



THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS is committed to protecting the academic freedom and personal safety of our scholars. Nationally, unfair attacks on scholars have increased, often in social media, on message boards, and through other online forums. These “trolling attacks” can be professionally disruptive and personally difficult. Unit executive officers are the first point of contact in mobilizing resources to support and assist faculty members targeted by one of these attacks.

These incidents often escalate quickly and can be very intense even if they are brief. Time is of the essence to notify the appropriate campus offices quickly, connect the scholar with available resources, and provide support.

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RESOURCES

for

UNIT EXECUTIVE OFFICERS ASSISTING
SCHOLARS TARGETED
IN TROLLING ATTACKS

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



IMMEDIATE ACTION

- ▶ **Is the scholar in immediate physical danger?**
YES: call 9-1-1.
NO: continue with steps below.
- ▶ **Document** the nature of the attack using the form found at: go.illinois.edu/trollinginformation.
- ▶ **Confirm** that UIPD has been contacted. If not, do so.
- ▶ **Provide** the “[Responding to Trolling Attacks](#)” handout to the scholar if he or she hasn’t already received it.
- ▶ **Mobilize** University resources by contacting the following:
 - Dean campus directory
 - Office of the Provost 217-333-6677
 - UIPD 217-333-1216
 - Public Affairs 217-333-5010
 - Faculty/Staff Assistance Services 217-244-5312
 - Technology Services/unit IT 217-244-7000
- ▶ **Prepare** and distribute to faculty within the unit a statement of support as quickly as possible, ideally within hours of the attack. Keep in mind that the statement will reach faculty, staff, and students in the unit; faculty in the discipline; and people in the community. Public Affairs can provide assistance in crafting the statement.

The statement should contain the following elements:

- A commitment to academic freedom
- A statement recognizing the faculty member’s standing in the field (*where applicable*)
- A statement supporting the research (*where applicable*)

Here is a sample message:

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is committed to academic freedom. SCHOLAR NAME is an established and admired scholar in DISCIPLINARY AREA and a valued member of our university. As with all of our scholars at the University of Illinois, PROFESSOR NAME has the right of academic freedom necessary to pursue scholarship and research on important subjects and to reach conclusions even if some might disagree with those conclusions. Exploring challenging and important questions is exactly what scholars in a world-class university should be doing.

- ▶ **Prepare staff** to handle harassing phone calls and inquiries. Provide them with language:
 - “I appreciate your interest in this issue. Calls on this topic are being handled by Public Affairs. Would you like me to transfer you to that office?”
- ▶ **Students** may be uncomfortable attending class or may have questions about the attack. Talk to the instructor about how to handle them. Be prepared to move classrooms. Discuss whether to have a substitute instructor. Offer ideas about alternative student activities while the attack is occurring.
 - There may be an impact on other classes, even classes not taught by the faculty member. Discuss this possibility with the advising team and faculty.
- ▶ **Faculty and staff** of the home unit may want to show support. Identify ways they can assist. Those can range from speaking publicly in defense of the person who has been attacked to talking through what has happened.
- ▶ **Other faculty** may worry about their safety and vulnerability to these attacks. Take these concerns seriously. Connect them with appropriate resources.
- ▶ **Co-authors and collaborators** may be affected, as the attack may have repercussions beyond campus. It may be beneficial to contact the relevant disciplinary organizations.

The effects of the attack will linger beyond the immediate episode. The scholar may lose trust in the broader community or experience reduced confidence. Connect the scholar with Faculty/Staff Assistance Services, who can assist with any recurring personal issues. Follow up with the scholar periodically.

Be aware that the attack may have implications for promotion and tenure. The faculty member may experience a decline in productivity. Be sure to discuss this with the faculty member in the months after the attack. Consider the possibility of tenure rollback. Keep in mind, when soliciting external evaluations for the promotion process, that the attack may affect the scholar’s reputation.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE TROLLING ATTACK

The form at go.illinois.edu/trollinginformation allows people reporting attacks to share information in one place, so they don’t have to repeat it to those who are providing support. We recommend that the unit executive officer and the scholar complete the form together. The information recorded is not presumed to be exhaustive, and the form includes an open-ended space to add any information not specifically requested.

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES CHECKLIST

- ▶ **UIPD** **217-333-1216**
Public Safety will help assess the situation and ensure that support and investigative action can begin immediately.
- ▶ **Dean** **campus directory**
Inform the dean as quickly as possible. The unit administration can assist with everything from identifying alternate space for classes to ensuring that campus administration services are mobilized.
- ▶ **Technology** **217-244-7000**
To minimize the spread of a trolling attack, alert the appropriate IT experts (Technology Services or unit IT) to aid in managing the scholar’s online presence.
- ▶ **Public Affairs** **217-333-5010**
Contact Public Affairs, who can handle media queries and coordinate with the college’s communications professional to assist with a communications strategy.
- ▶ **Faculty/Staff Assistance Services** **217-244-5312**
The professionals at FSAS provide counseling support to faculty under attack and employees affected.
- ▶ **Office of the Dean of Students** **217-333-0050**
Trolling attacks can be unsettling for students. ODOS can provide advocacy and support and can also help make connections to appropriate counseling services.
- ▶ **Threat Assessment Team** **217-333-1216**
If the attack is ongoing, UIPD will convene the Threat Assessment Team to monitor and access resources necessary to ensure the safety of the person who is under attack.