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clarity_now2

Abused at BAIR

CS/EECS

Hi all,

TLDR: 7 undergrads, including myself, and a grad student were abused in a BAIR lab for many months. I have reported everything and nothing has happened over quite a few months now. This is a call to all victims of abuse in academia - Lots of power dynamics in the lab encourage us to stay SILENT. I understand this. The EECS department needs to create better systems for PREVENTATIVE and RESPONSIVE measure to incidents like this that PROPERLY address abuse. We need to stand up for ourselves. I was too afraid to stand up for many months. The school needs to do something substantial about these things. We need to make this school accountable and change this culture of abuse and subsequent silence.

My name is Liam and I have something that I want to say today.

Seeing all the serious and supportive responses aimed at properly addressing harmful behavior has encouraged me to go a little more public with the tremendous amount of abuse that I and several other undergraduate and graduate students were made to face a little while back.

I apologize in advance for the vulgar language.

I have already reported this to the school, to the chair of EECS, to the Principal Investigator of the lab, and to the EECS Department itself. In seeking to report this I've filled out every form that there is, and over the 6 months since I initially reported this to the PI, nothing has happened. The situation has not been properly addressed.

I am explicitly not naming the person publicly, as I do not want anyone to harass them or the PI involved.

I am an undergrad and I worked at BAIR. I worked with a very famous professor and his postdoc at BAIR.

This postdoc subjected quite a few undergrads (including myself) as well as a graduate student to abuse for many months.

Keep in mind, the following are only a selection of the incidents that occurred while I was working under this postdoc, as I worked with this person nearly every day for 6 months.

A brief list of things that happened:

- The postdoc kicked a chair at me
- The postdoc threw his phone in anger during a meeting and almost hit two students
- The postdoc punched a wall in anger at me
- The postdoc would not let me go home and physically blocked my way as I was trying to go home for the day
- The postdoc told a grad student that he would "f*ck the grad student up first" if the grad student did not do exactly what the postdoc wanted

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The postdoc yelled at a collaborator over the phone, said they were, then smashed the phone and hung up

- The postdoc called me a (idiotic c*nt) to another one of his undergrad mentees and badmouthed me to the rest of his students
- The postdoc sh*t on all of his mentees to his other mentees behind their backs
- The postdoc would threaten to fire his mentees if we didn't do what he wanted
- The postdoc would make disparaging comments about his students any chance he got, mocking us
- After I did not kowtow and walked out after the postdoc did not let me leave the lab, he stopped talking to me altogether, even though he was my supposed research mentor
- "Jokes" about giving us sh*t letters of recommendation, dangling letters of recommendation over our heads to make us work harder, longer, and do what he wanted
- Constant emphasis of seniority and power above us, coupled with reminders of the evaluation he will present to the professor come time for letters of recommendation - standing up for ourselves would just jeopardize our letters of recommendation, as he would often suggest that he has a great deal of power in our graduate school application results. Coupled with his unreasonable demands and bad behavior, we felt our hands were tied
- (more minor) The postdoc mandated constant overwork and late night meetings, with 7 day workweeks
- (more minor) Pinging very often at 3 am, a lot, and multiple times in a night
- There are more things that I won't mention, for brevity

Steps that have been taken:

- I have extensive documentation of incidents that I've shared during all reports
- I brought the issue up to the PI
- I emailed the chair of EECS
- I contacted EECS student services
- I have asked multiple faculty for advice
- I have filled out the EECS incident reporting form
- I have submitted my report to OPHD
- I have submitted my report to the Abusive Conduct Compliance Division of Employee & Labor Relations

What has happened so far

- I left the lab
- 6 months ago, the PI gave a quick chat with the postdoc and his behavior did not change. I know this because some of my former lab mates still faced his abuse after I told the PI and left
- The school has been processing my report for 4 months. I have not heard a real update

No disciplinary action has been taken. No new preventative measures for future cases have been taken. It seems to me that the school and PI have ignored the problem as best as they could.

Personal Testimony:

His actions have impacted my lab performance. and more importantly, my well-being. His threats and the effects of overwork while under him have caused me a great deal of stress, burnout and anxiety. It has

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I felt very intimidated after he blocked me from leaving, and quite fearful after he kicked his chair at me. In general, I felt demoralized due to these experiences.

I have a poor perception of research, as well as my own research abilities. I feel that I was not able to work in BAIR anymore. even after trying for a few months after reporting the incidents to the PI. I believe that working with this person has really discouraged me and has really gotten me to question whether a career in AI research is for me. I will not be conducting research in AI anymore. I believe that if I had worked under another mentor from the beginning, this might not be the case.

This is an abuse of power that occurred in a very hostile work environment. This person has violated countless items in the code of conduct manual. He has emotionally and psychologically harmed many students.

Myself, and 3 other undergrads brought the issue up to the Principal Investigator. In addition 3 graduate students brought the issue up as well. I do not believe the principal investigator has taken this seriously.

I brought this up with the EECS department chair and student services. Student services was kind enough to help me submit a report to the school. I thank them for that. However, I have been waiting almost four months since submitting this report to the school.

The School must take further action to properly address the situation. In addition, the EECS department should do something to make sure this never happens again, to anyone. They need to create a more effective system to deal with these kinds of situations. Dealing with this, virtually by myself, was a nightmare and I do not want to see anyone else face the same fate. We need to do better. We need better trainings. We need better responses when these things do happen.

We need to push the EECS department to be a place where abuse is not tolerated and trainings are better to PREVENT abuse from happening in the first place.

Abuse in Academia can be horrible and the EECS department and community must do something to address these kinds of issues, BOTH PREVENTATIVE as well as RESPONSIVE.

I was afraid to report all of this for a very long time because I didn't want my professor to make my letter of recommendation poor in retaliation. I was afraid everyone was going to respond poorly. I was afraid I'd ruin my reputation. I think we shouldn't have to live in such environment. We can do better.

If you are a student facing similar issues, feel free to reach out to me. I have a lot of knowledge of what your options are. You shouldn't have to deal with this. I'm sorry.



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General-Shallot1000 · 2y ago

You deserve justice for this, fuck BAIR for protecting your abuser

↑ 158 ↓ ...



emmamentaryparticles · 2y ago

A close friend told me about this situation last summer, and it's appalling that the department has not handled this better. That professor also has built enough of a reputation in academia that there is 0 excuse for them to not act swiftly and appropriately in addressing the behavior of that postdoc.

↑ 151 ↓ ...



XSokaX · 2y ago

"Seeing all the serious and supportive responses aimed at properly addressing harmful behavior has encouraged me to go a little more public" is exactly why people should share their stories, good luck.

↑ 148 ↓ ...



root3over2 · 2y ago

It takes courage to speak out on these topics as you have done. It's crazy that these things happen in one of Berkeley's most well-established labs

↑ 92 ↓ ...



sev_ofc · 2y ago

Thank you for speaking out.

↑ 79 ↓ ...

⊕ [deleted] · 2y ago



ObligationGlad · 2y ago

Liam, I'm sorry this happened to you. Thank you for further exposing this issue. I realized the system failed you but hopefully it won't fail the next student. I also hope you get some justice.

↑ 62 ↓ ...

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I'm sorry that this happened to you. If it helps you feel that you are not alone, I think BAIR is unique in the things they get away with. I have found many faculty here to be both racist and sexist, telling women "you are unqualified to do research in my lab" or telling students "I don't have time for you yet alone my own students". I've even seen faculty ignore requests for collaboration and steal ideas from those students they rejected.

I think they are allowed to get away with it because of the program's prestige. I haven't heard of such experiences from others. Don't let this abuse discourage you from research if you genuinely enjoy the work. Look elsewhere and really quiz the students of those departments to understand the culture there. Simple things to ask for are how often do students hangout, are you friends with your lab mates, how many people do you know were able to switch advisors, etc.

21 ...

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Tbh completely tangential to this but hearing about your academics and research being impacted so heavily because of the abuse you've experienced really validates my experience, because everything you describe the postdoc doing kinda describes my home life with my parents (along with actual physical contact violence) for most of my childhood.

I hope you get the support and justice that you deserve, OP. Fuck that postdoc.

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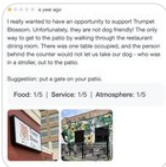
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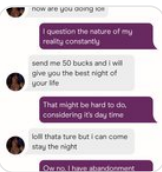
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