

Faculty Senate Statement Against Targeted Harassment January 2022

The Faculty Senate of Virginia Tech condemns all acts of targeted harassment.

Targeted harassment campaigns attempt to limit free speech through intimidation and fanning public outrage. These campaigns are usually conducted by external organizations; their tactics include using social media to spread misinformation, partisan reporting, and calls for violent attacks against individuals or small groups. People targeted by these harassment campaigns often receive hate mail, personal threats, and inflammatory messages, calls, or emails from strangers. They are frequently subjected to doxxing (using social media to make private or identifying information public with malicious intent) and bot attacks (using automated web responses to inundate, manipulate, or disrupt an individual's social media accounts). The objective of these behaviors is to scare, harm, intimidate, and silence the targets.

Virginia Tech students and faculty members have experienced targeted harassment. One Virginia Tech faculty member's testimonial about their experience follows:

“As one of many faculty who has been targeted here, my words were misrepresented, my name was smeared in the media, and I received personal threats of harm. Beyond the psychological toll that this situation took on me and leadership in my unit, student learning was interrupted, and students feared for their safety. We must afford students who face targeting the same protections and support that faculty receive. Civil discourse must re-emerge as the expectation, as opposed to the ideal.”

In accordance with Virginia Tech's Principles of Community, the Faculty Senate affirms the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect. We recognize that the goal of targeted harassment is to shut down or circumvent free and civil discourse and is contrary to our principles.

We urge members of the Virginia Tech community to dedicate themselves to constructive communication, and to promote and nurture an environment where civil discourse is “the expectation, as opposed to the ideal.” We are hopeful that members of our community will not be targeted in the future; should they be, we ask that community members support and defend them with compassion. As an institution that values academic freedom and the safety of its community, Virginia Tech must oppose targeted harassment and remain steadfast in our conviction that it is never acceptable.