

## #8: Darryl: A One Man Force of Annoying

### The Case Study

#### Tags

Referral to  
Counseling

Communication  
with BIT

Limit Setting

Student Conduct

Follow-up

Academic Issues

**D**arryl is not the easiest person to get along with. He often finds himself arguing with just about everyone he comes in contact with. In the past, this has included friends, family, teachers, members of his church and, in a few instances, he argued with police over speeding tickets and had to be taken to the police station.

#### Stirring Things Up

Darryl's "difficult" manner has continued during his time on campus. He has been involved in multiple arguments with various departments, professors and students. While none of these have escalated to anything physically violent, several incidents have risen to the attention of the student conduct office, as many people report a feeling of "being scared and worried" about what Darryl might do.

Recently, Darryl got into an argument at food services over a forgotten ID card. He was frustrated at the cashier for not allowing him through the line. Darryl responded with, "Look, you part-time food service worker. I pay your salary by being a student here at the college. All I want to do is get a damn apple before class. It's not like I'm trying to steal anything. I just left my ID card in my room." Darryl proceeded to take an apple and then had to meet with the student conduct office because of his behavior and language to the staff.

Another problem occurred when Darryl made some inappropriate comments to a professor. He told her that her "insight was pretty good for a woman, but men are always going to be better at the hard sciences." The professor took offense to this and the information was shared with the campus BIT as a possible concern.

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#### **Multiple Concerns**

When the incident was discussed at the BIT meeting, it led to a flurry of discussion around the table about other offices that knew of Darryl's rude and disrespectful behavior. Many shared concerns about Darryl and wanted to hold him accountable for his language and behavior. The team required an assessment at the counseling center.

The counseling center staff, who had previously not encountered Darryl, did not get a chance to meet with him. As he was scheduling his appointment, Darryl managed to offend the office manager and two graduate students in the office. He said, "Is this a picture of your husband? Because there is no way he deserves to be with a hottie like you." He then stared inappropriately at the two graduate students while making conversation with them, saying, "I don't even really have to be here. I'm just doing this to keep the Dean happy. Some professor got her panties in a bunch." The staff was shocked at this behavior and the counselor assigned to work with Darryl canceled the appointment.

Counseling services reported the behavior back to the Dean of Students.

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### Discussion Questions

#### Basic Level

- 1) How might you approach a student like Darryl?
- 2) Why is it important to report his behavior to the BIT?
- 3) While Darryl's behavior and language are clearly upsetting, does he have the right to express himself this way on campus?

#### Intermediate Level

- 4) Darryl lives off-campus and is not connected to residential life staff. What are some ways that his behavior would be handled differently if he were a residential student?
- 5) Does FERPA allow the school to notify Darryl's parents in regards to his behavior? What would the benefit be in including them?
- 6) Suppose Darryl was a non-traditional student with two young children. How might the case be handled differently? Suppose Darryl was a student athlete? A Greek student? How would this change how the case might be handled?



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### Discussion Questions

- 7) Discuss the importance of improving the communication between professors and the campus BIT. What ways can professors be encouraged to share information with the team? Discuss the importance of the BIT communicating back with the professor.

#### **Advanced Level**

- 8) Has Darryl's disruptive behavior risen to the level of him being separated from college? If so, what was the threshold incident that crossed the line? If not, when would your college consider a suspension?
- 9) Would your school force the issue of having Darryl assessed despite his inappropriate behavior in the counseling center? If the center refuses to see him, what are some other ways to have him assessed?
- 10) Discuss how the issues of gender and ethnicity could impact how people on campus see Darryl's behavior.
- 11) Some may argue that with advanced training, staff and faculty could better avoid becoming upset by Darryl's offensive behavior and then be in a better position to address it with him. How does training staff to work with difficult students like Darryl run the risk of enabling these students to continue to behave in an inappropriate manner?

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### A Counselor's Perspective

There is no doubt that Darryl is a difficult and, frankly, annoying student to deal with. The challenge for a campus is to have a clear process that can be applied to Darryl's behavior in order to develop a corrective plan. Darryl's case is particularly difficult because, with the exception of him stealing the apple, most of the reports and problems are related to disrespectful and sexist behavior that is more difficult to review in a conduct setting.

While a counseling assessment may be helpful to understand some more details related to Darryl's behavior, it is unlikely that such an assessment would reveal any substantial new information beyond what is already known. In some ways, the counseling assessment is just a way for the conduct office to move closer to a disciplinary action.

Counseling staff could be helpful to a conduct officer or Dean of Students in brainstorming some suggestions for working with a student like Darryl on campus. Any change in behavior must first occur in a relationship where there is some degree of trust and open communication. Darryl will be more open to suggestions that will modify his behavior from someone he feels comfortable with and he believes is focused on what is in his best interest. Many counselors who work with difficult students make use of the Motivational Interviewing approach to treatment that offers some practical advice on persuading students to make a change in their behavior, even if they don't completely agree there is a need.

Dealing with difficult people is no picnic. Some staff and faculty have more experience with and training on how to manage their reactions to these students. The best reactions are calm, with a clear and consistent response. It might be helpful for staff to say, "I find that kind of talk offensive and I'd like you to stop it." It is unlikely that this will deter Darryl or lead to some kind of epiphany, but this approach allows faculty and staff to clearly document the behavior and report their reaction back. This information can then be shared with the student conduct office or BIT. In this case, both can address a pattern of behavior over time.