

UW-MADISON POSTDOCTORAL ASSOCIATION DIVERSITY
AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE



HOW TO NAVIGATE WORKPLACE ADVERSITY AS A POSTDOC

2022 DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION FORUM

ABOUT THE 2022 FORUM

Have you, or a postdoc you know, experienced a difficult situation in the workplace and you weren't sure where to go for support?

The UW-Madison Postdoctoral Association held a panel discussion entitled "How to Navigate Workplace Adversity as a Postdoc" on Tuesday, April 26, 2022.

The goal of this event was to provide resources, information, and advice to postdocs regarding how to handle adversity in the workplace with an emphasis on the experiences of postdocs from diverse backgrounds.

The panel discussion was structured by (1) reading pre-written, fictional scenarios and (2) response and discussion by panelists. Panelists recognized the adversity faced by the postdocs in the scenarios, provided context from their office/unit, and highlighted resources on campus.

PANELISTS



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HUMAN RESOURCES

Most questions about your employment at UW-Madison can be directed to Human Resources (HR)

HOW CAN HUMAN RESOURCES ASSIST POSTDOCS?

- Address questions about your appointment such as:
 - Benefits e.g., healthcare
 - Paid time off
 - Training requirements
 - Work hours
 - Visas and immigration issues
- Receive reports of workplace incidents such as hostile and Intimidating Behavior (HIB), however, such conversations may not be confidential.

CONTACT INFORMATION

website: hr.wisc.edu

Local HR contacts: hr.wisc.edu/docs/hr-contacts.pdf

HIB LIAISONS

Hostile and Intimidating Behavior (HIB) Liaisons are points of contact for those who have experienced, have witnessed, or have questions about hostile and intimidating behavior

HOW CAN HIB LIAISONS ASSIST POSTDOCS?

- Hostile and intimidating behavior (HIB) is defined as unwelcome behavior pervasive or severe to the extent that it makes the conditions for work inhospitable and impairs another person's ability to carry out their responsibilities to the university:
 - Abusive expression such as derogatory remarks or epithets
 - Unwarranted physical contact or intimidating gestures
 - Conspicuous exclusion or isolation
 - Sabotage of another person's work
 - Abuse of authority, such as using threats or retaliation
- Informal discussions with HIB liaisons can help answer your questions about the HIB process and connect you to resources. **No notes are taken, and the discussion is confidential.**
- Postdocs can report incidents or concerns to HR (or their supervisor, manager, department chair, director, dean) but these conversations may not be confidential
- HIB complaints are not filed with HIB liaisons. Instead, you can file an HIB complaint with your Department Chair or Dean's office. The complaint would be investigated in accordance with the appropriate HIB policy.
- If you would like to pursue a formal discrimination complaint (instead of or in addition to a HIB complaint), you can file a complaint with the Office of Compliance (see page 7).

CONTACT INFORMATION

Website: hr.wisc.edu/hib

OMBUDS OFFICE

The Ombuds Office assists UW-Madison faculty and staff in dealing with challenges that arise in the workplace. It is a safe place where employees, including postdocs, can seek guidance regarding concerns at any time, without fear of reprisal, and at no cost.

HOW CAN THE OMBUDS OFFICE ASSIST POSTDOCS?

- Provides a **confidential** place to collaboratively explore complaints, clarify issues and consider options concerning workplace issues
- Confidentially receives questions and concerns related to individual situations as well as broader systemic issues
- Listens impartially and gives unbiased feedback
- Encourages and empowers postdocs to find solutions to problems
- Guides postdocs toward available services and resources
- Facilitates communication when conflict arises
- Serves as facilitator in group problem-solving
- With the postdoc's consent, consults with university units and departments to obtain more information about the issues at hand, and explores options for conflict resolution
- Suggests the redirection of matters to formal channels
- Promotes fairness, equality, inclusion, and access for all persons
- Serves as a catalyst for institutional change by reporting trends and opportunities to enhance university policies and procedures

CONTACT INFORMATION

Website: ombuds.wisc.edu

Phone: 608-265-9992

Email: uwombuds@mailplus.wisc.edu

OFFICE OF COMPLIANCE: CIVIL RIGHTS

The Office of Compliance promotes ethical conduct and compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies at UW-Madison. The Office of Compliance provides fair and impartial investigations of protected class discrimination, discriminatory harassment, and retaliation complaints.

HOW CAN THE OFFICE OF COMPLIANCE ASSIST POSTDOCS?

- Investigates discrimination complaints based on all protected classes including age, color, creed, disability, gender identity or expression, national origin, pregnancy, race, sex, and sexual orientation.
- If you believe that you have experienced discrimination, discriminatory harassment, or retaliation based on your protected class, you can reach out for a private informational meeting to discuss your situation.
- You can choose to request a formal investigation. This process includes:
 - The filing of a formal written complaint which including your name, protected class, person accused, dates (within past 300 days), description of discrimination, impact of discrimination on work, witnesses, and supporting documents
 - An investigatory interview with a trained investigator
- If your allegations are within the purview of the Office of Compliance, a formal investigation will be conducted
- If the Office of Compliance finds the person accused to be responsible, resolutions range from a letter of expectations to disciplinary action, including up to termination of employment
- The Office of Compliance's determinations may be appealed

CONTACT INFORMATION

Website: compliance.wisc.edu

(608) 265-6018

Email: OC_CaseManager@wisc.edu

OFFICE OF COMPLIANCE: DISABILITIES

The Office of Compliance Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) unit is committed to ensuring no qualified individual with a disability is denied access to or participation in services, programs, and activities at UW- Madison.

HOW CAN THE OFFICE OF COMPLIANCE ASSIST POSTDOCS?

- The ADA unit works to ensure that all individuals with a disability have equal opportunity to succeed at UW-Madison by following the ADA (see website)
- Every school and college have a Divisional Disability Representative (DDR) who assists with employment reasonable accommodation requests
- Postdocs can request an accommodation through two ways:
 - Formal requests through their DDR which ensures their medical information is keep confidential as required under the ADA
 - Informal requests through their supervisor, which is not recommended
- Postdocs may appeal an accommodation decision which is typically issued within 30 days to ensure minimal impact on an individual's access
- Accommodations are not limited to physical disabilities but also include mental disabilities
- Report an accessibility barrier via the Office of Compliance website
- Visit Accessibility@UW-Madison (accessible.wisc.edu) for more information on the university's accessibility and disability resources and how you can help create an accessible university for everyone

CONTACT INFORMATION

Website: compliance.wisc.edu/ada/

Disability discrimination: ruben.mota@wisc.edu



SCENARIOS

The following scenarios were presented to all panelists, who commented on how a postdoc may respond in each situation.

Some options are formal and time intensive (e.g., filing a complaint with the Office of Compliance). Other courses of action are less formal (e.g., talking with the Ombuds Office).

All postdocs are encouraged to contact the panelists (page 3) with any questions about which response is best for their specific situation.



SCENARIO #1

CAREGIVER DISCRIMINATION

I am a postdoc and primary caregiver of my two children. If I take any time off during the week for anything related to my children's personal health (e.g., dentist appointments, sickness, etc.), my PI forces me to work nights and weekends to make up the time. Additionally, my PI doesn't allow me to take off federal holidays, for which it is difficult to find childcare. Also, in my individual meetings, my PI belittles me and compares my productivity to single postdocs who willingly work nights and weekends. My PI also shouts at me behind closed doors, but people in the hallways can still hear.

WHAT CAN I DO?

At UW-Madison, most postdocs, and many staff and faculty, are "exempt" employees.

This means that they are not paid overtime. Postdoc work requirements are set by individual Principal Investigators (PIs), but, in general, exempt employees are expected to work 40-60 hours a week, including nights or weekends if needed, "until the job is done." Starting July 1, 2022, all postdocs are eligible for absence with pay and legal holidays.

If **you are consistently working over 60 hours a week**, you can talk to the Ombuds Office (page 6) or Human Resources (page 4). Discussions with the PI prior to the start of your appointment about work expectations and the support you need to succeed may also help.

If **your PI belittles or shouts at you**, you can talk to the Ombuds Office (page 5). You can also discuss the process for filing a complaint with a Hostile and Intimidating (HIB) Liaison (page 5), since this behavior may be considered "abusive expression" under HIB policies.





SCENARIO #2

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

I am the only person of color in my lab. Often in lab meetings, my PI will ask me how something relates to my culture. I do not feel comfortable representing my entire racial group by answering. I explained this several times, but my PI continues to ask me these questions. Recently, there was an opportunity to work on an exciting new project at the VA. When I asked if I could work on the project, my PI said that the participants would prefer a clinician who looked like them rather than someone 'exotic looking'. She went on to say that she thinks my participation would result in lower recruitment and retention of their participants solely based on my race. She denied me from working on this project.

WHAT CAN I DO?

If **your PI makes (micro) aggressive comments towards you**, you can talk to the Ombuds Office (page 6). You can also discuss the process for filing a complaint with Hostile and Intimidating Behavior (HIB) Liaison (page 5), since this behavior may be considered "abusive expression" under HIB policies.

If **your PI denies you work on a project based on a protected class status (e.g., color)**, you can discuss filing a formal complaint with the Office of Compliance (page 7).





SCENARIO #3

ABLEISM

I am a postdoc with ADHD and a physical disability. I disclosed this to my PI prior to being hired. The PI assured me that they wanted my expertise and would work with me to have the appropriate accommodations to ensure I excel in the position. However, whenever I make the smallest mistake, my PI says something like 'Did you forget to take your meds today?' Even when I perform well, she will say something about me being properly medicated. Within the first month of working, the PI requested that I complete a task that required great fine motor skills. I explained that this wasn't a good idea because of my disability, but the PI insisted. The experiment failed and the PI said that they didn't understand why I couldn't complete this easy task. When I reminded them of my physical disability, they said they didn't realize how impaired I was, and they were going to have to find tedious tasks to fill my time if I can't handle basic techniques. I've been completing administrative tasks rather than basic science and my publication record is suffering.

WHAT CAN I DO?

If your PI makes (micro) aggressive comments towards you, you can talk to the Ombuds Office (page 6). You can also discuss the process for filing a complaint with a Hostile and Intimidating Behavior (HIB) Liaison (page 5), since this behavior may be considered "abusive expression" under HIB policies.

If your PI denies you work based on a protected class status (e.g., disability), you can file a formal complaint with the Office of Compliance (page 7).

If you have a disability and need accommodation, you can make an accommodation request by contacting your Divisional Disability Representative. Formal requests protect your health information provided and make it more likely that your PI will implement these accommodations (page 8).





SCENARIO #4

LGBTQ DISCRIMINATION

I am a nonbinary postdoc who uses they/them pronouns. During lab meetings, my coworkers often share personal information, but when I share anything about my personal life, people have commented that I'm 'pushing an agenda' or that they don't agree and don't want to hear about my 'lifestyle.' No one in my lab uses my pronouns correctly and defaults to he/him. They even say things like 'he's the man.' I have corrected my coworkers and PI many times but to no avail. Additionally, the PI has noticed I no longer speak up in lab meetings and I explained that if I can't have my gender respected, I don't feel that my thoughts will be respected either. My PI said that people are trying their best and I need to stop being sensitive or he will start using 'she/her' pronouns instead.

WHAT CAN I DO?

If **your PI makes (micro) aggressive comments towards you**, you can talk to the Ombuds Office (page 6). You can also discuss the process for filing a complaint with a Hostile and Intimidating Behavior (HIB) Liaison (page 5), since this behavior may be considered "abusive expression" under HIB policies.

If **your PI denies you work on a project based on a protected class status (e.g., sexual orientation)**, you can discuss filing a formal complaint with the Office of Compliance (page 7).





SCENARIO #4

INAPROPRIATE POWER DYNAMICS

I am an international postdoc. My PI's motto is 'work hard, and when you think you're done, work even harder.' I work 40-60 hours per week and if my PI is ever in the office before or after me, he will make comments to me about not working enough hours. My PI doesn't allow us to observe federal or religious holidays. If we miss a day because of illness, he emails us immediately wanting to know how we are going to make up the hours. If we don't respond quick enough, he leverages our visa. One other postdoc in the lab is a mother, and although she works the same amount of time, he says that she spends too much time on her child and that's why she won't advance in her career. The rapport is very low in the lab and postdocs leave within 1-2 years and the lack of continuity impedes the publication rate. The PI blames the leaving postdocs on 'millennial attention span being too short.' Whenever anyone challenges the 'work ethic,' the PI says something like 'R01s aren't meant for the weak.' Half of his Ph.D. students drop out, but his constant NIH funding keeps him in good standing.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Exempt employees, including postdocs are expected to work 40-60 hours a week (see scenario #1, page 8). However, if **you are consistently working over 60 hours a week**, you can talk to the Ombuds Office (page 6) or Human Resources (page 4).

Postdocs are encouraged to have a mentor network (outside of their PI) to help them navigate and discuss these issues.

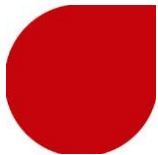
If **your PI leverages your visa**, you can talk to the Ombuds Office (page 6) or Human Resources (page 5)

If your PI has created a toxic work environment, you can talk to the Ombuds Office (page 7).

You can discuss the process for filing a complaint with Hostile and Intimidating Behavior (HIB) Liaison (page), since this behavior may be considered "abusive expression" under HIB policies.



DIVERSITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE



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