Student Incivility and Poor Academic Performance: A Threat for Faculty Obtaining Tenure and Promotion

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Student Incivility and Poor Academic Performance: A Threat for Faculty Obtaining Tenure and Promotion

The ever-changing climate of academia has proven to be a significant challenge for educators across disciplines. Administration places great emphasis on student feedback from evaluations to determine if faculty are worthy of being granted tenure and promotion (Kreitzer & Sweet-Cushman.). Although student feedback is critical to measure meaningful learning from the scholars' lens and course revisions, the question remains whether it should be equated to distinguishing an educator's value. The overarching theme of incivility in the academic arena remains salient as some students extend malice deliberately to tarnish faculty reputation. Without regard to context and motive, untruthful allegations have the potential to mitigate professional advancement and might cost an individual their position and livelihood.

**Keywords:** Incivility, Tenure, Promotion, and Academic Success

Incivility attributed to poor academic performance

Incivility encompasses disrespectful behaviors that disrupt harmony in the classroom and impede learning for cohort members and educators alike (Abraham et. al, 2022). Educators grapple with the lack of active engagement and respect from students in the classroom. Vural et. al., (2020) posit students are not studying, or completing course requirements and remain preoccupied with electronics in the classroom which directly correlates with poor academic performance. Summative and formative assessments are associated with the instructor's effectiveness; however, consideration of the equation needs to examine the effort of the student. Lack of investment and effort from the scholar's standpoint does not constitute poor instruction. The academic landscape changed drastically during the global pandemic affording students the ability to learn remotely. Unfortunately, this learning environment halted face-to-face interactions with peers and faculty negatively affecting students' social skills (Mukhtar et. al, 2020). Students also were accustomed to extended grace during the pandemic as the academic arena navigated the unknown diligently striving to deliver optimal learning to students during uncertain circumstances. Gaining more autonomy in their learning environment, manipulating the rules, and engaging in academic dishonesty were easy to employ (Amzalag et al., 2022). However, the return to in-person learning expectations does not align with the behaviors exhibited when learning remotely. Disruption in the classroom negatively affects learning for peers and the ability of faculty to execute stellar education because the focal point converts to commanding respect and contending with unacceptable behaviors (Eka and Chambers, 2019). Disrespect and incivility in nursing classes challenge students’ motivation and illuminate anxiety and depression removing the focal point of active engagement and learning (Hyun et al., 2018).

Nursing programs are high-stakes as faculty prepare students to be safe and successful as they matriculate through courses, advance into direct patient care during clinical rotations, and enter the most trusted profession serving patients. The vast content necessary for preparing
students to care for individuals across the lifespan with acute and chronic health problems demands fast-paced learning. Coupled with the complexity of the professional demands, nursing programs must adhere to accreditation body mandates and remain in compliance with standards. Situating students for excellence in the nursing program and the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) requires high standards and expectations throughout the nursing program without compromise. Respecting the rigorous nature of nursing programs, mitigating incivility is paramount to promoting academic excellence. Challenges arise when academic benchmarks are not met, and students perceive the expectations as unrealistic. Feedback from that perspective exemplifies the data collected from course evaluations are best described as student satisfaction as opposed to the effectiveness of teaching.

**Misuse of negative feedback**

Student evaluation of teaching was established in the 1920s with the sole aim of providing feedback for faculty to make revisions to best meet the needs of the students. However, psychologists Herman H. Remmers and Edwin R. Guthrie devised this evaluation tool declaring that “it would be a serious misuse of this information to accept it as the ultimate measure of merit” (Wolfgang, 2020). As students diligently attempt to gain leverage in the classroom by deliberating the effectiveness of assignments, equality of exams, and attendance policies, they outright threaten poor course evaluations if not granted expressed changes in coursework and policies. Nursing faculty must evaluate theory and skills performance to ensure students are safe to advance into the clinical setting without causing patient harm. Not all students meet the required benchmark to demonstrate proficiency. Anger presents and faculty are threatened to pass them or contend with retaliation. Evidenced in classrooms today manipulation is transpiring, and poor evaluations are extended when students are displeased with occurrences and academic scores. Shana et al., 2020 posit some faculty intentionally strive for complimentary feedback from student evaluations so they deliberately reduce course workload and award high academic marks even when undeserved. The argument remains central to providing a disservice to students academically and professionally by gambling on stellar evaluations to support tenure and promotion. Passing students in classes when they are not academically prepared to advance in the programs is not ethically aligned with the nursing profession standards. In addition, setting students up for failure on the national certification examination is another disservice. Faculty are placed in peculiar circumstances when tenure and promotion are on the line. Faculty will be required to answer to low pass rates in their courses, poor evaluations, or low pass rates on the national certification exam eventually being accountable for the students not succeeding. Deliberation remains over the validity of evaluations completed by students to merit the effectiveness of instruction and quality of the course (Jones, 2012). Tenure and promotion are assessed on performance with scholarship, research, and teaching. At the University level, the quality of teaching is assessed solely from the student lens through course evaluations (Murray et al., 2019). Faculty often opt to receive optimal evaluations and jeopardize program and licensure pass rates since they are not directly evaluated for tenure and promotion.
Accountability of student feedback

Respecting student feedback is critical to adapting learning and ensuring that it is meaningful. Yao et al., (2019) argue the majority of student feedback aligns with faculty perceptions and values of the course status. However, with significant value and decisions attributed to student course evaluations, a change in practice is warranted. When providing insight and personal experience from the class, surveys should remain free from anonymity. Students must be accountable for their declarations and assertions of faculty. This provides the opportunity for clarification and additional dialogue to best understand discrepancies and lack of elucidation from articulating negative experiences. Additionally, the administration would have the opportunity to view student academic progress and disciplinary measures instituted. Consideration of students’ footprint throughout their academic journey is paramount to the validity of allegations. Students are more likely to be honest with feedback when they are confident it will guide the direction for course improvements (McClain et al., 2017). Removing anonymity potentially proves problematic in eliciting transparent feedback, but it is critical to assess the comments provided when tenure and promotion are equated. Students prefer the evaluations be provided at the end of the course to ensure retaliation will not transpire. This positions them well to deliver spiteful and unjustified responses. It is clear, that the intent of student surveys is being misused across higher education establishments today. Removing this criterion when deliberating tenure and promotion status should be adopted. Regaining respect in the classroom with zero tolerance for incivility and eliminating manipulation and retaliation from extending student surveys is demanded. Students must remain focused on learning to flourish into stellar scholars for academic and professional success. Students have earned the right to engage in meaningful learning, but not to dictate how classrooms should be orchestrated. The phenomenon of entitlement and dictation from students must be halted. Educators deserve to remain free from that toxic learning environment cultivating an atmosphere with minimal disruptions impeding learning.

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