

Statement on open and constructive dialogue

Uwemployees <uwemployees-bounces@lists.uwaterloo.ca>

on behalf of

UWaterloo Communications <msc-comm@uwaterloo.ca>

Thu 5/5/2022 12:01 PM

To: uwemployees@lists.uwaterloo.ca <uwemployees@lists.uwaterloo.ca>

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To:	All employees, including employees at the Affiliated and Federated Institutions of Waterloo, and graduate students
From:	Vivek Goel, President and Vice-Chancellor
Date:	Thursday, May 5, 2022
Subject:	Statement on open and constructive dialogue
Notes:	This email is for information

The past couple of years have placed unique strains on everyone in our world. The pandemic and its associated impacts to the way we all live, learn and work have changed so much about how we interact with the people around us, and with people we've only met virtually on video, by email or on social media.

In many circumstances, discussions about pandemic public health measures have been very passionately charged – understandably so, when life and liberty are the issues at hand. But sometimes passion has translated into personal attacks or has reached levels of harassment or abuse.

It's not just pandemic pressure that has elicited passionate responses between people in recent times – also crossing the line from discussion to abuse. Researchers working in a variety of areas across the University have had to endure some abusive treatment by email and on social media recently. Increasingly, as we seek to bring our research to more audiences, our people

are subject to deeply troubling conduct from individuals around the world – and sometimes from people here on our campus and community.

Anyone involved in public discourse, novel research, even just opening their email or scrolling their social media feed, has experienced big changes in the level of civility in the conversations we are hearing or observing. This isn't a new phenomenon, either. Many have written about the growth of cyberbullying, online harassment, and abuse. It's simply too easy for any of us to write an email, compose a tweet or tap a text message that can harm the recipient.

The consequences of these kinds of behaviours are serious, and real. When the abuse emerges from outside the University, we have a range of supports available to help people manage unwanted and harassing attention. On campus, we have policies in place that protect free expression and academic freedom. We have many appropriate fora to discuss and debate ideas and issues in an honest and responsible pursuit of knowledge. We also have policies that allow us to act if behaviour crosses the line of harassment or unethical behaviour. We will not tolerate any form of harassment in any forum.

To be clear, our mission is to advance learning and knowledge through teaching, research and scholarship in an environment of free expression and inquiry. These freedoms require us to act responsibly, noting that academic freedom is not a license to say or do whatever one pleases, and upholding free expression for all is compromised when some begin to self-censor in an abusive environment.

Ultimately then, the spirit of our mission to seek knowledge through scholarship and learning relies on each of us to conduct ourselves in ways that promote civility and respect no matter where we are working – whether this is in a Senate meeting, an interaction with students in a classroom or posting on social media. It also requires every one of us to participate in university life with care, concern and respect for the people around us. Speaking up against inappropriate conduct one observes is one of the ways to express these values of care, concern and respect.

It's clear that our community must do some healing after two years of isolation and to address this pernicious movement to disrespectful, often hate-fueled dialogue. As we work together to reconnect and rekindle relationships, we must celebrate and preserve the University as a place where we can have different opinions and respectfully challenge one another to think differently. We must

also preserve our values and demonstrate genuine care, concern and respect for all members of our community and the world in which we live.

Resources for dealing with online harassment or unwanted attention

The Conflict Management and Human Rights Office has a range of supports for anyone dealing with conflict, human rights issues or workplace harassment including a [social media abuse help page](#).

The University Communications team offers support for dealing with issues including handling media enquiries, message development and PR handling, social media support, and more. They can also act as spokespeople for the University in responding to email.

If you are in a situation involving unwanted touching or aggressive and threatening behaviour, you can consider contacting the Special Constable Service (ext. 22222 or 519-888-4911) or the [Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office](#).

The University's Employee Assistance Program offers short-term, confidential counselling that includes face-to-face (flexible hours), telephone or online sessions for a variety of reasons. Services for students are available through [Student Care](#).

This message has been published on the [Employee Communication website](#) for the future reference of employees.

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This message is sent to AFIW employees for information purposes. AFIW employees should consult directly with their employer to determine whether and how this message applies at their workplace.

Our mailing address is:
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For more information, contact us at:
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