**Facing Trolls on Social Media – What Are Your Options?**

**Summary:** Research shows many adults have experienced harassment online. How those situations are dealt with is very much up to each individual impacted. Here are several options one can consider if they find themselves in a situation where they facing hostile criticism and or threats on social media.

1. **Ignore them:** Trolls are agitators—they want to stir the pot, rile people up, and try to force a response. The more rise they get out of someone, the better they feel about themselves. They want you to react, it is their main goal. Good news is that even the most persistent trolls eventually move on.
2. **Block them**: Several social media platforms allow users to selectively prevent others from following their channel, commenting on their posts or seeing their content altogether. Caution—those that you block are generally notified. This may serve to embolden trolls.
3. **Mute them:** Tired of seeing what someone is saying about you? You may choose to mute them on Twitter. The combination of ignoring and muting users may be the perfect solution, as no one is notified that you’ve taken this action.
4. **Respond**: Misinformation is everywhere. It’s especially frustrating when your name is attached. If you choose to respond to someone who is communicating misinformation about you make sure to follow these steps:
   1. Stick to stating undisputable facts that are not open to interpretation. Trolls are not interested in having rational or open-minded conversations. Keep responses short, concise and above all, factual. If responding, it is best to correct inaccuracies and move on.
   2. Kill them with kindness. Be polite. Professional. Again, factual. It’s been said, “Any time you win an argument online, you’re losing. All anyone really remembers is that you’re combative.” Resist getting defensive or fighting fire with fire.
5. **Monitor:** If you feel harassed or in any way seriously threatened, don’t hesitate to contact the proper authorities and keep a record of what is said. Take screenshots. Save them. They will come in handy if you need to file a police report or take legal action.

**OSC Suggestions/Options to handle media interest**

**Summary:** Amid growing tensions throughout the United States, scholars have increasingly drawn the attention of various fringe media outlets. This has often led to continual aggregation of the story in likeminded websites and subsequent backlash, most notably on social media.

**Note:** The University of Iowa supports its faculty’s right to free speech and academic freedom. The Office of Strategic Communication will not tell you what you can and cannot say publicly. We will do our best to prepare you for the external scrutiny one may face based on something they have written or said publicly, and provide assistance, and statements when appropriate.

1. **Plan ahead. Consider your audience. Notify early.** Whether on social media, in a scholarly journal or during a speech or lecture, it is important to know that your words have the capability to reach a large audience. Sometimes that audience is larger than expected or even intended, which brings a wide range of lenses for your words to be viewed through. Some media outlets are often looking for specific words or phrases that are or could be viewed as controversial in publications, articles and social media posts. In some cases, those words have been taken out of context or twisted to fit an incendiary narrative. Considering all potential audiences and how they will interpret or potentially manipulate your words is valuable. This doesn’t mean you have to alter your scholarship, but it is important to know the risks and potential consequences of research/writing about hot-button issues. Also, if you’re concerned about the response to something you’ve written or said, please feel free to reach out to your DEO and our office before it is published or early on in the process so we can be prepared to assist.
2. **What to do when you’ve been contacted by a news outlet based on something you’ve written or said.** If you are ever contacted for further comment on something you’ve written or said, first take note of what outlet the reporter/writer is representing. If they do not identify in an email or phone call, make sure to ask. How you handle this situation is entirely up to you. We recommend contacting OSC first to discuss a response. Someone from our team can offer advice on the necessary steps, especially when it comes to dealing with fringe media or big national outlets. In some cases, we may suggest providing a prepared statement and in others we may suggest it best not to comment at all.
3. **What to do if you feel your work is being inaccurately represented or an outlet is presenting factually inaccurate information.** You can and probably should request a correction by presenting facts and evidence to support your request. Be advised, for some outlets, there is no reasoning or explaining things in a way that will help them understand. Additionally, don’t expect your request to be “off the record.” They still want you on the record and there is the risk that they can use your quote or a segment of an email or statement against you. It is often best to keep your responses or requests for corrections brief, while sticking to facts over opinions. We strongly recommend discussing these matters with someone in OSC, who can offer advice on dealing with these outlets or assist in requesting the correction. Note: An outlet’s *opinion* of your work or what you said does not fall under this umbrella, even if it is misguided.
4. **Facilitating media requests.** Please forward any and all media requests to OSC, even if you’ve decided to speak with the reporter on your own. This will allow us to track who is getting a hold of you and what kind of stories we should expect. We can also help facilitate or deny those requests on your behalf, depending on your preference, and issue prepared statements when appropriate. We will provide recommendations based on our media experience, but the decision on how to proceed is ultimately up to you.
5. **Trust the news cycle.** The intensity of media or social media firestorms can feel extreme, but they are often relatively short-lived. The news cycle and the consumers of it often find something new to move onto within a few days. If you wish to avoid extending the story’s life, it is best to avoid additional interviews on the matter regardless of the outlet’s validity.