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(This narrative is part of a collection; please see the [intro page](#) for more information.)

For many, the intense emotional turmoil associated with the “Jaeger Case” has faded into the past, but others still feel threatened and angered by how associated events unfolded. Indeed, at a protest last month, students called for Jaeger to be fired, and opined that they felt silenced and concerned that incoming students were uninformed about the case. There is much to be learned from this case and the current culture in which it is embedded, and there are wide differences of opinion on many important issues. Yet, many have felt unsafe speaking openly in what feels to be a hostile and increasingly polarized environment. Offering and hearing other points of view should not be threatening; it is the currency of knowledge, and educators should seize every opportunity to lead by example. In the current moment, it is especially important to address ongoing anxiety about safety, to create comfortable spaces for the honest expression of concerns and opinions, and to welcome differing points of view that deepen understanding.

[Some context for my perspective: I was a founding member of Brain and Cognitive Sciences (BCS), and from the time BCS was launched in 1995 until my retirement in 2018, I served as ombudsperson for BCS graduate students. Over the years, I developed close personal relationships with several of the faculty complainants: our families socialized frequently. In contrast, I rarely interacted with Florian Jaeger during this time except in departmental meetings and at social gatherings where many BCS faculty were also present. I had no first hand knowledge of how Florian interacted with his students, and so when I learned late in the spring of 2016 about the investigation into his behavior, I was surprised and disturbed by the allegations. Several months later, I began working with other BCS faculty colleagues to examine departmental structures in an effort to clarify expectations for faculty conduct, strengthen university policy, and encourage the reporting of faculty misconduct.]

I cannot know all the reasons people continue to be angered by Jaeger’s presence on campus, but the false narrative that he is a sexual predator undoubtedly fosters fear and insecurity. Jaeger was never accused of assault, abuse, coercion, stalking, or unwanted touching; behaviors typically associated with sexual predation. If we confuse failure to recognize appropriate professional boundaries with more aggressive and horrific behavior, we minimize the experiences of those who survive sexual predation and we deepen their emotional pain. Mischaracterization also perpetuates anxiety for those who think they are unsafe if Jaeger remains on campus, and it fuels the false impression that administrators and faculty who tolerate Jaeger’s presence don’t care about student safety. As someone who had many interactions with administrators and BCS faculty as the Jaeger case unfolded, I know that this impression could not be further from the truth. But most importantly, it endangers students if it results in reduced reporting.

In my view, Jaeger’s presence on campus and resumption of teaching responsibilities does not threaten student safety. All investigations confirm that his behavior changed many years ago

when he learned how it affected some students, and those who have worked with him over the past 5 years praise his dedication to teaching and mentoring, and support his return to full faculty responsibilities. He has been officially disciplined for substantiated unprofessional behaviors, and has expressed regret and apologized for failing to consider the adverse effects of such behaviors. I would hope we are a community that believes in second chances; especially when mistakes have been acknowledged and behavior has changed. And, Jaeger's students should not have to endure any further disruption to their education.

Educational institutions have a responsibility to cultivate honesty, thoughtful analysis, and empathy among all members of their community. When the Jaeger case was first publicized, the narrative understandably provoked a public outcry and need to condemn the accused; the support and willingness to listen to those bringing forward complaints is essential. At the same time, due process also is critical. Unfortunately, in this highly unusual case, investigations have shown that some of the allegations leveled against Jaeger and others were either misleading or demonstrably false. This stirred outrage among those (including former and current students) whose experiences were misrepresented to support the notion that Jaeger was a narcissistic predator. Aside from the White Investigation report, there has been precious little counter-information publicized. Although one woman published an article in the Campus Times to correct the false claim that Jaeger had made a pass at her, many others with deep knowledge of what had transpired chose to either communicate privately with the UR administration, or remain silent to avoid further collateral damage or backlash. In the absence of more complete information, anger and frustration fed outrage that became polarizing and destructive. Some have issued a call to shun Jaeger by not welcoming him at professional meetings, and this punishment has spilled over to negatively affect his graduate students (many of them women) who have felt ostracized at conferences, had their accomplishments called into question and boycotted, and been wrongly described as willing to tolerate and support sexual harassment and predatory behavior. Others in the community who did not support the call for Jaeger to be driven out were characterized as individuals who protect a sexual predator and are willing to sacrifice student safety to protect their own and/or the institution's reputation. The underlying innuendo of selfish intent has fed hostility that interferes with respectful discussion of complex issues. As a result, most have not taken this critical opportunity to listen, learn, consider differing perspectives, and evaluate whether one's own beliefs deserve revision. Engaging in this process offers benefits far beyond understanding this particular case. And, fostering these conversations would inevitably enhance student safety.

Finding the right solutions to minimize or eradicate harassment is not simple. In part, this is because harassment comes in many forms: from predatory behavior that includes force, coercion, and manipulation, to behaviors that purposefully or inadvertently embarrass, demean, or otherwise cause discomfort and anxiety. There are many shades of gray between these extremes, and it can be tempting to over-simplify. Yet, finding optimal solutions requires that we embrace the nuances and enter into respectful discussions that consider a diversity of opinions. When all members of the community can engage in such conversations, we will have taken a huge step towards establishing a culture of respect that will significantly curtail harassment.