

# Scholarship & Safety: A Guide for CU Denver

Created originally [by CU Boulder](#)

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## Introduction

University faculty members, graduate and undergraduate students, and staff increasingly have to navigate challenges that arise when scholarly or creative work receives public attention or criticism. This guide is provided as part of CU Denver's commitment to [Academic Freedom](#) and to [Freedom of Expression](#), along with its concomitant commitment to the health, safety, and well-being of everyone in the CU Denver campus community. Specifically, it is designed to advise those who publish and engage in public scholarship and art, i.e., faculty, staff, and students.

Ultimately, this guide aims to support and provide assistance and resources to aid in responding to individuals and organizations who aggressively contact or target faculty, students, employees, and scholars for the content of their public scholarship, research area, or artistic endeavors. These aggressive tactics are not normally employed through the scholarly process but often occur through social media, personal communications, and other media. It is important to note that such aggressive tactics may be used disproportionately on scholars who are underrepresented in the academy, such as scholars of color, women scholars, and/or LGBTQ+ scholars. There are also examples of faculty being the targets of such tactics based on politics.

Other efforts that draw attention to faculty also occur in mainstream media outlets (see the section of this website titled "Scholarship in the modern digital media environment"), both of which may, at times, quote or criticize faculty, staff, graduate students, or undergraduate students for their research, essays or editorials, programs, or teaching. The University is committed to the tenets and protections of academic freedom and will support its community to enable free expression and inquiry.

For resources related to policies and procedures that cover harassment based on a protected class, please contact the [Office of Equity](#).

## Scholarship in the Modern Digital Media Environment

Our faculty, staff, and students often publish in journals and scholarly venues throughout the world. This scholarship finds its way into a variety of media spaces—from discipline-based publications, to publications that focus on academic scholarship

and innovation, to mainstream national news publications, daily newspapers, local and national TV and radio broadcasts, podcasts, blogs, and social media.

Added to all this is social media, which analysis shows is a regular source of news for some [18% of Americans](#), according to data gathered in 2019–20 by the Pew Research Center.

## **Responding to Communication from Individuals & Groups Outside the University**

Faculty, staff, and students can choose whether to respond to personal contacts of any kind regarding their scholarship and academic work. They are not obligated to do so and should consider whether responding is a productive use of their time and attention.

If a response is appropriate, as a public university, CU Denver encourages faculty and students to engage with the public in a positive, productive context, particularly when advancing their scholarship, research and creative work, and describing its positive impact on humanity. Receiving a negative response is sometimes what these contacts want to provoke.

Regents Policy affirms our commitment to Academic Freedom and outlines the high expectations for all when communicating and engaging: “The University of Colorado values academic freedom, diversity, and respect for all persons. The university is committed to the principle of non-discrimination and does not tolerate harassment on any basis, including race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, marital status, political affiliation, or political philosophy. **Members of the university community are expected to treat colleagues, co-workers, and students with respect, professionalism, and dignity in all interactions and communications.**” [Regent Policy 8.](#)

Faculty, staff, or students who choose to respond to criticism, a challenge, or an attack, are expected to do so with respect, using facts, evidence, reason, and data in the tradition of scholarly debate and exchange.

## **Responding to a Critical Opinion Piece in the Media**

Research, scholarship, and creative work with public policy implications often are debated in public spheres such as local and national newspapers and magazines. At times, faculty and staff may be asked or choose to publish in these outlets to respond to scrutiny or criticism of their work. If a faculty member or a student wishes to submit an opinion piece to a local or national publication in refutation of claims made against them or their research in that publication or in another media outlet, they are advised to access campus support mechanisms and work in partnership with a media professional on the CU Denver UCOMM team [[LINK](#)]

With extensive experience in working with global media, a media relations professional in UCOMM can assist with crafting, editing, and placing an op-ed piece, provide other helpful strategies in navigating digital and social media environments, and can assist in dealing with critical or aggressive audiences.

In addition to working with a media relations professional in UCOMM, faculty, students, and staff are advised to contact their department chair, advisor, dean, and unit-based communicator when they intend to submit an op-ed in response to public or media criticism.

The same notifications are recommended when one is pro-actively writing about their research in a popular venue. These notifications will allow the university to better support and provide resources to faculty, students, and staff, rather than to prevent these types of engagements. It is especially important for faculty and students to reach out to the UCOMM media experts when they believe their research has been mischaracterized and a correction is warranted.

## **Responding to Critical Emails, Letters, or Social Media Posts**

It is important to distinguish between a communication that is critical of someone's scholarship and a communication that constitutes a threat or an attack or is part of targeted harassment. Threatening and harassing communications are often unsigned, signed with obviously fake or misleading names, or provide an email address but no specific identity.

Members of the CU Denver community have the choice to respond to or ignore a critical email and other forms of communications from outside the university. It is inadvisable, however, to respond to angry, highly partisan responses that engage in ad hominem or personal attacks.

Responding to email communication may result in your response being broadcast on social media or other venues. Even if you respond thinking you are entering into a private conversation, someone can take your response and use it in ways you may not want.

Knowing that these criticisms can be upsetting and disruptive, the university wants to provide support and assistance to faculty, staff and others facing such attacks. If you need advice on responding to a critical but non-threatening email, letter, or social media post, consult a communicator from your college or school or the media relations team in UCOMM for advice on crafting an effective response.

Often sharing the e-mail with a colleague or fellow student can provide a second set of eyes or additional viewpoint on the communication. Sharing the communication helps

you with context on the language in the communication, its tone, and whether there is something that you may be overlooking or underestimating. The campus human resources office and CARE teams can also provide support and helpful context to concerning communications for employees and students.

## **Protecting Private Information: BE PROACTIVE**

Interacting with unknown parties also raises the potential for a person's private information to be disclosed and disseminated, otherwise known as doxxing. There are ways to minimize the possibility of doxxing, including using a virtual private network, minimizing the disclosure of information on social media and limiting social media contacts to private groups, reviewing past social media posts and removing those that contain personal information, and asking vendors such as Google to remove personal information that has been inappropriately revealed to others. Please remember to use virus protection and malware detection programs and to change passwords regularly.

Being proactive to "google" one's own name/information is important BEFORE publication or dissemination. This could include asking a department to remove one's office location or office phone number from a publicly facing website. Best practice is to regularly check for your name and information so that you can respond quickly.

## **Responding to Threats or Aggressive Contact**

Any language in a communication that contains actual or implied threats of harm should be reported immediately to the Auraria Police Department or their local police department (often an employee's "home" police department can be supportive) and to a department chair, dean, the Provost's Office and the [CARE Team](#) for students and [FAST](#) team for employees. This applies to all forms of communication, including emails, snail mail, social media posts, telephone calls or messages, or in person encounters. This applies whether the person making the actual or implied threat is affiliated with or is external to CU. If anyone feels the threat, harassment or stalking behavior is based in any way on protected class status, it should also be reported to the [Office of Equity](#).

Faculty, staff and students are not recommended to respond to anything that resembles a threat and to report it immediately to the police.

Likewise, any mention of personal information (outside of what is included in the university's directory or considered public information), such as office location, home address, or home phone number on an individual's or organization's website should also be reported immediately to the above authorities.

If your personal information is posted on social media, please contact the social media provider and request that your information be taken down. Many social media providers require the impacted person to make the takedown request and the University cannot

do that on your behalf. UCOMM and others can help with the language and how to make the request, but you may need to contact the provider.

## Managing Targeted Campaigns & Online Harassment

Receiving a cache of emails, phone calls, social media, or text messages with similar or identical language within a specific time frame is evidence of a targeted campaign against the faculty member or student. It is always advisable to report targeted campaigns to a department chair and for chairs to report these to the dean and to the Provost's Office.

The goal of this type of online harassment is to intimidate researchers, scholars and artists— to tie up their time with responding to attacks and to direct negative attention toward those scholars and artists, their departments/institutes and academic homes, and their universities at large.

The process of monitoring and responding to online harassment is best achieved via a collaboration among individual departments, colleges/schools, the Office of the Provost, UCOMM, Auraria Police, FAST/CARE, and other campus entities such as the Office of Equity and the Office of University Counsel. Options that can be deployed in managing online harassment on social media are below, adapted from an excellent guide by the [University of Iowa](#):

1. **Responding.** As mentioned above, if a person or organization is conducting a misinformation campaign on the author or the research, a brief, fact-based response may be appropriate. Remember that this will likely prompt additional activity by harassing people or organizations, but it demonstrates the researcher/author or artist has sought to officially correct the record. Again, always use the same tone of professional, scholarly positioning—resist the urge to engage in verbal combat.
2. **Using an auto email response.** When faculty, students, and others receive a concentrated amount of harassing emails, they might consider using an auto response to let harassers know that they are not engaging and to let non-harassers know that there may be a delay in sending an email response. The auto email response may also indicate that any threatening or harassing emails will be reported to the appropriate authorities. Another option might be to have your emails forwarded to another employee who can be a buffer or a second set of eyes on the e-mails. Office of University Counsel, human resources, and members of UCOMM, can support you through this process.
3. **Reporting/Recording.** If faculty members or graduate students feel at all threatened, notify the parties identified in the preceding section. They should not delete any messages that they and their department receive. They should document the harassment, and save voice messages, emails, screenshots on social platforms

or websites to provide to investigating authorities.

4. **Ignoring.** People who mount campaigns against faculty and students often hope to provoke a negative response, distract them, or otherwise disrupt them from their teaching, research, or artistic pursuits. Don't give them that opportunity.
5. **Blocking.** When managing or responding from a university-affiliated account (such as a college, department, unit, etc.), blocking is rarely advised because they do not prevent the negative comments and campaigns from continuing or deter those involved from finding other ways to engage with you. Blocked individuals often just respond by creating a new e-mail account. By blocking, you lose the opportunity to keep a trail of comments and an ongoing awareness of harassment campaigns and attacks. Please reach out to UCOMM before deciding to block. Again, sometimes having someone else monitor your inbox can be helpful so you are not the only recipient and they can help support you sift through and identify truly concerning/threatening content.

## Getting Support

Experiencing harassment or attacks in response to one's research or art can be challenging and traumatizing. CU Denver stands with its faculty, staff, and students to protect academic freedom and support safety and well-being.

## Support Resources for Faculty, Staff & Students

- [Auraria Police Department](#)
  - **Main Number – Emergency Dispatch**  
303-556-5000
  - **Emergency from a Campus Phone**  
911
  - **Text-a-Tip**  
720-593-TIPS (8477)
  - **Campus Information Hotline**  
1-877-556-EMER (3637)
- [Mental Health/Crisis Support Resources for Students](#)
- [Mental Health/Crisis Support Resources for Employees](#)
- [Victim Services-The Phoenix Center](#)
- [University Communications](#)

### Helpful Links & Articles for Scholars on Responding to Attacks

- [Online Harassment](#) (Field Manual). PEN America.
- [Academic Outrage: When the Culture Wars Go Digital](#). Tressie McMillan Cottom, University of North Carolina.
- [Confronting Threats and Harassment Against Faculty](#). PEN America.
- [Defending Research Against Unfounded Attack](#). The American Psychological Association.

- [Faculty Under Attack](#). Abby L. Ferber, University of Colorado Colorado Springs.
- [Fighting Targeted Harassment of Faculty](#), American Association of University Professors.
- [If There is an Organized Outrage Machine, We Need an Organized Response](#). The Chronicle of Higher Education.
- [Personal Attacks](#). Shea Kinser. Union of Concerned Scientists.
- [Promoting Sociological Research: A Toolkit](#). Compiled by the American Sociological Association's Task Force on Social Media.
- [Science in an Age of Scrutiny: How Scientists Can Respond to Criticism and Personal Attacks](#). The Union of Concerned Scientists.
- [Targeted: Surviving Social Media Attacks](#). Inside Higher Education.
- [Trolling Attacks on Scholars: Executive Officer Action](#). The University of Illinois.
- [When Your Research Is Attacked](#). Alex Zahara. Discard Studies.