

Strategies to Protect Yourself Online in the Current Climate

A Guide from the AAUP, the AFT, and Faculty First Responders

In a moment when it is becoming increasingly difficult to predict the repercussions of our online speech and choices, we hope you will find these strategies and resources helpful.

If You Need Support Right Now

- If you are facing suspension, dismissal, or other employment repercussions as a result of your speech online, reach out to your union or AAUP chapter immediately and contact the AAUP national staff.
 - To find your AAUP chapter, visit <https://www.aaup.org/chapters/find-chapter>.
 - To contact the AAUP national, write to academiccfreedom@aaup.org.
 - To contact your AFT union local, reach out to your local union officer or write to highereddept@aft.org.
- If you are facing harassment for your views expressed online, contact Faculty First Responders (FFR) at facultyfirstresponders@gmail.com for peer-to-peer advice and support. (FFR cannot and does not provide legal advice or representation.)

Top Five Tips for Engaging with Social Media

Academic freedom for faculty includes freedom from institutional censorship or discipline when you are speaking or writing as a citizen. Academic staff are protected by the First Amendment and have the right to speak and write as a citizen. Whether you are staff or faculty, if you are concerned about harassment or suspect that your employer will not respect your academic freedom, consider the following.

1. Higher education faculty and staff sometimes use personal social media accounts as part of our work, social commentary, and to communicate with colleagues, friends, and family. Consider your intended audience and set your social media accounts accordingly. If you don't intend to communicate with a wide audience, consider setting your social media accounts to private mode. When prompted, approve the setting to make all previous posts private.
2. Be mindful that anything you post online can be screenshotted and shared.
3. Before posting or reposting online commentary, pause and ask yourself: What is the level of risk associated with sharing this viewpoint and language online, when my employer, students, and the public can see them? What potential backlash may I receive from my employer or other entities when I share my view in these terms?



4. In your social media bios, state that the views expressed through the account represent your own opinions and not your employer. You do not need to name your employer.
5. Consider posting positive statements about positions you support rather than negative statements about positions you disagree with. Some examples could be:
 - A healthy society depends on the free search for knowledge and should not be controlled by the desires of wealthy donors or partisan political aims.
 - What we're fighting for: an accessible, high-quality system of higher ed that promotes innovation and social mobility, and is a bedrock of democracy.
 - College & university faculty teach classes that transform students' lives and run labs that result in lifesaving medical research. They create opportunity and strengthen communities. We must defend higher education, not defund it!
 - Great countries fund science! Medical research at US colleges and universities has brought us lifesaving cancer treatments, advances in genetic testing to prevent disease, and advances in drugs used to treat diabetes and Alzheimer's.

Top Five Digital Safety Tips

1. Use strong, unique, complex passwords and passcodes on devices and accounts. A password manager can save them all for you.
2. Install software updates immediately. Updates are usually security-related.
3. Enable two-factor authentication for all social media and other sensitive accounts.
4. Do not use your employer-provided email address, devices, or campus wifi for nonwork activities, including organizing and any other sensitive activities.
5. Search for your name in common search engines to find out what is available about you online. Put your name in quotation marks to narrow the search. Search both with and without your institution attached to your name.

Three Key AAUP-AFT Member Benefits

1. [Trauma Counseling Programs and Services](#). Taking care of our mental health is necessary if we are to continue doing our work and supporting our students, colleagues, and community members. Online harassment can be scary, isolating, and traumatic. If you are not currently working with a mental health professional, or find yourself needing additional support, the AFT offers services to members who experience workplace trauma.
2. [Legal Services](#).
3. [Occupational Liability Insurance](#). The AFT offers insurance that provides coverage for legal expenses in the event that you are sued for activities performed in the course of your work duties.



Get More Information

- AAUP [Center for the Defense of Academic Freedom](#) (CDAF):
- CDAF [Academic Freedom First Aid Kit](#)
- Additional AAUP Resources:
 - [Legal](#)
 - [Digital Security](#)
 - [Dox Defense](#)
 - [Responding to Freedom of Information Requests \(FOI\)](#)
- AAUP/AFT “[FAQ: Campus Free Speech/Academic Freedom in Politically Charged Times](#)” AAUP [Guide to Targeted Harassment of Faculty](#)
- AFT [Guide to Defending Higher Education in 2025](#)
- Faculty First Responders [Guide to Academic Freedom Self-Defense](#)
- [AFT Know Your Rights Guide: Academic Freedom and Campus Free Speech For Scholars and Students on Visas](#)
- AFT [Mobilization Best Practices](#). Includes information on rights and safety during and while planning rallies and other mobilizations.

