

Addressing Challenging Graduate Student Situations: Comprehensive Approaches and Techniques



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Introductions



- Name
- Institution
- Position
- Length of time in position

Role of Dean

(dean, associate dean, assistant dean, etc.)



/dēn/

noun 🔊

1. the head of a college or university faculty.
“the dean of the graduate college”
synonyms: college head, university official, chief.
“students need the dean’s consent”
2. Counselor, mediator, referee, negotiator, peacemaker....

Barbara Scenario



- Work in four groups
 - Fifteen minutes for discussion
- One person per group will report out
 - Five minutes for the report out per group
- How do you handle this situation?

Barbara Scenario



- Barbara was one of the top three graduates in her Master's program. Barbara was encouraged by her advisor to begin a Ph.D. program and did so.
- Barbara is a non-traditional student who has experience in corporate security for a large, national retail store. She hated the job and wanted to get out of the field and teach. Barbara is single, but is the primary caregiver of her parents.
- Barbara was encouraged to teach one course each semester before entering the dissertation phase. Barbara is ABD, and her progress is erratic.

Barbara Scenario – Group 1



- Students are complaining to the department head that Barbara is not a good teacher.
- Students report that she often arrives late for class (20 minutes or more) and is rarely prepared to teach.
- One student who was struggling in her class noted that she had a number of headless dolls on her bookshelf.

Barbara Scenario – Group 2



- Barbara shared with her advisor that she suffers from depression and takes medication.
- In meetings regarding her dissertation, she seemed to have direction and would promise to return in one to two weeks. When she returned several months later she indicated that she had had issues with her parents, her cats or her car, and was unable to complete various tasks.
- On one occasion, she became angry and stormed out of her advisor's office.

Barbara Scenario – Group 3



- Barbara experienced significant weight gain and loss, and her advisor thought this could be related to her depression.
- Barbara ended communication with her advisor for over a year.
- Peers made comments in front of her advisor that Barbara was often very aggressive and made statements about having a gun and knowing how to use it. This was just after the Virginia Tech murders.

Barbara Scenario – Group 4



- The Graduate College updated its policy and starting tracking unsatisfactory research (UR) grades, in addition to formal course grades and semester and overall GPAs. Now, a UR grade may result in an enrollment hold and more than one semester of UR grades can lead to dismissal from the graduate program.
- Barbara had six consecutive semesters of UR at the time of the policy change and a hold was put on her registration.
- Barbara still had two years for “time to degree” and didn’t understand why she couldn’t register. She demanded to meet with the Dean of the Graduate College. She appeared angry – raising her voice with the staff and loudly projecting, “Something isn’t right here and I demand to see her NOW!”

You Can't Make this Stuff Up....



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- Graduate College had no knowledge of the situation until the student showed up demanding to see the dean!

Graduate Student Concerns of the Past



Piled Higher and Deeper *by Jorge Cham*

www.phdcomics.com



www.phdcomics.com

title: "Red ink" - originally published 3/7/2006

Complexity of the Issues has Increased



- How do you handle these situations?
 - What questions would you ask?
 - What are you listening for?
 - What are your resources?
- May be many possible approaches
- Possible solutions can be challenging given the nature of graduate education
 - Dependence on individual faculty member as advisor, instructor, etc.

Barbara Scenario – Where to Start?



- **Unpack Situation – immediacies of concerns**
 - Student issues
 - ✦ Threat to self or others, mental health concern, bad behavior, hazing...
 - Academic issues
 - ✦ Lack of expectations and satisfactory progress, plagiarism...
 - Lack of reporting
 - ✦ Faculty member, students, staff...
 - Faculty issues
 - ✦ “Benign” neglect, abusive environment, hazing, work hours associated with GTA/GRA ...
 - At risk populations
 - ✦ Students with disabilities, immigration restrictions, underrepresented groups...

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 - Unpack issues, bring the right people/resources to bare on the situation

Break



The Student Affairs Perspective

Graduate Student Issues



- Mental health concerns
- Stress (impact on mental and physical health)
- Alcohol and drug abuse (abuse of prescription drugs)
- Veiled and direct threats,
- Verbal harassment
- Suicide ideation and self-harm
- Title IX complaints
- Financial and family woes
- Perceived or actual abuse of graduate students

Institutional and Personal Issues



- Graduate faculty unaware of student support services and emergency protocol
- Student services marketing typically aimed at undergraduates
- Graduate student isolation (older, family, lower disposable income, work, research demands)
- International students hesitant to use counseling services
- Perceived bureaucracy with process of advanced degrees

“Grad School Blues” by Piper Fogg



- Studies have found that graduate school is not a particularly healthy place.
- At UC Berkeley, 67% of graduate students said they had felt hopeless at least once in the year.
- 54% felt so depressed they had a hard time functioning.
- Nearly 10% said they had considered suicide, a 2004 survey found.

“Grad School Blues” Continued



- 25% of graduate students surveyed were not aware of mental health services on the campus.
- Stigma about seeking help in a highly competitive atmosphere, can be seen as admitting weakness.
 - Particularly challenging if fellow graduate students are employed in the counseling center.
- Graduate students are in a position of profound powerlessness.

Warning Signs and Symptoms



- Difficulty concentrating
- Fatigue
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Changes in sleep and eating patterns
- Persistent aches and pains
- Loss of interest in activities and hobbies that were once enjoyable

Suicide Ideation



- 47% of graduate students who considered suicide in the last year did not tell anyone.
- 52% did not seek professional help.
- Relationship problems are number one for suicide ideation followed by academic, financial and family problems.
- Chris Brownson, Head of Counseling Services at UT Austin

“Paranoid? You Must Be a Grad Student”



- “The model depicts how factors common in the graduate-school experience like being a newcomer, unsure of your standing, and knowing that you’re being sized up constantly can ultimately induce social paranoia, a heightened sensitivity to what you imagine others might be thinking about you.”
- Don Troop, Kramer, author of Paranoid Cognition in Social Systems

The Challenge



**DISCERNING WHICH BEHAVIOR IS
ANNOYING AND POTENTIALLY
PROBLEMATIC FROM
DANGEROUS BEHAVIOR**

A Faculty Guide to Addressing Disruptive and Dangerous Behaviors



Disruptive behaviors

- Taking/making phone calls, texting, social media
 - Students misuse of technology (cheating using tech)
 - Frequent interruption of professor
 - Inappropriate or overly revealing clothing in classroom, PJ's
 - Carrying on a side conversation during class
- Brian Van Brunt and W. Scott Lewis, 2013, by Routledge Press

Disruptive Behaviors Continued



- Frequent use of restroom
 - Poor personal hygiene
 - Use of alcohol or drugs in class
 - Eating in class without permission
 - Strange clothing (Goth, military)
 - Reading newspaper or books not related to class in class
- Brian Van Brunt and W. Scott Lewis, 2013, by Routledge Press

Dangerous Behaviors



- **Racist or other fixated talk**
 - “All gays are an abomination to God”
 - “ Muslims are all terrorists.”
- **Bullying other students in class**
- **Direct communicated threat to professor or student**
 - “I am going to kick your ass.”
- **Prolonged non-verbal passive aggressive behavior**
 - Glaring at the professor
- **Self injurious behavior**
- **Physical assault**

Dangerous Behaviors Continued



- Storming out of the classroom when upset
- Conversations to upset other students
 - Weapons, killing, etc.
- Throwing objects in class
- Psychotic, delusional or rambling speech
- Arrogant or rude talk to the professor or other students
- Objectifying language that depersonalizes prof or other student

During the interaction.....



- Remain calm, be polite – don't feed emotions
- Use assertive body language and eye contact
- Respect other person's physical space
- Lower voice and slow rate of speech
- Use the student's name as much as possible
- Encourage student to sit
- Engage in problem solving if possible
- When in doubt, if you feel unsafe, leave
- Document - document - document!!!!!!

Behavioral Consultation Team



- Typical mission statement
- Through a **proactive, collaborative, coordinated, objective and thoughtful approach**, we will **identify, assess, intervene and manage situations** that pose or may reasonably pose a threat to the safety and well-being of the campus community.
- Gene Deisinger, Ph. D., Marisa Randazzo, Ph.D., Daniel O'Neil and Jenna Savage

BCT/BIT Typical Membership



- Vice President for Student Affairs
- Campus police
- Academic Affairs representative
- Director of Counseling
- Director of Residential Life
- Student Health Director
- University Legal Office representative
- Director of Campus Life
- HR and Employee Assistance
- Counselor/psychologist
- Other ad hoc members
 - Graduate College, international student affairs office, etc.

ANOTHER BIG ISSUE



TITLE IX COMPLIANCE

Title IX Compliance



- 2001 Sexual Harassment Guide by Office of Civil Rights
- Dear Colleague Letter (2011)
- Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities by those campuses receiving federal financial assistance
- Sexual harassment of students (which includes sexual violence) is a form of sex discrimination prohibited under Title IX.

Gender Discrimination defined



- Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is **sufficiently severe and pervasive that it interferes with or limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's programs.**
- Sexual violence is prohibited under Title IX.

Our Responsibilities



Take immediate and effective steps to:

- End sexual harassment and sexual violence
- Prevent its recurrence
- Address its effects on the victim (change housing, classes, lab assignment, etc.)
- Prevent retaliation
 - 31% of all EEOC charges were based on claims of retaliation in 2009

“Deliberate Indifference” Standard



- This standard was drawn from two cases
 - Gebser v. Lago Vista Independent School District (1998)
 - Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education (1999)

“If you knew about an incident or reasonably should have known and did nothing, you or the institution may be said to be deliberately indifferent and individuals may be sued for monetary damages personally.

- Regardless of where the incident took place (on or off campus)
- Law enforcement investigation does not relieve the school of the need to independently investigate the situation

Procedural Compliance with Title IX

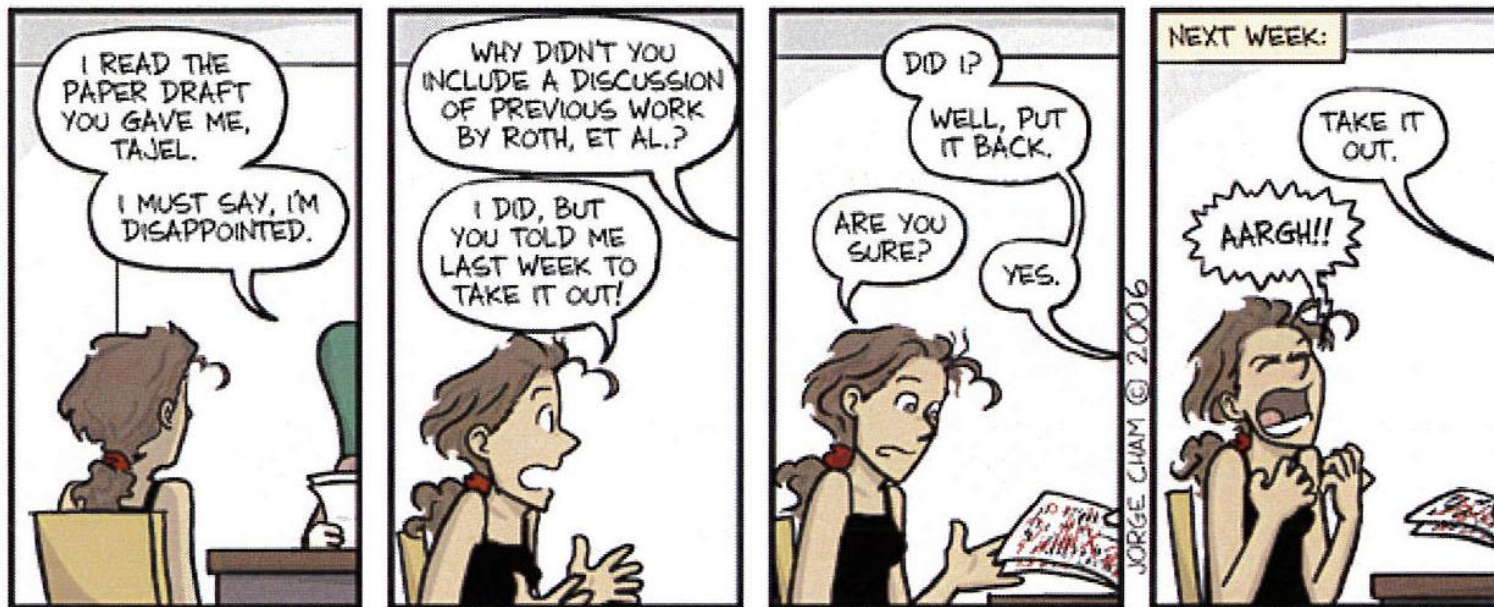


- MUST designate at least one employee to coordinate Title IX compliance (may have deputies that are well trained in investigation)
- MUST publish notice of non-discrimination (we must phrase it in such a way that is easily understood by students and must be readily understood)
- MUST publicize grievance procedures
- MUST provide adequate training to faculty and staff who may receive complaints



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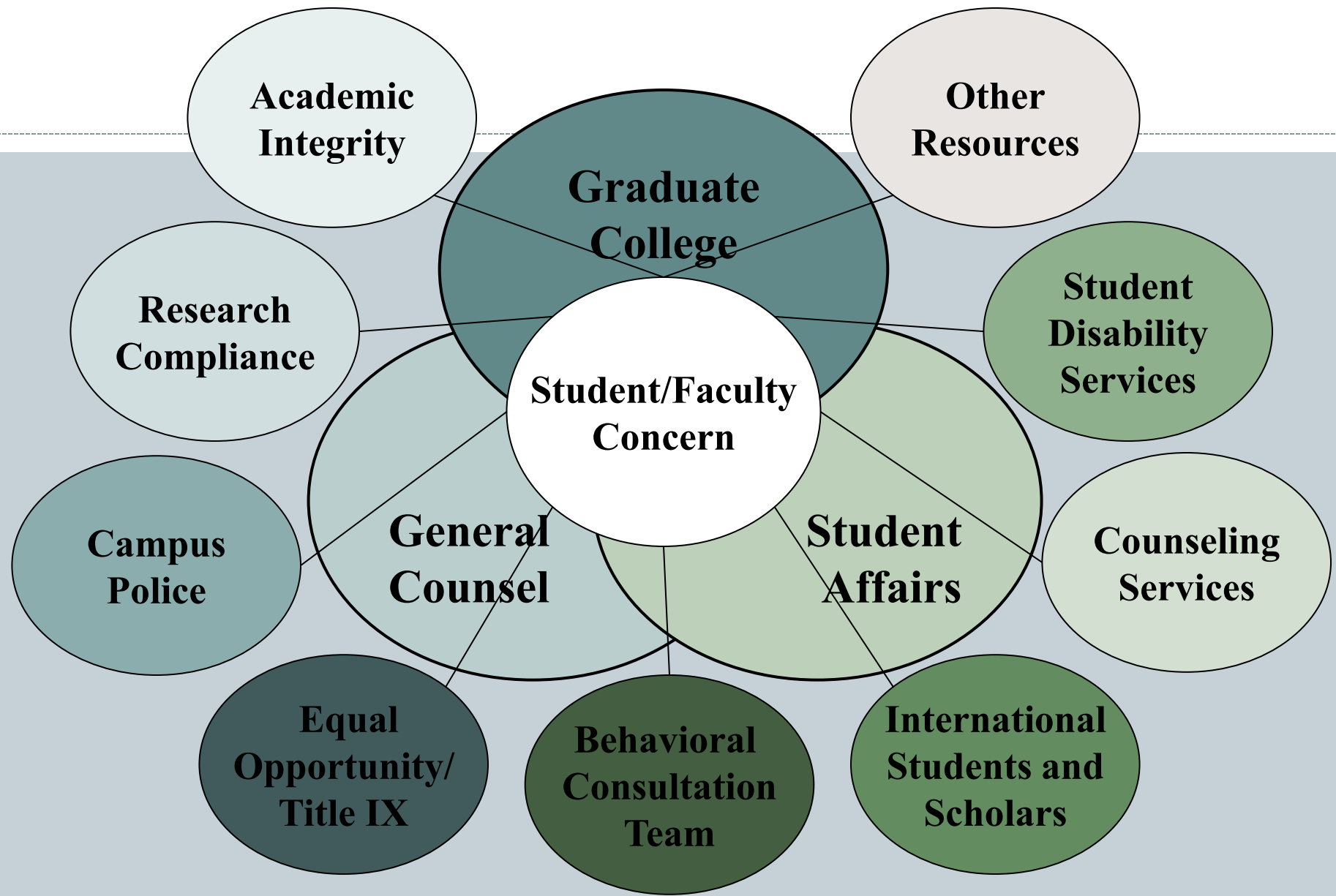
WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM

title: "Take it out" - originally published 1/3/2007

What We Need To Do



- Listen and follow-up
 - Learn to “unpack” complex situations
- Work together to avoid silos of information
- Train faculty, staff, GRA’s and GTA’s to recognize and deal with aberrant or troubling behavior
 - Multiple opportunities, continuous reminders, etc.
- Encourage faculty, staff and students to report behaviors of concern before they become a crisis
- Know referral agencies on campus (counseling, etc.) and encourage students to use campus resources



Academic Integrity

Other Resources

Graduate College

Research Compliance

Student Disability Services

Student/Faculty Concern

Campus Police

General Counsel

Student Affairs

Counseling Services

Equal Opportunity/Title IX

Behavioral Consultation Team

International Students and Scholars

Prevention Practices



- Build relationships/connections/partnerships/collaborations **before** the problem arises
 - Campus police officers checking buildings and noting concerns
- Learn what campus resources exist
- Graduate schools must be seen as a resource
 - Student, faculty and staff concerns
- Selection of graduate coordinators
 - Front-line personnel
- Annual reviews – timely feedback to students
 - “Syllabus” for research courses
- Graduate program and student handbooks

Evan Scenario



- Individually read the background information
- Jot down your thoughts to the questions posed

Evan Scenario



- Tutors for the department to mixed reviews
- Perceives himself as an excellent student
 - Dismayed when he received 9/100 on his mid-term exam
- Claims that the faculty member (a woman) is biased against him
 - Requests the department head re-grade his exam – received 5/100
- Alleges religious bias because the department head is Muslim
- Shares his thoughts about unfair grading and bias with students using classroom learning platform
 - Troubling rant
 - Complained about lack of response to an email that was received at 3:20 am
- Professor and department head complain to the VPSA
 - They are a little worried because of his tone
- Based on everything to date, his GTA position is terminated
 - Triggers several emails characterized as “hostile, accusatory, irrational and troubling”
- **What action steps do you recommend at this juncture?**

Evan Scenario



- Begins sending his theory of calculus with exercises and solutions to many of his fellow students
 - Documents are 30-60 pages in length each
- States that he understands why the faculty dislikes him – “so advanced” that they are jealous of him – in VPSA meeting
- Redoubles his efforts and includes his version of the “Evian Bible” with his theory of calculus (“total gibberish”) when asked to cease such messages
- **What do you recommend now?**

Evan Scenario



- Begins writing rants to the University President and VPSA
 - “I am Christ and I am coming home. You will lose everything and everyone you have ever cared about. You will not have the opportunity to repent on that day. You will perish and be consumed in the flames!”
- Faculty member refuses to go to class, the students in the class are freaked out and the President is none too happy.
- **What now?**

Evan Scenario



- At what point in this scenario might you report this to your Behavioral Consultations Team or equivalent?
- Could sharing this information violate FERPA?
- Where does the First Amendment end on matters such as this and threatening begin?

Resources



- Mediation training – available from law schools, municipalities, etc.
- Association for Student Conduct Administration (ASCA)
 - February national annual conference and summer training academy
 - Legislative mandates (FERPA, Clery, Title IX, etc.)
 - Threat assessment/BIT training
 - Due process
 - Student conduct
- Legal Issues in Higher Education (Burlington, VT)
- Phinished website
- National Graduate Student Crisis Hotline 1-800-472-3457

Prevent Future Situations



QUESTIONS