

Academic Bullying Case Study #2 - Tough love vs. academic bullying

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Tough love vs. academic bullying

- **Side One (Alex):** Alex is a new PhD student in the department. Alex's Master's Faculty was very encouraging and supportive of Alex, always providing feedback in a positive light. Alex's new PhD Faculty (Dr. Smith) is a tenured faculty member who is known for a "non-coddling" approach to mentorship. When Alex submits a paper draft to Dr. Smith, Alex is upset and alarmed when Dr. Smith is unhappy with the draft and has numerous major edits for Alex to incorporate. Dr. Smith does not sugar-coat suggestions and states his expectations for higher-quality work next time. Being accustomed to more hand-holding and a different mentorship style, Alex complains to the department head that Dr. Smith is emotionally abusive and hyper-critical.
 - **What are your thoughts about Alex's experience?**
 - **If you were Alex, how would you feel? What outcomes would you want to see happen?**
 - **Why do you think Dr. Smith acted in this way?**
 - **What actions do you think could be taken to address Alex's concerns?**
 - **Whom do you think the student could talk to in order to get perspective on Dr. Smith's actions?**
 - **What do you think would be some possible outcomes if Alex talked to other students in the lab about their experiences with Dr. Smith?**

- **Side Two (Dr. Smith):** Dr. Smith is known for an intense approach to mentorship and treats all of the students the same. Dr. Smith believes that "tough love" is the best way to help students reach their full potentials and that there is always room for improvement. Dr. Smith provides constructive feedback to Alex on a report that is due. Since this is Alex's first paper within the lab, Dr. Smith has a lot of comments about the paper and tells Alex that the quality of work for even a draft needs to improve.
 - **What are your thoughts about this situation after hearing Dr. Smith's side?**
 - **If you were Dr. Smith, how would you feel if you were approached with this student's concerns?**
 - **Have your opinions on how the situation should be handled changed since hearing side 2? If so, how?**
 - **What do you think could be done in the short term to resolve the immediate tension and what would have to change long term in order to create a working relationships between Alex and Dr. Smith?**

- **Case Study 2: Final Thoughts**
 - **How does this case resonate with your experiences at Virginia Tech?**
 - **What level of support would allow you to move forward in a positive direction?**