Best Practices for Managing Social Media Harassment

Faculty, students, and staff are vulnerable to coordinated social media harassment. Often the goal of this harassment is to silence university members with the threat of a coordinated attack that can result in "doxing" (revealing identifying information like addresses and phone numbers), threats of violence, and advocating for disciplinary action from the university.

If you or someone you know is in danger, contact law enforcement officials immediately. These guidelines are intended for use once safety has been ensured. UCR Campus Police: (951) 827-5222

1. Large social media attacks are intended to make it feel like the majority of platform users feel the same way about an issue. Remember that most harassment of this nature represents a small (but persistent) group and not the majority opinion. Organizations should avoid knee-jerk reactions to what might feel like large-scale criticism.

2. Social media and news wire policies allow local events or individual comments on low-traffic platforms to receive national attention. Harassers are often not community-members and might not have any connection to the university, even though they may portray themselves as having a connection. Practice care when weighing the need to respond to such harassers with the need to safeguard and protect the rights of community members.

3. Generally, negative attention will accompany positive attention. If a community member attains any level of celebrity, negative comments on social media are routine, especially for women, people of color, and underrepresented minorities. Publicity that might not seem controversial (e.g. publishing a book or winning a grant) can draw enough attention to attract social media harassment. It is important to expect and plan for negative attention when engaging with the public.

4. It can be tempting for peers to speak out publicly when they feel as though a community member is being harassed by members of the public. Unfortunately, these kinds of defenses can backfire or prolong the period of harassment and can expose private information which may put the person facing harassment at greater risk. Instead, reach out to the person facing the harassment to ask how you can best support them without making a public statement. Remember, you are not obligated to publicly respond and it is often better to refrain from doing so as many social media harassers are simply looking for a response or emotional reaction.

5. Harassment campaigns often attempt to force an organization to discipline the victim of the harassment. If you are forced to respond to such an attack, avoid revealing any additional information and respond with the university's prepared statement. Phrases like "I cannot comment on personnel matters" or "This issue is being addressed through university processes, but I cannot comment at this time," are helpful. Remember, you cannot speak for the university unless specifically authorized to do so. Instead, refer inquiries to UCR's University Communications.

6. Report abuse: Most reputable websites have a "Report" feature that allows you to tell them about behaviors that violate their terms of use. The site owner may consider banning guilty parties. Avoid sites that do not provide clear options to report bullies.

Students: Contact the Dean of Students: deanofstudents@ucr.edu or (951) 827-6095

Faculty & Staff: Contact the Faculty & Staff Assistance Program: eap@pro-resources.org or (951) 781-0510 or (800) 266-0510 (24-hour hotline)

UCR Information Technology Solutions can help redirect, filter or block harassing emails/phone calls or with securing new emails/phone numbers. Please contact offices above first who will refer you to ITS when needed.