

Incivility in Academic Environments: If You See Something, Say Something

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Objectives:

1) Explore modalities of incivility and bullying in academic environments

2) Consider strategies for reducing incivility and bullying or its effects

I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Incivility: Rude and discourteous actions (ANA, 2015)

Bullying: Intentional, more frequent and intense, repetitive interactions usually by one person against another (ANA, 2015)

Mobbing: Repetitive interactions by a group constrained in size by the setting (e.g. workplace)

What is bullying?

Core elements:

Unwanted aggressive behavior

Observed or perceived power imbalance

Repetition / high likelihood of repetition of behaviors

Modes: Direct or indirect

Types: Physical, verbal, relational, property damage

(CDC, 2014, from Olweus, 1994)

Examples:

A new faculty member screamed at a clerical staff twice in front of peers, “Just do what I tell you,” when the staff person was trying to protect the faculty member from making a serious error.

A department chair published a paper based on the slides describing results of a junior faculty member’s dissertation.

A faculty member is famous for selecting one student in the class to “pick on” all semester.

A student “hit on” a same sex professional staff, who felt he could not complain.

Who bullies:

Administrators, faculty, staff, students

Who is bullied:

Administrators, faculty, staff, students

Prevalence:

**Students: 8.6 – 27.15% have been victims
63.35% have witnessed**

**Faculty: 18-68% have been victims
22-75% have witnessed**

Staff: 18.1-60.7% have been victims

Administrators: 62% witnessed / experienced within past 18 months

Numerous authors report that incivility and bullying have increased in recent years.

Dynamics of bullying:

Bully-centered motives: power and attention, access to resources, protection of status, frustration, perception of injustice

Victim-centered motives: race or appearance, a failure

Cultures that breed hostility: competitive, adversarial, highly politicized, authoritarian, more conformist

The tenure process plays a role:

If tenure is perceived as risky, more incivility may occur

Junior faculty feel powerless

Tenure may actually increase both being a perpetrator and a victim

Tenure / academic freedom may feed discourse that becomes uncivil

Organizational factors that place universities at risk:

Strict hierarchy

Organizational change

Helpless management

Poorly organized work

Role conflict

Conflicting goals

High job security

Subjective performance measures

Competitive nature of faculty work

Shrinking resources



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How did we get to this point?

**It has been part of academic culture for 1000 years,
since Oxford and Cambridge were founded (Axtell, 2016)**

The PhD socialization process

The tenure track process

Diminishing resources

Increasing competition

Increasing corporitization of academic organizations

Why does incivility matter?

Cost in stress / human suffering even for witnesses

Cost in terms of legal risk

Compromises socialization to a caring profession

Student retention and performance suffer

Socialization / The culture reinforces the behavior

Great junior faculty leave

Tenured faculty who are bullied may disengage

Disengagement is costly and compromises institutional goals

Strategies:

Intervention must come from the president and cabinet

Data driven:

What is the institutional climate?

Do incidents come from specific units?

Do genders and races participate equitably in service:

Is compensation equitable?

What are the patterns of tenure and PhD completion?

What policies exist?

What reporting mechanisms exist?

Insert text

Strategies, continued

Are mentorship programs in place?

Education throughout the system – what incivility is

Department chairs and faculty need continuing education on management of conflict and difficult conversations

Issues need to be raised in meetings

Codes of conduct for faculty, staff, students

The goal is a culture of respect / safety

Faculty / staff development on work life balance

Strategies, continued

When a situation is reported:

Involve HR or Student Life

Victims need support: listening, coaching

Bullies may be able to learn new behaviors

Reporting mechanism

Maintaining a paper trail – organization, victim

Redress / punishment

Disclosure

Please note that the literature is conflicted on reporting.

Conclusions:

Resolution requires acknowledgement

The cost of organizational avoidance is high

Considerable resources exist, drawing from corporate culture

Change starts at the top

There is no reason for organizations to tolerate incivility

Questions?



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Thank you!

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