

## Faculty to Student Example

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to provide you with a confidential case study of academic bullying that I experienced at Virginia Tech. I believe that this is a serious issue that I know leads to both health and mental health issues. This is my personal case. While I had resources in my personal life as well as used the graduate school and my departments resources to resolve most of my issues, my fellow graduate student colleagues did not fair as well and choose to leave the program to protect their health. This was even after accessing the supports of the graduate school resources and Cook counseling center.

The first three months of my program seemed to be going well. While I noticed some red flags, I believed that it was just part of the experience. After the first three months, those red flags turned into true academic bullying. Following are just some of the experts of what I experienced. There are too many to completely list here.

- Another faculty member asked me if I was interested in pursuing a potential research topic that was motivated from a class discussion. I met with this faculty member for one meeting just to pursue the potential of beginning this research project. When I came back from the meeting, my advisor asked me where I went and after I told her she yelled at me in front of other graduate students and told me that the faculty member will use me and I should never work with her. She continued to scream at me in front of others. In order to avoid any more problems, I told this faculty member that I was not able to work with her. At the end of the semester, my advisor pushed me to question my grade in the class. In this process, I witnessed her making phone calls and doing things to access this faculty members settings in her scholar site to try and “investigate”. I was uncomfortable with this but forced to go along with this or face more yelling and intimidation. I eventually refused to pursue further investigation into the matter, which was faced with criticism.
- Many times my supervision meetings were spent doing other things for my advisor such as shopping or listening to her make phone calls. When I asked for assistance in research, she told me I had to figure it out and that I worried too much. When I accessed the statistics assistance offered by Virginia Tech, she yelled at me and told me I should have asked her. However, when I did ask her, she would just tell me to go read.
- I was criticized in front of undergraduate and graduate students continually for being “too nice”, “too concerned about my students”, “valuing my family”, and “spending too much time on my coursework”. This is just to name a few. I was continually criticized in front of others for being kind to everyone including one of the custodians. Eventually, during a supervision meeting, she called the custodians supervisor to complain about her in front of me to be sure to show me that she had the power. This show of her power happened often in multiple situations. While it was not said outright, this behavior was meant to intimidate me as a student.

- Due to the position of power that my advisor had, she had access to students' records. She told me confidential information about other graduate students. She would also ask me multiple questions about other students. This questioning was done to get other students "in trouble". She pitted many students against each other in this manner. I was also present when she would go into students' accounts and look at their information. This was unethical and meant to again show me her power. This is just one of the many unethical behaviors that I witnessed.
- I was humiliated, teased, spoken to harshly, and intimidated often by this advisor. Several graduate and undergraduate students had also felt this way and sought out my advice in how to best handle this.
- Using many resources, I was able to move to a new advisor. My former advisor still holds a position of power in my department. She has not spoken to me in two years and out right ignores me in front of other students and faculty members. While I am not able to prove it, in her position of power, she has delayed documents of mine that required her signature and treated me unfairly in assigning departmental duties.

Of great concern of mine is the power that this faculty member still holds. Regardless of her behavior, it is the students who have suffered. This is a serious issue that can have drastic consequences. I am happy to be an advocate for future students. I am thankful that the graduate school considers this a severe problem and is willing to address this issue. While the ombudsman is a great resource to talk, it does not come with any power to make a change. I look forward to hearing about the next steps of the graduate school as it addresses academic bullying.