end.

Faculty told us such attacks are not simply irritating but devastating and traumatic. Many told us of sleepless nights; of anxiety over what might await them in their social media feeds and email; of fears that a sender of dozens of pieces of hate mail might carry out a threat against themselves, their families or their colleagues. We know of at least one faculty member who had to move to a more secure apartment building. Even faculty who see harassment simply as a price of public engagement agree that it diverts them from important work.

Most targeted faculty have already been marginalized or minoritized. For them the burden is even heavier.

### Damage to research, teaching, and academic freedom

It's obvious that a faculty member who is harassed or intimidated will suffer losses of time and attention they would otherwise give to their work. But such attacks harm the research mission in larger ways, as well. Organizations such as Professor Watch and even more extreme groups have made it their missions to target whole areas of research that threaten the status quo and majoritarian or extremist narratives on race and ethnicity, sex and gender, social justice, and the like. Thus they have a chilling effect on the entire research enterprise. Faculty productivity declines. Scholars hold back from public engagement. Professional advancement and the free exchange of ideas suffer.

In the classroom, students and uninvited guests have behaved in obnoxious, intimidating, and outright threatening ways in response to course material. These incidents, which go well beyond normal class debate, occur in the context of routine school shootings and violence, which adds to the tension. Faculty and other students in these situations understandably fear for their safety. For them, as for administrators and facilities staff, securing classrooms, addressing intimidating acts by students, and providing safety before and after class are becoming routine considerations--but policies and best practices are still developing, and are not shared across the institution.

Such attacks constitute an assault on free speech in general and academic freedom in particular. These high principles become meaningless when scholars are deliberately frightened into silence. We recognize the right of anyone to criticize and disagree. But we must oppose those who cross the line from dissent into harassment and intimidation. They make a mockery of the principles on which the University is built.

A University like ours, which takes its public mission so seriously, hires faculty precisely because of the work that makes them targets. We expect them to pursue their studies freely, fearlessly and publicly. Thus we are obliged to support and protect them.

#### Damage to diversity, equity, and inclusion

Harassers typically target research focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and researchers who are women and/or members of minoritized communities. By design, this threatens the research itself, hamstringing fruitful and essential exploration, slowing "real-world" changes that could result from that research, and damaging the university's ability to sustain a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace.

## GAPS IN THE UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSE

The University of Michigan has taken a number of steps to deal with threats and harassment. For instance, U-M provides advice about how to engage on social media; we have quick-response protocols to assemble key people in crises; and across many of our schools, colleges, units and Michigan Medicine, staff and faculty are finding and creating their own solutions. DPSS has been building its threat assessment capabilities. And in support of students, the Dean [of Students]' Behavioral Intervention Team identifies and responds to potential dangers.

These efforts are valuable, but they are not enough. Targeted faculty often do not know where to find help or, when they seek it, feel that they've been turned away. This only intensifies the traumatic and dispiriting effects of being harassed. We know at least one faculty member who has left the University and others who have considered doing so because they felt the University failed to support them.

The shortcomings in our response include, but are not limited to, the following:

- It is hard to find information about the University's existing resources, such as threat assessments; Special Victims advocates; protocols for hiding contact information on MCommunity and securing email and websites; and advice for dealing with internet trolls. Many in our community are unaware these resources even exist.
- DPSS provides services for some targeted individuals. But many incidents don't rise to the level of criminal behavior or don't merit sustained police engagement. In such situations, faculty often sense they're being told their situation isn't "terrible enough" for institutional support. So they feel isolated, disrespected, discounted, and at a loss for what to do to protect themselves.
- When a harasser makes a false accusation of unethical behavior, the accused faculty member may feel there is no way to clear their name or that the University will not issue clear public statements of support. This is also important when accusations are made by students or even fellow faculty.
- Similarly, some faculty targeted for "controversial" research or teaching believe the University has failed to stand by their work or their right to pursue it.
- Many staff who work with targeted faculty are not well informed about logistical options such as changing classrooms or offices, or securing faculty websites and email accounts.

When faculty cannot find or do not receive support, they typically feel isolated and alone, even when the University understands the incident and has responded to the best of its current ability. A number of factors contribute to such feelings:

- *Confusion and/or lack of awareness regarding resources:* We heard frequently from faculty and unit leaders supporting them that they did not know where to turn for help as an incident unfolded.
- *Gaps in resources:* In some cases the University's ability to respond is limited. For example, harassing social media posts can be reported to social media companies, but

this takes time and the outcomes are uncertain. Likewise, the University has been unable to provide legal counsel in some cases where faculty have been victims of sustained targeting. In such cases, targeted faculty feel our responses have been inadequate, sometimes grossly so. Many sense an invisible “terribleness meter”—if one's problem is judged to be “not terrible enough,” the University will leave the targeted faculty member isolated and bearing the burden of a great deal of difficult work.

- *Fear of lack of support for ideas:* Several faculty members expressed a fear that if they are targeted for “controversial” research, or if public or political pressure gets too “hot,” University leaders may disavow that research and even the faculty themselves. Even tepid support can feel like no support at all. As one department chair put it, “I don’t feel like the University would neglect my physical safety. But I think a lot of us are concerned that if push comes to shove, they won’t have our backs in terms of what we’re publishing.”
- *Lack of follow-through:* Some faculty reported feeling that after they reported a problem, there was an initial burst of activity...followed by silence. They were not given updates about research or other actions undertaken on their behalf.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### A word of caution

Faculty cautioned us repeatedly that one must take care in describing incidents of harassment. Some individuals, even those who are “used to it,” and soldier on with little outward sign of strain, can be retraumatized by such descriptions even years after an incident. We strive to honor this concern and urge that it be kept in mind by those who design improved responses.

### Faculty input: some themes

In our conversations with faculty, we asked about what had helped them deal with being targeted. They gave us a great many ideas, most of which are addressed in the recommendations below, but we wanted to highlight a few things that were particularly helpful when they went right:

- Having at least one person they could consistently connect with for information and reassurance--and who understood and empathized with their situation.
- Knowing the protocol for whom to contact in a developing situation (this was important to faculty and unit leaders alike).
- Feeling the university is willing to take action beyond lip service to protect and defend them.
- Knowing that the university supported them and their research--and was willing to say so publicly.
- Being able to access team support in different functional areas, such as communications, legal, technology, and facilities.
- Receiving guidance for assessing the seriousness of a situation, including in some cases having a formal threat assessment conducted.
- Connecting to a mutually supportive network of other faculty who have shared this experience.
- Feeling support to take actions to protect their own safety, even when such steps are outside the university’s purview.

## **Primary Recommendations**

### **Sponsor and coordinate anti-harassment efforts at the executive level**

Many units and functional teams are addressing these concerns, but they are doing so in silos, with little coordination or even awareness of parallel efforts. This leads to confusion, inefficiency, and missed opportunities for comprehensive solutions.

Given the need for central coordination we recommend that these efforts be led by the provost’s office, and that the provost engage other units--particularly OGC, ITS, and the Office of Research, as well as Communications--at the executive level to review existing efforts, then coordinate a consistent, cohesive set of responses.

This is our most important recommendation.

## **Expand the university's threat assessment and management capacity**

We recommend that the university review and expand its threat assessment and management capabilities.

We looked at three Big Ten peers to see how they handled threat assessment and response: Pennsylvania State University and the University of Iowa, which are recognized as leaders in this area, and the University of Illinois, which is in the process of expanding its staffing and capacity. Each has built or is building flexible, cross-functional teams to respond to the potential of active shooters and other campus threats.

Many threat assessment teams were created after the mass shooting at Virginia Tech University, where warning signs about the assailant went unheeded. Although not originally developed to support threatened or harassed faculty, these programs have successfully expanded to do so.

Core components of these programs include:

- Full-time leadership and dedicated staff with expertise in threat assessment who do not have significant outside duties that would distract from this core work.
- Representation on the team of the university's department of public safety. Law enforcement agencies have access to information about individuals or emerging situations that others may not have. (These teams also have formal MOUs allowing all members to view that information.)
  - At other universities, these teams may or may not be led from a police department. Iowa's is, for example, while Illinois' is not. There are trade-offs to consider that are beyond this work group's scope, but that should be addressed by any team that might implement this recommendation.
- Many faculty have concerns about engaging law enforcement in these matters, and so the system should also provide robust reporting options for targeted people who have concerns about dealing directly with police. It will be important to include that perspective in the planning for and creation of such a program.
- Case managers who serve as points of contact with affected individuals, and who are responsible for ongoing communications and updates
- An extended team or committee representing key areas of the university such as communications, HR, Student Life, ITS, the Provost's Office, OGC, faculty, etc.
- Proactive, broad-based outreach across campus to ensure the community is aware of the service and how to use it.

These teams are highly networked across their campuses, with representatives from relevant functional areas. The teams meet regularly and can be convened quickly and flexibly to address emerging issues.

In fact, the University of Michigan has its own example of just such a structure. The Dean [of Students'] Behavioral Intervention Team (DBIT) meets regularly to identify and support students who may be a threat to themselves or others, or who have been

threatened or harassed themselves, whether from university or external sources. Including representatives from key areas including DPSS, the Dean of Students' office, CAPS, ECRT, Public Affairs and others, the team assesses threats, then makes and executes plans to help students who are making threats, acting erratically, and/or talking about self-harm or suicide. The focus, as the team puts it, is on how to *engage* the person, rather than on *enforcement*.

The key virtue of this structure is that it provides flexible, broad support. When a situation rises to the level of criminal enforcement or legal action, DPSS or OGC step in to intervene. In situations that don't meet those thresholds, a number of people and services provide support. The DBIT team, built on proven models, works.

But there is no such structure to support faculty or staff. This is perhaps the primary reason that faculty so often encounter gaps in our response: there is no system to provide support if a situation doesn't rate high enough on the "terribleness meter."

We recommend a University-wide system modeled on those that work here and at peer institutions. One option may be expanding our existing DBIT team to include support for faculty (and ideally staff). Such details are beyond the scope of this committee. But we recommend that any such system include the core components, listed above, that are common to such teams. At a more philosophical level, our strategies need to account for the fact that in most of these situations, there is no clear line between the professional and personal, and so institutional support needs to be broad and flexible in what it covers and how it takes action.

### **Expand a case management approach**

Over and over we heard targeted faculty say they did not know whom to call for help, or if they did, that weeks or months would go by without updates. Others were frustrated that their situation, however bad, did not rise to a level of sustained intervention by law enforcement, OGC, or HR.

To help address this need, DPSS has implemented a case management strategy in place that has a 2 week, 30 day, and 6 month follow up when situations are reported to DPSS.

We strongly recommend assigning an office or committee to explore ways to extend the DPSS case management strategy to a university team along the lines of those at other universities. This team should have sufficient staffing and resources to manage harassment and threats that do not meet the criminal threshold of DPSS or OGC, and reporting mechanisms that provide an alternative to targeted community members who have concerns about working directly with police.

Ideally, this would be integrated into the broader threat assessment and management approach described above, and would provide targeted faculty with a single point of contact for updates, questions, and reassurance. Penn State, Illinois, and Iowa follow

such a case management strategy. This means that each targeted individual is assigned a particular person who serves as a point of contact, answers questions, and provides updates.

### **Until a case management structure can be created, assign a single person to be the point of contact in each case**

Our current approach to threat/harassment situations is typically to convene an ad hoc group with representatives from relevant units. In most cases, no single person serves as the faculty member's point of contact. We recommend assigning one person to each incident as a habit and best practice.

This contact person could be someone from a Central unit or a school or college. Their role would likely vary depending on the situation, but they would have a common set of responsibilities:

- Serve as the person to provide updates and answer the faculty member's questions; and to pass information from the targeted faculty to those managing the case
- Connect the faculty member to resources as needed
- Check in regularly, even if only to provide “no-update updates” on progress.
- Serve, when appropriate, as a proxy for the faculty member when repeated questions or administrative tasks arise, to alleviate the stress of continually responding to such demands.

### **Integrate some of these recommendations into the DEI 2.0 strategic plan**

Because diversity, equity, and inclusion are fundamental factors in the great majority of these incidents, it makes sense to integrate responses into our formal DEI plans for visibility and accountability. We recommend that any adopted recommendations should be considered for inclusion in the 2.0 plan.

## **Communications-Specific Recommendations**

### **Provide full-throated support for individual faculty and for academic freedom**

Threats, intimidation, and harassment of faculty for their research or based on their identities is not only a matter of an individual's physical safety and mental health. It is a clear and dangerous attack on academic freedom and freedom of speech — indeed, on the entire academic endeavor. Whether these threats come from politicians, from interest groups, or from individuals, the common goal is to push certain people and ideas off the public stage, to remove them from the free exchange of ideas. It is incumbent on U-M, and all colleges and universities, to counter these attacks in strong and unequivocal language.

That said, not every faculty member wants their situation to be public. And in many cases, going public about threats would only encourage more threats.



But in *all* cases—especially those that become public—it is important for faculty to feel they have the support of the institution, not just to ensure their physical and emotional safety, but to support their bold engagement with the very research and teaching that may have made them targets in the first place. In the current political and social climate, it is critical to faculty to hear unequivocal support for the academic endeavor generally, and their own in particular.

The university should create flexible protocols to provide statements of support (either publicly and/or privately to the targeted faculty member) from top leadership (provost, president, dean) for the faculty member's value to the university, the worth of pursuing research where it leads, and the importance of academic freedom and free speech to the institution and the nation. For a potential model, [see this one from the University of Illinois](#).

This approach will require careful planning and will need to be nuanced to cover situations in which such a statement of support could be inappropriate (e.g., in which a faculty member may credibly be accused of unethical or illegal behavior).

We must also provide public support when accused faculty are cleared of wrongdoing. We are aware of situations in which dubious or outright incredible claims have been made against faculty, and which investigation proved to be baseless. But the policy of not publicizing investigations meant that the faculty member could not satisfactorily clear their name. Implementing this approach will require thoughtful consideration of the ethical, practical, and legal implications, but we believe it will be worth the effort.

Finally, we want to be clear that “support” may mean different things for different faculty members, and the wishes of targeted faculty should take precedence in how this support, including any statements, is delivered.

### **Significantly increase the visibility of existing threat assessment services**

DPSS does have an existing threat management program. However, it is small (one FT position), and awareness of its existence is very low; even members of this work group did not know about it, and it is not mentioned on DPSS's website. We know DPSS is working to increase awareness of this program; we appreciate these efforts.

To be effective, a threat assessment team program must be visible to the whole community. It only works when people are aware it exists and feel safe sharing information with it. We spoke with other universities about their threat assessment and management teams and noted that in each case, extensive, proactive communication about the program's existence was essential to its success. We recommend that the university and DPSS invest in strategic outreach about the program, with a particular emphasis on reaching faculty and units that have been most affected.

## Expand online resources and make existing ones easier to find

The University already provides a number of helpful resources and could extend that content even further. Currently, [UMSocial's website](#) provides a wide range of advice and resources. [Public Affairs created a set of guidelines](#) for those dealing with threats and harassment, though it is not currently publicly available. ITS provides [guidance for safe computing](#). But awareness of these materials is low, and their accessibility limited. There are other good sources of help outside the University, such as PEN America's [Online Harassment Field Guide](#) or [The University of Iowa's](#) online guide for faculty support, which we can link to prominently or emulate.

We recommend the following actions:

- *Make [Public Affairs' guidelines](#) more accessible online.* And use the [Iowa guide](#) as a model for expanding and posting it.
- *Promote Digital Security information:* Make faculty fully aware of tools to protect themselves on University websites, for example removing data such as office location from MCommunity and departmental websites. U-M's ITS office provides [guidance for maintaining digital security for computers, email, and websites](#). Ensuring that faculty and relevant staff are aware of these options can go a long way toward creating a stronger sense of security. Specific recommendations, some of which are already being implemented, include:
  - Proactively identify potential faculty targets in order to protect their accounts
  - Provide resources for home computers as well as office machines
  - Provide technical support to family members of targeted individuals
  - Identify U-M websites that may be targeted by DOS and other attacks
  - Enhance monitoring of email accounts to watch for abuse
- *Decision flowchart:* Threat situations can be complex and quickly moving. We should provide guidance to faculty, unit leaders, and support staff in the form of decision trees or flowcharts that identify key questions, decision points, and links to appropriate resources.
- *Designate an expert for counseling:* Whether through FASSCO or another source, consider assigning a point of contact who specializes in the areas of trauma and threat, and who can be a resource for faculty who would like counseling.

## Review and more broadly communicate protocols for events

We should review our current protocols for managing events that are likely to be controversial or targets for disruption. Because the landscape around events and speech has changed, with legitimate fears of violence and attention-seekers looking to score social media points through disruption, we should find out whether our current procedures (for instance, convening "hecker panels") remain adequate and consider alternatives or enhancements. For example, Harvard has established a system to quickly move in-person events to an online format in case of disruptions.

We should be sure our protocols are clearly documented and easily accessible. Unit administrators and communicators need all relevant information, including cautions and protocols for engaging Public Affairs and other appropriate units.

We may need a larger pool of trained staff who can work on heckler panels. This would relieve a small group of this burden and ensure that all concerned understand the protocols and potential problems of setting up such a panel.

## **Additional Recommendations**

### **Survey faculty**

Members of our group have worked on this problem for years. Yet even we were surprised by what we heard about how many faculty have experienced threats and harassment.

We know that women, people of color, Jews, and LGBTQ+ faculty are the most frequent targets, though not the only ones. We know most cases are concentrated among certain departments and areas of research and teaching. But we have no precise knowledge of how many have been targeted. We must develop a better understanding of the problem's scope.

How many faculty have been threatened or harassed because of their research, teaching, or identity? How many in the past year? How many have changed their research as a result? Their degree of public engagement? Their home situation? How many have quit social media? Or even left the University? How many self-censor in public to reduce their risks of being targeted? Anecdotally we know of faculty who have made all of these choices.

We will develop better responses if we understand the problem's scale and cost. So we recommend a comprehensive faculty survey, perhaps through ADVANCE if it has capacity, or via other trusted, existing source.

### **Survey schools, colleges, and units**

To improve our training, we need to know about units' current resources and needs. How great a problem are threats and harassment in their areas? What protocols or systems do they have in place to address concerns? Are unit leaders aware of resources outside their unit, or whom to contact with questions? We recommend that any survey of faculty include an additional component for SCU leadership.

### **Support and promote scholar networks inside and beyond the university**

Faculty often find support from other faculty, both at U-M and other universities. Scholarly networks generally can provide connections, advice, and resources; colleagues can be a crucial source of emotional support. More formal networks also exist, and the University would do well to support their work and increase awareness of

them. One example is the [Diversity Scholars Network](#), organized by U-M's National Center for Institutional Diversity. Its mission is to “foster academic, educational, and social connections and environments that facilitate the professional success of diversity scholars.” In practice, the Network has provided targeted faculty with allies and supporters who speak up publicly on their behalf, advocate for their work, and offer emotional and logistical support. Boosting efforts like these can greatly extend U-M's impact.

### **Offer training and education to appropriate people and teams**

We recommend optional training to those who can support targeted faculty, such as HR staff, department chairs and other unit leaders, unit communicators, etc.

We recommend including material about DPSS's threat assessment services in all new faculty orientation.

We can also point faculty and units to outside organizations with deep experience in the areas of harassment, threats, and free speech for institutional training and individual coaching. For example, PEN America—which has worked for many years to support the free speech and human rights of journalists, writers, and academics—offers training in [online abuse](#) and [free speech on campus](#), not only to faculty but also to leaders and support staff.

### **Establish policies and best practices for protecting classrooms and offices**

The classroom has become a frequent target of threatening behavior, both by enrolled students and outsiders. This issue is largely beyond the scope of this work group. But we offer the following suggestions raised by administrators and facilities and technology staff:

- Conduct a professional assessment of best practices for “protected” classrooms for use by targeted faculty. (This service could be provided by DPSS.)
- Clarify protocols for classroom situations involving student and non-student disruptors; ensure that unit leaders and facilities teams are aware of them.
- Explore ways to identify individuals who repeatedly harass or threaten classroom spaces and take appropriate action (this would be core work for a threat assessment team).
- Create protocols for moving classes to different locations in the middle of academic terms. (LSA is currently piloting an approach.)
- Consider limiting public view of classroom locations.
- Make it easy to to remove office locations from MCommunity and U-M webpages.
- Establish protocols for a faculty member to change offices for security reasons.

### **Provide options and support for faculty to take protective action on their own**

Even with the steps recommended above, some faculty may want to take further steps to feel safe. In cases where the University—for reasons of law, policy, or capacity—cannot

directly address the problem, faculty have asked for help in finding their own resources. We suggest:

- *Establish a referral network of private investigators and security firms.* These firms could provide services such as home protection when DPSS or other law enforcement cannot do so. Because targeted faculty have expressed concern about whether their work or identities would be treated by such services with dignity and respect, the University's role could include vetting these services for those qualities, negotiating rates on behalf of faculty, and/or even paying the cost in certain circumstances.
- *Evaluate the effectiveness of services* that help remove personal information from the internet, and cover the costs of these services.
- *Cover the costs of expenses* for those whose safety has been explicitly threatened and who have to move locations temporarily or permanently.

### **Conduct further benchmarking of proven approaches used at other institutions**

Our work group's ability to gather other institutions' best practices was limited but very fruitful. We strongly recommend building on what we learned through a more structured benchmarking process with individual institutions and umbrella organizations such as CASE or AAUP.

## **CONCLUSION**

Harassment and intimidation of faculty is a significant problem, even a crisis for the institution and its people. For many faculty — especially for people of color, LGBTQ+ people, Jews, women, and those whose research and teaching focus on equity, reproductive health, and social justice — living and working in a rainstorm of threats and harassment has become business as usual. The effects on individuals are often traumatic, affecting their health and well-being, their families and colleagues, and their scholarly productivity. The damage to the University of Michigan is profound and in many ways unquantifiable; it ranges across the entire institution, from Michigan Medicine to academic units and the administration. Harassment and threats have done real and specific damage to faculty's ability to teach and conduct research, to engage in public scholarship, to accept leadership positions that are likely to be targeted, and even to remain at the university.

Responding to these threats calls on people and expertise across the entire institution, including in public safety, technology, communications, facilities, legal affairs, policy-making, and more. But even as an increasing number of people and teams have been pulled into managing these situations, the university's responses typically remain ad hoc and uncoordinated. Many of us who work on these issues remain unaware of others doing similar or complementary work in other units or fields.

The blunt truth is that the University of Michigan lags behind many of its peers in confronting this problem.

The good news is that the University already possesses expertise and experience in dealing with threats and harassment, from individuals who have been through it many times to teams that have built up internal resources and protocols. Our committee recognizes the importance of the work done so far, and we see it as a strong foundation on which to build a more strategic, integrated, and comprehensive approach to managing threats and harassment, and protecting targeted members of our community. By doing so, we will protect and strengthen our ability to carry out the University's essential missions.