

Protecting Your Privacy While Sharing Public Scholarship

By Teresa Valerio Parrot

The need for academic scholars, particularly women faculty and administrators, to share their expertise with the public and correct misinformation has never been higher.

But scholars writing in national media face rising levels of backlash. The threat of social media pushback, organized attack campaigns and calls for “canceling” political left and right are at a fever pitch. There’s daily coverage in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed* about scholars in the crosshairs.

Yet there are positive, safe ways to participate in public scholarship, even if your topic is controversial. There are safety precautions you can implement concurrently as you consider participation, engage in opportunities and receive feedback. These tactics allow you to both share your intelligence with a broad audience through op-eds, quoted insights and expert citations, as well as return to freely sharing your thoughts and engaging on social media.

What to Do Now

Check social media accounts and privacy settings. Create a checklist of your social media presence. Familiarize yourself with your current security and privacy settings and the range of options each platform provides. Now is the ideal time to “try on” more limited or private statuses to see if they still allow for your preferred level of access to others and vice versa. Think through your biography or personal statement. Consider how your word choices and affiliations provide insight on you, your location or even your family.

Look for publicly available information. Perform a quick Google search for your name and see what private information comes up, such as home address, voter registration status or other personal identifiers. I chose to subscribe to a service, DeleteMe, that removes information from data brokers rather than spend the time submitting the request forms myself. Some sites give recommendations for doing it yourself. It’s worth asking your human resources offices if they have negotiated rates for services that remove personal information online. Note that it takes approximately six weeks for the search results to change significantly, so plan accordingly!

Ask for college or university support. Sit down with your campus’s chief communications officer and social media manager and ask how they can help protect your identity should you get blowback from your current or upcoming public scholarship. They can share where your identifying information appears on the institution’s website and other searchable spaces associated with the institution.

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You can plan—in advance—for temporarily taking down your online directory information including your direct telephone number, office location and email address should it be necessary. On a very different front, introduce yourself to your campus’s public safety or campus police. Ask how to employ their services to vet threats, and determine what language reaches the threshold of a credible threat to safety. They can also share if and how they can help should you receive threats.

Readying for Your Piece to Post

Create Google Alerts for your name. A Google Alert sends you an email whenever a key term or phrase shows up for the first time in a Google search. I recommend setting up Google Alerts for all combinations of your name as well as your last name with keywords associated with your employment or areas of scholarship. Google Alert email updates allow you to see a simplistic scope of reach for your piece and alert you, in real-time, to who is sharing your work both positively and negatively and where references to you are appearing. These messages are helpful to understanding if the sites are amplifying your scholarship and identity to others, their positionality and their influence.

Give a heads up to the chief communications officer, your department chair and possibly your dean. Once you have an accepted piece, share the text of your public scholarship and the proposed date of publication or posting.

The intent isn’t to limit your voice, but instead for them to prepare their bosses if the content may be considered controversial, and set into motion any protections the institution can provide.

Considerations Once the Feedback (or Pushback) Begins

You don’t have to read the comments! We often pitch our public scholars with lightning rod areas of scholarship to outlets that don’t allow comments online, and we always remind faculty and staff who may receive hostile responses to read comments carefully and sparingly. You don’t have to subject yourself to unfair reactions. Your campus marketing and communications office may be willing to share the reach for your piece, including potential readership and social media share metrics. They may even be willing to share an overall summary of the feedback you receive, including categories of constructive feedback so you can ignore the rest.

You don’t have to engage online trolls! Remember, social media trolling often is not personal (but feels personal) and not even about the content; it’s about others using your work to advance themselves. And sometimes it is

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Music in Boston MA, as of Jan. 10. Passafaro previously served as the City of Boston's director of intergovernmental relations.

- **Brig. Gen. Diane Dunn (Ret.)** joins her alma mater as a senior advisor for special initiatives at the University of Maine, effective Jan. 3. Dunn previously served as assistant adjutant general of the Maine Army National Guard, from which she retired on Dec. 31, 2021.

- **Emma Wolfe**, a former chief of staff and deputy mayor of New York City, joins Barnard College NY as the inaugural senior advisor to the president for external relations and leadership development, effective Jan. 18.


- **Dr. Naomi E. Boyd** will serve as dean of the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Business, effective July 1. She moves from West Virginia University, where she is currently associate dean for innovation, outreach and engagement and chair, professor and the Fred T. Tattersall chair of finance in the John Chambers College of Business and Economics Department of Finance.

- **Dr. Jennifer Jones Cavanaugh** will become dean of the University of Richmond's School of Arts and Sciences on July 1. She joins the University of Richmond VA from Rollins College FL, where she currently serves as dean of the faculty. 

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personal. Recently, I've also started to receive unpleasant emails and direct messages, which serve as a reminder to go back and review my social permissions to limit direct messages from people I don't know. You don't have a responsibility or need to engage with trolls online or through direct outreach.

Don't forget to enjoy the kudos and connections too. There are real reasons to participate in national media and thought leadership: to share information with the public and to engage in a conversation of the application of your scholarship. Don't shy away from the conversation with others interested in your expertise, especially as collaborations and opportunities arise through Twitter and social conversations.

While the prospect of sharing expertise with a national audience may feel overwhelming, I encourage you to set some protections in place and then share your knowledge broadly. Your scholarship and ideas deserve to exist in the public realm and engaging may provide you with additional opportunities inside and outside of your academic career. 

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undergraduate student to mentor, I accept. I also chair the American Council on Education Women's Network. We're creating a pilot mentoring program. For all who may think, "I don't know if I should go for that position," I would say, "Just try it, go for it." Listen to your mentors and others who may see something in you that you don't yet see in yourself.

You've remarked on how implicit bias regarding your Japanese background surfaced during your career. How did bias show up and what did you do to confront it?

I have experienced implicit bias and overt racism at every step of my career. It's hurtful. When people say, "Why are there so few Asian American women in these leadership roles?" I smile and could say, "Do you want to see the scars on my back?" I maintain that if I were six feet tall and male, I don't think they'd ask me that question. We still have that bias and the stereotyping that makes it harder to excel in these leadership positions...

For a long time, I tried to be the role models I saw—white women. I'd see this assertion, this aggression... that was not my personality. I thought if I aspired to be a leader, I needed to be more like them.

Early in my career, I went to lunch with the then Chair of the Academic Senate and told her that I'd been watching her because I wanted to be more like her. She said: "Judy, that's really interesting because I've been watching you and want to be more like you." I couldn't imagine this. [She said] "You don't speak as often as I do, but when you speak, people listen to you... and when you go into a meeting, you know what you want and you don't leave until you get it." ...Later in my career I said to myself, "This is who I am, right? I can be an effective leader with these skills, this personality, these cultural values and traits."

What impact did your family and upbringing have on your career trajectory?

So many of these Japanese traits, gaman, to just tough it out. This came out of the internment, shikata ga nai, some things just can't be helped. Pivotal values have helped me, this perseverance, this strength. My mother and father used to say, "Tsumoreba yama to naru." The translation is, "Even the tiniest particles of dust, when you gather them together, can create a mountain that enables others to climb higher and see farther than you ever dreamed possible." ... These sayings have stuck with me.

How have you addressed combatting anti-Asian hate among anti-racist stances at Sonoma State University?

The president of Santa Rosa Junior College is a Chinese American man, and the superintendent of the Santa Rosa public schools is a Japanese American. We wrote an op-ed piece for the Press Democrat. On campus we created, "Brave Spaces," and town hall meetings where people could come together... I participated and communicated to the campus community... creating an awareness, being that role model [and] creating spaces on campus for people to ask questions or be with each other in community.

When I'm walking around, I'm not the president of the