

College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences
Protocol on Public Scholarship and Harassment
January 2023

If College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences faculty or academics units find themselves under attack from constituencies outside the university concerning public statements made by a faculty member, the College recommends the following course of action:

1. The individual under attack should inform the appropriate chair/head/director as well as the CLAHS Director of Communications, and Debra Stoudt, Associate Dean, in the Office of the Dean. The Director of Communications will be able to help with media positioning and the Associate Dean may be able to assist with the mobilization of resources within the College and the university. All parties should be informed of the parameters of the attack: what sparked it, what forms it has taken so far, whether it seems to have traction to continue a cycle of harassment into the future, etc.
2. The chair/head/director should first address the safety of the individual under attack and assist with the mobilization of resources identified below. After gathering the facts of the case and consulting those involved as well as the Office of the Dean the chair/head/director should condemn the harassment and offer a statement of support for the individual under attack. The chair/head/director may need to address issues of accuracy, as noted by the AAUP in “What You Can Do about Targeted Online Harassment, “Although the administration is certainly free to express disapproval of the faculty member’s speech, the administration may need to be reminded that a number of sensationalized reports of faculty members’ speech or online posts have been taken out of context. Reports may not correctly reflect the actual speech.”
3. If the initial incident that sparked harassment relates to a media appearance, the chair/head/director and the Office of the Dean should consult Tracy Vosburgh, Vice-President of Communications and Marketing.
4. The chair/head/director may consider contacting the Office for Equity and Accessibility (<https://oea.vt.edu>), which offers guidance in conflict management.
5. The chair/head/director may also consider contacting the national office of the AAUP (academicfreedom@aaup.org), which has resources that may be made available.
6. If there is any concern for safety or any direct threat, the Virginia Tech Police Department (VTPD) encourages anyone to call immediately. The officers may work directly with faculty/researcher supervisors to inform them of the situation. They also may work closely with outside law enforcement, although some laws

related to online/social media harassment currently are disputed. According to Lt. Tony Haga, the contact at VTPD: “It is also important to note that threats, harassment, and stalking are all very different types of offenses, some of which are not prosecutable under Virginia Statute.”

All faculty considering engaging in more explicitly public-facing academic work should consider attending media training workshops offered by VT Media Relations. See <https://vtnews.vt.edu/unirel-mediatraining.html>.