



A Faculty Guide to Addressing Disruptive and Dangerous Behavior

Van Brunt, Brian; and Lewis, W. Scott
Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014

Book Review

Tags: faculty well-being | student behavior | student learning | student mental health

Reviewed by: Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *McAfee School of Theology - Mercer University*

Date Reviewed: January 19, 2015

At some point in one's teaching career, perhaps every teacher is confronted by disruptive behavior from a student that interferes with the processes of teaching and learning. Many faculty are challenged daily by common disruptive behaviors ranging from using social media during class to acts of physical and psychological aggression. On occasion, faculty find themselves afraid of a student, yet rarely do teachers receive training for these situations. Many assume a "do-it-yourself" mentality, believing it to be one's sole responsibility to handle what happens within the classroom. At most, faculty may discuss it with departmental colleagues, but often fail to report disruptive student behaviors to appropriate university officials.

It is precisely this approach that Brunt and Lewis discourage in *A Faculty Guide to Addressing Disruptive and Dangerous Behavior*. They encourage faculty at community colleges, technical schools, and four-year colleges and universities to expand their categories of what constitutes disruptive and potentially dangerous student behavior, to manage such behavior with both sensitivity and firmness, and to learn when and how to make use of institutional resources for dealing with student conduct problems.

The book is immensely practical, drawing upon the authors' expertise as a university counseling center director and a higher education risk management professional. The issues and techniques discussed in each chapter are illuminated by case studies contributed by faculty and administrators from a wide array of institutions. Each chapter also includes discussion questions that could guide important faculty dialogue around these issues.

In part one, Brunt and Lewis operationalize dangerous and disruptive behaviors, teaching faculty how to identify signs of potentially dangerous behaviors and to conduct threat assessments. The authors challenge professors' tendencies to dismiss, ignore, or take an overly punitive approach to disruptive behavior. Yet they also recognize that contextual factors shape whether a situation is viewed as a crisis and what strategies will be effective. They introduce terms and university resources that ought to be familiar to all faculty, but probably are not. How many teachers know whether their institution has a Behavioral Intervention Team, Risk Assessment Team, Student Conduct Office, or equivalent? More importantly, do faculty know when and how to contact them?

Part two focuses on student populations who present a particular challenge. This is the least informative section of the book, as the material on each population is sparse, usually two pages or less. Further, the authors' approach is confusing. In some cases they identify nontraditional student populations with physical and mental health problems, generational characteristics, or life circumstances that may impede their academic progress and thus predispose them to acting out in frustration: military veterans, international students, millennial and older students, and distance learning students. In other cases, however, they problematize groups whom they describe as likely to be victims of discrimination: African Americans and GLBTQ students. For example, their explanation of the micro-aggressions that African Americans may experience on campuses is commendable, but they regrettably frame the problem as being occasioned by the presence of African American students rather than by the cultural myopia of White students.

In part three, Brunt and Lewis advise faculty not to "reinvent the wheel" but rather to take advantage of campus resources for assisting students. They begin with a helpful description of FERPA, HIPAA, and Title IX regulations, clearly outlining the limits of and exemptions to privacy laws that faculty often perceive as obstacles to discussing student issues with colleagues. They then discuss the various resources available to faculty and how to make use of them. In part four, they review ten "core concepts," that is, characteristics and skills that will assist faculty in managing their classrooms, reducing the likelihood of dangerous and disruptive behavior, and handling it effectively when it occurs.

I highly recommend this book for postsecondary faculty. This is a book that needs to be read, but also needs to be discussed with colleagues. Many faculty will find similarities between the scenarios described in the case studies and issues confronted in their teaching experience. As a licensed psychologist, I have usually felt confident in my capacity to address most student issues, but reading this text helped me to recognize occasions when I may have missed clear student distress signals. It has prompted me to investigate the resources available on my own

campus.

https://wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/a-faculty-guide-to-addressing-disruptive-and-dangerous-behavior/