
Book Review

Faculty incivility: The rise of the academic bully culture and what to do about it

Darla J. Twale and Barbara M. De Luca
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University of Dayton Professors Darla Twale and Barbara De Luca set out in *Faculty Incivility: The Rise of Academic Bully Culture and What to Do About It* to confront the threats posed to civil culture in American higher education by ‘bullying, mobbing, camouflaged aggression, and harassment in the academic workplace’ (p. xii). Approaching these phenomena from historical and sociological perspectives, the authors incorporate a broad array of research literature on workplace aggression and the recent evolution in the demographics of academic workplaces.

This integration effectively portrays the challenges faced by many incoming graduate students and junior faculty members who may struggle to adjust to the written and, perhaps more often, unwritten rules of behavior within their new institutions and departments. While their research is instructive for those readers considering

or entering academic careers, Twale and De Luca do not quite convince the reader of the increased prevalence of academic incivility in recent years; their analysis also muddles the relationship between the academy and the external environment.

Twale and De Luca open the book with an observation: ‘Lately it seems that people in academe have become less civil to one another.’ The remainder of *Faculty Incivility* strives to explain why this perceived increase in uncivil behavior has occurred. To explore this question, they first discuss the nature and evolution of academic culture. Members of each professional field abide by standards of conduct determined by the culture of their field; affronts to that culture are generally discouraged or repudiated. In higher education, however, according to the authors’ interpretation of past research literature by Hume (2003), Campbell (2000), Braxton and Bayer (1999), and



others, much of the professional culture revolves around the perpetuation of ego-driven politics, passive aggression and occasional outright humiliation of colleagues. To augment this contention, the authors throughout the book include running commentary from surveyed faculty members as they discuss examples of bullying in their own academic careers. Although some attention is paid to classroom incivility between instructors and students, relying on Braxton and Bayer, the bulk of this book focuses on incivility within the faculty.

Incivility arises from a variety of causes and manifests itself in several, often overlapping frameworks. The authors discuss incivility manifested as manipulation; retaliation and indifference; bullying; and mobbing behavior (pp. 13–20). Much of the blame for academic incivility is directed toward the very nature of the culture of the academic workplace. Particularly for junior faculty members who lack the job security of tenure, resistance to ‘the way things are done’ can lead to backlash from more established, typically tenured colleagues.

The challenge posed to male dominance of faculty presents, for the authors, one of the primary precipitating causes of increased incivility. Although Twale and De Luca fall victim themselves to broad statements about the biology and socialization of men and women (contending, for example, ‘women have not been socialized to seek out dominant positions’ but are ‘better able to manipulate a person or situation through indirect, passive-aggressive means’), their implication of a rise in the number of women in

positions of authority as threatening to traditionally dominant males does seem a plausible cause for uncivil reactions by an old guard (pp. 52–53). Increasing diversity at institutions across racial and ethnic lines may also present opportunities for expressions of incivility, as recent racial controversies at Columbia, Duke and other American campuses have exposed.

Twale and De Luca present their most compelling argument by contending the academic environment represents a particularly hospitable one for uncivil acts committed by colleagues. Higher education institutions often operate by committee, and confidential committees – including, most notably, promotion and tenure committees – present the perfect forum for aggressive faculty members to stonewall a junior colleague or rival’s career without bearing any direct consequences themselves. However, the authors also blame increasing corporatization of academe for rising incivility, as corporate culture engenders competition rather than collaboration, self-interest over shared effort. As more faculty members seek income from external sources such as grants and entrepreneurial endeavors, their connections to their institutions and colleagues become more tenuous, leading to diminished senses of loyalty and collegiality (pp. 142–143).

The closing chapter of *Faculty Incivility* outlines a series of steps to confront academic bully culture. Much of this discussion concentrates on measures to explicitly state policies on harassment in the academic workplace to govern behavior and to establish reliable processes to pursue grievances



when faculty members fall victim to bullying by colleagues. The authors encourage departments and institutions to survey their own cultures, evaluating how faculty members fulfill (or do not) their obligations of teaching, research and service. The authors also take a prudent approach to cultural change within the faculty, recommending enhanced civility through data analysis of cultural indicators, outside hiring to bring in new perspectives and critical examination of the workplace environment. Nonetheless, the chapter would be improved by further explanation of how to build faculty cultures of support and collegiality rather than focus so much on new policies, punishments and grievance protocols.

Perhaps this potential improvement is made clear because the authors fall just short of establishing definitively the urgency of addressing a problem of increasing incivility. Twale and De Luca fail to establish the reality or pervasiveness of incivility as a cultural problem in the American academy. They also spurn the rise of corporate-style culture in higher education, but make frequent use of such terms as 'means of production' in reference to the work of faculty members. The authors also undercut some of their arguments by falling

prey to the kind of sweeping statements, particularly regarding gender imbalances in the faculty, they would likely repudiate if they came from some of their case studies in bullying.

Overall, *Faculty Incivility* provides an easily accessible, broad-based overview of faculty cultures. This book would be instructive reading for any aspiring academic or junior faculty member struggling to adjust to the demands of the academic workplace. It provides concrete policy approaches to resolving uncivil cultures and useful thoughts on building more supportive departments and institutions. Along with these important contributions, however, the book has notable faults associated with its generalized commentary on faculty demographics and extensive focus on punishing acts of incivility to the detriment of addressing uncivil faculty cultures at the root level. Still, faculty members and academic leaders will glean important insights into their own work environments and, hopefully, resolve to build more positive workplaces for having read it, regardless of how uncivil they may feel their own environment to be.

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