Addressing Academic Bullying: Variety is the key

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Land Acknowledgement

The University of Illinois at Chicago rests on the land of multiple native nations. We recognize and honor the native and indigenous peoples of the Chicagoland area – the Three Fires Confederacy, Potawatomi, Odawa and Ojibwe Nations, as well as other Tribal Nations that know this area as their ancestral homeland, including the Menominee, Ho-Chunk, Miami, Peoria, and Sac and Fox. Native people are part of Chicago’s past, present, and future and it is our responsibility to listen to their voices, to do no further harm, and to work together for equity and inclusion.
Overview

• Nature/faces of academic bullying
• The hurt/costs
• Behavior and meaning – context matters
• The whys
• Approaches to addressing – variety and coordination
When you choose a career in academe, you need to be prepared not only for rough-and-tumble politics, but also for the verbal abuse that goes with it.

Robert J. Sternberg; The Chronicle of Higher Education (June 19, 2015)

Smart people are abrasive
Continuum of Conduct: The good, the bad, and the ugly

Civil ........................................ Uncivil .......... Misconduct ............... Illegal ................................ Criminal

- Respectful Disagreement
- Friendly Competition
- Creative

Bullying Mobbing

Discrimination Harassment

- Destructive
- Dangerous Climate
- Violent

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University of Colorado at Boulder
Incivility

Low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others. (Andersson & Pearson, 1999)
**Bullying**
- Repeated, persistent, patterned, and enduring acts of aggression.
- Unwanted by the victim.
- Done deliberately or unconsciously
- **Cause** humiliation, offence, distress.
- Creates unpleasant work environment, interfere with job performance and health harming consequences for targets and bystanders. (Einarsen 1999)

**Mobbing**
- Malicious attempt to force a person out of the workplace through unjustified accusations, harassment, and emotional abuse.
- Involves rallying others into systematic and frequent “mob-like” behavior against target.
- “ganging up” (Davenport et al 1999)
Cyberharassment and cyberbullying

Repeated, persistent, patterned, and enduring – core features

- Nature of e-media, particularly social media amplifies
- Happen once BUT relived; re-shown; re-framed; de-contextualized
- Permanence -> enduring - can be resurrected months later
- Boundaryless
- Anonymous
- Infinite audiences
Challenging/difficult but not egregious

• People not getting along
• High performance standards
• Corrective feedback – constructive, fair
• “Direct” communication
• Techniques like irony, satire, hyperbole, conjecture, refutation
Challenging but not egregious...

• Expression of conflicting opinions *
  • “Many academics hold strong opinions. This is a characteristic of a profession of experts. Many academics may also occasionally express their opinions in ways that are abrasive. There is a very broad consensus in the profession that they must not be penalized in any way for how they express their opinions, unless the expression infringes on the rights of others.” (CAUT report on David Noble)

• Legitimate expression of academic freedom
What does it look like: Types of behavior

- Isolation/Exclusion
- Control and manipulation of information
- Emotional abuse
- Control- abuse of working conditions
- Professional discredit and denigration
- Devaluation of the role in the workplace
How big a problem is it?

- 12 month timeframe – 25%; witness ~40%
- Women, racial and ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, disability
  - intersectionality
- Actors – faculty>admin>students; men>women (same sex harassment)
  - The institution
  - The state
  - Public (primarily online)
- Within faculty – senior>junior rank
- Tenure/permanent status not necessarily protect
- Mobbing frequent for faculty; less for staff
- Longstanding – 3 years or more
- Missing voices – contingent, temporary faculty
Effects

• Individual level (targets and witnesses)
  • Mental and physical health; stress; burnout
  • Job attitudes – including satisfaction, engagement and organizational commitment
• Creativity
• Productivity and performance
• Intent to leave; withdrawal
  • Career impact
Effects

• Department/Institutional level
  • Talent flight – replacement costs
  • Hostile/toxic climate
  • Reputation
• Quality of education
• Legal costs re lawsuits; health and safety claims
What influences the hurt?

• Person-focused vs task-focused
  • Verbal aggression vs argumentativeness; Skill in debate and critique
• Repetitive/persistent – like water on stone – wears away
• Patterning – variety; progression/escalation
• Power imbalance – ability to respond and defend
• Norm violation – how people “should” be treated
• Cumulative communication of (de)value – the micros
• Context - Without “reasonable” justification
Culture of cruelty?
- Farley & Sprigg (2014)

Are academics “mean & nasty”?
- Hiatt (2008)
Behavior does not speak for itself: Context and meaning

Normative context
Structural context
Specific activity context
Relationship context
The normative context

Academic freedom

...means colleagues can disagree with each other passionately. Thus, shouting and pounding fists does not constitute anything more than energetic disagreement. Actor characterization of behavior Hegranes (2012)

Autonomy

Debate, critique, dissent, disagreement

Tenure/permanent contract (for some)

Sorry, can’t help you, the faculty in question is tenured. Crawford (2020; ed.) pg. xix
The normative context

- Shared governance
- Community of scholars and peer review
- Rank hierarchy among academics and within the institution itself
- Distinction between faculty/academic staff and all other staff
Role expectations

Critique expected in academic engagement...may be experienced as unnecessary and distressing in interactions with others.

Different modes of interacting for each group

- staff - cooperative and supportive roles
- faculty - independent roles; use critique and influence

Matching behaviors to relational context; norms of what is acceptable.
How faculty are perceived

12 Strategies for Working Skillfully with Difficult Faculty
   Who Is Difficult for You? .......................... 198
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http://workingwithfaculty.com
“Academics, however, given their independence, individualized pursuits of research and teaching, and academic freedom, are likely more direct and confrontational than professional staff.

....their subculture, which encourages critique and debate, can lead to a higher frequency of accepted confrontation and at times individualized aggression....

Academics assume they are fundamental to the organization’s purpose, which feeds their sense of importance and the demands they make of professional staff.

In the “academic star” category, the highly accomplished academics, the stakes and self-importance are even greater.... They see themselves as important and deserving of admiration.”
Nuances of power: Position

Relative institutional position

Professorial rank and tenure

Academic capital and the university agenda

Social identity
- Vulnerability - Women, racial and ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, persons with disability, class
- Intersectionality & unequal influence
- Tenure, rank and institutional position do not protect

My fights are with my peers
Actor characterization of interactions; Mangan, 2018
Ironically...the reality that marginalized faculty have been able to breach the bulwark of higher education, coupled with the presumed nature of academe – civility, meritocracy, autonomy – serves to render their experiences of bullying and marginalization invisible and stifles the voices of marginalized faculty when they speak out. It also serves to discredit them when they are heard, by labeling them as troublemakers, malcontents, and ungrateful workers.

Nuances of power: The institution

- Subjective evaluation procedures
- Politicization of funding agendas
- Donor influence
- Marketization and corporatization
- Vulnerability of “critics”
- Responses to external critique of faculty
Nuances of power: Unique actors

The state
Scholars at Risk & threats to academic freedom
UK – Research Excellence and Teaching Excellence Frameworks
US – State legislative engagement in curriculum, tenure, DEI, appointment of leaders

The public
Harassment through e-communication e.g., Campus Reform

Keashly, 2019
Nuances of power: Unique actors

Students

• “contrapower harassment”
• Power of social media for organizing and amplifying
• Students as consumer and enrollment pressure
  • Institutional responding
• Where is the line between collective action and mobbing?

Keashly, 2019
Some reasons why: Implications for action

• Poor or miscommunication
• Poorly managed conflict
• Poorly managed stress
• Low perceived costs/risks for behavior – role of tenure; high performer
• Lack of normative guidance re behaviors - policies
• Competition for scarce resources (prestige, promotions)
• People perceived as “different” – conformity
• Threats to perceived status
• Perceived norm violation – breaking the rules
• Env’t – rigid hierarchy, uncertainty, lots of change, resource scarcity, productivity demands, lack of autonomy (team-based), role state stressors
Possible actions

Variety & coordination of actions are key

• Nature of the situation and motives/intents involved
• Institutional – systemic responding
  • Policies and procedures
  • Addressing structural influences, inequities & stressors
• Departmental/group
  • Addressing hostile/toxic work environment
  • Developing constructive approaches
• Individual – Accountability, “behav mod”, support/coach, skill building
Institutional level:
Understanding own profile

Describing climate and culture; **truly joint effort** (WHO 2010)

- Mission and core values
- Data driven; data collection
- Sharing and discussing information with institutional members
- **Modeling the collaborative and inclusive climate you want**
- Identifying key areas of focus & action teams
  - visible, meaningful, consistent, persistent
Academic Civility & the Dignity Project

Academic incivility has emerged as a serious concern on campuses across the country. Although generally a taboo topic for discussion within academe, evidence of academic incivility’s negative effects on students, faculty, and staff is increasing. It is essential, therefore, that universities address this serious issue and work to ensure campus climates that are conducive to well-being, learning, and productivity.
Workplace Climate and Bullying

Chancellor Subbaswamy’s statement on workplace bullying:

May 16, 2013

Shortly after my arrival on campus last year, I learned of the disturbing results of a survey about workplace bullying that had been administered to all faculty and staff members. While the numbers were consistent with those found at workplaces of all types throughout the country, this is clearly an area in which UMass Amherst aspires to be something much better than average. Although bullying has received a lot of national attention in recent years, most of that attention has been focused on bullying of schoolchildren. But the survey results here, and especially the poignant comments that survey respondents submitted, point to the very serious effects that workplace bullying can have as well. Such behavior is antithetical to the values we espouse as a place where all should be free to take full advantage of the learning and employment opportunities the campus offers. And it violates Trustee policy, which provides that:

RESOURCES AND FORMS

Preventing and Responding to Workplace Bullying (powerpoint pdf)
Workplace Bullying Grievance Procedure
Grievance Form
Complaint Response Form
Policies: Necessary but not sufficient

Codifications and communication of desired conduct and practices
A framework for solving problematic circumstances and mitigating risks
Grounded in the university’s mission, vision and shared values including academic freedom and freedom of expression
Without it, incidents are examined in isolation increasing chances framed as subjective thus not considering systemic or structural patterns;
• Inconsistent responding
Some examples of policies

- University of South Carolina, Columbia and regional campuses: Workplace bullying policy: [http://www.sc.edu/policies/ppm/acaf180.pdf](http://www.sc.edu/policies/ppm/acaf180.pdf)

- University of Wisconsin, Madison: Hostile and Intimidating Behavior Policy: Faculty, Academic Staff, Staff Congress policies and HR website: [https://hr.wisc.edu/hib/principles-and-policies/](https://hr.wisc.edu/hib/principles-and-policies/)

- University of New Mexico: Respectful Campus Policy: [http://policy.unm.edu/university-policies/2000/2240.html](http://policy.unm.edu/university-policies/2000/2240.html)

- University of California, Davis: Abusive Conduct in the workplace: [https://hr.ucdavis.edu/departments/elr/policies/abusive-conduct](https://hr.ucdavis.edu/departments/elr/policies/abusive-conduct)
Guidance on cyberbullying and harassment

- Iowa State University
  [https://www.provost.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/wdclientcss/Faculty/Development/Guidlines%20for%20the%20occurrence%20of%20trolling%20or%20doxing%2C%2012-14-2021%5B1%5D.pdf](https://www.provost.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/wdclientcss/Faculty/Development/Guidlines%20for%20the%20occurrence%20of%20trolling%20or%20doxing%2C%2012-14-2021%5B1%5D.pdf)

- College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, U Mass Amherst
  [https://www.umass.edu/social-sciences/faculty-resources/responding-harassment](https://www.umass.edu/social-sciences/faculty-resources/responding-harassment)
Challenge for policies

- Power imbalance works to silence or mute responding
- Most do not report formally
  - Covert, indirect, and often passive nature of behaviors hard to describe
  - Serious enough? Is this normal?
  - Fear of retaliation
  - Fear of negative impact on career
  - Nothing will be done
- No policies or unaware of policies
- Onerous nature of grievance process
- Higher up may trivialize complaints
- Feel ashamed not able to handle situation
- Not want to be labeled a “troublemaker” or not collegial
- Investigation biased if actor is higher up or high performing
Institutional level

Addressing structural influences and inequities
Role state stressors – overload & invisible work, ambiguity, conflict;
Reward structure; acknowledgement more broadly
Clarify procedures and indicators (subjective performance measures)
Mentoring and support resources
Addressing donor pressures
Institutional level: Educational programming

About policy, procedures and responsibilities and relevant resources & offices
Acceptable and unacceptable behavior and why?
Dynamics of power
How respond to unacceptable behaviors; fostering and affirming exemplary behavior
Power of the peer – “see something, say something”
Skill building – critique & argumentation, resilience, conflict management, stress management; setting expectations
Required Training on Abusive Conduct Policy for ALL Employees
Effective January 1, 2023, the University Office of the President released the University of California Abusive Conduct in the Workplace Policy and all UC Davis employees are required to complete a 20-minute asynchronous Abusive Conduct in the Workplace training by July 17, 2023, available through the UC Learning Center. Information specific to UC Davis can be found at the Abusive Conduct in the Workplace website.

Please note, the 20-minute asynchronous Abusive Conduct in the Workplace training requirement cannot be satisfied with the completion of the Is It Bullying? Awareness, Understanding and Strategies in Dealing with Abrasive Behaviors in the Workplace course.

Is it Bullying? Awareness, Understanding and Strategies in Dealing with Abrasive Behaviors in the Workplace

Is it Bullying? is part of the university's collective efforts to foster a positive working environment.
Example:
Prevention through skill-building

Setting Expectations and Resolving Conflicts Between Faculty and Graduate Students

Group/Dept Responding

• Addressing work environment
• Prolonged nature of situation creates (or is created by) an env’t that is difficult, conflictual, hostile, toxic
• Developing/articulating and reinforcing shared norms
• Some approaches:
  • Department communication protocol
  • Bystander responsibilities and efficacy
  • Restorative interventions – reintegartion
Developing shared norms: Communication Protocol

• Provides a set of agreed upon procedures that a department, team or unit creates to promote productive outcomes to conflicts or complaints that arise between and among members of the group
  • Promotes informal problem-solving between people; not close doors to usual University resources and policies
  • May include guidelines for decision-making, based on the culture and norms of the department or unit
  • The process of explicit articulation of and support for relational conduct expectations models the power of collaboration and clear communication
A pitch for the power of the peer

• Relationship with colleagues critical element in work environment
• Faculty and staff behavior and responses influence the institutional climate and culture
• Responses to norm violation communicate what the norms are here
• Colleagues are around more so than supervisors, chairs, administrators – early detection

• For faculty in particular:
  • **Self-regulating profession** – resistant to institutional regulation
    • Suasion vs coercion; collaborative vs regulatory
  • **Centrality of peer review**
Bystander Leadership

The Bystander Leadership Program is an educational program for faculty members that is intended to move participants from “insight” to “action” to increase inclusion among faculty as well as to address gender and race bias within faculty interactions in positive and prosocial ways.
Bystander Intervention: Stepping In With Care and Confidence

Course Description

Have you ever witnessed something that left you uneasy or concerned for another person at work, but you didn't know how to step in and improve the situation—so you did nothing? You are not alone. It is common to feel unsure of what to do when we witness behavior that concerns us.

This interactive workshop will introduce you to important intervention skills for building healthy, inclusive, and engaging workplaces. You will have the opportunity to practice multiple intervention options in real-life scenarios, and will leave equipped with options to interrupt and improve concerning workplace situations when they arise.
On the horizon: Restorative practices

- Philosophy of Restorative Justice
  - Focus on reparation of harm, healing of trauma
  - Grounded in community
    - Bring together those harmed, those who cause harm, and others around them

Central practice – collaborative decision making where:
- Accept and acknowledge responsibility for harmful behavior
- Repair harm caused to individuals and community
- Work to rebuild trust by understanding harm, addressing personal issues, and building positive social connections
Power of preventive work

Altering circumstances

Changing attitudes and narratives supportive of the undesired actions

Institutional and unit environmental practices

Building strong relationships a priori
  • Provide the context for early and constructive engagement
  • Building a sense of collective identity and supportive norms
    • “we watch out for each other”
A caution: Weaponizing our words

Use of incivility, (un)professional, (un)collegial, bullying may be communicative ways of:

• Silencing those who speak truth to power or who challenge the status quo
• Privileging a specific culture
• Ensuring the dominance of one narrative
• Enforcing conformity and mediocrity
Faculty as participant-observers

As a community of scholars – take responsibility
Apply critical, analytical and discursive skills to surface the “elephant in the room”
Embrace power of the peer
Facilitate sensemaking by sharing research
Help people tell their stories and guide attention to ways to address
When perceived as actors – engaging constructively and reflexively
In sum

• Academic bullying is an institutional and industry-wide issue
• Systemic, structural, and cultural influences shape expression and experience
  • Inequity connect to identity
• Costly to individuals, the institution, higher education and society
• Multi-level assessment and variety of responding are critical
• Full engagement of all university members
• Need research to further document situation and also institutional responses and impact
Thanks for your time

Let’s continue the conversation!

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Resources

• Academic Parity Movement https://paritymovement.org/about-academic-parity-movement/ - Group of faculty researchers focused on addressing bullying and mobbing in STEM disciplines; 3 virtual conferences; target support site www.targetstip.com (Morteza Mahmoudi, Michigan State U)

• http://www.workplacebullying.org/ - great resources for information on workplace bullying, including research as well as practical advice and support.

• http://www.kwesthues.com/mobbing.htm - Ken Westhues, Sociology at U of Waterloo (retired); wrote extensively on mobbing of faculty


• Inside Higher Education and Chronicle of Higher Education have done pieces on academic mobbing and bullying over the past several years.
Some additional resources


• Keashly, L. (Jan 12, 2023). When faculty are bullied: The unacceptable costs of doing our job and what universities can and should do about it. *FEBS Letters, 597*(3), 338-343.

• Lester, J. (Ed; 2013). *Workplace bullying in higher education*. Routledge

What if it is happening to you?

Getting clear and taking care

• Label what is happening to you (**Naming**)
  • Conflict, incivility, bullying, harassment?

• Enlist support from other coworkers
  • If possible, reduce dependence on other (**Bound & Buffer**)

• Enlist support from family and friends

• Engage in outside activities that build self esteem (**Buttress & Strengthen**)
Deciding what to do
(Target & transform; a negotiation perspective)

• Clarify own needs
• Get information about the other’s needs
• Think through alternatives to engaging with the other.
• Sources of power and influence you have and the other has:
  • Positional - reward, coercion, legitimate
  • Personal - expert, referent, informational
  • BATNA - Best alternative to a negotiated agreement
Happening to you

Confronting the actor:

- relative power important here
- high risk of becoming more isolated or losing job
- positive move if done early in the process when bullying/intimidation has not become established part of working relationship.
- when no threat to physical safety
- assertion and conflict management
  - Crucial conversations model – Grenny 2009

Do not retaliate!
Happening to you

• Keep factual log of events
• Look for internal bullying/harassment policies in personnel handbook or mission statement
• Look for violation of discrimination laws
• Keep copies of letters, memos and emails
Happening to you

- Report disruptive behavior to person identified in workplace policy, supervisor or HR
- Consultation with a union representative
- Consider help of an employment lawyer
- Leaving the job may be the only option in light of significant health risks.
Accused?
Take it seriously
• Listen carefully
• Don’t be defensive
• Take time to reflect
• Use of silent witness (another set of eyes & ears)
• Consider accusations rationally
• Ask what behavior (s) prefer
• Apologize genuinely for offense
• Request a third party to help with conversation

If false, take to higher up
Questions we should all ask...

• Am I aware of how I come across to my colleagues, students, staff, faculty and administrators?
• Do I ask for feedback on the way I behave?
• Do I pay attention to my own emotions while at work?
• Is my body language in tune with what I am saying?
• Do I join in when jokes are made at someone else’s expense?