

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

April 19, 2018

To: University Committee on Faculty Affairs

Dear Committee Members,

Over the past several years, Prof. Selman Akbulut has repeatedly bullied and harassed a number of faculty members in the Department of Mathematics by sending numerous emails containing distorted and unsubstantiated allegations of fraud and corruption. These emails have been sent to the entire faculty of the mathematics department and at times copied to graduate students, department staff, university administration, the board of trustees, members of the state government, and NSF administrators. He also posts similar content on his personal website and on Twitter, where it is publicly visible.

It is hard to gauge the full psychological and emotional toll of this harassment. I suspect it is worse than most of us realize, because Prof. Akbulut's stream of bullying has been at times so steady as to define a new normal. His emails have sometimes created a toxic atmosphere and made it difficult to carry out day to day tasks. Certainly, his harassment has led me to consider stepping away from departmental service and to think about seeking employment elsewhere despite otherwise being quite happy at MSU.



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I have been the target of a number of Prof. Akbulut's emails, apparently in retribution for my service in spring 2016 on the committee that undertook the administrative review of the letter of reprimand sent to Prof. Akbulut in January 2015. Since May 2016, Prof. Akbulut has repeatedly and publicly referred to the report produced by the committee as "fraudulent" and has threatened to oppose the appointment of any committee member to "any committee in any venue."

Prof. Akbulut objected strongly to my appointment as Director of Graduate Studies. He has expressed his objection through emails sent to a wide audience, sometimes including department staff and graduate students, accusing me of being an "unqualified liar" and suggesting that I resign. In my capacity as graduate director I often need to send informational emails to faculty and students. For some time, Prof. Akbulut would regularly reply to such emails with an accusatory response copied to a large audience. Knowing that his replies were copied to students and staff made my job as graduate director quite stressful and difficult. Feeling that these emails were interfering with my ability to carry out my duties, I formally complained to Prof. Promislow about the harassment in October 2017. Although Prof. Akbulut has now ceased his accusatory replies to informational emails from the graduate office, he has continued to harass me and other members of the department in emails sent to the entire faculty and copied to university administrators and members of the state government.

I usually start letters with some variation on the phrase “It is my pleasure to write to you regarding”. As this letter is quite different, let me close by saying that it was distinctly **not** my pleasure to write this letter. Prof. Akbulut’s steady stream of bullying and harassment has been a sad and troubling episode in the life of this department. Although I take no joy from writing about it, I feel it is my duty to do so. It would be easier in the moment to give in to the bullying, but it would serve no good purpose in the long run.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeff Schenker", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jeff Schenker