

## Faculty to Faculty Example

Last year, during my first few months as an assistant professor at VT, I was befriended by a tenured faculty member in my department. This woman was also assigned as one of my formal faculty mentors. After several unpleasant encounters, I decided to end the social relationship last August. Since then, this woman (M, for purposes of brevity) has engaged in several instances of lecturing me and threatening my job security. Unfortunately, the nature of these threats is not straightforward, leaving her plenty of room to claim that she's just acting as my mentor and telling me these things "in my best interest."

For example: earlier this semester, I was asked by several graduate students to tutor them. This ended up backfiring, and I was asked to stop by another faculty member in our department. I did, but M arranged a meeting with me two weeks later to rehash the subject. This meeting came across as entirely punitive, as the situation had already been explained to me and I had already agreed to stop tutoring the students. M kept me in her office for over 40 minutes, repeating herself, attempting to shame me, and seemingly not stopping until I said exactly what she wanted me to say, how she wanted me to say it.

Two weeks after that meeting, M entered my office, saying "I know you don't like unsolicited mentoring, but..." and then proceeded to insist that her previous meeting had been in my best interest and that my reaction hadn't been acceptable, because junior faculty want to "seem open to advice." She continued, "If I was on the P & T Committee..." which read as a threat. So much of what she says comes across as "Do what I say or you'll get in trouble," as if acting like she wants me to act is the only way to succeed in our department.

The worst part about interactions with M is that they've made me paranoid. I know her conversations are manipulative and subversive in a way that makes them very hard to describe without making myself sound whiny and thin-skinned. "It's not what she said, it's how she said it" is a very poor-sounding complaint, yet it's important to understand that bullying is not always overt. I don't trust a thing this woman says, and every interaction with her leaves me tense and uncomfortable. The fact that she frames all of these interactions as "mentoring" only serves to bolster her position of power and make me feel less able to disagree with her presentation.

## Faculty to Student Example

Last academic year, in the fall, my committee met to approve my plan of study. Upon arrival to class the next day, classmates asked how the committee meeting went and if my plan of study was approved. I promptly replied the meeting went well and my plan of study was approved. The professor for the class who happens to also be the department graduate coordinator stated in front of the entire class "Your plan of study isn't approved until I say it is approved and I am not sure I will approve it." Not sure about the meaning of the interaction that just took place, I remained quiet. Her tone and comment felt like a threat.

The following day after class I mentioned the interaction with the professor/graduate coordinator to another professor in the department, whom I trusted. The trusted professor shared that if my committee approved my plan of study there shouldn't not be a problem due the committee having final say so if all the requirements were met. The trusted professor also shared that if the graduate coordinator decided to reject my plan of study, it would be as if the graduate coordinator didn't trust her peers. After breathing a sigh of relief, I then asked what I should do. The trusted professor then asked what my end game was with the situation. I shared with the trusted professor that my end game was to make sure something didn't happen to other students like what had happened to me. The trusted professor told me to wait until the end semester was complete until I spoke with the department chair about the situation due to the graduate coordinator's reputation for being vindictive against faculty and students.

After speaking with the trusted professor, I decided to move forward with at least meeting with the ombudsperson since that was confidential. The ombudsperson mirrored what the trusted professor had said. At the end of the semester, I met with the department chair to share the incident. The department chair was appalled and shared that several students had relayed the same story to her on my behalf. To my knowledge, the professor/graduate coordinator was spoken too, however, her reputation of running off students and being unprofessional still exists.

The main issue is the graduate coordinator wields her power around to block students she doesn't "like" from privileges and assisting them. For instance, she held my plan of study for 6 months before approving it to be sent the graduate school, she will not acknowledge my presence if I am in the room even when I speak to her, and she will only answer my email if our department chair is copied on the email. I wish I could say I am the only one such incidents have happened to, but sadly that is not the case.