

Institutional support for MSU faculty and staff (and potentially also students) who are trolled

Strategic Plan Theme: Staff and Faculty Success

Funding Level: Below \$1 million

Facility Needs: Adjustments to existing facilities will be needed

Submitting Unit: College of Arts & Letters

Collaborating colleges/departments/units involved with this proposal.

FASA, College of Arts & Letters, Institutional Diversity and Inclusion

What is the proposal's big theme or idea?

Through a variety of supports, to retain high quality faculty and staff whose innovative work has led them to be trolled either by their own students or colleagues or from the outside on social media or in other fora.

What is the proposal's goal?

Numerous MSU faculty and staff are attacked on social media each year as a result of their scholarly and creative work, teaching and learning activities, classroom engagement, and/or service and outreach commitments. Such attacks whether coming in sudden short bursts or over time, are frightening, traumatic, and create a profound sense of vulnerability. Women and faculty and staff of color are comparatively more likely to be attacked. It is incumbent on MSU, to provide a variety of support mechanisms to targeted faculty and staff employed at the institution and their supervisors, chairpersons, or directors. Such measures should include symbolic support, immediate security response if needed, and management strategies for the short and long-term to deal with the fall out of such attacks.

Define the significance, or impact of your big idea.

Baseline – if MSU wants to recruit and retain high quality faculty, it needs to provide meaningful support in the event that faculty are exposed to traumatic environments - one example being trolled in social media whether the source is internal or external.

Who will be impacted?

MSU faculty and staff across campus and potentially in Grand Rapids, Flint, and Detroit. This could be extended also to support students who are trolled.

What does sustainability for your proposal look like?

Over the course of AY 2021-2022, a group including myself, Deborah Johnson, Jennie Yelvington, Nwando Achebe, Teresa Mastin, and Terah Chambers worked together to do an initial scan of potential support areas on campus. We wish to thank all of those who took part in reviewing and making suggestions in our Google document and/or took part in informational meetings. These include the MSU Police, MSU IT, FEAs, Employee Assistance Program, Dean of Students Office (for incidents involving MSU students), IDI, OIE, OCR, General Counsel, Center for Survivors, and Faculty Grievance and Conflict Resolution Office. As a result of their input, we put together initial recommendations that provide information to faculty and

staff who are trolled and to their supervisors. After final review, we are now in the process of putting these recommendations on the College of Arts & Letters and linking to the IPI websites this semester. A next step would be to integrate them into administrator training.

The majority of work that we have done so far has been to collect information on best practices from peer institutions and to figure out what support mechanisms exist on campus already. These include the above mentioned offices. The voices that have not yet been heard in a meaningful way are those of the faculty and staff who have been attacked. A next step would be to hold general stakeholder meetings to listen to faculty and staff experiences and needs, and also ask for further feedback on the materials that have been developed. The aim would be to identify how existing support mechanisms can be improved to address trolling.

Moving forward, we wish to propose that MSU explore creating a central location where all such incidents are reported. This will ensure a proactive support network response as well as serve as an avenue to collect institutional data on the nature and number of such attacks on a yearly basis. Several peer institutions have created such a mechanism (e.g., University of Illinois), and it would be worthwhile to reach out to these institutions for a conversation as well. While it is the work of all administrators to advocate for trolled faculty and staff in such matters, MSU needs to think through how best to support such employees at an institutional level. Ideally this central location might best be housed in the Office of Civil Rights and provide a similar type of trauma-based support akin to RVSM and the Center for Survivors and potentially with help from POE. In addition, awareness and proactive measures can be building into faculty web presence trainings and in computer science and digital-related and communications coursework on campus, etc.