

Policy and Procedures for concerns about Faculty

Background

The Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences (BCS) is committed to the idea that every member of our community has a right to be treated with respect. Outstanding science thrives in a culture where diverse perspectives are heard and valued; it is impaired in a culture that permits bullying or demeaning behavior. We expect all members of the BCS community (BCS, MIBR, PILM) to treat each other with respect and to contribute to a workplace we can be proud of. Our faculty, who have been involved in ongoing discussions about mentorship and leadership in the department, fully support this vision of our community.

The purpose of this document is to outline departmental processes for community members to address concerns or conflicts related to faculty behavior. Specifically, this process is for issues that are not in direct violation of an [MIT policy](#). For issues that are potentially violations of MIT policy, see resources listed at the end of this document.

The goal of the departmental process is constructive: it is intended to facilitate the appropriate support and training needed to improve our workplace culture. The goal is conflict resolution, education to improve the lab environment, and restorative processes. It is premised on the assumption that all members of the community intend to create a healthy and productive environment, that BCS faculty members play a critical role in establishing the culture of each lab and classroom, and that shortcomings can be addressed through dialogue, training, and better understanding. This process is not designed for formal investigations or punishment.

How we respond—the big picture

We respond to concerns by providing support to individuals who have been or might be affected; gathering information; maintaining a record of concerns; intervening to make any changes needed; providing transition funding, support, and accommodations to help people who want to leave the environment. The process is also designed to be responsive to patterns of concerns, even if no individual concern stands out.

Types of intervention

Direct discussion with faculty member: If you have a concern about how you or any individuals are being treated by a BCS faculty member, we strongly urge you to directly approach the faculty member to discuss your concern. Most faculty are grateful for direct feedback even when it is negative, as it may allow them to address a concern or behavior of which they were not aware, and it presents them an opportunity to become better mentors and leaders. These conversations can be difficult, especially where power differentials are involved, but we believe that, by far, the best first step is to talk directly with the person(s) involved. If you would like help preparing for one of these conversations, these resources are available to help: [BCS REFS](#),

[Restorative Resolutions office of IHDR](#), HR administrators (see contact information below), and the [MIT Ombuds Office](#).

Mediated discussion with faculty member: If you are concerned about having a one-on-one meeting with a faculty member, most of the people listed in the resources section would be willing to act as a mediator. The role of the mediator can be helping to coach prior to the conversation, participating directly with you in a conversation with faculty to help guide discussion and serve as a resource after the conversation.

Indirect discussion with faculty member: If direct communication has failed, or if you believe that the issues cannot or should not be resolved this way, you can ask one of the resources listed below to have a discussion with the faculty member on your behalf. They will first speak with you, gather information, and then talk with the faculty member in a confidential manner that shields your identity, unless otherwise requested by you.

Intervention by department leadership: Recurring patterns of concern, or concerns of a more serious nature, will be escalated to the attention of department leadership, including the department head. The leadership team will then work directly with the faculty member to facilitate the process of resolving the situation of concern or improving the lab environment.

How the department escalates interventions based on patterns of behavior

The response of the department to complaints and concerns will escalate depending on the number and nature of the reports received. It is the responsibility of all BCS staff and faculty contacts listed below to document reports in order to build an aggregated picture of concerns. Note: we accept confidential reports, but not anonymous ones. Reports will be documented, stored on file and kept confidential. Information will be aggregated across HR representatives to ensure that concerns are not siloed.

1. **First complaint:** The report will be evaluated to help assess which of the levels above is appropriate and determine if there are issues that need to be escalated to higher levels of intervention immediately. We will ensure that the individual reporting understands this process, reviewing available resources, and offering any support that might be helpful.
2. **Second complaint:** We understand and take into consideration that there may be disagreement about the merits of some complaints, and that interpersonal conflicts happen. However, we are confident that any member of our faculty who has received multiple complaints can benefit from hearing that feedback, having a one-on-one discussion with leadership, and from training. Thus, a second report about a specific faculty member will escalate the concern to one of the department leadership team, depending on the nature of the incidents: An Associate Department Head, the BCS Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Officer, and/or the Department Administrative Officer. These individuals will meet one-on-one with the faculty member to discuss the department's expectations for

equitable, ethical, and respectful treatment of all its members, discuss a plan for meeting these goals, and follow up within three months with both the faculty member and the person raising the concern to see if the issue has been resolved and if not, discuss continuing steps.

3. Third complaint: The report will be elevated to the BCS Department Head who will review and discuss the past record of concerns with the BCS HR team. The Department Head will meet with the individual faculty member to discuss the department's expectations for equitable, ethical, and respectful treatment of all its members, discuss a plan for meeting these goals, follow-up with a written letter documenting the meeting and the plan going forward. The Department Head or other leadership will follow up within three months with both the faculty member and the person raising the concern to see if the issue has been resolved, and, if it has not, discuss continuing steps. A third report may also invoke any of the following: an independent mandatory training appropriate to the issues that are causing concern (i.e., anti-bias training, anger management training, etc.), appointment of secondary advisers for graduate students in the lab, limits on the faculty member's ability to train BCS graduate students, or, when applicable, re-evaluation of joint appointments.

4. Fourth complaint: Further reports will bring the situation above the department level. The materials on file in BCS, including all preceding complaints and follow-up measures, may be brought to the attention of the SoS Dean and/or IDHR to determine subsequent procedures.

Reports will be kept on file for five years and will then expire and be removed from record except for the purpose of anonymized, aggregate reporting.

Confidentiality

We will honor confidentiality and take steps to try to mitigate the risks of exposing any individual, except where all individuals decide that direct communication is a better alternative or when the report is in fact a violation of MIT policy and responsible employees are subject to [mandatory reporting obligations](#).

In accordance with MIT policies pertaining to faculty governance and Human Resources, concerns pertaining to specific details about individual personnel matters, please be aware that the status and our responses through this process will **not** be shared publicly. Please be assured that we follow through on all concerns as outlined above, even though you may not be made aware of the details of our responses.

Aggregate data on the number of individuals for whom concerns have been received and the responses taken will be made available at time intervals that allow for both anonymity and meaningful tracking of data (i.e., not less than five or more than ten years).



Retaliation

BCS and MIT are committed to protecting members of our community who raise concerns in good faith. As outlined in [MIT's Non-Retaliation Policy \(9.7\)](#), retaliation is not tolerated at MIT. Please note that we support confidential reporting but not anonymous reporting. Hate speech and other attacks that imperil the safety of the environment can happen on anonymous channels and leave the department with no effective recourse.

Resources

The BCS staff and faculty contacts listed below will track reports to build an aggregated picture of concerns. Peer and institute resources are also available to provide support.

BCS Staff and faculty contacts

Departmental Human Resources (HR)

Brain & Cognitive Sciences (BCS): Kimberli DeMayo; kdemayo@mit.edu

McGovern Institute (MIBR): Mary Roderick; maire@mit.edu

Picower Institute (PILM): Lauren Anderson; lauren1@mit.edu

Other Departmental Resources:

BCS Academic Administrator & Transitional Support Coordinator: Sierra Vallin; svallin@mit.edu

Building 46 DEIJ Officer: Farrah Belizaire; farrah@mit.edu

BCS Administrative Officer: Kate White; kowhite@mit.edu

BCS Graduate Officer: Mark Harnett; harnett@mit.edu

BCS Associate Department Head: Laura Schulz; lschulz@mit.edu

BCS Associate Department Head: Josh McDermott; jhm@mit.edu

BCS Department Head: Michale Fee; fee@mit.edu

Peer support

BCS REFS: a confidential, student-run, peer-to-peer resource for grad students at BCS

MIT resources

MITs Restorative Resolutions Coordinator: Nina N. Harris; nnharris@mit.edu

MITs Ombuds Office: Confidential consultation; can help people work through difficult situations, bring clarity to policies and processes, and help identify resources. As a sounding board, they can help guide people through the many challenging situations. To schedule a meeting via phone or Zoom, please email Kalina Schloneger: kalina_s@mit.edu or call 617-253-5921.

Concerns about department or building leadership can be conveyed to Heather Williams, Assistant Dean, School of Science; heatherg@mit.edu

Violations of MIT policy

While the process described above is for concerns that do not rise to the level of violations of MIT policy, the same resources will be able to handle more serious complaints that do violate these policies. We are committed to helping you quickly and vigorously address such concerns and we encourage you to report these immediately to the same resources listed above. MIT also offers additional resources to file formal complaints (listed below). The department will support you in addressing your concerns, whichever path you take to report them.

Institute Resources for Faculty Complaints

For concerns that violate (or may violate) MIT policy and that should be addressed above the department level please use the following resources:

- Refer to MIT's complaint and resolution process when there is a potential violation of MIT's Conduct Policies [<https://hr.mit.edu/complaint>]. A range of MIT resources are available to advise and assist anyone in dealing with a complaint [<https://hr.mit.edu/complaint/resources>].
- Issues that warrant a formal complaint and investigation should be reported to the Institute Discrimination and Harassment Response Office (IDHR): <https://idhr.mit.edu/>. They have a number of reporting options, detailed here: <https://idhr.mit.edu/reporting-options>.