

## **Student stalking of faculty: impact and prevalence**

**Robin K. Morgan<sup>1</sup>**

*Abstract: This study investigated the incidence of faculty stalking by students in a large university system (eight campuses). A subsample of stalked faculty members was interviewed. Results are discussed in relation to categorization schemes for stalking, faculty-student interaction, changes in teaching methods, and the unique problems engendered by students stalking faculty members.*

*Keywords: stalking, faculty-student interaction, harassment, teaching climate, social constructivism*

### **I. Introduction.**

In October of 2002, three nursing professors at the University of Arizona were killed by a despondent student who claimed, in a suicide letter, he murdered the professors for giving him failing grades (Lenckus, 2002). In the year prior to this attack, these nursing professors were repeatedly harassed and stalked by this student (J. Haase, personal communication, June 20, 2007). Fortunately, not all such incidents result in murder, as exemplified by the charges filed against a student at the University of Maryland at College Park for threatening a professor with a handgun in an attempt to manipulate the professor into providing him an A (Schneider and Basinger, 1998). More recently, a former graduate student at Loyola University attempted to burn his professor's house down in response to having received a failing grade (Collins, 2006). In the year prior to setting the fires, the student had made repeated harassing phone calls to the professor (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2006).

### **II. Stalking in the United States.**

Since the early 1990's stalking has emerged as a significant social and policy concern (Fisher, Cullen, and Turner, 2002). Today all fifty states and the District of Columbia have implemented anti-stalking laws (Marks, 1997), yet state-level statistics on the number of people charged, prosecuted, or convicted of stalking are not readily available, with estimates varying widely. This discrepancy reflects the ambiguity associated with the definition of stalking behavior itself. Several researchers have attempted to isolate and describe stalking behavior into categories that are easily accessible to both law enforcement and mental-health professionals.

Although studies differ in their definition of stalking, some elements are fairly consistent (Romeo, 2001). Stalking involves repeated and persistent unwanted communications and contacts that create fear in the target. Stalking differs from harassment in that harassment is annoying while stalking leads to fear, feeling threatened, or intimidated (Purcell, Pathé, and Mullen, 2004). A standard list of stalking behaviors might include: abusive/excessive telephone calls, letters, or emails to the person's home/work; trespassing, following or threatening the target or the target's friends/relatives, obsessively observing the target from a distance, driving by the

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<sup>1</sup> School of Social Sciences, Indiana University Southeast, 4201 Grant Line Road, New Albany, IN 47150, [rmorgan@ius.edu](mailto:rmorgan@ius.edu).

person's home, school, or work, and vandalizing the person's property. Many of these activities can be seemingly innocuous in the beginning, but progress into a pattern of activities that introduces terror into the lives of victims.

The term “stalking” has only recently been used to describe behavior directed towards the general population (i.e., to someone other than a celebrity). The term first appeared during the 1970s primarily in the context of obsessed fans who intrusively followed and interacted with famous individuals, such as movie stars (Mullen, 2003). Since these initial accounts, researchers have reported rates of stalking between 2 and 33%, with a national average between 5 and 6% (Spitzberg and Cupach, 2003). Basile, Swahn, Chen, and Saltzman (2006), for example, report stalking in 7% of the women and 2% of the men contacted in a cross-sectional, random digit-dial telephone survey. Similarly, in the National Violence against Women Survey (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000), 2.2% of men and 8.1% of women reported being stalked. Some of this variability may be a result of how those who have experienced stalking perceive the level of threat. Turmanis and Brown (2006), for example, revealed that 23.4% report stalking when they are asked about behaviors that led to their being ‘a little or somewhat’ fearful, 12.3% when fear was moderate, and 4.7% when fear was of a ‘significant degree.’

Across studies, women appear to be at higher risk for being stalked, especially when they are single and below the age of 55 (Basile, et al, 2006). The most common patterns of stalking involve a stalker who had a prior intimate relationship with the person being stalked (Roberts and Dziegielwski, 2006). Pathé and Mullen (1997) reported stalking behavior is frequently triggered when a close relationship ends, with the stalker attempting to affect reconciliation or gaining revenge. Key characteristics of stalking behavior in such situations are jealousy and possessiveness (Mullen, Pathé and Purcell, 2000). Dziegielwski and Roberts (1995) proposed three categories of stalkers: the domestic violence stalker (the most common representing 75-80% of stalking cases involving a need to establish, continue, or re-establish a domestic relationship), the erotomaniac/delusional stalker (where the stalker becomes fixated on a person with whom no prior relationship may have occurred), and the nuisance stalker (where the stalker continually harasses with emails, telephone calls, or shows up at the victim’s workplace or home). Hall (1998) describes two categories of stalkers: the domestic violence stalker and stalkers who seek revenge. Similar to Dziegielwski and Roberts, Hall also found the domestic stalkers to be the most common type.

### **III. Stalking on College Campuses.**

Studies investigating stalking on college campuses have almost consistently focused on student stalking of other students. Fisher, Cullen, and Turner (2002), for example, surveyed a nationwide sample of almost 4,500 randomly selected female college students. Approximately 13% of these women reported being the victims of stalking incidents, a figure much higher than the 5-6% generally accepted as the national average. Interestingly, 83% of these women had not reported the stalking to any university official. Bjerregaard (2002) also found that 21% of her sample of college students (24.7% of female students and 10.9% of male students) reported past experiences of stalking and 6% reported currently being stalked. Overall, female students are at a greater risk of being stalked and male students, typically an ex-boyfriend, are most likely to be their stalkers.

Little attention has been given to whether faculty members are at risk of being stalked by their students. This apparent discrepancy is even more disconcerting when considering the

pedagogical changes recommended to college faculty over the past two decades. Partly as a function of constructivist theories, faculty members have been encouraged to engage in teaching practices that increase faculty-student interaction. Social constructivism, most closely identified with Lev Vygotsky, argues that learning is enhanced when instructors create an interactive environment designed to enhance learning experiences (Llewellyn, 2002). Such interaction has been shown to enhance the quality of education provided to students (Astin, 1994) and has been the focus of numerous studies. Student achievement, whether measured by grades, standardized tests, or self-reported learning, increases as a function of quality faculty-student interaction (Anaya, 1999). Accordingly, faculty are encouraged to increase interaction with students (Holmes, Rupert, Ross, and Shapera, 1999). Faculty may become involved with students in multiple roles – as an academic advisor, an instructor, a mentor for research, a supervisor for internship – resulting in a blurring of boundaries (e.g., Biaggio, Paget, and Chenoweth, 1997; Feldman-Summers, 1989; Kitchener, 1992).

Increased faculty-student interaction may open the door for increased harassment or stalking of faculty by students. Batty (2004) reported that female academics in Great Britain reported physical attacks, stalking and heckling by students. It would seem evident that such experiences would have a significant impact on future faculty-student interactions. For example, Bloom (2000) reports on a course he taught where he was heckled by students in the classroom. As a result, Bloom changed his teaching strategy by providing an introductory motivational anecdote on the history underlying each topic, leading to less heckling and more positive interactions with his students. In this case, it can be argued that negative interaction with his students led Bloom to make a potentially positive change in his teaching methods. However, Bloom's experience may have been idiosyncratic. It seems just as likely that professors may be making changes in their teaching in an effort to protect themselves from such harassment and stalking that detract from teaching effectiveness.

In many ways, it is questionable whether the majority of research that has been conducted on stalking would apply to faculty who are stalked by students. As reported by Roberts and Dziegielwski (2006), in most stalking situations there is a prior intimate relationship between the stalker and the person being stalked. In the case of faculty, there should be no prior intimate relationship as such relationships are frequently forbidden by university policies (Wilson, 2007). The clearest parallel to faculty being stalked by students might be cases in which mental health professionals are stalked by their clients. McIvor and Petch (2006), for example, found that among mental health professionals male therapists were more likely to be stalked by female clients. This contrasts with the findings of females being more likely to be stalked in relationship based stalking incidents. McIvor and Petch also reported three distinct patterns of stalkers among clients who stalked their therapists: those who suffered from personality disorders, those who experienced drug and alcohol problems, and those who had a history of behavioral problems. In a similar vein, Hudson- Allez (2006) reported 24% of her sample of mental health professionals had experienced at least one incident of being stalked by a client. The clients most likely to stalk their therapist in this study were described as needy clients who made early attachments to their therapists, clients who were sexually attracted to their therapists, and clients who suffered from personality disorders, especially narcissistic personality disorder.

The present study, then, addresses three major sets of questions regarding the similarities between student stalking of faculty and stalking in the general population. First, what is the incidence of student stalking of faculty? Is the incidence of student stalking of faculty consistent with the rate of stalking in the general population, more similar to the rate of student stalking of

other students, or consistent with client stalking of therapists? Given the prior literature, there are several obvious sub-questions relating to incidence. Is stalking more prevalent on smaller, commuter campuses, or on larger, residential campuses? Is such stalking more common among faculty teaching smaller or larger classes? Are female faculty members or male faculty members more likely to be stalked? Second, what types of stalking behaviors do faculty most commonly report? Given the prior literature, there is an obvious sub-question relating to stalking behaviors. The literature reports domestic stalking, that is, stalking arising from a previous relationship, as being the most common form of stalking. Would this be true among students stalking faculty where no intimate relationships may exist prior to classroom interaction? Finally, the third major question concerns whether student stalking of faculty impacts future teaching behaviors of faculty? Specifically, does student stalking of faculty change the interactional patterns of faculty with their students? If so, what types of changes are faculty making in response to such incidents?

## **VI. Phase One.**

### *A. Method.*

*Participants:* Nine hundred and sixty-eight full-time faculty members from all eight campuses of a large Midwestern university volunteered for the present study; of these, 934 surveys were fully completed and usable for data analysis. Full-time faculty members were contacted via a university supplied email list, with a response rate of 31%. Response rates by campus varied from 23% to 70%. Faculty reported teaching a wide variety of classes with many teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate level; sixty-one percent of faculty taught graduate classes, 91% taught undergraduate classes, and 6% taught medical students. Twenty percent of the faculty reported teaching large courses (over 100 students). The age range of full-time faculty members was 27 to 81 with a mean age of 49 years ( $SD = 9.71$ ). Of those participating in the study, 55% were men and 45% were women. This contrasts with a university-wide gender ratio of 62% men and 38% women. Time spent teaching in the university system ranged from  $\frac{1}{2}$  year to 40 years with a mean of 13 years ( $SD = 10.1$ ).

*Materials:* A demographic questionnaire and a modified form of the Obsessive Relational Intrusion Scale (ORI) - Short Form was given to all faculty members choosing to participate in the present study. The demographic questionnaire consisted of the participant's sex, age, campus of employment, how long they have been teaching at the college level, and what type of students were taught. The Obsessive Relational Intrusion Scale-Short Form (Cupach and Spitzberg, 1998) consists of 28 questions assessing stalking behaviors on a five point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (over 5 times). For example, the ORI provides the stem, "Has anyone ever undesirably and obsessively pursued you by:" followed by possible stalking behaviors such as, "threatening to hurt him-or-herself," "verbally threatening you personally," "showing up at places in threatening ways or physically hurting you." The modifications for this study simply involved changing the wording to reflect faculty and students rather than intimate relationships. Cupach and Spitzberg (1998) report that the ORI has been shown to have satisfactory reliability and validity.

*Procedure:* All faculty members listed on the university supplied email list were asked to read an informed consent statement and, if choosing to participate, to click on a link to an online survey. The online survey included the demographic questionnaire and ORI. The instructions to

faculty members specified that behaviors on the ORI should only be reported if a student “undesirably and obsessively pursued” the faculty member and only if the faculty member felt “intimidated, anxious, or fearful” as a result of the student’s behavior. Once the faculty member had completed the questions, the faculty member was asked to hit the submit button. All data were compiled and sent to the researcher with no identifying email addresses or names. Completing the demographic questionnaire and the ORI required approximately 10-15 minutes.

## *B. Results.*

*Research Question 1: Incidence of Student Stalking of Faculty:* To determine the percentage of faculty reporting stalking, responses to the ORI were evaluated. To be considered as experiencing stalking, a faculty member needed to report repeated incidents where a student engaged in at least two separate behaviors on the ORI. Out of the 28 different stalking behaviors on the ORI, the range of behaviors reported by faculty who were classified as having experienced stalking ranged from 3 to 25 with a mean of 6.29 (SD=4.29). In addition, the instructions on the ORI specified that behaviors must lead to feeling intimidated, anxious, or fearful. Using this definition of stalking, 32.97% (n = 308) of faculty members who completed the survey could be classified as having experienced stalking by a student. The average age of those reporting being stalked (48.98 years) did not differ from the overall sample mean age of 49 years.

*Research Question 1a: Incidence of student stalking of faculty on smaller commuter campuses vs. larger, residential campuses:* The percentage of faculty members who reported being stalked by a student varied by campus, ranging from 22% to 57%, and these differences were statistically significant,  $\chi^2(7) = 45.86, p < 0.001$ . Overall, more stalking was reported on the six smaller campuses (Campuses 3-8) than on the two larger campuses (Campuses 1 and 2). Another distinction was found with respect to residential vs. commuter campuses. On Campus 1, a traditional residential campus, 31% of faculty respondents reported having been stalked. However, on the six primarily commuter campuses (Campuses 3-8), the average percentage of faculty reporting stalking incidents was 44%. Twenty-two percent of faculty on Campus 2 reported stalking incidents. This campus was importantly different from all others, in that it had the lowest response rate of any campus (23%), and, residing in a large city, has a mix of both residential and commuter students.

*Research Question 1b: Incidence of student stalking of faculty in smaller vs. larger undergraduate classes:* No significant difference was found in stalking between faculty members who taught in large or small undergraduate classes.

*Research Question 1c: Incidence of student stalking of female vs. male faculty:* Of those being stalked, 54% were female and 46% were male, a significant difference ( $\chi^2(1) = 11.37, p < 0.001$ ).

*Research Question 2: Types of Stalking Behaviors Experienced by Faculty:* Although not all faculty experienced all 28 behaviors identified on the ORI, each of the 28 behaviors was identified as having occurred at least once. Among those faculty who were identified as having been stalked, the most common behaviors reported were students invading the faculty member’s personal space and students intruding uninvited into the faculty member’s interactions with colleagues and students by 61% and 57% of faculty respectively (for all percentages, decimal points were eliminated by rounding). The least common behaviors, reported by only 2% of the faculty, were leaving or sending the faculty member a threatening object and kidnapping or

physically constraining the faculty member. Table 1 presents the percent of stalked faculty reporting specific stalking behaviors from the ORI. As can be seen in this table, 12 of the 28 stalking behaviors listed on the ORI were reported by approximately 25% or more of the faculty who had been stalked.

**Table 1. Percent of stalked faculty reporting on the ORI-Short Form (N=308).**

<b>Stalking Behavior from ORI</b>	<b>% of Faculty Reporting Behavior</b>
Invading faculty member's personal space	61%
Intruding uninvited into faculty member's interactions	57%
Leaving unwanted gifts	47%
Leaving unwanted messages of affection	46%
Leaving unwanted threatening messages	36%
Involving faculty member in activities in unwanted ways	36%
Making exaggerated expressions of affection	32%
Verbal threats	32%
Following the faculty member around,	28 %
Watching the faculty member	28%
Engaging in regulatory harassment	27%
Student threatening to hurt him or herself	25%
Showing up in places in threatening ways	17%
Intruding on family/coworkers	17%
Invading faculty member's personal property	16%
Approaching faculty member in public places	14%
Monitoring faculty member's behavior	11%
Obtaining private information	10%
Student threatening to hurt others	10%
Stealing/damaging valued possessions	8%
Sexual coercion	8%
Physical threats	8%
Invading faculty member's property	8%
Physically hurting	8%
Physically restraining faculty member	7%
Physically endangering the faculty member's life	7%
Leaving or sending faculty member threatening objects	2%
Kidnapping or physically restraining faculty member	2%

## **V. Phase Two.**

### *A. Method.*

*Participants:* For this phase of the study, participants were recruited through self-selection. After completion of the online survey and demographic questionnaire used in Phase One, faculty members who were willing to be interviewed about their experiences were asked to email the author. Fifty-five faculty members volunteered to be interviewed. Of these 55, 52 were interviewed. Of the three who were not interviewed, one decided not to be interviewed due to scheduling conflicts and the other two withdrew because they reported that it would be too painful to talk about their experiences. Similar to faculty in Phase One, faculty in Phase Two taught both undergraduate and graduate students; 17.3% of faculty taught only graduate or

medical/dental classes, 55.8% taught only undergraduate classes, and 26.9% taught both undergraduate and graduate classes. Approximately twenty percent (20.38%) of the faculty reported teaching large courses (over 100 students). The age range of full-time faculty members in this phase was 32 to 64 with a median age of 49, mean age of 48.27 years (SD = 6.56). Of those participating in this interview phase, 55.77% were women and 44.23% were men. Time spent teaching in the university system ranged from 2 to 35 years with a mean of 17.92 (SD = 6.53) years teaching. Of those interviewed 19.23% had a rank of Assistant Professor, 48.08% had a rank of Associate Professor, 3.85% had a rank of clinical professor, and 28.85% had a rank of Professor. No one discipline predominated, with faculty representing almost every school.

In comparison to the faculty who participated in Phase One, the participants in Phase Two were approximately the same age with a mean age of 48.27 as compared to a mean age of 49 for those in Phase One. Likewise, approximately 20% of the faculty in Phase One and in Phase Two reported teaching large courses (over 100 students). Two significant differences occurred between participants in Phase One and Phase Two. In Phase One, 55% of respondents were men while in Phase Two, 45% of respondents were men. In addition, the mean time spent teaching in the university was 13 years in Phase One but 17.92 years in Phase Two.

*Materials:* No additional materials were used in this phase of the study. The basic questions used to initiate discussion during the interviews may be found in the Appendix.

*Procedures:* Interviews of each professor were conducted on the campus of the faculty member being interviewed at the location of their choice. Each interview began by explaining the study and gathering demographic information. Following this, the faculty member being interviewed was asked to describe their stalker(s), the incident(s), and their reactions in their own words. Follow-up questions were asked to clarify the incident(s) and the reactions of the faculty member. Following this open-ended account, the interviewer asked the faculty member to describe the impact of the stalking on their subsequent teaching and interaction with students. The author conducted all interviews and data were recorded by hand. Tape recorders were not used to preserve confidentiality.

## *B. Results.*

### *Research Question 2: Types of Stalking Behaviors Experienced by Faculty*

*The Stalkers:* The number of stalkers reported by each faculty member varied from one to six with a mean of 1.67 (SD = 0.92) and a total of 87 stalkers among the 52 faculty members interviewed. Of the stalkers reported, 51.72% were men and 48.27% were women. Sixty-seven percent of stalkers were undergraduates, 31.03% were graduate students, and 2.3% were medical students. The age range of stalkers was reported by faculty as 19 to 45 with a mean age of 25.16 (SD=5.87). Faculty were not always sure of the student stalkers' ages so these are their best estimates.

*Behaviors Reported by Faculty:* The 52 faculty members interviewed reported on the stalking behaviors they experienced in the 87 incidents described in the interviews. Faculty reported a wide range of problematic behaviors with a mean of 8 behaviors per incident and a total of 696 behaviors. Using coding procedures similar to those outlined in other studies utilizing interviewing and open ended questioning (Dupuis, Bloom and Loughead, 2006; Holmes, 2005), all 696 of these behaviors were organized into categories by the author and two research students based on similar characteristics; agreement on categories was 100%. For example, being sent numerous email messages, letters, or being called repeatedly on the

telephone was placed into one category, unwanted messages. As can be seen in Table 2, the most commonly reported behaviors were unwanted messages, with 92% of faculty who had been stalked reporting receiving repeated unwanted messages, following the faculty member around campus and off-campus and obsessively watching the faculty member (73%), and regulatory harassment, that is, threatening to or reporting the faculty member to their superior (61%). Fifty-six percent of faculty reported being verbally or physically threatened and 32% reported sexually coercive behavior on the part of the student stalker, including attempts at kissing the faculty member, requests to engage in sexual activity, and unwanted caresses. Seventeen percent of faculty reported incidents in which their life had been endangered, in each case where a student either attempted to kill or actually killed another faculty member being stalked, and 46% of faculty reported incidents in which the student threatened to harm him or herself.

**Table 2. Stalking behaviors reported by interviewed faculty (N=52).**

<b>Stalking Behaviors</b>	<b>% Experiencing Behavior</b>
Unwanted messages	92.31% (n=48)
Following around, watching	73.07% (n = 38)
Regulatory harassment	61.54% (n = 32)
Verbally or physically threatening the faculty member, showing up	55.78% (n = 29)
Spreading misinformation about the faculty member, exaggerated expressions of affection	53.85% (n = 28)
Obtaining private information	51.92% (n = 27)
Student threatening his or herself, monitoring behavior, intruding uninvited	46.15% (n = 24)
Sexually coercing, intruding upon family and coworkers	32.69% (n = 17)
Invading personal space, unwanted gifts	30.77% (n = 16)
Physical restraint	21.15% (n = 11)
Damaging or stealing possessions, Involving in activities, endangering life	17.31% (n = 9)
Invading personal property	15.38% (n = 8)
Invading property	11.54% (n = 6)

*Research Question 2b: What is the most common category of stalking in this population?* Previous literature has reported that stalking may be subdivided into various types. As indicated earlier, a common categorization scheme for stalking has been suggested by Dziegielwski and Roberts (1995), who outlined three subtypes: the domestic violence stalker, the erotomaniac/delusional stalker, and the nuisance stalker. The 87 reported stalking incidents were reviewed by the author and two research students to determine if they fell into one of these three subtypes. Stalking was labeled as domestic violence if the stalking incident was viewed as resulting from a need to establish, continue, or re-establish a previous relationship even if the prior social contact was misperceived by the student. For example, one incident of stalking in this category occurred following attending an off-campus conference with a faculty member. Stalking was labeled as erotomaniac/delusional if the stalking was viewed as a result of becoming fixated on a faculty member with whom no prior outside-of-class social contact had occurred. For example, one incident of stalking in this category involved the student interpreting faculty gestures in the class as conveying personal, sexual messages to the student. Finally, the stalking was labeled as nuisance if there was repeated harassment of a faculty member without the intent of building a relationship with that faculty member. Students falling into the last category typically were perceived as trying to manipulate the faculty member into changing course



requirements or changing their grade. This category might be most similar to Hall's (1998) category of stalkers seeking revenge. There was 100% agreement between the three raters on placing each of the 87 stalkers into the three categories. Fourteen percent (n = 12) of the stalking incidents were classified as falling into the domestic violence or prior social contact category, 42.53% (n = 37) fell into the erotomanic/delusional category, and 43.68% (n = 38) fell into the nuisance/manipulative category.

*Research Question 3: Impact of Student Stalking on Teaching - Responses Reported by Faculty:* Faculty reactions were organized into categories based on similar response characteristics by the author and the two research students. For example, if faculty reported that they told their Dean or their Assistant Dean, this response was categorized under Contacted Administrator. The responses reported by faculty could be organized into two categories: general behavioral responses, and emotional responses. In terms of general behavioral responses, 67% of faculty had told their colleagues, 58% had told an administrator, and 38% had contacted city or university police; however, 27% had told no one about being stalked. Characteristic comments from faculty included: "administrators only interested in solving problems, can't count on them to help," "told a colleague about this latest incident and colleague blew it off ... not very supportive ... made me mad," "student would have to injure me to be taken off campus... someone has to get hurt before something is done," and "how has academia allowed these things to happen?" Those faculty who had told no one about the stalking typically continued to work with the student, reporting, "Teacher in me feels I can't ignore students – feel an obligation to help students."

Forty percent of faculty reported directly telling the student stalker to stop. Twenty-seven percent of faculty members reported that they had been accused by a colleague, an administrator, or the student stalker of having a sexual relationship with the student stalker. One faculty member, echoing the comments of several others, stated, "There is a tendency to immediately take the student's side over the professor ... very unfair ... professor has no rights in this process," and "I did not feel I had any rights, the students have all the rights – nothing I know of in system to protect the faculty member unless the student does something criminal and you can prove it."

Emotional responses were a large category of responses reported by the interviewed faculty. As can be seen in Table 3, the most commonly reported faculty responses included emotional reactions with 52% of faculty reporting embarrassment, 42% reporting helplessness, and almost 37% reporting feeling responsible for the student's behavior. Common responses of faculty included: "We're supposed to be accessible to our students. Where do faculty member boundaries come in? We don't have a life outside their (the student's) world," "Dose of reality, you lose your sense of trust – can never be fully replaced – can be somewhat mended but there's a scar – always in the back of your mind – could this be a situation?" and "Made me question what I was doing to promote this – what would make them think they could do this to me?"

*Impact on Teaching and Future Interactions with Students Reported by Faculty:* Responses to this question were also categorized based on similar reactions by the author and two research students. For example, if faculty reported that they had stopped using personal examples while teaching or no longer shared personal stories with students, this was placed in the 'less personal when teaching' category. Relative to the current incident of stalking, 40% of faculty reported giving a higher grade to the student stalker than what the student earned. For example, one faculty member reported, "Just easier to give them all B's than to have to deal with

**Table 3. Responses of interviewed faculty members (N = 52) to stalking incidents.**

<b>Response of faculty member</b>	<b>% Reporting</b>
<b>General Behavioral Reactions of Faculty:</b>	
Told colleagues	67.31%
Felt supported by colleagues	31.25%
Contacted Administrator	57.69%
Felt supported by administrator	16.67%
Directly told student to stop	40.38%
Accused of sexual contact with student by colleagues, administrator, or student	26.92%
Contacted city or university police	38.46%
Told no one	26.92%
Considered leaving university	23.07%
Caller id installed	21.15%
Changed home telephone number	21.15%
Coordinated with colleagues	17.30%
Panic button installed in office	17.30%
Divorced	17.30%
Consulted union	17.30%
Obtained a personal protection order	17.30%
Faculty member moved to a safer community	9.61%
<b>Emotional Reactions of Faculty:</b>	
Faculty member embarrassed	51.92%
Faculty member felt helpless	42.31%
Faculty member felt responsible	36.54%
Stress related health problems	32.69%
Contacted psychological clinic	23.08%
Emotional reaction to student committing or attempting to commit suicide	17.31%

them.” Another commented, “Give all multiple-choice objective test items now so students can’t argue lack of objectivity.”

Twenty-three percent of faculty reported that the student was banned from campus email, almost 10% of faculty reported that the student stalker was banned from campus, and almost 6% of faculty reported that the student was jailed as a result of the stalking incidents. Almost 83% of faculty reported that they were less personal when teaching subsequent to the stalking incident. Fifty-four percent reported reduced spontaneity when teaching and 56% reported that they now keep their office door open when meeting with students. Additional reports from faculty about how the stalking impacted their teaching are listed in Table 4. In general, the responses of the faculty members reflect their efforts to reduce any but the most necessary contact with students. For example, one faculty member commented, “Every year (I) get more and more distant; very cautious – treat them with kid gloves”.

**Table 4. Impact on teaching reported by interviewed faculty members (N=52).**

<b>Impact on Teaching</b>	<b>% Reporting Change</b>
<b>Reactions of faculty to current stalking:</b>	
Gave higher grade to student than deserved	40.38%
Refused to talk with student or answer emails	36.54%
Avoids office	34.62%
Professor tried to be nicer to student	32.69%
Attempted to cajole student	30.77%
Banned student from email	23.08%
Banned student from campus	9.62%
Pursued legal action leading to student being jailed	5.77%
Made changes to syllabus	98.08%
Removed phone number/contact information	88.46%
Reduced difficulty level/number of assignments	53.85%
Increased structure/rules on syllabus	40.38%
Substituted objective grading (multiple-choice) for subjective (essays, papers)	30.77%
Less personal when teaching	82.69%
Keeps office door open when meeting with students	55.77%
Reduced spontaneity in classroom	53.85%
More professional, No longer meets with students outside of office	50.00%
Changed or cancelled office hours	40.38%
Second guesses self	30.77%
Only responds to certain emails	26.92%

## **VI. Discussion.**

Stalking was operationally defined in the present study when a faculty member reported repeated incidents of at least two separate stalking behaviors by a student that led to the faculty member feeling fear, threatened, or intimidated. In the present study, an average incidence rate of 33% was found. This rate is concerning given the national rate of stalking among the general population is about 6-7%. However, the rate seems more consistent with the rate of 24% among mental health professionals. Although female faculty members were slightly more likely than male faculty to report stalking, the discrepancy is not as large as found in the general population (e.g., Basile, Swahn, Chen, and Saltzman, 2006).

Likewise, the most common types of faculty stalking differ in significant ways from the most common types of stalking found in the general population. Among the faculty interviewed in the present study, it was clear that three distinct patterns of stalking were occurring, similar in some ways to the three types proposed by Dziegielwski and Roberts (1995). To recall, Dziegielwski and Roberts outlined the domestic violence stalker, the erotomanic/delusional stalker, and the nuisance stalker. In the present study, faculty reported what can be called a prior social contact based stalking where the student perceives an intimate relationship with the faculty member and begins the stalking as a way of increasing intimacy or of punishing the faculty member for refusing deeper intimacy. This might be similar to the domestic violence stalking described by Dziegielwski and Roberts. However, in the case of students stalking faculty, there has rarely been any intimate relationship. In the present study, for example, only one faculty

member admitted a previous romantic relationship with the student who later stalked her. In addition, most studies in the general population report that this type of stalking is the most common, accounting for up to 80% of all stalking. In the present study, this type of stalking accounted for only 14% of the stalking. Although there was only one instance of a faculty member reporting a prior romantic relationship with a student, there were ten additional incidences of student stalking following what might be perceived as blurred boundaries with faculty members. For example, one instance of stalking occurred following a pattern of interactions with the student that included going to the professor's house (working in the professor's bedroom) and attending conferences with the professor. In a second incident, the student had met with the professor off-campus at restaurants and in bars.

A second type of stalking occurs in students who appear, to faculty members, to be experiencing significant psychological difficulties. These students may have had little to no contact with the faculty member but have fixated on this faculty member in a delusional manner. This is what Dziegielwski and Roberts call the erotomaniac/delusional stalker. In the general population, this type of stalking is considered relatively rare. In the present study, this type of stalking accounted for 42.53% of the stalking. In many ways, this higher figure parallels the findings of mental health professionals who are stalked by their clients. In those studies, the clients who were most likely to stalk the mental health professional suffered from personality disorders, had experienced drug and alcohol problems, had a history of behavioral problems, had quickly attached to the therapist, or were sexually attracted to their therapists. This seems very similar to the descriptions of the student stalkers in the present study. The fact that this percentage is so high is of concern as the majority of college faculty are not trained as mental health professionals. College campuses are filled with students at a very vulnerable stage of development (Fromme, Corbin, and Kruse, 2008). These students may be away from home for the first time, may be trying to attend school and work full-time, and on many commuter campuses, may be attending school full-time, working full-time, and caring for children. The pressure for all students to attain a college degree has become more intense. It may be that students who attend commuter campuses are even more stressed than those on residential campuses, increasing the dangers to faculty who teach on these campuses.

The third distinct category, that may be specific to faculty, is where students stalk faculty in a seeming effort to influence the grade the faculty member assigns. Although this may be considered a subtype of nuisance stalker, it seems evident that this subtype is specific to this environment and is relatively common, with 43.68% of the incidents in the present study falling into this category. Given the pressures that students are under to achieve high grades and an increasing consumer attitude that if they pay for their education, they are entitled to a good grade (Ritter, 2008), these attempts at manipulation of faculty are not surprising.

Faculty responses to incidents of student stalking included both teaching-related responses and more personal responses. Although personal responses were not a direct focus of this study, some reactions are noteworthy. Interestingly, most faculty members (84%) attempted to balance what they perceived as the best interests of their students with the stress being caused by the student. For example, although one professor was experiencing physical symptoms of stress, crying, intense fear, and embarrassment, this professor continued advising the student stalker as the professor believed that no other faculty member would be as familiar with the student and the student's issues. This was not always the case; several faculty members reported that they simply refused to teach students sharing characteristics of their stalker (for example, undergraduate

status or a major in, say, psychology), even though they recognized that this was not in the best interests of students.

One of the primary concerns of the present study was to assess the impact of student stalking on faculty teaching and interaction with students. Faculty have been encouraged to increase active learning approaches in the classroom and to engage with students outside the classroom in order to increase learning. Social constructivism—an instructional philosophy most closely associated with Lev Vygotsky—argues that learning is culturally and socially influenced; that is, the community around us affects the way we see the world. The classroom, from this social constructivist perspective, must be "active, constructive, intentional, and cooperative" (Jonassen, Howland, Moore, and Marra, 2003, p. iv), with instructors creating learning experiences that students find challenging and personally meaningful (Llewellyn, 2002). Within this framework, the classroom is much like a community, with students participating in both individual and group roles and seeking support and encouragement from their instructor as well as their peers. In order for such a classroom to succeed, it seems evident that the professor must be able to feel safe in the community of students.

Unfortunately for students, however, every professor interviewed directly identified changes in their willingness to interact with students. These changes varied from changes in the syllabus – more rules, more structure, and fewer opportunities for students to interact with the faculty member outside of the classroom – to increasing the difficulty level for students in contacting the professor by no longer providing a home telephone number, to preventing student access to the faculty member's office without supervision. Faculty members who were able to do so reported decreasing their exposure to students by refusing to teach particular classes or even particular populations of students (students from a particular major or students at a particular academic level, such as undergraduates). These changes may decrease student choices in terms of courses and may decrease the community cohesiveness in the classroom.

Not all of these changes are necessarily negative. For example, several professors reported no longer providing students with their home telephone number. Although students might enjoy contacting professors at home, there is no pedagogical reason to believe that this is necessary for student learning. Likewise, three professors noted that the stalking incident led them to reevaluate their course assignments, leading them to improve the clarity of their requirements. Such a change would benefit all students.

As a result of their experiences with stalking, many faculty reported a change in how they viewed colleagues, administrators, and the general climate of the university. Almost every faculty member attempted at some point to communicate their concerns about the student stalking to a colleague (67%) or an administrator (58%). In 62% of these cases, the faculty member reported a lack of concern, disbelief, or recommendations to 'let it go and not cause any trouble.' Both male and female faculty reported that frequently other colleagues viewed the professor as the instigator of problems or that the professor should be flattered by the student's interest. In these cases, the stalker was perceived by other faculty and, at times, by administrators, as having a 'crush' on the faculty member. Since students are almost always of legal age, the perception of many was that as long as the student was no longer in the professor's class, there was no problem with the professor and student dating. Conceptualizing stalking behaviors as simply dating attempts was frustrating and humiliating for the professor involved. In two cases, the student stalker sought out colleagues of the professor to try and help convince the faculty member to date the student, and the colleagues did so.

The results of this study indicate a potentially critical problem on university campuses. That is, stalking appears much more common than in the general population and highly likely to lead to changes in the professors' treatment of students. Faculty have a tendency to withdraw from students following stalking incidents, decreasing the very warmth so many researchers have argued is necessary for better classroom learning environments. Equally important is the significant distrust engendered by such incidents between the faculty members and the academic community. Almost two-thirds of faculty report negative experiences when attempting to report stalking incidents to their immediate superiors – deans or assistant deans – or to their colleagues. Faculty do not feel supported when these incidents occur, reporting that the students are more likely to be believed than they are. Efforts to address these issues will require significant campus efforts to educate faculty and administrators about how to handle potential stalking situations and the development of protocols to allow faculty concerns to be heard openly without fear of repercussions. Although only a few faculty members reported feeling supported by colleagues and administrators, those individuals were unlikely to have made potentially negative changes in their teaching or interactions with students.

## **VII. Limitations and Future Directions.**

Several limitations of this study caution against overgeneralization. Although eight campuses were surveyed, all campuses were within one university system. It is possible that the findings within this system would not be representative of other universities. Obviously, the next step would be to survey a larger set of faculty from a variety of campuses across the United States. Likewise, the present study used the ORI – Short Form. This survey instrument was designed for use in a more general population and with more traditional stalking situations, that is, in situations where there had been a previous relationship between the stalker and the person being stalked. There is no guarantee that this scale reliably and validly measures stalking in the present population. Future studies should modify this form to reflect the findings of this study. Specifically, the form needs to reflect situations in which no prior personal relationship existed between the professor and the student as well as asking more questions about how the faculty responded to the stalking incidents. Although there was considerable overlap between the stalking behaviors identified on the ORI and during the interview, the category rankings were not identical. Ninety-two percent of faculty who were interviewed described a pattern of unwanted messages including email, telephone, and traditional notes/letters from students. The ORI did not have a category that specifically meshed with this. On the ORI, unwanted messages were categorized into either unwanted messages of affection or unwanted threatening messages. At times, the types of unwanted messages described by faculty were rambling diatribes reflecting confusion, hatred, or incoherence and were not perceived by faculty as falling into either of the two ORI categories. Likewise, in light of the research conducted by Turmanis and Brown (2006), indicating that rates of stalking vary when assessing level of concern, it seems critical that this be assessed as well as simply stalking behaviors experienced. In the present study, although all faculty members reported the unwanted behaviors as threatening or intimidating, thereby fulfilling the definition of stalking, the level of concern about the stalking was not specifically addressed.

In addition, since not all faculty chose to complete the survey, it is impossible to know how the characteristics of those choosing to participate differed from those who did not choose to complete the survey. It may be that those who had experienced stalking incidents were more

likely than those who had not experienced such incidents to complete the survey. Likewise, female faculty who had experienced stalking incidents may have been more likely to respond to the survey than male faculty members. On the other hand, it seemed clear from the interviews with faculty who had been stalked, that they were reluctant to share their experiences with others. It may be that faculty experiencing stalking incidents are less likely to categorize their experiences as stalking and thus, were less likely to respond to the survey. In either of these scenarios, the actual incidence of student stalking of faculty may be misrepresented by the present study.

Despite the above limitations, the present study clearly illustrates the need for additional research in this area. The types of behaviors experienced by faculty who are being stalked by students identified in this study overlap with the general findings in the stalking literature but present some unique challenges in that such stalking incidents are less likely to be the result of prior, mutual emotional relationships. This suggests that student stalking of faculty may be more similar to clients stalking mental health professionals. These differences need to be added to future surveys of faculty stalked by students. The detailed interviews with the faculty in this study clearly suggest the significant emotional impact of student stalking and the toll it takes on the future interactions between faculty and students both within and outside of the classroom. Finally, the interview data suggest that college campuses need to develop a more supportive environment for those faculty members who may be experiencing student stalking. More specifically, the development of campus wide training for faculty and administrators on the potential problem of student stalking of faculty and appropriate measures would be of use. Such training needs to be coordinated with campus security and the campus improvement of teaching center, if available. The inclusion of administrators such as deans, assistant deans, and program chairs ideally should allow for a greater sense of support. Clear guidelines for faculty to document such incidents should also be developed. In addition, faculty need to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of meeting with students off-campus or in more isolated parts of campus. How stalking impacts teaching and the campus community also needs to be directly addressed. As stated by one of the interviewed faculty members, “Everyone knew this was going on...no one was stopping her...my colleagues were just glad it was happening to me and not to them.”

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### **Appendix 1. Standard Questions Used to Initiate Discussion in Interviews.**

For each stalking incident:

- Tell me a little about yourself: age, gender, race, marital status, length of time at university, rank, discipline, etc.
- Tell me a little about the stalker: age, gender, race, level of program, etc.
- When did these events take place?
- Describe the behaviors of the student – follow-up questions as needed.
- Did you tell anyone while this was occurring? Who? What was their reaction?
  - If not, why did you tell no one?
- What impact did this have on your teaching?

- Do you have any indications that this impacted your teaching?
- Do you believe this was a positive or negative change in your teaching? Why?
- Did you change anything on your syllabi as a result of this incident?
  - Get specific information on changes
- Did you change any of your classroom procedures as a result of this incident?
  - Get specific information on changes
- How do you believe this incident impacted your students?
  - Get specific information
  - Can I use this in any way?

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