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**BOOK IDENTIFIES INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS IN COLLEGE TEACHING**

*The authors determined and defined consensus among faculty members in several disciplines and at several kinds of colleges and universities.*

BLACKSBURG, Aug. 5 , 1999 - "College and university faculty members are reporting a dramatic rise in (student) incivility in the classroom," write John M. Braxton of Vanderbilt University and Alan E. Bayer of Virginia Tech in their just released book, *Faculty Misconduct in Collegiate Teaching* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). "While many explanations have been offered... rarely has the professorate looked inward toward itself as a possible source," until now. "Might faculty misconduct in teaching provoke this growing problem of student misbehavior in the classroom?" ask Braxton and Bayer.

The book identifies seven inviolable standards -- behaviors that result in the highest level of collegial indignity, and nine admonitory standards -- less serious negative behaviors, but still deserving of collegial disdain. "We wanted to identify -- maybe establish -- norms," says Bayer. "College and university faculty members possess a great deal of autonomy in their roles as teachers and researchers. Norms serve as guides to their performance of these roles. They function as an informal code of conduct."

Bayer's contributions to the book included illustrating each unacceptable or questionable behavior with a lively hypothetical example. "Professor Willburn is always too busy to prepare for her first day..." "Mr. McLaughlin is habitually late..." "Dr. Barkley is quick to humiliate his students ..."

**Seven inviolable norms**

"Norms vary in their intensity. Violations of some are largely ignored or dismissed as personal eccentricities, whereas violations of others are seen as demanding the most severe sanctions available to social agents," write Braxton and Bayer.

Faculty members surveyed indicated that of 126 behaviors, they are severely unwilling to accept 33 behaviors that fall under the headings of (in alphabetical order) *condescending negativism, inattentive planning, moral turpitude, particularistic grading, personal disregard, uncommunicated course details, and uncooperative cynicism.*

- **Condescending Negativism** is the treatment of colleagues and students in a condescending and demeaning way. For example, an instructor makes condescending remarks to a student in class, expresses impatience with a slow learner in class, or criticizes the academic performance of a student in front of other students. Unacceptable behavior also includes negative comments about a colleague in public before students. "Such faculty behavior

- discourages learning and intellectual risk taking," the book notes. Some 71 percent of faculty respondents agreed about the seriousness of this behavior.
- **Inattentive Planning** is defined by two behaviors: "required texts and other reading materials are not routinely ordered ... in time to be available for the first class session" and "a course outline or syllabus is not prepared for the course." More than three-fourths (79 percent) of respondents would want sanctioning for this behavior.
  - **Moral Turpitude** includes sexual relations or sexual comments to a student, or attending class while intoxicated. Almost all faculty members surveyed (98 percent) agreed in the inviolability of this behavior.
  - **Particularistic Grading** is the uneven or preferential treatment of students in the awarding of grades. Bayer's fictional anecdote describes a teacher who meets with a group of her students outside of class and allows them extra credit assignments. There are eight denounced behaviors associated with this class of misconduct, including "social, personal, or other nonacademic characteristics of students are taken into account in the awarding of grades;" "the instructor allows personal friendships with students to intrude on the objective grading of their work;" and "stated policies about late work and incompletes are not universally applied to all students." About 83 percent of faculty respondents agree with the extreme severity of sanctions for this behavior cluster, according to the book. "We judge science on the basis of quality, not on the basis of researchers' country of origin etc. The same applies in the classroom, with how a faculty member approaches students. We should treat all students fairly and equally, with differentiation in evaluations based solely upon academic performance," says Bayer.
  - **Personal Disregard** includes behavior ranging from poor hygiene and the use of profanity to frequent early dismissal of classes, with 69 percent of those surveyed agreeing with the seriousness of such behavior.
  - **Uncommunicated Course Details** occurs when a faculty member fails to inform a students about important course requirements during the first day of class, and can also include the instructor changing classroom location to another building without informing students in advance, and changing meeting times without consulting students. Such behavior was condemned by 83 percent of those surveyed.
  - **Uncooperative cynicism** describes the refusal to participate in departmental matters as part of the role of college teaching, in particular, refusal to advise students, refusal to participate in curriculum planning, and expressed cynicism about teaching. Some 72 percent agree with the severity of such behavior. Bayer's fictional example is a full professor with several textbooks to his credit and no complaints from his classroom; but he refuses to advise undergraduate students or participate in curriculum planning.

## Other types of misconduct

The authors group 53 behaviors into the nine "admonitory norms" -- behaviors that reflect broad consensus among faculty members as being inappropriate: **advisement negligence; authoritarian classroom** -- or a closed approach to course content and to different points of view expressed by students; **inadequate communication regarding course structure; inadequate course design; inconvenience avoidance** -- such as when the faculty member violates confidentiality by leaving graded papers and exams where students can search through to find their own; **instructional narrowness** in teaching methods and ways of assessing students; **insufficient syllabus; teaching secrecy** -- such as by not sharing course material or ideas with colleagues; and **undermining colleagues**.

Faculty members across all type of colleges and universities surveyed share similar disapproval of authoritarian classroom, inadequate course design, and teaching secrecy, Braxton and Bayer report. Research university faculty are less critical of advisement negligence, inadequate communication, inconvenience avoidance, insufficient syllabus, and undermining colleagues. Academics at selective liberal arts colleges also express less disapproval of inconvenience avoidance, as well as of instructional narrowness.

Women faculty members in particular dislike the "authoritarian classroom" teaching style. "An 'authoritarian classroom' might have once been the norm, and may still be in other parts of the world," says Bayer. "Having faculty identify it as an example of misconduct represents an evolution in attitude."

Bottom line, the books says, **inviolable standards are respect for students as individuals, equal consideration of all students, a professional obligation to prepare for courses, and the obligation to participate in the teaching-related administration and planning of one's department, college, or university.** "This behavior is critical not only to effective teaching, but to building the foundation from which individuals advance knowledge."

## Conclusion -- Identifying standards just the beginning

What instigated the study?

"We'd been working together on studying misconduct in scientific research for a number of years," recalls Bayer. "Most research universities and several federal agencies now have review panels for dealing with allegations of misconduct in science research, and professional organizations have codes of conduct pertaining to the research enterprise. It occurred to us that most university administrators deal more frequently with allegations related to improper teaching or misconduct in the classroom. Yet, there are few university panels or professional codes related to misfeasance or malfeasance in teaching. And there hasn't been much written. There

is a lot about how to teach and how students learn, but not about professorial behavioral misconduct.

"Administrators feel as if they are left out on a limb because they are not sure how others might perceive a particular behavior," says Bayer. "Issues of academic freedom come up when administrators try to deal with faculty member misconduct in the classroom versus standards of behavior and expectations of what teachers should do, starting with meeting classes, planning classes, and treating students with dignity."

The book is a first step in identifying or instituting college-level teaching norms.

"A decade or so ago, literature was trying to define what scientific misconduct is. So that's where we are with teaching misconduct -- trying to determine what the consensus is," Bayer says.

Braxton and Bayer recommend keeping systematic records of incidents, developing a formal code of teaching conduct, doing audits at the college and department level of prevailing standards, creating a committee to hear misconduct charges, creating sanctions, including instruction regarding teaching standards in graduate education, rewarding faculty members for teaching integrity as part of raises, promotion, and tenure, codifying teaching expectations in collective bargaining agreements, and expanding institutional policies to include teaching behaviors.

"Graduate education doesn't tend to train us for a teaching role. The National Academy of Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science have called for all disciplines to teach ethics in research, but there is no counterpart to teach the ethical basics of how to teach. More professional association codes of conduct address how to treat animals in research than how to treat students in the classroom," Bayer observes.

Data collection spanned almost six years. An important resource for identifying the preliminary 126 unacceptable behaviors -- since literature searches were not very helpful -- was the members of the American Sociological Association's Project on Teaching, reports Bayer. Other teaching colleagues also contributed. Then three separate surveys were conducted, focusing on faculty in different disciplines and different segments of the population of higher education institutions, from the most prestigious and very large doctoral-granting research universities to the community colleges whose mission is almost exclusively teaching.

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