

## Academic Bullying Case Study #4 - Student witnesses bullying

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### Student witnesses bullying

- **Side One (Alex):** Alex is a first year PhD Student and is thus taking several classes, starting dissertation research, and working 20 hours/week as a graduate teaching assistant. Alex is also a parent to two children under the age of 5 and is trying to balance a million things at once. When Alex meets with Dr. Smith about the research project, Alex tries to explain that the expectations being asked are too great for a first year student taking a full course load. Dr. Smith views this as an excuse and yells at Alex. Feeling overwhelmed, Alex rushes out of Dr. Smith's office to avoid crying in front of Dr. Smith.
  - **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 (Bailey):** Bailey is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Master's student. Therefore, Bailey knows most everyone in the department and has strong working relationships with many of the faculty and staff. One day, Bailey hears a student in another lab (Alex) being yelled at by Alex's Faculty (Dr. Smith). While Alex and Dr. Smith are in Dr. Smith's office, the door is open and the yelling can easily be heard down the hall. Bailey sees Alex run out of the office looking upset and flustered. Bailey is torn on whether to report the potential emotional abuse of Dr. Smith to the department head, confront Dr. Smith directly, or just talk to Alex to see if everything is okay.
  - **If you were Bailey, how would witnessing this situation make you feel?**
  - **If you were Bailey, what would you do and why?**
  - **What responsibility do you think witnesses have in these types of situations?**
  
- **Side Three (Dr. Smith):** Dr. Smith has a meeting with Alex. Dr. Smith and Alex have had several previous discussions about work expectations, as Alex is having a hard time keeping up with research due to class and assistantship work. When Alex says there is still no progress on the research, Dr. Smith is frustrated and yells in order to make Alex understand that not working on the project is unacceptable. Since this is not the first time they have had this conversation, Dr. Smith believes that the more understanding tactic that was used in their previous conversations is not working, and thus takes a more assertive approach to getting the point across.
  - **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 4: 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?**