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 with primary or joint appointments in BCS. 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.

Our process—the big picture

We encourage you first to try to speak to the faculty member, either directly or with the support of a mediator and other resources listed below. However, we understand that this might not always be possible. If that is the case, you can report concerns about faculty to the BCS Human Resources Administrator, the BCS Academic Administrator, or the Building 46 DEIJ Program Officer (contact info given below; you may also report concerns to the BCS Associate Department Heads or Department Head). We will track those concerns and respond as discussed below. If there are multiple complaints of a similar nature about a faculty member, the issue will be escalated to the BCS Department Head, who will discuss the matter with the faculty member in question.

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. If you report a concern about a faculty

member, you may not be made aware of the details of our responses due to constraints of confidentiality, but please be assured that we follow through on all concerns as outlined below.

Talking with the faculty member about your concerns
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.

Reporting concerns about a faculty member
If you think you cannot discuss your concern with a faculty member or you have recurring patterns of concern, please contact the BCS Human Resources Administrator, currently Kimberli DeMayo, the BCS Academic Administrator (current contact), or the Building 46 DEIJ Program Officer (current contact). You may also contact the BCS Associate Department Heads or the BCS Department Head. Reports will be documented, stored on file and kept confidential. Information will be aggregated across all three of these administrators to ensure that concerns are not siloed.

What happens next

1. **First complaint:** The report will be evaluated to help assess whether 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:** A second distinct report about a specific faculty member will escalate the concern to the Associate Department Head 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. We understand 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 additional guidance and support.

3. **Third complaint**: A third distinct report will be elevated to the BCS Department Head who will review and discuss the past record of concerns. 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 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.

<u>Confidentiality</u>
We will honor confidentiality and take steps 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.

Please note that the individuals to whom concerns are reported are accustomed to handling confidential information. Part of their job is to maintain confidentiality in situations that demand it, and breaches of confidentiality are taken very seriously.

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.

Follow-up

The person who receives the report will talk with any individual reporting a concern immediately and will check in within three months afterwards to see if the issue has been resolved or needs additional follow up.

Please be assured that we follow through on all concerns as outlined above. However, to respect the confidentiality both of the person reporting and of the HR process, we do not discuss the details of disciplinary processes except with the individual involved. Please know that the department will respond to every concern per these procedures, even though you may not hear the details of any response.

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.

Who to report to

BCS Staff and faculty contacts:
Brain & Cognitive Sciences (BCS) Human Resource Administrator (currently Kim DeMayo; kdemayo@mit.edu)
BCS Academic Administrator (currently Sierra Vallin; svallin@mit.edu)
Building 46 DEIJ Officer (currently Farrah Belizaire; farrahab@mit.edu)

You may also report concerns directly to:
BCS Associate Department Heads (currently Laura Schulz; lschulz@mit.edu and Josh McDermott; jhm@mit.edu)
BCS Department Head (currently Michale Fee; fee@mit.edu)

Concerns about department or building leadership can be conveyed to the Assistant Dean for Human Resources in the School of Science (currently Magdalena Reib; mrieb@mit.edu)

Violations of MIT policy

The process as described above is only appropriate for concerns that do not rise to the level of violations of MIT policy.

Institute Resources for Faculty Complaints
Concerns that violate (or may violate) MIT policy are handled at the level of the Institute

- Please refer to MIT's complaint and resolution process when there is a potential violation of MITs 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.