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Examining Undergraduate Faculty’s Competence and Confidence in Addressing Distressed and Disruptive College Students

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EXAMINING UNDERGRADUATE FACULTY’S COMPETENCE AND CONFIDENCE IN ADDRESSING DISTRESSED AND DISRUPTIVE COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Dissertation Presented

by

Nicholas E. Negrete

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The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education
Specializing in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

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ABSTRACT

Mental health issues serve as a leading barrier to academic success for college students. As mental health issues among college students continue to escalate, there is an increased likelihood in the manifestation of demonstrable distress and disruption among college students within the classroom. However, there is dearth of research surrounding faculty’s confidence and competence related to college students’ mental health experiences, namely experiences with students in distress or those whom are disruptive. This qualitative research study will focus on examining faculty’s confidence and competence in responding to distressed and disruptive college students through an interpretivist lens. Using Noddings’s (1999) Ethic of Care theory and Johnson’s and Bany’s (1970) Classroom Management theory, this research study seeks to address and assess faculty’s confidence and competence within these theoretical frameworks. The ability to better understand undergraduate faculty experiences with disruptive and distressed college students has the potential to inform institutional training opportunities for faculty, as well as provide insight into how student affairs administrators can build collaborative bridges in supporting students through key partnerships with faculty. Furthermore, improving upon faculty competence and confidence through comprehensive training programs can contribute to early intervention strategies with potential to positively impact student retention and completion rates.

Key Words: Faculty, Mental Health, Faculty Development, College Students
DEDICATION

This Dissertation is dedicated to my mother,
Eleanor Martinez Negrete
August 29, 1948-March 21, 2001

My Nina,
Lucille Martinez Olivares
September 12, 1949-June 26, 2015

and,

My Auntie who passed a few weeks before my defense,
Sandra Martinez

These three women and sisters have taught me about strength and perseverance in the face of life’s insurmountable challenges.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation study could not have been possible without the participation of willing faculty who valued the need of a research study of this type. I was humbled by the participants’ ability to articulate their experiences and expose themselves in ways that were vulnerable and genuine. My sincere gratitude goes out to those faculty members and instructors who participated in this study, and whom have taught me so much about the world they live and teach in everyday. As a full time professional, I had the undying support of my supervisor, Annie Stevens, to move through this process and complete my dissertation in the face of work commitments and student crises. My advisor, Dr. Judith Aiken, offered her time, energy, ideas, and overall commitment to my study. Her mentorship and guidance were critical in my success.

I am eternally grateful for my friends and family who have supported me through my entire journey, providing advice and encouragement along the way. This includes my wonderful father, Robert Negrete, my sister Yvonne, and my brother, Robert Negrete, II. With great success comes great sacrifice, and I am fortunate to have a supportive and understanding family as there were many family sacrifices I had to make to keep moving forward. I am indebted to my dear friend Jennifer Garrett-Ostermiller who provided her editing eye throughout my research process. Finally, I dedicate this piece of work to my late mother, Eleanor Negrete, who passed away in 2001—I know that her spirit lives on, as she was a mother who always encouraged me to achieve anything I set my heart and mind on, reminding me to never to give up.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Discussing the topic of distressed and disruptive college students inevitably leads to a deeper conversation about the prevalence of mental health issues across colleges and universities. Today’s institutions of higher education are experiencing a significant increase in students who are struggling with mental health issues. Not only have the number of students struggling with such issues increased, the complexity and level of care required to address these concerns has also prompted significant demand from college campuses in order to respond to this phenomenon (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; Kay, 2010). The prevalence and urgency surrounding mental health issues is summarized by the following national data points:

- One in four young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 have a diagnosable mental illness (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2013).
- More than 20% of college students have been diagnosed or treated by a professional for a mental health condition within the past year (American College Health Association, 2014).
- More than 40% of college students have experienced a higher than an average amount of stress within the past 12 months (American College Health Association, 2014).
- More than 85% of college students felt overwhelmed by all they had to do in the past year; 48% have felt things were hopeless (American College Health Association, 2014).
Almost 73% of students living with a mental health condition experienced a mental health crisis on campus, however, 34% reported that their college did not know about their crisis (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2012).

College counseling centers have observed an increase in the prevalence and severity of mental health issues experienced by students and an increase in the number of students taking psychotropic medications (Gallagher, 2014).

These striking and concerning data points serve as a brief backdrop to the specific topic being researched in this study: to examine undergraduate faculty’s competence and confidence in responding to distressed and disruptive students in college. Chapter 1 will provide a brief contextual backdrop to the problem, address the role of student affairs administrators in supporting faculty, introduce the study’s research questions, and discuss the significance of this study. In addition, key definitions will be reviewed and the researcher’s background will be expanded upon. Chapter 2 will provide an in-depth description of the literature reviewed as it relates to this research study. Chapter 3 will outline a methodological plan on how this research was conducted while Chapter 4 will present and analyze the findings. Finally, Chapter 5 will summarize the findings of this study, respond to the main research questions, and offer implications for practice and future research.

1.1 Contextual Backdrop

Mental health issues serve as a leading barrier to academic success for college students. In fact, Eisenberg, Golberstein, and Hunt (2009) conducted a study examining mental health and academic success across multiple measures and found that mental health issues were associated with lower academic success in college. More specifically,
college students cited depression and anxiety as primary barriers to academic performance. It is reported that 31% of college students have felt so depressed in the past year that it was difficult to function and more than 50% have felt overwhelming anxiety, making it difficult to succeed academically (American College Health Association, 2014). The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reported in 2012 that 64% of young adults who were no longer in college at the time of the study were not attending college due to a mental health related reason. Finally, NAMI (2012) reported that depression, bipolar disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder are the primary diagnoses for young adults struggling with mental health during college.

As mental health issues among college students continues to escalate, there is an increased likelihood these issues present themselves in the academic arena, more specifically, the classroom. There is a dearth of research surrounding faculty’s confidence and competence surrounding college students’ mental health experience (Backels & Wheeler, 2001; Becker et al., 2002; Brockelman et al., 2006). Upon review of the literature involving faculty working with students with mental health issues, only three studies focused on faculty’s perceptions of students living with mental health challenges, and there was no study that examined faculty’s direct experiences interacting with distressed or disruptive students. Many studies addressed these issues peripherally, but there was a resounding absence of undergraduate faculty’s voice related to this timely and important issue. Yet, of the existing research, it has been found that faculty perceive mental health issues as having an impact on students’ academic performance and engagement (Backels & Wheeler, 2001). To illustrate, Backels and Wheeler (2001) conducted a study that surveyed faculty about the perceived effect of mental health issues
on student academic performance. Their research found a variation in faculty responses based on the length of faculty’s experience in the classroom. For example, faculty with 15 years or less teaching experience were more likely to view substance abuse and test anxiety as having an effect on academic performance than those with more than 15 years experience, where they were more likely to view relationship (intimate) problems as having an effect on student academic performance. Yet, in spite of this research, it appears that while faculty may experience students who are struggling with mental health issues, they are often perplexed as to how to assist them, namely, providing flexibility for individual students’ academic support (Backles & Wheeler, 2001).

Other research studies indicated that faculty frequently question a student’s ability to be enrolled in a course of study during college especially if they are struggling with mental illness (Armada, 1999; Becker, Martin, Wajeeh, Ward, & Shern, 2002; Hoffman & Mastrianni, 1992; Wolf & DiPietro, 1992). In other words, instead of seeking best ways to support these students, faculty often suggest that they do not belong in the college classroom. Such a perception has serious implications given the current increase of college student mental health issues. College faculty generally lack the knowledge, awareness, and abilities to work effectively with disruptive and distressed college students, further demonstrating a critical need to invest in faculty development around this issue in order to better serve today’s college students (Hernández & Fister, 2001).

1.2 Supporting Faculty: The Role of Student Affairs Administrators

Generally, the role of student affairs administrators on college campuses is to support students who experience both academic and personal challenges. The increase in students experiencing mental health issues during college represents a unique challenge
that student affairs professionals must address—developing opportunities to bridge the gap between faculty and student affairs services in order to increase support for disruptive and/or distressed college students. Bridging the gap allows both faculty and student affairs staff to provide a seamless experience that communicates a culture of care in tandem with structured support. Student affairs administrators must build a supportive and collaborative relationship with academic affairs in order to better serve faculty’s interactions with disruptive and distressed college students. However, in order to successfully achieve this, student affairs administrators must first understand the factors that contribute to or detract from undergraduate faculty’s competence and confidence in responding to disruptive and distressed college students.

1.3 Research Questions

In this study, I was interested in examining undergraduate faculty’s experiences responding to distressed and/or disruptive college students inside or outside of the classroom. This research study sought to answer the following research question: How competent and confident do faculty believe they are in recognizing, responding to, and supporting disruptive and/or distressed college students? More specifically, this research study focused on answering the following questions:

1. What experiences or critical incidents have faculty encountered with students who are disruptive or are in distress?
2. How do faculty construct their own understanding about what their role is in supporting or responding to students who are disruptive or are in distress?
3. What expectations might faculty have regarding their institution’s role in supporting them when they are working with a student who may be disruptive and/or in distress?

1.4 Significance of Study

Research has demonstrated that colleges will continue to enroll students struggling with mental health issues, primarily because mental health onsets occur during the years students are traditionally in college (Eisenberg et al., 2009). Even prior to college, students are presenting emerging symptoms associated with mental health challenges (NAMI, 2012). Today, preK-12 education has provided the infrastructure for students struggling with mental health to be successful academically. In addition to new medications and comprehensive therapy and treatment programs, state and federal mandates require students be afforded services to help them meet academic challenges. For instance, the use of individualized education plans within preK-12 education has made higher education not just a possibility, but a reality for all students (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Colleges and universities must be prepared to receive these students in record numbers, and while many of these students can and will be successful, there will inevitably be those who will disrupt the academic environment and experience episodes of distress that will require supportive intervention efforts. The question is: Whose job is this? I argue that it is every campus official’s responsibility to care for and respond to students who may be in distress or disrupting the college experience for other students.

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1 The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services. Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education.
The term campus official is not relegated to senior administrators, counselors, or other student affairs staff; it also includes faculty. Many faculty may experience student issues within a context that other campus officials are not privy to—the classroom environment. Current research lacks focus and insight into faculty’s experiences, competence, and confidence in addressing disruptive and distressed college students (Backels & Wheeler, 2001; Brockelman et al., 2006).

Of the research that does exist, one quantitative research study focused on faculty’s perceptions of how mental health impacts college students’ academic performance, remaining distant from the faculty experience itself (Backels & Wheeler, 2001). Another quantitative research study at one Midwestern college campus (Brockelman et al., 2006) began to inquire into faculty’s comfort level and confidence working with students, specifically those with psychological disorders (PDs), but it lacked a reputable response rate (~20%) and relied on individual faculty’s definition and interpretation of what was perceived to be a PD. Thus, the study was lacking in generalizability and reliability (Brockelman et al., 2006). Finally, a more recent dissertation study examined faculty’s response to acutely distressed students, using qualitative research and focusing in on a narrow definition that primarily encompassed severe mental health crises, primarily situations where a student demonstrated harm to themselves in the form of self-injury and suicidal threats (Schwartz, 2010). Schwartz’s (2010) study was specific in examining faculty’s intentions to respond to acute crises (e.g. suicidal gestures and ideations) using Ajzen’s (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior.
and while valuable because it examined faculty’s intention and motivation for intervening, it did not seek in-depth knowledge in identifying faculty’s confidence or competence in responding to students in distress.

This dissertation study captures undergraduate faculty experiences through a qualitative approach, adding their voices to the conversation about how to respond to disruptive and/or distressed college students. More specifically, this study highlights the faculty experience more fully, and provides a qualitative research tradition to the very limited research that has been conducted within this area of study. The ability to better understand undergraduate faculty experiences with disruptive and distressed college students may offer the opportunity for the development of increased training opportunities for faculty, as well as provide insight into how student affairs administrators can build collaborative bridges in supporting students through key partnerships with faculty. Furthermore, improving upon faculty competence and confidence through comprehensive training programs can contribute to early intervention strategies with the potential to positively impact student retention and completion rates.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

I would like to address my use of the terms “disruptive” and “distressed” as I have used them when referring to students struggling with mental health issues. While mental health is critically important to discuss, it also refers to a wide range of issues, many of which cannot be explored or defined within the limitations of this study. I have chosen to focus discretely on college students who demonstrate distress and/or disrupt the academic

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2 A central factor in the theory of planned behavior is the individual’s intention to perform a given behavior. Intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behavior; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior.
environment in ways that require faculty to respond to a situation or critical incident. In this section, I am providing several other operational definitions that appear throughout this research study:

**Competence:** Ability to perform a task well and with appropriate knowledge.

**Confidence:** A sense of performing a task in ways that feels empowering. Where knowledge, awareness, and ability align.

**Critical Incident:** Within the scope of this research study, a critical incident is a specific incident or unusual circumstance that the participants are asked to reflect upon and describe in detail. An incident is any specifiable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act (Flanagan, 1954). To be critical the incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects (Flanagan, 1954).

**Distressed Students:** Within this study “distressed students” are students experiencing emotional and/or psychological problems that are interfering with their ability to learn. This is not always obvious or known to an individual on the receiving end of the distress (e.g. faculty), but this is often communicated by the students themselves and/or peers may report the distressing behavior they are witnessing.

**Disruptive Students:** Those students whose behavior makes teaching and learning difficult for others in the classroom. It is important to note that “disruptive” and “distressed” do not take the place of “mental health,” but rather provide a more contextualized layer to the demonstrated behaviors faculty may experience in the
classroom or one-on-one with students.

**Escalating Behaviors:** While distress and disruption are two specific behaviors with different definitions, they can often overlap, creating some complexity, often leading to behaviors that are escalated for the student in crisis (Hernández & Fister, 2001).

**Faculty:** Within the scope of this student, faculty are defined as full-time faculty who are tenured or on tenure track, as well as full-time instructors (non-tenured) who primarily teach undergraduate students at a four year institution.

**Mental Health:** Mental health is an essential component of overall health and well-being, and is seen as a component of the holistic health of individuals (U.S. Department of Human Health Services, 1999). Mental health, in this study, is referenced as emotional health and wellness.

**Mental Illness:** Mental illnesses are medical conditions that can dramatically impact a person's thoughts, feelings, judgment, and ability to function (Jed Foundation, 2015). Oftentimes, mental health and mental illness are used interchangeably.

**Mental Health Crisis:** Situations involving mental health crises may include intense feelings of personal distress (e.g., anxiety, depression, anger, panic, hopelessness), obvious changes in functioning (e.g., neglect of personal hygiene, unusual behavior), or catastrophic life events (e.g., disruptions in personal relationships, support systems or living arrangements; personal or sexual trauma) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2013).

**Student Affairs:** The delivery of services enhancing educational experiences of college students within the framework of an institution’s mission and values. While student affairs includes student services, and this defined much of student affairs until the mid-
1970s, student development and the process of how student affairs administrators work with students created new ways of thinking about the nature of student affairs (Task Force on the Future of Student Affairs, 2010).

Student Affairs Administrators: Professionals who work with students within the framework of co-curricular involvements at a college or university, delivering student affairs services as provided in the definition above.

1.6 Researcher’s Background

College student mental health and faculty interactions with disruptive and distressed students are sources of ongoing intrigue for me, as they directly relate to the work I do as an Assistant Dean of Students addressing retention initiatives, working closely with students who are in crisis due to various mental health issues, and supporting staff and faculty through training and education surrounding mental health. I have worked within the field of student affairs professionally for thirteen years and in my current position as Assistant Dean of Students for six years, providing me with great breadth and depth of knowledge and experience into this particular topic. This study allowed me to better understand how to work closely and collaboratively with faculty, bridging a gap that too often exists between student affairs and academic affairs units. I captured the voices of faculty in a focused manner, identifying ways to support the faculty experience within their classrooms in an effort to impact college students in ways that are positive, validating, and supportive.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Colleges and universities across the country have witnessed the increase of college students struggling with mental health issues, with many students arriving to campus with preexisting issues, and some experiencing mental health onsets during college (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004; Soet & Sevig, 2006). While many students are successful living with mental health issues, others continue to struggle and do so in ways that manifest into disruptive and/or distressful behaviors. Faculty on college campuses often experience distressed and disruptive students within the classroom context, and only a few research studies have captured faculty’s perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of students struggling with mental health issues (Backels & Wheeler, 2001; Becker et al., 2002; Brockelman et al., 2006). The purpose of this study was to examine undergraduate faculty’s confidence and competence in responding to the distressed and disruptive college students through a qualitative research approach, capturing faculty’s lived experiences.

This literature review is organized in six parts. First, the prevalence and severity of mental health issues is discussed through a national context. Second, the role higher education institutions have historically played in student development is examined to better understand the current positionality of colleges and universities today. Third, the devastating shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007 is discussed, providing an overview of this national tragedy, aiding in understanding the fear and anxiety that often emerges at postsecondary institutions related to acutely distressed college students. Fourth, I examine faculty’s experiences with distressed and disruptive students as presented in existing literature along with the academic barriers associated with distressed and
disruptive students. Next, the barriers in addressing mental health issues on college campuses are discussed with a focus on academic achievement, social stigma, and legal issues. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of the literature and identify the gaps in the literature that this research study is attempting to address.

2.1 National Context: College Student Mental Health Prevalence and Severity

Research studies have demonstrated that college campuses are experiencing a mental health crisis, meaning, there is a significant number of college students struggling with multiple and complex issues related to mental health (Collins & Mowbray, 2005; Gallagher, 2014; Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004; Kitzrow, 2003; Zivin, Eisenberg, Gollust, & Golberstein, 2009). Of those students who are struggling, many are seeking help once they step foot onto their college campuses, thus requiring a comprehensive response from college administrators. Traditionally, college and university counseling centers have strived to “assist students to define and accomplish personal, academic, and career goals by providing developmental, preventive, and remedial counseling” (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2015, p. 204). While these have been traditional goals for college counseling centers, they have had to evolve rapidly to meet the shifting needs of students with severe psychological issues (Gallagher, 2014; Kitzrow, 2003; Pledge, Lapan, Heppner, & Roehlke, 1998; Storrie, Ahern, & Tuckett, 2010).

According to the National Survey of Counseling Center Directors (2014) at 275 institutions, 52% of center directors reported an increase in “severe” psychological problems over the last five years, while 69% of counseling directors noted an increase in student crises requiring an immediate response (Gallagher, 2014). They estimated that approximately 52% of counseling center clients had severe psychological problems, and,
of this group, eight percent suffered from an impairment so severe that they could not finish school or could only do so with intensive treatment (Gallagher, 2014). Furthermore, 86% of counseling centers indicated a steady increase of students arriving on campus already on psychiatric medication due to severe psychological problems (Gallagher, 2014). Ninety percent of counseling centers had to hospitalize an average of 1.5 students per 1000 students for psychological reasons during one academic year, which means for a campus of 10,000 students, you are talking about approximately 15 hospitalizations each academic year due to mental health. Finally, counseling directors reported a total of 125 student suicide combined for the academic year on their campuses (Gallagher, 2014).

These alarming data points are consistent with what students have reported through the American College Health Association’s (ACHA) 2014 annual survey, which included over 66,000 college student responses across 140 institutions where college students self-reported their experiences with mental health. Over one third of respondents reported that they had been so depressed it was difficult for them to function at some point within the last 12 months. Over half of all respondents indicated that they had felt an overwhelming anxiety and nine percent seriously considered suicide, all within the past year. It is no wonder that college counseling centers and directors of college student health are experiencing a demand for increased services that address the urgency and intensity of the issues college students are facing.

The increase in college students living with mental health issues may also be attributed to disability laws, increased and improved treatment centers, and comprehensive support services in preK-12 educational institutions for students with
disabilities. This increase in educational access for students with disabilities in preK-12 education has created a pipeline of possibility for high school students living with mental health issues to successfully complete high school and enroll in college, thus heightening the need for college campuses to increase support and resources to help today’s college student achieve academic and personal success (Belch, 2011; Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Additionally, new medications used to treat mental illness have improved in number and effectiveness, making it possible for many students with serious psychological disabilities to attend college who would not have been able to do so in the past (Gallagher, 2014).

Higher education institutions can no longer evade what is known to be a mental health crisis on campus, but rather, colleges and universities must face this reality with great intentionality where solutions for supporting students are explored, and problems are no longer ignored. While this backdrop of problematic issues is concerning and may represent a range of troubling trends, from minor to more severe, it is the duty of student affairs administrators, college faculty, government officials, parents, and community partners to address these concerns head on and develop a solution with the goal of helping college students succeed inside and outside of the classroom.

2.2 Role of Higher Education’s College Student Development: A Historical Overview

The role of higher education in relation to college student development has shifted over the course of time. This shifting role higher education has experienced provides critical context that informs the roles and responsibilities colleges have in responding to the needs of its students. Prior to the 1960’s colleges were considered to act in loco parentis, or “in place of parents,” having significant supervision in guiding students
through their college careers with great oversight and direction (Lake, 2013; Kaplin & Lee, 2007). College student affairs administrators and faculty demonstrated a pronounced control over student life and approached student development through a parental-like approach. This era was soon buried once the constitution came to campuses, recognizing freedom of speech and association and declaring college students constitutional adults (Lake, 2013; Kaplin & Lee, 2007). This was known as the Civil Rights Era; the 1960’s and 1970’s was a time of many college student demonstrations--protests against the Vietnam War, women’s liberation, civil rights and desegregation, and the emergence of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in 1974, which “grants students access to their educational records and to protect their records from access by unauthorized persons” (Roth, D’Agostino, Brown, Warner, & Wheeler, 2015, p.43).

College students took the constitution into their own hands and demanded to be treated as adults, ultimately cutting those parental-like ties to college administrators.

As college students continued to move throughout their college experience practicing their constitutional rights, university faculty and administrators acted as “bystanders” taking a completely hands-off approach and remained distant from the college student experience. The 1970’s and 1980’s was known as the Bystander Era where universities allowed students to demonstrate their freedoms in their entirety (Lake, 2013). While the positive side to students’ freedoms meant free speech and freedom of association manifested through student activism and sociocultural movements, the negative aspects of such freedoms began to manifest in the form of students experiencing legal trouble, sustaining injuries, harming others through their negative behaviors, and becoming seen as uncontrollable. Lawsuits against colleges began to emerge, and there
were critiques about a college’s duty to protect their students from harm. One seminal case law that scrutinized college administrators’ role in student safety was found in *Jain v. Iowa State* (2000), where a student killed himself by running his moped in his residence hall room and ingesting the fumes. The University did not take advantage of the discretionary exception in FERPA to contact parents in an emergency and chose not to do so. While the university was not found at fault, there were many questions as to how much oversight and responsibility a university should or should not have with its college students. College students were still seen to hold the burden of responsibility for protecting and taking care of themselves, as in the case of *Jain v. Iowa State* (2000), but as lawsuits and incidents began to pile up, more and more pressure was placed on colleges and universities, with the court of law asking college administrators to take a more active role in college students’ health and safety. In the case of *Shin v. MIT* (2002), there were numerous reports and indications that Elizabeth Shin was suicidal, and she eventually killed herself on campus. Shin’s parents filed a lawsuit against Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) claiming that administrators knew she was struggling and failed to intervene in a timely and appropriate manner. The university was found to have a duty to respond to Shin’s mental health issues, further raising questions and expectations of higher education institutions, creating a litigious campus environment across the U.S., further pressuring college campuses to take more responsibility for student health and safety. While the initial development of FERPA served to protect the educational records of college students, including disciplinary records, the U.S. Department of Education stepped in to address those instances when an emergency made it necessary to protect the health and safety of an individual student or the campus
community, allowing intuitions to disclose critical and important information to parents. The 1994 amendment to FERPA states that “conduct that posed a significant risk to the safety or well-being of that student, other students, or other members of the school community” is appropriate to disclose to parties who have an educational interest in the student’s behavior (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Colleges and universities often struggle with the tensions of balancing the privacy of the individual student while protecting the campus community, and there continues to be an ongoing negotiation between individual privacy while upholding campus safety.

As a result, the Facilitator Era was ushered in during the 1990’s, as colleges began to navigate students’ constitutional rights while enforcing safety and security on their campuses. While students’ privacy rights were being upheld and due process was afforded, students were beginning to be held accountable for their unsafe behaviors. The Facilitator Era is best defined as the balance between university control and student freedom (Lake, 2013). Today, universities continue to act as facilitator between students, parents, university policies, and the law. Students are able to enjoy their personal freedoms while living and learning in a structured environment where they will be held accountable for their actions that are against university policy as well as state or federal laws. While some may argue that colleges and universities are still in this facilitator relationship with its students, I would argue that we are now entering what I would call a Compliance Era. There are many more guidelines the federal government has prescribed for colleges and universities related to student safety. These compliance guidelines are
most readily seen in what we know as Title IX\(^3\), namely Sexual Assault, Violence Against Women’s Act (VAWA) and Title II\(^4\) within the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Although it is not my intent in this study to discuss fully these new mandates, generally they call for student affairs administrators to respond to legal mandates and guidelines around providing appropriate prevention and intervention efforts in regard to sexual misconduct and to be responsive to students who threaten self harm and suicide while still upholding their legal rights as students with disabilities. These are just two legal frameworks that have vastly impacted the role of student affairs practitioners, and “the challenge for higher education continues to be to understand and respond constructively to changes and growth in the law while maintaining its focus on its multiple purposes and constituencies” (Kaplin & Lee, 2007, p. 22). Supporting faculty, a primary constituent on college campuses, as they navigate situations involving disruptive and distressed students is essential in order to maintain a healthy academic environment.

Today, colleges and universities are frequently writing and rewriting campus policies in an effort to align with emerging federal guidelines to remain in compliance and as far away from public scrutiny as possible. This compliance approach to college student development has required student affairs administrators to become much more vigilant in upholding student safety and remain free from costly lawsuits that have the potential to dismantle an institution’s reputation. Despite the difficult legal landscape

\(^3\) The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces, among other statutes, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance.

\(^4\) Title II applies to State and local government entities, and, in subtitle A, protects qualified individuals with disabilities from discrimination on the basis of disability in services, programs, and activities provided by State and local government entities. Title II extends the prohibition on discrimination established by section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, 29 U.S.C. 794, to all activities of State and local governments regardless of whether these entities receive Federal financial assistance.
student affairs administrators find themselves interacting with, there continues to be a steadfast approach to upholding a safe campus free from violence, thus the emergence of strategic behavioral intervention teams focused on monitoring students of concern (Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008). As the threat of campus safety increases, so does the fear among faculty, staff, and students.

2.3 Virginia Tech University Tragedy: A Paradigm Shift in Crisis Management

The tragedy that occurred at Virginia Tech on April 16, 2007 was not the first act of violence on a college campus, and it certainly has not been the last one, but it was undoubtedly the largest act of violence on any college campus to date, where Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 people in total (Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008). I discuss it here to highlight the importance of developing deeper understanding and importance of issues of mental health on the college campus. Prior to Virginia Tech other college campuses had experienced violent acts perpetrated by students, community members, staff, faculty, and even the U.S. Military. The tragic events at Kent State University shook the nation in 1970 when four students were killed and nine were wounded when National Guardsmen opened fire on students protesting the Vietnam War (Ferraro & McHugh, 2010). Unfortunately, many more acts of violence have occurred more than 40 years after this event, but there was something about the violent shootings at Virginia Tech that shifted the paradigm around college campus safety and security.

The immediate emergence of behavioral intervention and threat assessment teams began to crop up on college campuses in addition to questions about client confidentiality within counseling and student health centers (Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008). While the Virginia Tech shooting was not the first shooting by far, it was the largest, and it was an
incident that uncovered a series of discrete events that led college administrators, police, and other law enforcement to believe that people had prior knowledge of Seung-Hui Cho’s emotional instability. Cho’s history of mental illness piqued many people’s interest, and the correlation between mental illness and school shootings began to evolve into conversations of causation. Blanco et al.’s (2008) research study addresses these inaccurate assumptions as they found that the predicted probability of violence among those living with severe mental illness alone is about the same as it is for subjects without severe mental illness. In fact, Appleby, Mortensen, Dunn, and Hiroeh (2001) found that people with psychiatric disabilities are far more likely to be victims of violence rather than perpetrators of violence.

While mental health plays a role in violence, the connection between the two has become a focused concern for many, causing faculty, staff, students, and parents to have an increased level of fear around distressed and disruptive students, despite what research has confirmed. The heightened interest in college student mental health shortly after 2007 seemed to be fear-based and reactive, instigating an increase in institutional response and protocols specifically around crisis management. Cho’s mental health history was disclosed after the shooting where we learned his personal struggle with depression, anxiety, selective mutism, and suicidal ideation. We learned that there were numerous concerns about Cho throughout his teenage years and into college, but these concerns were never shared with appropriate administrators, and when they were shared, this information was collected by different people at different times, but never pieced together by someone who could arrange the entire puzzle, which might have allowed for more immediate and comprehensive interventions (Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008).
There were missed opportunities to connect the dots in this tragic story, which mobilized college campuses to create better infrastructures and build capacity around protecting the health and safety of college campuses. The federal government continues to contribute to this conversation through the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Title II guidelines addressing direct threat to self and others. While threats to self are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) due to the assumption that such threats relate to a mental illness, threat to others is what colleges can swiftly take action on in an effort to protect their campus community. However, these conversations continue to be ongoing and very nuanced (Lannon, 2014). Despite the complexity of crisis management, it is evident that colleges and universities have had to shift their approaches to student crisis management, and do so in ways that address individuals at risk (within the context of this study, students), their campus environment (health and safety trends), and their current institutional systems focused on health and safety (policies and protocols).

2.4 The Distressed and Disruptive College Student

The discussion surrounding college student mental health also includes students who are characterized as distressed or disruptive on college campuses (Armada, 1992). While distress and disruption are not synonymous with mental health, they are strong indicators that often intersect with issues involving mental health (Armada, 1992; Kitzrow, 2003). Hernández and Fister (2001) characterize disruptive behavior as “rebellious and disrespectful that is intentionally defiant” (p.49). This can be illustrated in the student who demonstrates blatant and inappropriate outbursts in class, interrogates their faculty during class, or demonstrates a disrespectful attitude toward the class and the faculty, refusing to participate. While each of these examples can be intentional, there are
unintentional disruptive behaviors that are often preceded by emotional instability or
distress (Hernández & Fister, 2001; Van Brunt & Lewis, 2014). Some of these
unintentional behaviors are characterized as the student running out of the classroom
because they are having a panic attack, or a student who continues to stare and encroach
on their peers’ personal space because they are unaware of social cues. While these
examples demonstrate a level of disruption, they also overlap with distressing behavior.

The areas in which both disruption and distress overlap can be of significant
concern, and can be referred to as “escalating behavior” that prompts immediate concern
and response on the part of faculty, staff, or even peers (Hernández & Fister, 2001).
While faculty response may be considered likely and necessary, Hernández & Fister
(2001) assert that faculty often choose not to discuss their thoughts, feelings, or details
about disruptions even with colleagues who may also be experiencing similar kinds of
behavior, fearing being seen as incompetent or irresponsible.

Students who experience distress in ways that are disruptive for themselves (e.g.
self-injurious behavior) and for those around them can impact the overall academic
environment including classrooms and residence halls (Kitzrow, 2003; Van Brunt &
Lewis, 2014). It is important to note that disruption and distress are two distinct
behaviors, but when we talk about students struggling with mild to severe mental health
issues, they are often demonstrating a level of distress that can be disruptive. Brockelman
et al. (2006) conducted a study of faculty perceptions of students with psychiatric
disabilities and found that most faculty could identify the difference between a student
with a psychiatric disability and an upset student. However, this same study found that
one of the factors that impeded faculty’s ability to help is their level of fear, especially if
they had no prior interactions or knowledge of psychiatric disorders and lacked adequate training. Similarly, Becker et al. (2002) found that faculty’s sense of fear and moral judgment interfered with their ability to help students struggling with mental health, and they believed in stigmatizing statements such as the belief that students with mental illness cannot succeed in college, which contributed to a problematic attitude about mental health issues, in general.

College faculty (and staff) undoubtedly require assistance in responding to students who demonstrate a level of disruption and distress inside the classroom that makes teaching and learning difficult (Hernández & Fister, 2001; Van Brunt & Lewis, 2014). While it is important for faculty to be assisted in developing knowledge about response techniques, referral resources on campus are just as critical for faculty to be aware of and understand. Discerning when and how to refer students who need critical and immediate care requires an additional skill set that faculty must develop through training and practice.

2.5 Barriers to Developing Adequate Resources and Support on College Campuses

As mental health issues continue to increase and intensify, colleges and universities must accept the fact that they are ushering in a significant number of students who will potentially struggle at some point during their college career, thus impacting student retention and graduation rates. Additionally, this is a time where colleges and universities must consider the role of their campus services as they relate to students living with severe mental health issues. Higher education institutions must develop an institutional commitment to support students struggling with a variety of mental health issues by promoting unique points of entry that students will interface with, such as
counseling and psychiatry services, student health clinics, disability services, academic units, and academic support programs, to name a few. Without adequate treatment, support services, and appropriate resources, young adults experiencing a mental health crisis are more likely to receive lower GPAs, drop out of college, or be unemployed compared with their peers who do not have a mental health challenge (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2008). Trela (2008) argues, “the quality of mental health counseling services is directly related to the ability of many students to gain a college degree” (p. 158). With the federal government continuing to articulate expectations surrounding student retention and graduation rates, colleges and universities will find themselves in new roles whereby they will need to address, directly and intentionally, their campus climate as it relates to students living with mental health issues. By doing so, higher education institutions can potentially impact a significant number of students who would benefit from positive and productive campus policies, protocols, support services, and resources related to specific barriers that may currently be challenging their individual academic and personal success. To illustrate, a research study conducted by NAMI (2012) revealed that students themselves have emphasized the critical need for the following services and supports to be available on campus, including:

- mental health training for faculty, staff, and students;
- suicide prevention programs;
- peer-run, student mental health organizations;
- mental health information during campus tours, orientation, health classes, and other campus-wide events;
- walk-in student health centers, 24-hour crisis hotlines, ongoing individual
counseling services, screening and evaluation services, and comprehensive referrals to off-campus services and supports (NAMI, 2012).

While many college campuses are increasing and enhancing supportive resources to address college student mental health concerns, they may not be moving quickly enough. In fact, suicides have tripled in the last 60 years among college students, making it one of the leading causes of college student deaths today (Mowbray et al., 2006). While this research study is not focused on college student suicide, the severity of suicides on campus, as one of many mental health issues related to distressed and disruptive college students, should generate a level of urgency for institutions. Every college campus is unique in its response to students who may be at risk, as related to severe mental health crises. Regardless of the variation of college campus resources, research and reports about these issues demonstrate that there is a critical need for a comprehensive set of guidelines on how to address college students struggling with mental health issues, which must include prevention efforts, education (for students, staff, and faculty), intervention efforts, and supportive re-entry processes for students returning to college from a medical leave of absence due to their mental health issues. Institutions of higher education that are committed to the holistic development of students will need to address these very issues that continue to impact the lives of students, faculty, and administrators alike.

2.5.1 Academic Success

One area of support that cuts across all college campus constituents is the vested interest in college students succeeding academically. Mental health problems early in life are associated with adverse academic, career, health, and social outcomes (Breslau, Lane, Sampson, & Kessler, 2008; Eisenberg et al., 2009a; Ettner, Frank, & Kessler, 1997),
suggesting that timely and effective intervention and treatment may positively impact student retention and completion rates in college (Kitzrow, 2003). Eisenberg et al. (2009b) conducted a detailed descriptive analysis of the association between mental health and academic outcomes in college and found that mental health problems are indeed associated with lower academic success. Kitzrow’s (2003) study affirms this as she asserts, “students with higher levels of psychological distress were characterized by higher test anxiety, lower academic self-efficacy, and less effective time management and use of study resources” (p. 172). More specifically, Eisenberg et al. (2009b) looked at three mental health issues (anxiety, depression, and eating disorders) and linked respondents with academic records finding that those struggling with these mental health issues had lower grade point averages, which impacted their decisions to remain in college. They go on to argue, “mental health problems can affect human capital accumulation—in particular, the amount and productivity of schooling—which may in turn have lifelong consequences for employment, income, and other outcomes” (Eisenberg et al., 2009b, p. 1).

Conversely, Brockelman et al.’s (2006) study did not find a significant correlation between mental health issues and a student’s college GPA. Instead, Brockelman et al. (2009) studied the impact of self-determination on a student’s GPA, surveying 375 students at a large research institution. It was found that mental illness was not predictive of GPA but self-determination had a significant impact on GPA (p<.01), regardless of mental illness. The lack of a significant relationship between the self-report of mental illness and GPA does not mean that the relationship does not exist. However, it is important to recognize that the sample size was not very large, and was only studied at
one large competitive research institution. The competitive admissions process could have created a skewed population of students in terms of academic achievement, and, therefore, other variables could be present that were not accounted for in this study.

If retention and graduation rates are key indicators in determining a college’s success, then higher education institutions must develop a supportive academic environment for their students who are living with mild to severe mental health issues. Research and national statistics reveal that while high school graduation rates will experience a five percent national increase in 2021-2022, certain states will have a much different story. In the case of the northeast, states will experience at least a five percent drop in high school graduation rates due to smaller numbers of students enrolled in high school compared to 2008-2009 (Hussar & Bailey, 2013). Additionally, college financing is becoming much more difficult and college campuses are continuing to experience shrinking budgets creating an expectation to focus more on student retention. Failure to address the mental health crisis on college campuses through a holistic and comprehensive approach can result in an increase in academically fragile students who will most likely be at a high risk of dropping out of college, if not for a short period of time, then for the remainder of their college career. That said, college campuses can be positioned well to address this critical issue by seeking a major reform in their mental health prevention and intervention programs and initiatives. These changes have the potential to positively impact retention and graduation rates of all students, especially address institutional budget projections and goals (and, of course, for individual student achievement) in a time of increasing competition for new students.
2.5.2 Social Stigma

It is important to recognize that while colleges and universities can increase their services and resources to assist students struggling with mental health, there remains an ongoing battle with social stigma related to mental health, serving as a key barrier to students’ help-seeking behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 2009a). Research illuminates for us that administrators and health providers across higher education institutions must take into account the public stigma that negatively impacts help-seeking behavior among college students and examine how it manifests uniquely within individual campus cultures in order to dismantle these barriers. As stated by Eisenberg et al. (2009a), “perceived public stigma might hinder people from using mental health services to avoid possible criticism or discrimination from others” (p. 524). Eisenberg et al. (2009a) found in their study that perceived public stigma was much higher than personal stigma experienced by the respondents in their study. The personal stigma, however, did still impact the respondents’ ability to seek help, which then served as another barrier to supportive resources that could possibly enhance academic achievement.

Examining Eisenberg et al.’s (2009a) study alongside Becker et al.’s (2002) study on faculty’s perceptions and attitudes on college student mental health, the problem of college student mental health is exacerbated even further. Becker et al. (2002) found that faculty bought into stigmatizing statements regarding students with mental illnesses and demonstrated a level of discomfort, fear, and social distancing from these students. If students perceive these strong stereotypes faculty have demonstrated, we know from Eisenberg et al.’s (2009a) study, that this only further increases the personal stigma students experience and decreases the chances of students asking for and receiving help.
The social stigma that surrounds mental illness is much more complex than what I can detail in this section, but it is important to understand how stigma surrounding mental health can be contingent on those perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors demonstrated by society, and in this case, faculty. This is no easy task, but one we must pay close attention to if we are to develop a campus environment where all students feel validated and welcomed and, therefore have an increased likelihood of personal and academic success.

2.5.3 Legal Landscape

The role and responsibility of college campuses to act in loco parentis, particularly in relation to college students who might be a health and safety risk, has become more of an expectation from the federal government within the last 10 years. While colleges and universities are navigating their role as facilitator between students, parents, and legal issues, they are often placed in a position where they are expected to exert control over students’ well being, and at times, serving in place of parents and family members. *Shin v. MIT (2002)* created a fear of litigation among colleges and universities related to students at risk, as the court ruled against MIT, indicating the university had a duty to protect and care for the student who was identified as suicidal prior to taking her life. In this case, Elizabeth Shin killed herself by lighting herself on fire in her residence hall room. MIT had knowledge of her suicidal threats the night prior as she shared her suicidal thoughts with a therapist at the institution who considered hospitalizing her. The ruling in *Shin v. MIT (2002)* was surprising to many higher education institutions, as cases that preceded *Shin v. MIT (2002)* resulted in the court’s ruling that institutions had no duty to respond or prevent student safety risks (*Jain v.*
\textit{Iowa, 2000; Bogust v. Iverson, 1960}. \textit{Shin v. MIT} (2002) prompted a paradigm shift for many higher education institutions, and they began to develop even stronger policies to effectively respond to risky behavior demonstrated by students.

Kitzrow (2003) argues, “student mental health problems have also impacted institutions in terms of legal challenges related to risk management issues and mental health services provided by the institution” (p. 173). Higher education institutions are expected to care for those students who struggle with mental health and alert parents or other family members if there is an imminent threat to self or others. This is a tall order to meet, but this is the new expectation, or “the new normal,” and colleges and universities have received little guidance on how to address this in a systematic way while still adhering to federal laws such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

If colleges and universities are to administer counseling, psychiatry, and other health services on their campuses, they must do so in ways that meet the majority of their students’ needs and demands. In fact, it can be viewed as unethical and legally risky to lack the training, expertise, and resources necessary to serve students in crisis if health centers currently exist on a college campus (Gilbert, 1998; Kitzrow, 2003). College counseling centers must work hard to meet this rising tide of college students with complex mental health issues, demonstrating a good faith effort in promptly developing and offering services that meet the current needs of students, while upholding the capacity to serve students comprehensively. As pointed out in a number of studies, college leaders, more than ever, need to consider ways to outline more clearly how college and university administrators can carefully navigate federal laws and students’
rights while maintaining a campus climate that is healthy and safe for all.

2.6 Literature Summary and Gaps

While there has been voluminous research on college students struggling with mental health at colleges and universities, four studies have focused on support services, resources, help seeking behaviors, and the student experience itself (Britt & Hirt, 1999; Eisenberg et al., 2002; Kitzrow, 2003; Mowbray et al., 2006). There is very little research surrounding faculty’s experience working with college students struggling with mental health. Additionally, much of the research that has been conducted around faculty and their response to these issues has been focused on their own perceptions and beliefs of mental health and students’ experience and not so much on their own personal experience interacting with students with mild to severe mental health issues or their perceptions surrounding institutional support and resources related to the topic of mental health (Becker et al., 2002; Brockelman et al., 2006). One research study indicated a lack of acceptance among faculty of students struggling with psychiatric disabilities (Becker et al., 2002). However, faculty must realize that they play a significant role in students feeling supported, not just academically, but personally. Eells (2008) argues that faculty members need specific guidance with curricular modifications, classroom management, and understanding resources on campus in order to best serve students with mental health issues. Belch (2011) expands upon this by stating, “faculty and staff need to understand basic ways to differentiate among troubling, disruptive, and threatening behavior” (p. 86). Schwartz (2010) argues that college faculty’s intentions to intervene or respond to acutely distressed college students are informed by the messages they are receiving (or not receiving) from their institutions. That said, faculty’s attitudes and perceptions
surrounding students’ mental health challenges can impact students’ experiences of college in a variety of ways. These attitudes and perceptions can also serve as a barrier to institutional response protocols that rely on faculty to be knowledgeable, aware, and capable of serving students with mental health challenges. Persistent negative attitudes by faculty toward mental health struggles must be addressed and corrected if improvements to the mental health climate on college campuses are to be gained, thus allowing for swift and effective responses to students who are being disruptive or demonstrating a level of distress.

One factor that has been identified as a possible contributor to faculty’s perceptions and beliefs surrounding mental health is the fact that faculty feel they do not have adequate knowledge or training to work with students struggling with mental health (Brockelman et al., 2006). Not surprisingly, faculty reported feeling fearful of students struggling with mental health deeming them as possibly unsafe or dangerous. This, amplified by the media’s portrayal of mental illness on college campuses, is a significant indicator of the lack of accurate information faculty hold and operate from (Becker et al., 2002; Ferraro & McHugh, 2010). On the other hand, Backels and Wheeler (2001) found in their study that faculty believe that students with mental illnesses can succeed in their academic pursuits. This incongruence between faculty behavior and beliefs pertaining to college student mental health is one that needs further research in order to develop a more holistic understanding of faculty’s experiences surrounding this timely topic.

There is also the issue related to the training and development for college faculty. Archer & Cooper (1998) make the assertion that “faculty members have a profound impact on students and their personal and professional growth plays a significant role in
how they teach and interact with students” (p.145). This is especially important to consider as we know that colleges provide a unique opportunity to identify, prevent, and treat mental health issues, because campuses often encompass students’ daily lives including on campus living, academic engagement, social networks, and many other services (Eisenberg et al., 2009a). If colleges and universities are to address aggressively the mental health crisis on their individual campuses, research and practice tell us that they must do so in a way that involves multiple stakeholders, including parents and families, students, staff, faculty, and health professionals, cultivating a culture of care on their campuses. More specifically, as pointed out by Archer and Cooper (1998), involvement of key stakeholders would include the development of training and educational opportunities for college faculty to engage with in order to best support those disruptive and distressed students that inevitably emerge within the classroom.

Research on faculty experiences with college student mental health is slowly emerging, but there is much more to explore. While Schwartz’s (2010) study focused on the faculty experience through a qualitative research approach, it was specific to acutely distressed students, namely, students who threaten self-harm or suicide. Schwartz’s (2010) research, while extremely valuable, may be too narrowly focused, and there continues to be a lack of research and knowledge about faculty’s general experiences with students who demonstrate more broad distressing and/or disruptive behaviors in and out of the classroom. This research study is aimed at addressing these gaps in an effort to provide a compelling contribution to the existing research and literature.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this study, I examine undergraduate faculty’s experiences related to the development of their professional competence and confidence in recognizing, responding to, and supporting disruptive and distressed college students. This chapter presents the methodology for the study, including the research questions, research tradition of inquiry, and research design. The population, sample, instrumentation, data collection, and analyses are further elaborated. Trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and human subjects/IRB compliance issues are also discussed.

3.1 Research Questions

This research study was developed with the intention of answering the following research question: How competent and confident do faculty believe they are in recognizing, responding to, and supporting disruptive and/or distressed college students? More specifically, this research study focused on answering the following questions:

- **Question 1:** What experiences or critical incidents have faculty encountered with students who are disruptive or are in distress?
- **Question 2:** How do faculty construct their own understanding about what their role is in supporting or responding to students who are disruptive or are in distress?
- **Question 3:** What expectations might faculty have regarding their institution’s role in supporting them when they are working with a student who may be disruptive and/or in distress?

3.2 Research Design

Based on the exploratory focus of my research questions, I chose to approach this
study using the qualitative research tradition of phenomenology (Husserl, 1963). Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences, “describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (e.g. disruptive and distressed college students) (Creswell, 2013, p. 73). Phenomenology seeks to reduce the individual experience to a universal commonality, “grasping the very nature of the thing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). In this study, the researcher examined college faculty’s experience working with college students who have demonstrated distress and/or disruption in and out of the classroom.

More specifically, I was interested in examining the phenomenon of the faculty experience related to their level of competence and confidence in response to disruptive and distressed college students. Addressing my research question through a phenomenological approach provided me the opportunity to utilize several research methods that allowed me to examine possible themes that emerged from the shared experiences of the research participants. Thus, my unit of analysis was the faculty experience.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

A focused theoretical framework guided my approach and analysis of this study. More specifically, an interpretivist framework seeking to understand the experiences of faculty through their specific lens, was applied throughout this study. Given that this was a qualitative research study, an interpretivist paradigm allowed for the researcher to make meaning within a specific time and context, where general meanings emerged from the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was important for the researcher to harness the voices of college faculty who have worked with disruptive and distressed college
students, in order to understand their individual and subjective perspectives and experiences, making sense of how they constructed knowledge of issues pertaining to distressed and disruptive college students. This study sought to unearth the patterns and meanings faculty ascribe to their role interacting and working with students who are in distress or who are disruptive, providing the opportunity to examine faculty’s competence and confidence in responding students who are in distress or demonstrated disruptive behavior. The researcher gained insight into the interactive dynamics between students, faculty, student affairs administrators, and the institutional systems that frame policies and protocols specific to college health and safety issues. Interpretivism allowed the researcher to develop and construct mutual meaning from the narratives of the participants, specifically, to understand faculty’s deep and vital experiences (Charmaz, 2006; Manning, 1999). This research study further framed the understanding of the research problem through the lenses and convergence of two theories: Noddings’s (1999) Ethic of Care and Johnson’s and Bany’s (1970) Classroom Management theories.

3.3.1 Ethic of Care Theory

Noddings’s (1999) ethic of care theory served as one of two theories that set the stage for the theoretical framework of this research study within an interpretivist paradigm. Care theory is rooted in liberal education traditions of the mid-century, but should not be confused with a simple altruistic sense of providing what is best for each person. Carol Gilligan (1982) produced seminal work that countered Kohlberg’s (1973) moral development theory, where Gilligan offered a more “feminine” perspective on psychological moral development, igniting a conversation about gendered dynamics around how people make moral decisions through a care-based perspective. Care-based
morality is best characterized as being focused on relationship building, being responsive to others, paying attention to others’ needs, and continually increasing one’s competence to best serve others. This is best depicted in Figure 1. Conversely, Kohlberg’s (1973) theory lends itself to what some have referred to as justice-based morality, as it focused on questions of fairness, equality, individual rights, abstract principles, and the consistent application of these concepts (Held, 2006). While both justice and care are inextricably linked, they offer a nuanced approach to building and sustaining relationships. Seeking to be care-oriented takes into account individual impact. In other words, “caring” refers to the relationship, not just to the agent who “cares” (faculty), but to those who are the focus of care (students) (Noddings, 1999).

According to Noddings (1999), caring relations must be maintained and are never a one-time instance. Noddings (1999) stressed the similarities between justice and care theorists, where care theorists usually seek goals that are compatible with justice, but try to achieve them by establishing conditions in which caring itself can flourish. Noddings (1999) asserts, “out of this healthy environment of personal and community caring, solutions may emerge that will satisfy not only the criteria of justice but also the people who are the targets of our good intentions” (p. 19). Personal and community caring takes into account both the intent and impact of caring relations. For instance, the intention of fair policies and solutions that meet justice and equity may be well received, but the impact such policies may have on targeted people should be considered in a caring nature. In this study, the researcher identifies how the four factors within care theory may serve as influential markers for faculty through their experiences in responding to disruptive and distressed college students. The researcher identifies places
where narratives around attentiveness, responsiveness, responsibility, and competence emerge for faculty in ways that are meaningful. More specifically, these four elements within the ethic of care are used to analyze the research study’s data systematically, providing a way to organize the data, which is discussed further within the methodology of this study.

![Ethic of Care Model (Noddings, 1999)](image)

**Figure 1. Ethic of Care Model (Noddings, 1999)**

### 3.3.2 Classroom Management Theory (Johnson & Bany, 1970)

Framing the ethic of care within this study through an interpretivist lens was the basis of this study’s conceptual framework and thus the backdrop for this study. As the researcher examined the experiences of faculty in relation to students struggling with mental health, there was a focus on how a culture of care was enacted (or not), through faculty’s classroom management style and how they addressed issues raised by disruptive and distressed college students within their classrooms. Johnson and Bany (1970) outlined their classroom management theory by describing classroom management as an art and a process. While this theory was written for a K-12 teacher audience, it is just as well suited for college faculty and teachers. It is important, though, to keep in mind that when these theorists discuss establishing group unity, classroom expectations, and group
cohesion, there are limitations to the college student classroom environment. Typically, college courses are bound within a certain timeframe, such as a quarter or semester, within which it can be challenging for faculty to establish group cohesion. Nevertheless, classroom management is essential in order to most effectively facilitate learning and teaching within a short period of time. Classroom management, according to Johnson & Bany (1970),

> Is seen as those highly skilled actions of the teacher based upon understanding the nature of groups and forces that operate in them, on the ability to diagnose classroom situations, and the ability to behave selectively and creatively to improve conditions. (p. 3)

At the heart of this theory, Johnson and Bany (1970) argue that teachers must meet their new challenges within the classroom by shifting and changing their teaching patterns. These teaching patterns do not occur in a vacuum, but rather, are influenced and informed by the individual (the student), the group (the classroom), and the school (the college/university), both separately and through an interactive relationship of the three (Johnson & Bany, 1970). Furthermore, Johnson and Bany (1970) stress that “teacher management activities include establishing, maintaining, and restoring the system or organization” in times of disruption or crisis (p. 6). Distressed and disruptive students challenge the classroom in ways that can potentially impact the classroom environment, affect teaching methods, and simply redirect attention toward situations that are not conducive to a positive and productive learning environment. The quality of classroom management is paramount to student learning and teacher success. Addressing classroom management from a place of care and concern requires the person who is caring (often faculty in the classroom) to continue to build upon their competence in order to evaluate
and respond to a wide range of expressed needs, thus consistently expanding on the breadth of their competence (Noddings, 1999). When overlaying Johnson’s and Bany’s (1970) classroom management theory with the importance of increasing competency in Noddings’s (1999) ethic of care theory, it becomes evident that the two can be mutually supportive of one another. Within the framework of classroom management theory, Johnson and Bany (1970) offer another definition of classroom management that incorporates, what I would argue, is an ethic of care:

> Classroom management is the process of handling those problems that affect instruction by using processes that increase group unity and cooperation, and, in addition, strengthen each student’s feelings of dignity, worth, and their satisfaction with classroom conditions. (p.11)

Again, the concept described above also contains several of the factors within Noddings’s ethic of care theory (1999), upholding that teachers (faculty) have the responsibility to control classroom dynamics, paying attention to members of their classroom and being responsive in ways that support classroom morale, all while doing so in a competent manner. This research study approached the research problem through these intersecting lenses, as depicted in Figure 2 and further elaborated on in Appendix K, where care theory meets classroom management theory, examining undergraduate faculty’s competence and confidence in responding to disruptive and distressed college students.
More specifically, the researcher attempted to identify how faculty’s classroom management styles surrounding distressed and disruptive students have encouraged or included an ethic of care, where faculty were able to cultivate an empathetic sensibility toward difficult incidents involving disruptive and distressed college students. In her description of care theory, Noddings (1999) overlays the discourse of justice with an ethic of care, and states, “care picks up where justice leaves off” (p. 16), implying that not all just actions cultivate a caring response. For instance, when faculty address a student who may be experiencing a manic episode, the just response may be to call police.
in order to address classroom safety (and management), the safety of other students, as well as the safety of the individual student in crisis leading to a student to be transported and evaluated in the hospital. This particular response may uphold the right to a safe environment for other students as well as the faculty themselves, however, it may be experienced as degrading and disorienting to the student in crisis. An ethic of care would not only take into account everyone’s right to a safe environment, but would go further and argue that the individual student in crisis should be attended to with a caring response, connecting them to resources that will enable them to recover from a traumatic incident and develop a positive sense of self, which would facilitate a supportive reintegration into the classroom community. In this example, a caring response would be to follow up with the student in crisis, articulating the need to intervene by way of a crisis response protocol, allowing a conversation to happen that upholds a reciprocal relationship.

Throughout this research study the researcher interacted with participants’ reported experiences through interpretive analysis, producing constructivist knowledge based on their experiences. The philosophical underpinnings within this study have served to provide a theoretical framework through which the researcher approached the study, peering through an interpretivist lens, with a theory of care as the foreground. The interplay between college student mental health, faculty interactions with students in crisis, faculty classroom management, and the meaning-making that emerged through these interactions produced vivid insights into faculty knowledge, awareness, and abilities through their lived experiences.
3.4 Researcher Subjectivity Statement

It is important for me to situate myself within this study as the researcher, as Creswell (2013) believes that the researchers themselves are instruments within qualitative research studies, interpreting data through their own personal lenses. As the Assistant Dean of Students focused on college student health and safety, this study was very relevant to my professional work. I have had several anecdotal insights into some of the experiences of faculty working with disruptive and distressed college students, as I work closely with faculty when student behavior has reached a high level of distress and/or disruption. As a part of my outreach and education efforts within my professional role, I have developed and conducted trainings for faculty around how to support students in distress, offering resources and tools for intervention. Additionally, I have served as an instructor for a graduate level course several times, and I can recount several incidents where I have had to respond to distressed graduate students struggling with mental health issues and, in a few cases, assist them in making the decision to leave their graduate program to focus on their personal challenges. Within my professional role, I also currently work on several committees focused on college student mental health and behavioral intervention efforts. As I moved through this research study, it was important for me to be cognizant of the deep professional knowledge I have gained surrounding this topic and to not allow my current professional experiences to inform interpretations of my data prematurely.

3.5 Setting & Participants

This research study took place at a four-year public university located in the northeastern part of the United States. The institution is made up of approximately 10,000
undergraduate students and approximately 2,500 faculty members, including part-time instructors. Research participants identified as faculty who primarily taught first-year undergraduate student courses, while a few of them taught a mix of students, first-year students being included. Research studies indicate that 50% of mental health onsets occur by the age of 14 and 75% occur by the age of 24, thus faculty working with a traditional-aged population of college students are likely experience distressed and disruptive students related to mental health concerns (NAMI, 2015). Furthermore, first-year college students who perceive the transition to college as stressful are likely to experience heightened emotional distress making it difficult to attend to the demands of college life (Kerr, Johnson, Gans, & Krumrine, 2004). With increased stress, anxiety, and the probability of mental health onsets occurring, undergraduate faculty primarily teaching first-year college students were an ideal group of participants to consider within this study. The researcher conducted outreach efforts to faculty within the institution at which he is employed, making access to the participants fairly seamless in addition to making outreach to faculty across various disciplines more effective due to preexisting relationships.

3.6 Sampling

A purposeful sampling strategy was conducted in this study, where the researcher identified sample participants to be studied, developed the type of sampling, and provided a sufficient sample size, which in this study, was defined as 10 individual faculty who primarily taught first-year undergraduate students. An initial invitation was distributed among faculty chairs of academic departments across the university, describing the study and asking them to forward the initial invitation to faculty who met the criteria, as
outlined in the recruitment email found in Appendix E. Interested faculty were instructed to email the researcher for further information about how to participate in the study. Those faculty who followed up with the researcher were then sent an official invitation asking them to complete a short recruitment survey that collected demographic data, initial insight into experiences with distressed and/or disruptive students, and gauged their further interest in participating in this study. The recruitment survey that was distributed to faculty was conducted through the University’s instrument, Lime Survey, and a copy of the instrument can be found in Appendix F.

3.7 Delimitations

A criterion sampling method was used to select the participants to be studied (Creswell, 2013). Participants had to serve as a faculty or instructor on a college campus for a minimum of three to five years, in order to ensure breadth and depth of experiences. Additionally, recruited faculty were those who taught exclusively or predominately first-year undergraduate college students and were willing to participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview, with the option to participate in a follow up focus group.

3.8 Data Collection Methods

3.8.1 In-Depth Interviews

Semi-structured individual interviews (Glesne, 2011) lasting approximately one hour, were conducted with 10 faculty. This approach allowed the researcher to gain robust information about the experience of each faculty; they were asked directed questions related to their experiences around teaching and working with students whom they identified as disruptive and/or distressed, a topic that served as a “theme of mutual interest” for both the participant and the researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 2).
This method was chosen because the researcher wanted to elicit responses and experiences about the phenomenon, as viewed by the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Semi-structured interviews consisted of specific questions that were still open in nature, allowing new questions to emerge based on the participants’ responses. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to probe more in-depth in order to understand the phenomena in the fullest possible way (Glesne, 2011). Preliminary interview questions are included in the appendices of this study, located in Appendix H. Each interview was conducted on the research site (the college) in a neutral location, such as an office chosen by the participant.

3.8.2 Critical Incident Technique

Within the individual semi-structured interviews, the researcher embedded a question prompting the participants to focus on a critical incident, where the participant was asked to describe in detail a specific critical incident involving a disruptive and/or distressed student where they had to respond as a faculty member within the classroom or in an advising capacity. The critical incident technique “consists of a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 1), thus attempting to connect theory and practice. In this study, the researcher collected rich and meaningful information about individual faculty’s experiences with critical incidents, further illuminating answers to the research questions outlined previously. Flanagan (1954) says that for an incident to be critical it “must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects” (p. 1). Faculty’s
description of a critical incident further developed insight into the intended or unintended consequences of faculty’s actions or inactions surrounding an incident involving a distressed and/or disruptive student. The critical incident prompt can be found in the individual interview protocol in Appendix H, specifically within question number five.

3.8.3 Focus Groups

Additionally, the researcher conducted one focus group that included a subset of the individual participants who had expressed interest in participating. The focus group was 60-minutes in length, and was comprised of the same participants who had participated in one-on-one interviews with the researcher prior to the focus group itself. A total of 6 of the 10 faculty interviewed participated in the focus group. The decision to perform a focus group was driven by the researcher’s belief that the participants would easily and freely discuss the phenomena being researched while within a supportive environment, understanding that there might be common experiences other participants would benefit from sharing and discussing (Morgan, 1997), as supported within the literature review. Where the individual interviews allowed the researcher to capture the depth of the phenomena being studied, the focus group interview offered the opportunity to attend to the breadth of the phenomena and to do so in a way that connected participants with each other around a similar theme and topic (Marshall & Rosman, 2011). Additionally, the focus group allowed the researcher to attempt to answer the last research question, seeking to understand the expectations faculty might have had regarding their institution’s role in supporting them when they are faced with a student who may be disruptive and/or in distress. The focus group protocol can be found in Appendix I and includes eight specific questions organized in themes that were informed
by the individual interviews, which sought to address faculty’s expectations and experience with their institution related to students who were disruptive and/or in distress. This research question alone, when asked in a focus group setting, created an environment where faculty members were able look to each other for common experiences that they shared, providing deep descriptions and broad experiences around their perceptions of their institution’s role and commitment to supporting faculty in difficult situations as described in this study.

3.8.4 Document Review/Content Analysis

Finally, the researcher conducted a digital document analysis, accessing webpages online that existed within the institution’s main platform, specifically, individual academic unit’s webpages. This digital document review was conducted to evaluate in what ways faculty support and resources did or did not exist through the lens of faculty development. Document analysis involves the process of examining and interpreting the data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Similarly, content analysis is a technique that “allows researchers to analyze relatively unstructured data in view of the meanings, symbolic qualities, and expressive contents they have and of the communicative roles they play in the lives of the data’s sources” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 44). Document review and content analysis as a technique allowed the researcher to further triangulate the data by examining the data against other data collection methods, seeking to find areas of alignment and misalignment across qualitative data points. Furthermore, the researcher attempted to provide “a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility” to this research study (Eisner, 1991, p. 110).
3.9 Fieldnotes and Data Management

Data was collected through digitally recorded interviews in addition to field notes recorded during the interviews to account for any points of interest, particular body language of the participant, or ideas to follow up with during the transcription of the data. After each individual interview and after the focus group the researcher produced an initial memo in the form of reflexive journaling identifying ideas, questions, and critical moments that emerged, thus beginning the preliminary stages of data analysis (Glesne, 2011).

Data recordings were stored on a secure, password-protected device that was only accessible to the researcher. Each interview was fully transcribed, and the researcher produced an additional memo to capture the ideas and initial emergence of themes within each interview. Member checking occurred where the researcher asked each participant to review the fully transcribed data of their individual interview to account for accuracy and ensure anonymity (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Finally, the researcher reviewed the clean transcribed data multiple times and produced a final research memo, summarizing larger ideas and preliminary themes.

3.10 Data Analysis

Coding involves piecing the text or data into various categories of information, and assigning a “code” to that category (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). A-priori coding (preexisting codes) was produced from the literature review, identifying categories that emerged from this segment of the research study. A-priori codes in this study included the following: college student mental health, classroom experiences, faculty competence, faculty confidence, barriers, and institutional perceptions. Additionally, emergent codes
were developed, or *invivo* codes, which are codes and categories that emerge from the actual data collected (Creswell, 2013). The use of a computer software, NVivo allowed the researcher to organize the coded data into analyzable text, further condensing and displaying the data in an effort to draw conclusions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

As a result of coding the data, the researcher was able to “create a framework of relational categories” for the data (Glesne, 2011, p. 195). Once the codes had been identified with specific labels, the researcher reviewed the aggregate data and assigned codes to specific pieces of the data, more specifically, thought units that fell into a particular category or code. An additional memo was produced to interpret the data, identifying initial insights the researcher had about the codes and themes. The researcher was able to extract the larger meaning of the data making sense of the way it was organized and thematized, further constructing personal views about the data while making larger connections to the literature review (Creswell, 2013). The researcher related these themes to the theoretical framework, further developing interpretations of the organized data. More specifically, four components were addressed within the ethic of care, identifying datapoints that were directed toward attentiveness, responsiveness, responsibility, and competency (as found in Figure 1), producing a matrix to visually organize the data in relation to these four components. The researcher also reviewed the data to identify areas where classroom management style was significant, identifying thought units that addressed individual, group, and organizational factors that may have informed a faculty’s response or lack of response to a distressed or disruptive student. Lastly, the data display was reviewed and compared to the final themes and categories that had been developed, identifying additional relationships that emerged.
3.11 Credibility & Trustworthiness

This study included 10 faculty participants, and a subset of the same participants participated in a 60-minute focus group session, which allowed the researcher to establish prolonged substantial engagement with the participants, and thus the phenomena. With the collection of this substantial data, the researcher developed thick descriptions for readers to assess the potential transferability and appropriateness for their own settings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

To ensure that the coding process was consistent, the researcher reviewed the assigned coded data and identified if they were aligned with the description of the codes. The researcher displayed the data in the form of a thematic summary, which allowed the researcher to begin to identify the relationships that coexist within the phenomenon that was being studied (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). After reviewing the code assignments, the researcher examined clusters of codes that developed into themes, or a broad unit of information, often situated around a cluster of codes with the purpose of forming a common idea (Creswell, 2013).

Member checks were performed with all participants to ensure the data analysis and interpretation was aligned with participants’ recorded experiences. Finally, the researcher attempted to triangulate the data by analyzing and drawing connections across the one-on-one individual interviews, focus groups, critical incident descriptive responses, and document analysis, understanding that “multiple means of data development can contribute to research trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and authenticity” (Glesne, 2011, p. 48).
3.12 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings from the study can be generalized to other settings and/or populations (Morrow, 2005). The use of thick descriptions from the researcher, methodology, and the findings, placed within the specific context of the study and among similar populations, allow for transferability (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). However, ultimately it is responsibility of the reader to determine if the findings of the study can be applied to another setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.13 Dependability

Dependability refers to the methods used to maintain consistency in the research (Morrow, 2005). Standardization of the interview protocol, the use of only one interviewer (the researcher), and consistency of the setting in which interviews took place support dependability (Boyatzis, 1998). Digital recording of the interviews helped reduce variation by “creating a consistent source of the qualitative information” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 147). The reflexive journal of the researcher also served as an audit trail (Glesne, 2011).

3.14 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the integrity of the findings—that they are based in the data and not the result of the researcher’s personal beliefs and biases (Morrow, 2005). Confirmability was ensured through the use of thorough descriptions of the analysis process and the maintenance of the reflexive journal which served as an audit trail and way to manage subjectivity (Morrow, 2005). In addition, use of direct quotations of the participants in the reporting of the researcher’s interpretation of the data analysis
supported confirmability. Finally, the researcher’s subjectivity statement, outlining his biases, experiences, and assumptions, is provided for confirmability.

3.15 Human Subjects/IRB

The research proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the institution under investigation for review upon the completion and approval of the dissertation proposal defense. Participants of the online sampling survey remained anonymous unless they indicated willingness to be interviewed, at which point their contact information was obtained yet remained confidential. Interview participants were provided a pseudonym, and interview data was stripped of all identifiable information. A participant chart matching each participant to his or her pseudonym was kept separate from the qualitative interview data in a password-protected database on the researcher’s computer. The participant chart can be found in Appendix G. Finally, an informed consent process was developed that discussed the potential risks of participating, which were minimal, as expected.

3.16 Limitations

The findings from this research study are subject to several limitations common to qualitative research methodology. The researcher made every effort to maintain the trustworthiness of the findings through such methods as triangulation of data, a strong interrelationship between the research design components—in particular the research questions, data collection methods, and data analysis. Although the findings cannot be generalizable to other contexts, they may be transferable in various college and university contexts based on the researcher’s comprehensive analysis and interpretation. In other words, members of other institutions may find connections of various elements and ideas
from the findings to their own and often similar settings. The nature of the limitations may also be impacted by the small sample size in the study and findings which are dependent primarily on self-reported data where respondents share perspectives about their experiences. Such data may be impacted by how participants recollect their experiences during interviews and focus group sessions. Additionally, this study took place at a single institution and relied on a finite number of faculty participants who teach undergraduate students. It did not include faculty who teach graduate or medical students, nor was it fully representative of faculty from across various disciplines. While the researcher attempted to have a diverse group of faculty to interview that included markers of gender, race, and years of teaching, this demographic was not actualized. Given the participants were part of a single institution, the responses may reflect subtle assumptions or expectations about their roles within this single institutional cultural context. The institution considered in this research was also within a specific region, which could also be a factor in the type of issues faculty may have experienced in the classroom. Venues for further research may address some of these limitations. The intent was for this study to make a contribution to understanding how faculty experience distressed and/or disruptive students in their classrooms and ways to support faculty. Credibility and dependability were addressed through various strategies in order to ensure the reality of the participants was adequately reflected in the findings and analysis.

3.17 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology for this qualitative interpretivist study examining faculty’s competence and confidence in responding to distressed and/or disruptive college students. The research questions and research design were presented.
The population, sample, data collection, and data analysis were also outlined in this chapter. A discussion of trustworthiness and human subjects/IRB compliance issues were provided. It is hoped that the findings of this study, to be presented in Chapters 4 and 5, will inform colleges and universities of ways to develop and improve upon faculty training related to disruptive and distressed college students, and will offer ways for student affairs and academic affairs to build a collaborative front regarding this critical issue.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this study I examined undergraduate faculty’s experiences at a medium-sized university in New England related to the development of their professional competence and confidence in recognizing, responding to, and supporting distressed and disruptive college students. In this chapter I present findings from the data collected through my 10 faculty interviews and critical incident analysis, one focus group interview, and content analyses of the institution’s website, all which were described in Chapter 3. Eighteen faculty completed the recruitment survey, and after applying my criterion and balancing the representation across academic disciplines, gender, and other social identities, I ended up with 10 total faculty participants, seven women and three men. Faculty experience in years ranged from four years to 26 years, with the average being 12.7 years serving as faculty at the institution. Of the 10 faculty interviewed, five identified as non-tenured full-time instructors, while the remaining five identified as tenured or tenure-track faculty.

The recruitment survey briefly asked faculty about their experiences with distressed and disruptive students, as well as their experiences with any training they may have received in relation to this topic. As the researcher, I was intentional in selecting faculty who identified experiences with what they would consider distressed and disruptive students. Additionally, participants ranged in their exposure to training they believed they either did or did not receive during their time at their current institution. Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the faculty participants.
Table 1. Faculty Participant Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Tenure Status</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Received Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor Little</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Agricultural Sciences</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Non-tenured</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor O’Donnell</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mathematical Sciences</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
<td>Non-tenured</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor David</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Biological Sciences</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Tenured</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Robbins</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Tenured</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Lola</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Tenure-accruing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Konnor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Non-tenured</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Adams</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Tenure-accruing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Johnson</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
<td>Non-Tenured</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Langley</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Psychological Sciences</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Tenured</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Dora</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Linguistics</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Non-tenured</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I developed the interview protocol (see Appendix H) for the individual one-on-one interviews with the intention to answer the research questions outlined below:

1. How do faculty construct their own understanding about what their role is in supporting or responding to students who are disruptive or are in distress?

2. What experiences or critical incidents have faculty encountered with students who are disruptive or are in distress?

3. What expectations might faculty have regarding their institution’s role in supporting them when they are working with a student who may be disruptive and/or in distress?

The interview protocol for the focus group (see Appendix I) was developed and modified as it was highly informed by the individual interview data collection, allowing the researcher to focus in on significant themes and topics that emerged during the one-on-one interviews. Based on the data from the individual interviews and focus group
interview, I developed five major themes, each of which contains several sub-themes. The major themes are as follows: (1) Faculty Role: Holistic Teaching and Advising, (2) The Contextual Classroom, (3) The Distressed and Sometimes Disruptive Student, (4) Faculty’s Role in Responding to Students in Distress, and (5) Institutional Role: Faculty Training and Development.

In developing both interview protocols, I applied the theoretical framework described within the methodology section as a scaffolding to interpret and analyze the data collected. In the subsequent sections, I discuss the five identified emergent themes that have been developed through the cluster of coding references “to create categories of data that we define as having some common property or element” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 27). Within this chapter I discuss each theme in ways that accurately and contextually represent the participants’ experiences, while connecting each theme with each other, and ultimately answering the research questions laid out in this study.

Following the discussion of the emergent themes, I provide a theoretical analysis and interpretation of the data using the theoretical model referenced in Figure 2, which overlaps Classroom Management and Ethic of Care theories. The purpose for conducting this level of analysis serves as an attempt to place the participants within one of the four quadrants (see Figure 2), further describing how faculty may approach their classroom management style in relation to their ethic of care, keeping in mind that these placements are never permanent, but rather, contingent on the contextual factors experienced by the faculty themselves.
4.1 Theme One—Faculty Role: Holistic Teaching & Advising

Within the context of this research study, the role of faculty emerged as a prominent theme, as faculty were quick to discuss their role and scope of expertise as it related to their teaching, advising, and in several cases, research and service obligations. In an effort to understand faculty’s role in responding to distressed and disruptive students, it was of equal importance to achieve some clarity about faculty’s own understanding about their role at the university. A few of the subthemes that emerged in my conversations with faculty were their roles in teaching, advising, and the difference or perceived difference between tenured (or tenure-track) and non-tenured faculty. I will expand upon each of these subthemes within this section of my findings.

4.1.1 Holistic Teaching

As I learned more about the ways in which faculty described their role as teachers, it became more evident that they were not just talking about teaching, but they were talking about teaching holistically. By this, I mean, faculty were seeking out opportunities to engage their students through a pedagogy that was interactive, reflective, and encouraged critical thinking. While each of the faculty participants spoke about critical incidents involving distressed students in various ways and across various contexts, the role of faculty in creating a holistic approach to teaching became a focal point, and thus an emerging theme. As faculty spoke about their role, there was a centralized focused on their commitment to teaching, student learning, and holistic advising. Professor David shared his genuine commitment to teaching by saying, “I want to teach students to engage in communication, engage in dialogue with people, and so that’s kind of what I’m trying to model in my class.” For Professor David, teaching is
about dialogue, intergroup communication, and engaging the students in meaningful
discussions that would contribute to their overall learning, as well as their personal and
academic growth. In the same vein, Professor Adams shares his commitment to
community engagement in the classroom, discussing personal issues that are relevant to
his courses, allowing students to build upon their personal experiences through an
academic and professional context. The description he offers about how he creates this
class dynamic is best described in this reflection:

One of my classes at least, and I think its embedded in others, but one class has
specific learning outcomes that speaks to [the idea that] we are our words and our
stories and literacies have consequences, and so part of that by making explicit
some of the learning objectives that may have been implicit before, I’ve found
that to be really helpful and with in secondary ed, the process is a process of
engagement and how it is that we’re reaching all students rather in that – you
know and that takes intentional strategies, and so working with students to that
end we also have community learning.

The process of engagement Professor Adams talks about is not just relegated to education
majors or social science coursework. In fact, Professor Little, a professor within
biological sciences shares similar sentiments about moving away from rote learning, and
creating a meaningful dynamic between the students and her course content as she says,

My role is not to disseminate information, but to help my students gain
understanding of the concepts I’m trying to teach. If I just am a talking head it’s
not very useful. They might as well use a textbook. So my goal is really to engage
the students. I’m really – although I hate throwing words around – into active
learning.

Over and over, each faculty participant spoke about their commitment to student learning
and their role as faculty being primarily about teaching students in a way that was
meaningful for the students’ growth and development throughout their academic career
and within the context of their classrooms. Faculty’s approach to student learning was
one that could only be described as robust, holistic, and developmental. Professor Langley talks about this in more detail as he describes his role in the following way:

Number one, my focus is on learning and that puts me – I get further and further on this teaching-learning dimension and so my – my responsibility is to figure out how to help students learn, and that means being as intentional as possible about the use of classroom time. But like right now, I’m revising an assignment template that’s being responsible about inviting them in to you know learning activities that are hopefully gonna hit them where they are or gonna encounter them where they are and help them get better.

This idea and style of pedagogy of meeting students where they are in terms of their own development is a characteristic of what I mean when I describe teaching as holistic.

Holistic teaching takes into account the learning, allowing opportunity for reciprocal engagement, co-creation of knowledge, and the opportunity for students to interact with the course content that provides a sense of rigor, vigor, and robust knowledge of the material. Each of the faculty participants described a commitment to doing just that, and this was one of the main focal points of what they described their role to be, in addition to student advising.

4.1.2 Holistic Advising

In addition to faculty discussing their approach to teaching and student learning, their commitment to student development was not just specific to the classroom experience. Student advising is an additional role many faculty find themselves fulfilling, and they spoke about this element not just a part of their job as faculty, but a part of their job that they thoroughly embraced. Many tenured and tenure-track faculty have a common percentage breakdown where they are expected to perform duties that include teaching and advising (~40%), research (~40%), and service to the university community (~20%). Tenured or tenure-track faculty are assigned a number of advisees in which they
are expected to interact with and guide through the students’ curricular experience. For those faculty who were non-tenured and identified as instructors, they were clear in stating that their responsibilities were 100% teaching-focused. However, regardless of their role to teach the majority of their time, almost all of them spoke about either having assigned advisees or working with students in an advising relationship, despite their responsibilities to simply teach 100% of the time.

Advising approaches can take on many different styles, as was discovered within my interviews. However, despite some nuanced differences in the advising approach faculty described, there was an overwhelming sense of student advising being more holistic, rather than one-dimensional. By this, I mean that faculty’s advising covered many aspects of students’ whole lives, both in and out of the classroom, with an emphasis on student development; personally, academically, and socially. One faculty shares her experience with advising which is primarily focused on a student’s major, curriculum, and in many cases their desire to figure out the “right” major. Professor O’Donnell talks about advising many first-year students whom she had taught in calculus or statistics, as she is regarded as the point person for students who may still be questioning their major within the college she teaches within:

I’ve done so many transitioning out of engineering into math, but also because they know me and also because I really enjoy those kinds of students. Like sitting with them for hours on end, figuring out ‘OK what wasn’t working in engineering?’ Or, ‘what worked in engineering but you just know in your heart that engineering is not for you.’ And they might think math is for them but then we realize, we together, student and I say ‘Hmm, OK, well that was a good idea and because you’re in this college.’ But you know what? Everything you’re saying to me tells me that you’re not really supposed to be a math major because you have other interests or other strengths.
Professor O’Donnell’s advising style, in this description, was focused solely on the student’s academic program, so on face value one would not identify this as holistic. However, as you read more into her approach, it becomes very clear that she is addressing the student’s struggle with their academic major from a “we” perspective, helping students understand that she is working with them in this search to find a meaningful experience together, as she sits with the student “for hours on end” asking them questions about what they like, what they don’t like, identifying their strengths and challenges, and helping them get to a place where they feel confident and satisfied with their decision to switch gears within their academic discipline.

Faculty advising is often thought of as purely academic, navigating course registration or providing guidance specific to the progress of a student’s academic major. This is exemplified by Professor Dora’s reflection, “I write a lot of letters of recommendation and a lot of times students ask me for advice, and if they ask me for advice in the major or minor program in my department I refer them to the faculty member who is directly in charge of that.” Conversely, Professor Little offers us a different perspective and interesting insight into the advisor-advisee relationship as she shares her experiences advising undergraduate students:

For the students who will come and see me and talk to me, I see myself as either somebody who can give them some basic information like, “How do I wash my sweater?” or for things that are out of my purview or I feel like I shouldn’t maybe give them any advice on…knowing where to send them. So that I also view as my role, and I’ve had students come talk to me about anything and everything, and some of them just come back and see me later to hang out, to chat, stop by, say hi, tell me what they’re doing.

Professor Little’s approachable nature and openness to the type of issues that come her way allows students to see her as not just a stereotypical academic advisor, but someone...
who can provide advice about their personal well-being, be a referral source, share in their successes, and even ask about washing their clothes. Faculty’s encounter with students within their advising capacity provided a deeper understanding about the faculty role, their ability, and genuine interest in their students’ overall transition and development during their college experience. Both examples, while starkly different in their descriptions, are at their core, holistic. In fact, a few faculty used the word “holistic” as a way to describe their preferred advising style, as in the following case:

So it’s simple questions sometimes. “How are you? How’s it going?” Holistic. “What is it like where you live? What do you do when you’re not in class? How do you study? What kinds of habits have you developed? What are your routines?” When you ask students whether they’re first year or fourth year students. Those kinds of questions, it helps you understand where the – where the sort of sensitive points are, what they’re struggling with, and then you problem solve from there.

Professor Johnson’s description of her advising sessions above provides insight into her holistic approach to advising. She begins with questions, building rapport with the students, demonstrating interest in their lives, both on and off campus, and using their responses as sources of information that allows her to lean into the student’s questions, struggles, curiosities, and overall success and satisfaction.

As the faculty participants in this study shared their accounts and experiences of student advising, it was evident that many, if not all of their descriptions centered around this concept of holistic advising. Their commitment to teaching, advising, and “helping students learn,” as Professor Langley describes, was not only evident in their responses, but it was what each of them named as critically important in their role as faculty. The sincere care and commitment to student learning and success served as a baseline expectation each faculty participant had for themselves. Interestingly, there were often
comments and assertions that non-tenured faculty made about tenured and tenure-track faculty related to their perceptions and assumptions of tenured faculty’s commitment to teaching and advising. The assumptions and perceptions that non-tenured faculty shared were never prompted nor solicited by the researcher, but were surprisingly common and consistent across each interview with non-tenured faculty, otherwise known as instructors. Thus, I discuss this finding in more detail below.

4.1.3 Tenured v. Non-Tenured Faculty

As mentioned above, the consistent and common experiences instructors shared about their perceptions of tenured or tenure-track faculty were striking, thus my inclusion of this subtheme within the scope of teaching and advising. To recap, non-tenured faculty in this study are known as instructors, whose job responsibilities include 100% teaching with little to no advising. However, in my conversations with non-tenured faculty, several of them discussed their role and assignment as an advisor, despite their official role and responsibilities for the university. Professor Johnson provides a helpful depiction of what the experience is like as a senior lecturer (non-tenured instructor) as she states,

A lot of times senior faculty like myself, lecturers, who have so much interface with students it makes sense that you advise to some degree. It makes sense that you’re engaged in the service that’s required to make a program run. But our workloads are not reflective of that in the way that tenured faculty are.

Professor Johnson’s account of her role as a senior lecturer specifically points to her advising duties, while not in her job description, she believes it makes sense for her, given the way she sees her work being highly integrated into the overall academic experience of the student. In fact, she puts it as simply as the reality of the amount of
courses she is teaching compared to tenured faculty where she says “eight pieces [courses] a year versus tenured faculty, sometimes it’s four or five. So you just have more class time with students, more face time with students.” More class time leads to more face time with students, which leads to more opportunities to engage with students in meaningful ways, and thus finding herself in an advising capacity that “makes sense.”

Professor Dora, who is also non-tenured, echoes this same sense of obligation to be highly involved in her students’ academic experience which goes above and beyond her assigned role of teaching, as she states:

I am a lecturer, which means that my workload is 100% teaching and I feel that in that capacity my workload is very much – it’s very closely aligned with dealing with students, I think. More so than for tenure track faculty, where they are evaluated typically maybe 40% on their teaching, and it’s expected that teaching will be no more than half of their workload. Which means that half of their workload probably has to do with activities that they do either alone or in association with other faculty members. So I feel that lecturers are in a position where they are very responsible for the wellbeing of their students even though they’re not.

Within Professor Dora’s description, she not only discusses her role and expectations as a lecturer within her discipline, but she also shares her insight about the reality of her job, which is to be highly connected to her students and to care for their wellbeing as students in her classroom. In the same breath, Professor Dora makes some comparisons about tenured and tenure-track faculty’s role, stating that teaching only makes up 40% of their entire set of responsibilities (within her college), thus implying that they do not have the same sense of obligation for their students overall wellbeing as opposed to a lecturer (like herself) who teaches 100% of the time. Professor Dora further elaborates on her assertion that she is responsible for her students’ wellbeing by linking it directly to the academic experience as she states:
Because the main factors for most students affecting their wellbeing in college is their academic career and lecturers are 100% responsible for teaching. We’re in a position where the wellbeing of our students is associated – it’s linked to our responsibilities.

Both Professor Dora and Johnson believe they have a responsibility to their students’ regardless of what they were hired to do, and this alone speaks volumes about their commitment to student success and engagement with student development.

While both faculty spoke about their commitment to student success, caring about the whole student, and high impact practices with attention to teaching, there was an undertone that this was not the same for tenured or tenure-track faculty, and there was an assumption, and in some cases, strong opinions that tenured or tenure-track faculty did not uphold the same commitment to student success through their teaching responsibilities. In fact, Professor Johnson was very vocal about her opinion of her tenured and tenure-track counterparts:

There are a lot of faculty [tenured/tenure-track] who don’t give a damn about kids [students] and it just burns me that they’re even here, you know? They just don’t, in the way that they operate, in the way that they act, and then if you’re a D1 research driven institution, you kind of put people, particularly tenure faculty, in a bind…because their existence here relies on their ability to do research. Well when you’re doing research you’re not teaching so there are lots of systemic issues that make it more difficult to push the agenda of being a more holistic, developmentally responsive institution, which is what I would ideally want us to be seen as.

Professor Johnson’s claim that when you are doing research you are not teaching rang loud and clear, and the perception that tenured and tenure-track faculty do not care about students as much as those who primarily teach was a common thread. However, during my interviews with faculty who identified as being tenured or on a tenure-track, this perception could not be further from the truth. Tenured and tenure-track faculty spoke
about their commitment to teaching and student learning, as well as the ability to integrate their sometimes competing responsibilities into their work with students themselves. Professor Lola shares about the integrative approach between her research and teaching, further providing some compelling insight into how she constructs meaning about her responsibilities:

I think you know that within the so called teacher-scholar model that we have within [my college], you know, I feel like I do this fairly well as integrating my research into my teaching but when push comes to shove, you know, research productivity is often – you can push that back easier than the student who’s picking courses for tomorrow so, despite the fact that of course publication is exceptionally important for promotion and tenure. So it’s a balancing act all the time.

This balancing act between teaching, research, and service is one that the tenured and tenure-track faculty spoke about often, which served as a barrier for some, however, their commitment to teaching and student learning continued to play a central role within their faculty duties. Several other tenured and tenure-track faculty shared their passion for students within the context of teaching and learning, keeping in mind the dance they have to do between teaching and advising, research, and service, just as Professor Robbins describes:

This year for me it is clearly kind of teaching-centric, especially this semester. So the good news is I don’t have any instructional responsibilities in the spring because all of them are loaded into this fall, because of the way we designed – you know, how we want our students to come on board. So if you were to do this interview with me in the spring I would say it’s much more focused on my scholarship and you know I’m thinking about my teaching responsibilities. I still have my advising responsibilities. But right now it is kind of student centric.

The use of her phrases “teaching-centric” and “student-centric” provide clear indicators where her priorities are lined up, and how she prominently positions her students within her role as faculty, despite the expectations and pressures for her to produce research. The
perception that instructors (non-tenured) hold about tenure-track faculty in particular may not be completely misguided, as they may be witnessing the balancing act with which tenured and tenure-track faculty struggle with as noted in the example provided, which calls into question the level of responsiveness to students or proactive engagement with students that tenure-track faculty exhibit due to their competing responsibilities. Student evaluations are an integral part in the review for faculty to gain tenure, and this alone can create tension around how they engage with students and the manner in which they do so, as Professor Lola describes:

I think a competing factor along with being young and female is being untenured and what you’ll probably hear with other untenured faculty members is that you don’t want to be a bitch in a classroom right? Because your course evaluations mean a lot and so in a big classroom setting if I’m thinking about this big group of disruptive students I have to think is it worth me calling them out and looking like a bitch – I hate that term – in front of them, and the entire class, right? Always thinking about the fact that I am being evaluated by students.

Professor Lola’s experience as an untenured faculty seeking tenure informs her practice in ways that limit her perceived ability to intervene or address students who may need to be addressed in a way that holds them to the expectations she has for them in the classroom. However, she does not feel empowered to hold the expectations she wishes, as she is somewhat paralyzed by the idea that she is untenured, and thus, must perform in a way that solicits the most optimal student evaluations which are a strong factor in her review for tenure. Professor David who recently achieved tenure status shared the same insight, expressing his empathy for those junior faculty who feel similarly to Professor Lola:

I’m pretty like upfront about my rules and my expectations and you know that helps I think a lot. What I think about is the people who don’t – who are teaching who don’t have – particularly like brand new faculty, without a lot of experience,
and so a lot of like nervousness and then if you are junior faculty going up for tenure you don’t – you know a student complaining about you can really hurt you, and I’ve had students like you know – I’ve had students try to hurt me professionally.

Unfortunately, there is an undertone of fear and anxiety untenured faculty seeking tenure hold about the influence students in their classroom have throughout their process for tenure. It is possible that these fears and anxieties create a barrier for faculty to respond and intervene with students when there are issues that disrupt the classroom environment or cause students to engage in distressing behavior. Instructors, tenured faculty, and tenure-track faculty alike were clear and direct about their student-centric and teaching-centric approaches, demonstrating the ability and interest to be involved in the success of their students with the goal of enhancing the students’ overall academic experience. Understanding their role as faculty was paramount to understanding their role as teachers in the classroom environment. Faculty often spoke about their roles and responsibilities, in tandem with their teaching obligations and a duty to create an optimal teaching and learning environment. The creation of such an environment takes a lot of work and strategy to develop, as the classroom appeared to have multiple contextual layers that were illuminated in this study.

4.2 Theme Two—The Contextual Classroom

The contextual classroom is one that takes into account the various dimensions that make up a classroom experience, including class size, course content, and the ways in which faculty approach classroom management strategies. Throughout my interviews, faculty’s approach to classroom management seemed to be highly contingent upon the size of their classroom which also led to some faculty developing classroom content in
ways that took these environmental factors into account. More specific to the parameters of this study, the interactions with and response to distressed and disruptive students in the classroom were often shared within the context of this setting. In essence, the contextual factors related to a faculty’s classroom experience mattered as they navigated the difficult experiences related to the distressed and disruptive student.

4.2.1 Class Size: “Sage on the Stage vs. Guide on the Side”

Classroom size creates limitations on how much faculty can intimately interact with their students, making it more difficult for them to do so in large courses. Larger classes increase the likelihood that there will be students struggling with all sorts of issues, some of which faculty will not be fully aware. There was often little to no awareness of distressed students because of the mere size of the courses. Professor David’s description of his large introductory courses that he teaches confirms this:

We’ve got 300 students in our class, as I said. In that class there are parents dying, grandparents dying, and students dealing with – discovering that they’ve got an illness. Brothers and sisters going to war, and boyfriends and girlfriends breaking up. You know, normal stressful things and this is what I also say to my students.

Professor David shares the spectrum of issues that any one student could be struggling with in his classroom, and his awareness of this is critical, as he approaches this information with some compassion toward his students, understanding they may be hurting in multiple ways. However, he was clear that he is not capable of knowing all that is going on with his students. As a result, he makes it a point to share this with his students in order to open up the conversation for them to seek resources, if and when they need them. Furthermore, Professor David has a clear rationale about why he is so structured and prescriptive around his classroom expectations as he says,
This is my introduction to why the rules are so strict. With this increased scale it’s harder for me to know all of [them]. You know, if it’s a 20-person class I know every single one of my students. But 300 of them is hard to – to know so that increase, at least this is in my department, all of our classes have gotten larger and that’s changed things.

The issues surrounding class size emerged for almost all of the participants in this study, whether large lecture-based courses or small discussion-based classes. With those faculty having a large student body in their classes, they continued to share the difficulty of being able to have a sense of what a student may be struggling with at any given moment.

Professor Little’s description of her courses affirms those experiences described by Professor David, as she shares, “The hard thing is unless I know the student and they come and tell me they have a problem, it is very hard for me to pick up anything when I’m faced with 200 students, or 150 students, or 130 students.” Large class sizes are wrought with issues that will inevitably crop up for students, and when those issues are brought to the attention of the faculty, they have a need to respond in some ways.

However, when you have the large courses, there will be larger numbers of students needing additional attention and sometimes intervention on the faculty’s behalf.

Professor Robbins shared her experience this semester teaching larger courses than she has ever taught in her time at the University, and she provided insight into the challenges she faces carving out time to address the issues that rise to her level of attention:

So just from a probabilistic sense you’re gonna have more students who have healthcare issues. You’re gonna have more students who have some form of disruption, right? A friend in a car crash or you know a grandmother passing away or you know it just increases the likelihood... just in the space of three weeks, I’m dealing with student [academic] integrity issues, I’m dealing with student health issues, I’m dealing with you know all of these kinds of things all at once. So I probably didn’t put enough time in my schedule, right, when I’m thinking on balancing my teaching and my research and my service, I probably
didn’t put enough time in my schedule to think about just how much time is it gonna take me to address all of these things happening at the same time.

With these large classes there are two issues that faculty are describing as barriers to their ability to perform their job in a way that best supports distressed students in particular. First, they are discussing the challenge of simply knowing what is going on with their students as there are just too many students for them to keep track of, which means the onus is on the student to speak up, ask for help, and let their faculty know that they are struggling in some way. The other barrier these faculty face is that when students are asking for help, the range of issues are across a spectrum. Furthermore, the capacity of one individual faculty to address even a small percentage of their students in a class with a n=300 is stretched, given the large enough number of students with whom they have to spend time addressing and helping resolve issues, all the while considering the balancing act Professor Robbins reminds us about related to tenured and tenure-track faculty.

Smaller discussion style courses allow faculty to be the “guide on the side,” as Professor Konnor would say, facilitating a classroom experience where faculty have the ability to know their students very well, and notice unusual or disruptive behaviors in a more immediate way. Professor Dora shares her experience as a language professor who, because of the very content of her course, has classes that are very small and intimate:

I teach small classes, by most people’s standards because language classes are limited in their size. So the elementary and intermediate levels are 22-student cap. The advanced levels are 15-student cap. I know it’s a luxury and I can see exactly what’s going on in the room. So I don’t have the problem of students sitting in little isolated pockets, you know, trying to separate their malfeasance from others.

Professor Dora sees her small class size as a luxury, as she has the ability to see what is going on, and students do not have the luxury to sit apart from the class in their own
“isolated pockets.” However, with small class sizes faculty have a real and perceived heightened responsibility to quickly address distressed and disruptive students as they can easily impact an entire classroom experience in ways that are starkly different from large lecture style courses. The notion of small courses being highly impacted by even just a few students who may be disruptive or demonstrating outward distress is best depicted by Professor Dora’s insightful experience in her small courses, as she shares:

You know I mean if I have a class of really excellent students and if 15% of them are not there to learn, they’re there to sit there and feel bored or to be entertained or for whatever reason they are disruptive. That’s enough to really just destroy the class dynamic and the other students pick up on it right away, and it interferes with the learning of the other students, and in classrooms where I have that relatively small element the class as a whole learns less. They tend to do less well on assessments. We cover less material. It really is disruptive to the entire class and all the students in it. So I can’t just say “Well it’s your problem and you have to learn this because you’re gonna make a bad impression on a job interview or something.” It’s my problem and it’s the problem of every student in that room, and it’s partly I think because it’s a participatory class.

Participatory classes like Professor Dora’s are optimal for high impact engagement practices for students to learn in a supportive environment. However, when you have students who have experienced both large lecture style courses of 150 to 300 students, and then place them in a small 20-student classroom experience, there is a different expectation around their engagement in the classroom. Behavior that may have gone unnoticed in a large class becomes much more noticeable and impactful in a small class, as Professor Dora further elaborates:

If they’re surfing [the web], if they’re texting, I know. If they’re falling asleep, I know. If they’re chitchatting its instantly clear to me and everyone else in the class. So that’s a luxury in terms of classroom management, and I’m sure it’s easier for me in that situation and there are just some really basic things I can do if they’re being disruptive.
Professor Langley argues that his large lecture style courses allow students to “self-police” each other around normative behavior. By this he means if there is a student or even a small subset of students are acting out in a negative way, they are often on the margins and the majority of the students in class are actually doing what they are supposed to be doing, creating an environment of social norming behavior that is conducive to the teaching and learning that is happening. This begs the question whether the students are influencing their courses in negative ways, or if the variable pedagogies and class sizes are having an impact on productive and healthy student engagement. 

Professor Adams builds upon this difficulty related to class size and pedagogy as he states:

I’m finding it harder to move to some engaged pedagogies because students have over the first couple of semesters been inculcated into a system in which they expect to be one of a 150 or so and they expect to not have to speak, and they expect to be able to be silent and unobserved in the experience.

Students moving through class sizes where there is low visibility around their participation to those classes where they are hyper-visible can create a sort of dissonance in the ways they are expected to engage with the course content. As we consider students who are distressed or acting out disruptively, level of engagement matters. Whether there are large lecture-style courses or small discussion-based classes, each environment provides a particular set of challenges that faculty must be able to plan for and address as they arise. Part of what goes into the planning around a particular class size is the ways in which the faculty member chooses to develop their courses in order to engage their students with their course content.
4.2.2 Classroom Content

As we continue to think about the contextual classroom, it is important to consider the actual content of a course as a part of the equation. Faculty within this study spoke in various ways about how the development of their course content and class activities are critically important and influential in how they manage their classroom environments. The course content helps engage students in a way that is dynamic, allowing faculty to focus students’ attention on the course and engage with each other. Professor Konnor’s description about how she approaches her two courses that are vastly different from each other in reference to class size, points to the strategic decisions she makes about how she focuses her pedagogy and course content:

For some of my courses are more lecture oriented, so in those courses I, you know, present material to the students. I usually give them some problems to work on or we do an activity to try to reinforce some of the more important concepts in the course, respond to their questions, provide them with opportunities to practice with their homework and things like that and give them feedback on that. In some of my smaller classes, the Stat classes in particular, they’re more activity based classes so those courses the students complete activities and I function instead of more like you know we talk about the “sage on the stage” and the “guide on the side” and we’re the guide on the side in those classes.

Professor Konnor’s metaphors of “sage on the stage” and “guide on the side” is very fitting when trying to visualize faculty’s approach to their variable class sizes. There is this recognition that there are limitations in large class sizes related to student engagement, and when faculty can recognize this difference and plan appropriately they can maximize student learning as much as possible, as described by Professor Dora:

Some classes are just filled with students who are there because they want to learn and – and if you give them opportunities to learn they will embrace them and they’re happy to be there, and there are other classes that have just enough students who are not there because they want to learn, that you have to really lead
them in a different way. And again, that’s the responsibility of the teacher and the teacher is judged on that, and maybe in ways that aren’t always fair, but the teacher is.

Professor Dora makes it clear that it is her responsibility to design the course content in ways that are meaningful for the learners in the classroom, “leading them in a different way.” It is important to point out that Professor Dora also talks about the student who is disruptive or uninterested in her course, and she is highly aware of that dynamic being present in her classroom. While it can be argued that it is a student’s responsibility to positively engage in their classes, Professor Dora firmly believes it is a faculty’s responsibility to maintain a classroom where teaching and learning are optimized. This responsibility is affirmed by Professor Robbins, as she outlines her commitment to creating an excellent learning environment for her students:

I try to focus on how do I do a better job in the classroom of creating a compelling learning environment, and then worry about whether the students are engaged in that compelling learning environment or not. That’s my expertise – and if I’m cognizant of the variety of learning styles, if I’m cognizant and observing of the ways in which the students are engaging in and out of the classroom with the material, or if I’m attending to that, I think I’m doing a pretty good job.

Other faculty described developing their course content while keeping students in mind and allowing them to be co-creators in the course experience. With this process comes students’ personal voices and experiences which can often lend to personal disclosures that the faculty may or may not be prepared for. One way Professor Adams incorporates this level of engagement in his classroom is through the use of discussion circles.

Professor Adams believes that educators have a responsibility to maximize student engagement in ways that matter to students, asserting “as teachers and as educators our role is to engage all students in the class, and to engage all students means that we need
to be mindful of you know the student experiences.” Being mindful of student experiences means to create a classroom environment where students feel brave enough to be vulnerable, and in some cases, share a lot of personal experiences that could possibly trigger past or current distressing events in their lives. Nonetheless, Professor Adams believes that “if we’re looking to develop meaningful learning opportunities for students we need to be able to have conversations that allow students to reflect and integrate the course content into their personal experiences.” Integrating the personal experience into the academic environment is one way Adams seeks to educate and empower his students. Similarly, Professor David discusses the fact that he knows students are affected and impacted by many challenging life circumstances, so he designs his first few weeks in the course to discuss resources and helpful strategies to encourage help seeking behavior for his students, as he shares:

I mean it’s always a struggle for me because it takes up teaching – like fact teaching time, but the first few weeks of this big class are always actually – ultimately about how students here at UVM can get involved in positive things to address some of those bigger issues.

The main reason Professor David takes so much time at the beginning of his courses is to be sure his students are well prepared to access resources and co-curricular engagement opportunities that support their overall health and wellbeing. Professor David is not naïve to the societal issues affecting his students on a daily basis, so he approaches this reality by incorporating current events into his course content in order to lead to healthy discussions by dissecting the issues that he believes matters for them and as he puts it, “learning to develop the fortitude to engage in complicated issues.” Within the classroom context, it became apparent through the faculty interviews that content matters and the
delivery of that content is just as critical in fostering a classroom environment where students are both supported and also held accountable if and when they begin to impact the learning of themselves or others. Being highly attentive to class size and intentional with the development of course content creates an overall commitment to classroom management styles. By this, I mean that classroom management is influenced by factors such as class size and course content, in addition to the faculty’s approach to these two factors, so it is only fitting to discuss the classroom management strategies and approaches some of the faculty discussed as related to the impact distressed and disruptive students have on the overall classroom experience.

4.2.3 Classroom Management

Throughout my interviews with the faculty participants, the term “classroom management” came up more frequently than I would have expected. Faculty used this phrase when talking about disruptive and distressed students, sharing their role in managing their classrooms through their course content, strategic activities, and the development of their syllabi. Some faculty were explicit about their expectations of students in their classes, while others were more implicit, but would create classroom activities that facilitated high student engagement to limit the amount of possible disruptions in the course. Whether the faculty were aware of their strategies or not, it was apparent that classroom management was on all of their minds, and how they executed that management looked different across each of the participants. Professor David considered his class size in making a decision to be very explicit with his students from the start sharing, “I have a whole page in the syllabus that goes over my expectations and I think everybody’s pretty convinced. Like they know I’m serious and I’m not gonna –
I’m not like – I’ve got no problem enforcing my rules for the class.” The syllabus should be thought of as the faculty’s contract with the student, where they can outline acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and attitudes, providing for students clear direction regarding the faculty’s expectations in the classroom with possible consequences should the student not adhere to this contractual agreement. Professor David further elaborates on what occurs should he have disruption in his large 300-student course:

...In terms of sort of disruptive students, for all the students I’ve taught I’ve really have[sic] only had a few incidents and I think largely its cause I start right from the get go. Like this is how the class is gonna run and my tolerance for bad behavior is very limited, and I can be fairly sharp about breaking the rules. Like in terms of you [student] break the rules, I call you out in class, and if you have broken a rule that... I mean there’s a variety of things that happen. You know, sometimes it’s like enough students are breaking the rules, it just happens to be you buddy. You’re the one we’re making an example out of. And so if I’ve been saying there’s talking in class and it’s – you really need to not talk. I’m giving the warning three times. On the fourth time I’m like “You. That’s right, you up on the right there. Up and out.” And then that generally straightens things out.

Professor David, being a tenured faculty, has been able to set a tone in his classroom and his students are aware of his boundaries and expectations by way of his syllabus. He makes it clear that addressing disruption in a large-scale course like his is difficult, but the more boundaries and clarity he offers in terms of his expectations, the better off he is managing his classroom.

While Professor David is very explicit in his classroom management approach, Professor Dora is much more implicit, as she structures her classroom content in order to receive behavioral outcomes she seeks students to demonstrate in her classroom.

Professor Dora discusses the importance of frequent assessments such as exams and quizzes as a way to manage her small 20-student class, and states:
I find that frequent assessments help a lot because if they’re not paying attention they will not do well on their assessments, and if they have a quiz every week it only takes a couple for them to realize that they better start paying attention in class. So if you don’t give them a grade until class has been going on for a month, they can spend a month goofing off, and so I find that to be really successful classroom management tool in an indirect way.

Frequent assessments conducted in the classroom sends a message that paying attention really matters because the professor will be grading the students in a consistent manner. This does not completely solve the disruptive student problem, but it is a good mitigating factor in decreasing and minimizing disruption in the course, while being able to allow students to have regular markers measuring where they are in the class, in terms of grades. Other faculty were more process-oriented, describing their classroom management style as a process where they may stop the class and ask the students what might be going on, collecting information about what might be creating or contributing to a difficult classroom environment. Professor Adams facilitates a lot of group work in his classes, and if there is some disruptive or distressing event he is experiencing from his students, he checks in with them as a class, which is an explicit maneuver, but involves the entire classroom community in providing a solution, as he states:

I have the good fortune of being able to stop the class and say “lets unpack sort of what’s happening? What is it? Is it something about the task? Is it something about how the groups were assigned?” And if it’s sort of on the more – not really extreme side – but if something happens you know I can start the next class period sort of saying “OK let’s unpack this.”

Professor Johnson takes a slightly different approach, but like Professor Adams, involves the entire class in meeting her expectations. She teaches students who are aspiring educators, so she uses this professional lens as a way to meet them where they are, and
provides an asset-based approach to creating a positive classroom climate, where she shares:

It’s very clear in my syllabi what’s accepted behavior and it’s not “don’t do this.” Instead, it’s “this is what an engaged emerging professional looks like and sounds like” and then I model a way – I think a way of being that can be irreverent and humorous but also focused and professional.

Professor Johnson is clear is stating that she not only provides for her students an example of what an emerging professional looks and sounds like within their field of interest, but she is sure to model that for them in a consistent way. Using self as a classroom management tool in terms of role modeling, is another unique approach faculty can take in working to achieve the classroom environment conducive to holistic teaching and learning.

With the numerous classroom management strategies each of these professors employs to create and sustain a positive and productive classroom climate, there still seems to be varied experiences in addressing the chronically disruptive or severely distressed student. While their interactions with distressed and disruptive students may not occur on a daily basis for them, when incidents do occur, the data reveals that faculty are not fully prepared to address them in the best way possible. The contextual classroom is very complex as there are multiple factors to creating a successful classroom dynamic, three of which I have discussed based on faculty’s shared experiences. Despite the various ways faculty talk about how they approach the management of their classrooms, they recognize that they will inevitably come across those students whom they have difficulty addressing because the situation does to allow them to intervene either successfully or appropriately. Naturally, with a heightened approach to teaching and
student-centered activities, the likelihood of faculty being exposed to the challenges students face remains high, and such challenges were often discovered through their common experiences they shared with distressed and disruptive students.

4.3 Theme Three—Faculty Experiences with Distressed and Disruptive Students

4.3.1 Defining Distress and Disruption

Entering conversations about distressed and disruptive students, it was important for me to gain an understanding about how faculty defined both distressed and disruptive students for themselves in order to compare these definitions to the researcher’s definition that was offered in Chapter 1. To recap, the researcher defined distressed students as students experiencing emotional and/or psychological problems that are interfering with their ability to learn. This is not always obvious or known to an individual on the receiving end of the distress (i.e. faculty), but the students often communicate this themselves and/or peers may share the distressing behavior they are witnessing. Conversely, disruptive students are those students whose behavior makes teaching and learning difficult for others in the classroom. Both of these definitions were further validated as each participant shared strikingly similar descriptions of what they would define as distressed and disruptive students. Professor David shared his definition of a distressed student as he states it is “somebody who’s got something personally that’s upsetting to them and it – it generally – most generally shows up with tears and crying but occasionally shows up in some other less obvious form.” Professor Johnson builds further on this as she states:

A distressed student is someone who is struggling to maximize the learning opportunities that they have in front of them, in my class, or in any class, or in the
residential hall. So distressed can look like a lot of different things. A student who is uncomfortable in their setting shows signs of distress to me.

Each participant had a very similar description of what they would categorize as distress, and it was clear that we were sharing the same idea and definition of the students we were discussing.

Professor Lola further asserts that distress “has to do with anything that is happening in or outside the classroom that is impacting their [students] ability to learn to their fullest ability.” There were numerous ways to describe distress, but the common characteristic within these definitions was the internal disruption the student was experiencing that impacted their ability to perform in the classroom and maximize their learning experience in college. However, Professor Little did not feel like she could define distress with one specific definition, as she discussed the variability and range of issues that could be identified as distressful. For instance, she states:

I don’t think there is one definition. Because I would define the student who came to me, when her best friend committed suicide, in tears cause she needed a hug, that’s a distressed student. I would also describe the student who was verbally abusive because he was not getting the grades he wanted and ended up calling my chair a piece of shit, a distressed student. As I would the one who had some mental issues, had [disability] accommodations, and ended up living in a very bad situation where his downstairs neighbors were drug dealers and there were guns, and the police came every other day. So there’s a huge range, and then there are the students who are away from home.

While Professor Little talks about the wide range of issues that could be identified as distressing to the student, at the core, these still appear to be those issues that personally and individually impact the student themselves, thus preventing them from achieving success in and out of the classroom.
As each participant shared their definition of what constituted a disruptive student, they once again shared very common definitions often referring to the external impact their level of disruption has or can potentially have on others. Professor Robbins talked about it as “other-directed,” but believed that it was linked to distress in some fashion. She further illuminates on this point by saying,

To me, disruption is the behavioral manifestation of distress. And it’s almost like I would rather have disruption than not, right? Because its – the ones I worry about are the ones where it’s the withdrawal. It’s the ones that are kind of self-inflicted versus other-directed that I go, “OK,” you know these other ones are kind of obvious, I can deal with this.

Professor Robbins further discussed the ability to recognize when something is wrong as disruption is clearly identifiable and easy for her to interrupt as she is fully knowledgeable about what she is interrupting. This is visualized more fully by Professor O’Donnell as she carefully defines disruption as:

Talking all the time. Getting up. Leaving class, coming back. Possibly multiple times, every class. Being unaware of their – you know like they might come into a class either just late or leave and come back, and instead of quietly going around the side come right in the front. Making a big “to-do” about leaving, you know, tripping over things or talking to every person as they go out.

Clearly, these behaviors impact those around them as well as the teaching and learning in the classroom. Professor Adams defines it as “really not engaging in the learning opportunity and – and purposefully obstructing others from engaging in that learning opportunity as well and so if you’re disruptive in class then it’s a barrier for other students to be able to learn.” He further states, “it’s really having a barrier and that barrier can be to other students and it can also be to teachers.”

To summarize, each participant carefully defined both distress and disruption in similar ways that I have defined them in this study as well as to each other with some
nuanced differences. Ultimately, distress was described as internal to the individual, where the sphere of impact in primarily directed to the students themselves, while disruption is external, impacting those around them in negative ways. I think it is important to be clear that we are talking about the same behaviors and attitudes defined above, as I further discuss faculty’s competence and confidence in responding to distressed and disruptive students.

4.3.2 The Disappearing Student

Faculty participants were able to commonly identify what characterized a distressed versus disruptive student, and every participant talked at length about the distressed student being more common in both their classroom and advising experiences. In fact the disruptive student was a rare occurrence for them as Professor David notes, “I can remember my disruptive students. There’s been only a handful and I’ve always found it difficult to deal with them. But there really have been very few over the years.” Professor David notes there have only been a few over his career at the University. Nonetheless, he still made a point to share that he is still not sure how to deal with disruptive students when it does happen. In fact, Professor Johnson shares the almost absence of disruption throughout her 23 years teaching at the university as she reflects stating, “So it’s interesting because when you first say the word somebody thinks of like an unruly or noisy or boisterous or belligerent – I don’t ever have any of that.” As I continued to ask about disruption there were few examples faculty offered, but it was evident that their experience with disruption was just peripheral to the entire experience as faculty.
On the other hand, faculty spoke with great breadth and depth about their experiences with distressed college students, both in their classrooms and in an advising capacity. One consistent indicator that emerged in many of my interviews was the absent student, or the student who seems to disappear. Over and over, faculty discussed their experiences with distressed students, oftentimes discovering the student in distress had been absent for a significant amount of classes or were sporadic in their attendance, leaving faculty to struggle to re-engage the student in some meaningful way. Professor Dora shared about how this played out for her most commonly, as she stated,

The most typical symptom of a student who is distressed is just that they don’t come. Generally they don’t come to class if they’re depressed or they have some other psychological issue and they’re distressed. And then maybe I’ll send them an email or they’ll come to class and they’ll say “I’ve been working with you know a counselor.”

Professor Dora went on to talk about not being able to get a full understanding about what is going on with some of her distressed students as they seem to not offer a lot of information about their personal circumstances, but there seem to be indicators to suggest that something is affecting them deeply. Professor Konnor further illustrates the disappearing distressed students as she states,

I notice that you know a student for instance who regularly was coming to class and participating and doing all their homework suddenly has dropped off the face of the earth and I don’t know why and often – I mean usually once I notice this I send them an email first, you know, and often they don’t respond. Sometimes they do but often they don’t.

This notion of the withdrawn, isolated, or absent student being an indicator of distress came up often, and Professor Robbins further supports this experience many faculty participants shared as she describes “the student is missing class. The student is reserved or quiet. The student is evidencing kind of distancing behaviors if they are in class, in
terms of being withdrawn.” As evidenced by faculty’s experiences, absenteeism seems to be one of the primary indicators that a student is experiencing some form of distress and could be in some kind of trouble.

4.3.3 Signs, Symptoms, and Stories

As I continued to probe and ask faculty about their specific experiences with distressed students, their stories were plentiful, and the individual incidents they could recall were profound. In order to get them to a place where they were highly descriptive in their storytelling, I had them discuss a critical incident that they could recall in a meaningful way related to a distressed or disruptive student. Almost all of them recalled the distressing incident that made a lasting impression on their experience as faculty. For instance, Professor David talked about a student who he later found out was sexually assaulted, but this was not as clear to him in the beginning. He goes on to describe the incident:

We were giving an exam and a female student came in about ten minutes late to the exam, which is always stressful for students cause they’re late, and she kind of walks in and comes and sits up in the front row. You know, and we give her the exam and get her going and then a few minutes into the exam – I don’t know even know if it was ten minutes - she just bursts into tears, gets up and runs all the way out of the class. And so – so I follow her out of the class and I’m thinking well she’s upset and she’s stressed about the exam. She overslept, she didn’t study, like who knows what. Exam stress she’s got, and so I go out there starting to talk about kind of prepared to say “Deep breath, relax, it’s just an exam. It’s not the end of the world. Take your time. Come on back in.” But as I get going you know within a minute she’s like, “I was assaulted last night.”

As he described this incident, he highlighted the fact that he does not always know what might be happening with his students, as there are often underlying issues going on that he is not aware of. Similar to an iceberg, we often only see a piece of what is going on in front of us, but typically there is much more going on beneath the surface that impacts a
student’s ability to maximize their learning opportunity. Professor Dora’s description of a student whom she had to interact with due to her concerns illustrates the iceberg analogy, as she shared the following:

I had a student with an eating disorder and I called I guess the – whatever the health services hotline was to ask for advice because she was just getting thinner and thinner, and I said “What should I do? Who should I refer her to?” and they said “Well talk to her first.” And so after class – I asked her to stay after class and I said to her “You’re – every week you’re thinner.” And she said “I’m seeing someone.” But then she told me that you know she was the daughter of an alcoholic and that the issues in her life went way beyond [her university experience]. You know and that – and that yeah. I think – I mean sometimes I feel sort of powerless.

Professor Dora’s feeling of powerlessness is a common feeling and experience, as faculty have noted that there is only so much they are able to do in regard to their role as faculty.

While there are often unseen issues students are dealing with that faculty are often not privy to, there are also incidents that are very obvious with clear and present indicators, such as the incident described by Professor Johnson:

So a female student, I’d say halfway through the class she half raised her hand and I said ‘Yes X.’ and she said “I need to go out in the hall.” And I said ‘OK’ and I watched her exit the room out of the corner of my eye, but I noticed that when she exited the room she almost immediately dropped to the floor. Not – she didn’t pass out – like she sat down. So I turned to the rest of the class and I said ‘Here’s what I want you to do for the next five minutes’ and I went out into the hallway and she was having a full blown anxiety attack in the hallway.

Faculty discussed all sorts of examples that included those incidents that were not very clear or visible in the beginning, as well as incidents that were very public where students were experiencing distress in the moment and in away that was obvious for faculty to notice. The other experiences faculty spoke about were uncommon patterns of behavior they witnessed in some of their students. Such as incidents where students they were fond of began to act out of character, causing the faculty to pause and ask more questions or
inquire about the student’s personal health and safety. Examples of these were best described by Professor Little where she describes the patterns of behavior that served as indicators for her to further recognize that her student might be distressed:

…Huge mood swings. Like things were fine and then exploded and then things were fine and exploded. He actually exploded – he was in my class in the fall term – he exploded at the end of the spring term too and it was just like erratic behavior. Very erratic behavior. And for the more sort of students who are going through distress, it’s the change in behavior. They always did their homework. They stopped doing their homework. They’re always in class. They’re not in class anymore. They were doing really well on exams and their homework, and now they’re not. Things like that tend to be red flags for me.

The signs and symptoms of distress that faculty described varied and provided a robust account of how students struggle in their classrooms, in ways that are both obvious and unapparent. While faculty were asked about their experiences with both disruptive and distressed students, the stories and personal accounts surrounding distress far outweighed the stories they were able to offer in relation to disruption in the classroom. Each faculty member demonstrated great breadth and depth of describing the distressed student experience, and oftentimes seemed surprised that they had to address that level of concern in their classrooms or in an advising session. As faculty continued to share their ongoing experiences interacting and responding to distressed students, there were variable assertions about their professional competence and confidence in addressing distressed students, and in a few cases, faculty candidly expressed their discomfort in this area, noting that it was not their expertise to address students in distress nor was it their job or duty to care.
4.4 Theme Four—Faculty’s Role in Responding to Students in Distress

Each of the individual interviews included a critical incident question that prompted faculty to revisit the experiences they have had with either distressed or disruptive students. As noted earlier, many more stories surrounded distressed students in the classroom where faculty were in a position to either respond or not. Throughout these discussions, there were multiple faculty who talked about the barriers they experienced in responding to distressed students, often identified as a lack of competence, confidence, or both. Other faculty described the necessity to uphold boundaries with their students, often being clear about their role as faculty, and not being pulled into issues that they believed they had no experience around. Despite faculty’s assertion that responding to students in distress was not their job, they shared their experiences around difficult and distressing incidents, often illuminating skillful interventions and strategies that led to a supportive and affirming response to their students’ issues. While faculty’s reluctance to accept this as a part of their job can be seen as a barrier, they continued to demonstrate critical moments where they were helpful to their students, regardless of whether they believed it to be a part their role as faculty.

As previously noted, faculty had much more to say about distressed students, as their experiences with disruptive students were very minimal. However, Professor Dora explained her role being much more prominent when it came to interrupting disruptive behavior, as opposed to those students whom she believed we in distress, differentiating her role in each instance as she states,

If a student is being disruptive in class, I will try to take measures, as the teacher of that class, to – to remove the disruptive behavior and if they’re also distressed
in some other way that isn’t – that isn’t something I see, I don’t consider that my problem.

Here, Professor Dora makes a clear distinction about what she feels she has influence and expertise around and what she does not. In this case, she is much more comfortable addressing disruptive behavior, as she considers this to be her role as faculty to manage her classroom in ways that seem to relate to her job. That said, she does not believe addressing a student in distress is her job at all. She further elaborates here:

I don’t really want to ever be in the position of helping a student in any personal way. I feel really unfit and unprepared for that. I have no training. You know, I have no direct experience. Well maybe I have some direct experience but I certainly have no training and I don’t want to be responsible for anyone’s mental health in any way.

There is an overwhelming reluctance that Professor Dora expresses around helping students with possible mental health issues, even if it means to simply refer students to the next best person. Professor Dora does not feel fit nor feel prepared to address distressed students and does not really want to be responsible for them in any way. Professor Dora is not alone as other participants also indicated that supporting distressed students is not a part of their job as faculty. As a tenured faculty, Professor David shares a similar perspective that his role is to teach and anything that might require him to respond to a student in crisis is simply not his job. He reflects on one incident where he says,

Like I remember in that incident just being like “I’m not giving her any comfort here. I’m really not being – I’m not…” and then I remember thinking my role is not to give comfort. My role is to be like “Got you, heard you. We need to help – this is what we need to do.” To go to people who have better training than I have.

What is revealing in this example is that this professor was self-aware of his limitations and thought about other professionals who may be more helpful or responsive to the
student who was in distress. Nevertheless, Professor David is very clear as he further states, “My job expectations do not include that I have that training and my job is not to be giving comfort in a crisis.” The notion of providing comfort in crisis is one that most of the faculty participants would agree is not a part of their role. In fact, some would go as far as saying that responding to distressed students is far outside of their scope of expertise, but instead, it is someone else’s job. Professor Robbins shares this exact feeling about her role, as she asserts:

I think it’s asking too much of me to kind of go to that next level and be part of the counseling staff. Right? Even with my training, even with my background, even with my years of experience. I mean it’s just that – you can get sucked in and have time burning in a hurry.

In addition to Professor Robbins, most of the faculty talked about the expectation to respond to students in distress was well beyond their call of duty, and felt that it was asking too much of them. They shared their self-perception about their inability to respond effectively, and interrogated their role and responsibility as faculty, often claiming that there were limitations to their own skillset in addition to the boundaries they believed they had to adhere to, as to not get “too personal” just as Professor Dora described.

4.4.1 Boundaries

As faculty spoke about their role in responding to students in distress, they would often bring up the idea that they had to create boundaries as to not get too far into a personal student issue they did not have the ability to respond to, from their perspective. There were some obvious and clear boundaries that faculty communicated related to the roles and responsibilities within their faculty position, being clear that anything outside of
that was outside of their scope of expertise. Professor Robbins is candid in her assertion of her boundaries where she says, “number one, I’m not trained with this area of expertise. Number two, I don’t want to be trained in that area of expertise. If I had, that’s what I would have done.” Professor Robbins was very specific that as a faculty member, she is responsible for creating an academic experience to increase and enhance student learning, as well as perform research and service for the University. Anything outside of these parameters is regarded as “not my job.” Similarly, Professor Little shared an experience where one of her students was in a peculiar living situation off campus, indicating that his health and safety seemed to be at risk. His performance in her course was reflective of the stress he was under, so in this case, she felt a need to respond to him given his debilitating situation. Nonetheless, Professor Little remains very clear where her boundaries begin and end, as she shares:

I have to remember that I can’t go there and get him out. Me. I can’t. Because that’s not my job and I can’t let it be my job. Instead I have to find the people whose job it is, and so that’s what I’ve had to remind myself, especially the ones – the things where it would be easy for me. The “I don’t have the money to buy.” I got two of those emails today. Would I have loved to say “Here’s sixty bucks.” Yes. I can’t start doing that. It’s – it puts me and the student in not the right position. You know, it – I want to. The person, me, wants to. The professor me says “I can’t go around giving money to students.” That’s – its – it’s not my job.

Professor Little’s example articulates the boundary between faculty, where her role is to teach and advise, and a counselor, whose role may be to help the student navigate the issues they are faced with, related to their health and safety, financial stress, or other personal issues. Some may argue, that as an advisor and teacher, it is well within their role to engage with the student to problem solve their personal situations in order to increase their ability to perform well academically, just as Professor Johnson states:
I know the difference between being an advisor and a therapist because I’ve been both. So I know I’m not providing therapy. I know what I’m providing is an opportunity for students, with some guidance, to make some decisions about what their choices are and how to manage things. So that to me is teaching.

Professor Johnson’s approach is specific to providing students with the opportunity to be open to her guidance and take advice from her on how to develop the decision-making skills and build a sense of resiliency around their difficult circumstances. While this can be regarded as being in a counseling role of some sort, Professor Johnson begs to differ, as she remains focused about her role as a teacher, and considers this teaching, more specifically, holistic teaching, as was described earlier in this chapter. She further elaborates:

As long as my emphasis is on teaching and helping a student learn what they need to know in order to do the next thing, the boundary is really clear for me, and I’m also really – it’s obvious to me when a student wants to draw me into a different kind of relationship, and that’s for me really clearly when I say “I’m your advisor, I’m not your therapist.”

It is important to note that Professor Johnson is specific in letting the student know that she is not a therapist and cannot provide that level of care and connection for them, but instead, keeps their personal wellbeing front and center within the context of their ability to academically succeed. While Professor Johnson remains very clear in her role while helping a student in a distressing situation, Professor Adams discusses his observations of faculty crossing the line and acting as a counselor or therapist, which he indicates can be more harmful to the student:

I’ve seen people try to become the counselor for a student and I’ve seen that have sort of horrific outcomes, you know and so – so why I think I’m sort of above is I realize that this isn’t – this isn’t me – this is my expertise, and even for all of my desire to be supportive and helpful that means getting out of the way and making sure that the right person or the right people are involved.
The perception of faculty not caring as much for students, or skirting around their duty to care is not an accurate one. Professor Adams eloquently outlines his role as faculty, as well as his care and concern for his students to do well both academically and personally, but he realizes the limitations he has within his faculty role. He has witnessed other colleagues stepping outside of their role as faculty into unfamiliar territory, deeply impacting a situation in a negative way and further escalating a student crisis.

While creating clear and manageable boundaries for faculty is critical in maintaining their own professional and personal wellbeing, there is arguably a way to do this while upholding an ethic of care for the students themselves. However, this requires an increased level of competence and confidence on the part of the faculty, helping them successfully navigate the recognition of a student in distress, being open enough to engage with students while distinguishing between their role and other professionals’ role, and supporting students through appropriate referrals and resources.

4.4.2 Competence

As faculty participants describe their level of competence addressing distressed and disruptive students, many of them rate their competence as low, and in some cases, feel adequate depending on the situation. As faculty describe what it means for them to be competent, there is a similar thread in each of their descriptions in that they are describing knowing what to do in the moment. A lack of knowing what to do or how to respond to a particular situation seems to correlate with a lack of competence they feel they had acquired. Professor Adams describes his inability to really know what to do where he says “I don’t think I’ve got sort of a robust enough understanding of how is it that you know there are other ways to foster student supports and so you know I’m
probably – probably middle to low so.” Being middle to low in his level of competence may be connected to his decreased awareness or understanding about how to address a situation involving a distressed student. Professor Dora discusses her lack of competence working with students who have demonstrated challenges related to their psychological wellbeing, where she says.

…With students with psychological difficulties I have felt not well prepared and I’ve felt like – like I can, you know, I can try to offer some kind of accommodation to help them but it’s completely sort of on my own responsibility and I’m really administratively probably going out on a limb. Possibly breaking some rules, I don’t really know.

The lack of knowledge about how to respond to a student in psychological distress, in Professor Dora’s case, is all about not knowing what to do when presented with a difficult situation like this one. In fact, she went as far as talking about her anxiety about possibly “breaking the rules” if she goes too far, or asks too personal of a question. While Professor Dora is open to providing undocumented accommodations to meet the student’s needs in the moment, she continues to feel a bit unsure if she is responding adequately to the issue at hand.

Professor Little talked about sometimes not really knowing how to identify what the problem is, especially for new faculty who may not have had the time or experience with students within this context, as she states:

Thinking back to being a new professor, it’s hard to know what’s considered a problem. What should I be worried about? What’s – you know what level does it have to be at before I can go for help? And my hope would be any level that makes you think you want to call, and I don’t – I don’t know whether people – professors know that…What do I do? What can I do? What should I do? What can I tell my student to do?
This feeling of uncertainty is further corroborated by Professor Konnor’s experience working with distressed students:

I guess I felt like I wasn’t sure if I was doing the best thing that I could for the student. I hoped that I was doing the right thing and that somebody was helping the student. But I – I really felt kind of unsure, you know? I just wasn’t sure if that was really – if I had done what I should do or – and for a long time I felt unsure if the student was even alive, you know, and I was really concerned about it.

Professor Konnor’s doubt was extremely stressful as she was dealing with a student whom she this case, if they were even alive. The level of care and concern that existed with Professor Konnor was appropriate, however, she remained unsure about her role as faculty and to what extent she should remain concerned as the student’s teacher.

Professor Dora believes that learning by doing is really what has allowed her to improve upon her competence, or knowing what to do in difficult situations that involves students in distress, as she states:

Well my competence in responding to disruptive students is slowly rising but I’m sure not as great as many other teachers. You know, its just something that – as you - as you have this kind of experience happen to you more than once you try to learn from your mistakes of the past. In responding to distressed students I don’t feel very competent at all and I tend to just like run for help. Call someone and say “I have a distressed student. Help.”

As in the case of Professor Dora, simply asking for help or calling a trusted colleague is as much as some faculty have indicated they could manage. Nevertheless, experience matters, and unfortunately, sometimes with enough experiences addressing distressed and disruptive students, a faculty member may have a better sense of what to do in a particular situation. Professor Johnson talked about being a bit more competent than some of her faculty colleagues and related this primarily to her “experience, time teaching, professional development, and my background.” The background that Professor
Johnson is speaking of is her training in a counseling environment. While she is no longer a practicing counselor, she carries that knowledge into her role as a faculty member, and it has served her well in working with distressed students who have been in challenging dilemmas, as she shares:

It [counseling training background] helps me understand the co-morbidity that’s existing for so many of these students. I understand personality development. I understand when it goes awry. I understand the genesis of depression, the genesis of anxiety, of panic. It just helps me understand who these people are and then it also means that I’m not freaked out by the behavior, and I think a lot of my colleagues just get really freaked and they – they say “I’m not trained for this” and they’re right. They’re not.

Professor Johnson is very clear about what she is knowledgeable about and how she benefits from the training and background she had experienced prior to her faculty role. She also understands that most of her faculty counterparts do not have the same training background, and she affirms their feelings of inadequacy and lack of competence, further acknowledging their fear and anxiety around students in distress. The data indicates that faculty competence in responding to students in distress is all relative to the faculty experience as a whole, taking into account faculty’s previous experiences with distressed students, professional training and development, and overall comfort level. As faculty competence varies, so does their confidence in addressing distressed and disruptive students.

4.4.3 Confidence

Intervening in difficult situations involving distressed and disruptive students is not just about knowing what to do, but also knowing who to go and what resources to access in support of the student. Discussions surrounding faculty’s confidence to intervene in distressing situations primarily had to do with their awareness of resources
and knowing who to go for support, as in Professor Dora’s case where she says, “I’m most confident when I just contact someone else and then – and I can see that someone else is intervening. I can see that someone at this university who’s a qualified professional is taking the reins.” Simply knowing who to go to raised some faculty’s level of confidence responding to a student, even if that meant going to the chair of a department or dean of a college, as in the case of Professor Little where she shared:

I have a very good relationship with my chair. I have a very good relationship with the dean of the college and the assistant dean in the college. So I know that if I don’t know where to go, I know who to ask and I’m comfortable asking them. So that gives me more confidence.

Taking action and getting a student the help they may need takes a certain level of confidence on the faculty’s part, but again, faculty must feel like they know who to go to and how to go about soliciting support for the student so that the distressing situation is addressed in a timely and appropriate manner, mitigating some potential negative outcomes. This action-oriented behavior from the faculty is best depicted in Professor Adam’s reflection about his confidence level where he says, “Once I feel as though action is necessary then I’m smart enough to know I’m not the person to execute the services that are needed, but I am persistent enough to support students in seeking those.”

Unfortunately, there were also faculty who claimed they were either not aware or were unsure about who to call or what offices to access to assist them in supporting their student. In these cases, faculty’s level of confidence was considerably low. More specifically, Professor Konnor struggled with not really knowing who to go to for support, in addition to being unsure about how to assess the level of concern to even know if and when she should report concerns to other offices or administrators:
Who should I contact first? How long should I wait? You know? You know, is a student missing a couple of classes, you know, a week of classes cause for concern where I should be contacting somebody or should I wait longer than that? Does it depend on the situation of the student? You know sort of like how long do I wait before I alert people? That would be one of the things I would say. If I don’t get a response should I expect a response? Should I not expect a response? I mean sometimes there are confidentiality issues. Maybe I shouldn’t expect a response. But should I at least expect to know that somebody contacted the student.? Do you know what I mean? I don’t know. What is expected of me, and what should I expect once I do try to alert someone?

Faculty’s readiness to respond can be contingent on not only their level of competence (knowing what to do), but also their level of confidence (knowing who to go to). Taking strategic and measured efforts to increase both competence and confidence in faculty’s interactions with distressed and disruptive students would ideally increase the likelihood of faculty intervening early. However, even when faculty have some ideas or experiences that inform them about what to do and who to reach out to, the issues surrounding boundaries emerge once again, particularly around faculty’s perception of proactive versus reactive responses. One faculty discussed her lack of confidence addressing a student in a proactive manner, if she has noticed something odd or unusual that might appear to be distressing. Conversely, if a student has reached out and asked for help, this faculty felt more inclined and obligated to help, because the request had been made by the student. However, an unsolicited offer to help made this faculty feel uncomfortable, and she wonders if that is even a part of her job, as Professor Lola shares in more detail:

What I have less confidence in is being proactive and knowing sort of what are the guidelines or what’s the scope that I’m actually “A” responsible for, and “B,” capable of, and “C,” sort of in my professional capacity I’m not a psychologist and I’m not very well aware of different emotional and mental sort of difficulties that the students are having. But is it appropriate to just say “Hey, how’s it going?” and then open that can of worms?
One would expect that at an institution of higher education, faculty have a role and responsibility to execute a certain level of care and concern if they are aware of a student who may be struggling in multiple ways, as this can surely affect a student’s ability to perform well academically, thus impacting student retention and success to graduation, especially if their issues go unresolved. Despite this assertion, faculty participants in this study have been very clear that they feel ill-prepared to support students in ways that they think require them to reach outside of their level of professional role, thus making a claim that it is not their job to get too personal with students. Even with increased levels of competence and confidence for faculty in addressing challenging and distressing situations with their students, there seems to be a heightened awareness about their personal and professional boundaries as faculty, being careful not to overstep into unfamiliar territories. Regardless, the data suggests that with the varied levels of competence and confidence that faculty participants spoke about, there remains a commitment to support students to be successful.

4.4.4 Skillful Interventions

Despite faculty’s belief and assertion that interventions with students who are concerning due to disruption or distress is not their job, or not something they are fully qualified to do, their behaviors and actions indicate otherwise. When asked about a critical incident that conjured up some significant memories and feelings, each of them were able to talk about their role in helping the student in distress, demonstrating skillful interventions that I believe was well within their scope as faculty. As described previously, Professor David shared an incident where a student disclosed that she had recently been sexually assaulted and had a breakdown in his classroom during an exam.
After storming out of the classroom, Professor David was able to assist the student and provide comfort during this very difficult time for her, as he shares:

I said, “I really – I really, really hope that you will go to the counseling center here at UVM. Do you know how to get in touch with them?” And then – and I said “you know, you don’t have to come back into class. We’re gonna worry about this exam another time. You know right now I want you to focus on what you – what just happened to you.” And then – and then I called the counseling center myself and gave them her name and said “so you know if she calls she needs to see you” and I think I sent an email to her in the afternoon, saying “I hope that you – thank you for telling me – talking to me today and I hope that you see the Counseling Center” and that was it.

This professor’s response was compassionate, immediate, and hopefully effective as he helped the student navigate the resources that may be supportive to her. He not only addressed the issue in the moment, but took the time to reach out to the student afterward to follow up on his referral. Similarly, Professor Johnson previously described a student who was having a panic attack in her classroom, and it was clear that the student was not okay. Professor Johnson knew she had to address the situation, and talked about what she did to get the student into a good place mentally:

…The whole class focused on another task and I went out into the hallway. I had the student put her head down and take deep breaths, in through her nose and out through her mouth to regulate her breathing, and then she was able to sit up and she wasn’t dizzy and she had calmed her body. I talked about calming her body. I sort of walked her through relaxing and bringing her shoulders down et cetera, and once she was breathing I said, “Here’s what I’m gonna do. I’m gonna go back into class. Class is going to end in five, ten minutes. Do you promise to stay here?” She promised to stay here. I said, “I’ll come back and check on you and then when class is done we’re gonna sit down and we’re gonna talk.” And she said “OK.” So I did just that. I went back into class, I cut short an activity that I had planned but you know it was OK and then I dismissed class.

Professor Johnson’s intervention created a safe place for the student to feel that her needs we being attended to while the faculty made sure not to neglect the rest of the students whom she was teaching. What the data reveals in this situation is how Professor Johnson
was able to provide the student very clear direction, and explain to her step-by-step what was going to happen before she came back to talk to her, providing the student with both clarity and a sense of safety. Once Professor Johnson returned to the student to address the recent incident, her approach to the student in crisis was very unique, as she shares:

I went back in the hall. I brought her back in the room. Now it’s empty and quiet and I said “So what made you choose UVM?” and she started to talk about her story. And then I asked you know “How many kids in your family? Where are you in the birth order?” I asked her if she was the first person in her family to go to college. I asked her where she was from. And the more we talked the more relaxed she became, and then I started to circle back to “can you tell me what happened?” and she described what she felt had been happening.

Building rapport with the student in crisis was one approach Professor Johnson took to get her to a place where she could then ask about the personal issues impacting the student, which manifested itself in her classroom. Professor Johnson described her intervention in a way that communicated a high level of comfort and ease, while making sure she was not acting outside of her professional scope of a faculty member who is both teacher and advisor to her students. Both Professor David’s and Johnson’s examples highlight intervention strategies that worked for them, while maintaining their role as faculty, and ultimately getting the student the help they needed. Other faculty talked about maintaining boundaries and did not get too directly involved in the critical incident they described, but nevertheless, their skills for intervention were just as valuable in that they were seeking help for the student. More specifically, Professor Robbins talked about a student who was struggling with a severe eating disorder that appeared to be obvious over the course of a semester and raised concern for many people, including other students. When asked about what her approach was to addressing this obvious concern, she shared the following:
I checked with some of my fellow faculty members in that area of study and said “you know I have some worries about So and So. How’s that coming across in your classroom?” And they kind of reiterated that same sort of experience and so we just really went through the student services team to address that, and I think the student actually ended up maybe taking a leave of absence.

Professor Robbins did not feel comfortable intervening herself or checking in with the student one-on-one, however, she still sought help in multiple ways. First, she asked other faculty who taught the student in other classes if they were witnessing the same concerns. Once they affirmed her concerns, she promptly alerted the student services staff who work in her college and whose job it is to check in with students through a holistic advising approach. While Professor Robbins was clear that this was not her job or expertise, she was still able to do something to get the student some care and support.

Professor O’Donnell is also very clear about not being a qualified professional, but just like Professor Robbins, she still makes it her duty to practice an ethic of care and get the student the support they need, as she shared about a time when one student was falling apart emotionally and she checked in with the student and said, “Look, I just want you to know that – I’m not qualified to really help if you start to fall apart, but I know the people who can.” Even in instances where faculty are clear that they are not qualified and are clear in maintaining their boundaries as the student’s teacher and advisor, they were still able to articulate helpful strategies to attend to the student in need. It is paradoxical to hear faculty share that addressing students in distress is not their job, setting clear boundaries given their self-perceived lack of competence and confidence intervening, but then witness clear examples of their ability to successfully intervene and support students during a difficult moment. As they told these stories they never shared a sentiment of discomfort around performing the intervention they described, further indicating that they
may not even realize their action as skillful strategies they have utilized in their roles as faculty and advisors.

4.5 Theme Five—Institutional Role: Faculty Training & Development

4.5.1 Institutional Inadequacies

There is an expectation that the institution plays a critical role in faculty development, providing better preparation for responding to student issues that inevitably impact the student’s academic experience and sometimes the academic experiences of others. As faculty shared their experiences with distressed and disruptive students, and while many of them demonstrated a level of competence and confidence that assisted them in supporting a student crisis, they were very vocal about the lack of training and the need for more training opportunities from the institution. Professor David notes, “I don’t feel trained enough on a whole lot of things, you know, like medical emergencies, security emergencies, mental health emergencies, emotional crises and I’d like to get a lot more. I’d like to be better trained.” Similarly, Professor Dora was not really able to assess her own level of competence and confidence, as she feels she has nothing to base it off of and feels like this has to do with the fact that she lacks the experience in training and development opportunities, as she shares, “I don’t know what I would do differently because I don’t – like I said I’ve not – it’s not like I’ve received any training.” Professor Dora’s experience as faculty on campus has not included any training that she could think of yet, she is fully aware of the mental health issues students are arriving to college with and her sense of urgency to learn more about these issues to feel better prepared were well placed. She states,
I think that we should talk about depression on campus. You know there have been articles written about this. How the number of depressed college students is on the rise. Suicide among college students is on the rise.

It is not a secret that student demographics in higher education are changing and faculty are well aware of this, particularly around students who are arriving on campus with mental health issues or having a mental health crisis. The lack of training in this area that faculty discussed caused them to feel uneasy about their individual assessment of their own skills and training, as Professor David emphasizes:

One of the things that sometimes stresses me out a little bit is as faculty we’re not really trained in crisis management and you – and you know the odds are very small that we’re gonna see anything where we need to be trained in crisis management.

Taking a step back from the inadequate faculty preparation around recognizing and supporting distressed and disruptive students, Professor Johnson felt very strongly about the lack of training across the board, and went as far as to claim that there are some baseline teaching skills that she believes faculty need to be trained around, never mind the training and development in specialized areas, as she asserts:

There’s no focus on training faculty to do anything other than teach, and there’s not even good training around that. Because there are a lot of people who teach at institutions of higher education who are masters of their content and they don’t know a damn thing about teaching. So you know we can’t even get that going let alone pushing the idea that you’re not here to you know expound on physics, you’re here to teach a human being. So what do you need to know and understand and be able to do in order to really maximize that – that student’s experience?

Professor Johnson’s strong opinion about some faculty’s inability to teach suggests that some faculty, from her perspective, are primarily at the institution for their content expertise or research initiatives, and she argues that the institution should expect more of faculty beyond their content expertise and contributions to research as she goes on to say,
We need people who are trained to be good instructors and good developmental advisors and people who understand what you do when you refer a student. Like there’s so much that should happen that doesn’t happen here and I often wonder and fantasize… So there’s lots that this institution should do that it doesn’t do. I don’t think it’s ill intent. I just think it’s that the model of higher education isn’t really changing to meet the reality of the constituency, particularly when it’s an institution of this size I guess.

The model of higher education she is referring to is the idea that faculty can simply divide their workload into three parts (research, teaching/advising, and service), as described in previous themes, and she pushes us to consider a structure more holistic and developmental in order to keep up with the needs of today’s college students. As was discussed in the previous sections, it is clear that teaching is the priority for all of the faculty participants in this study, both tenured and non-tenured. Instead, it is suggested that inadequate preparation for faculty surrounding pedagogical practices may be a good first start to link the faculty professional development to the primary reasons they are at the university. One faculty, Professor Lola, shared her thoughts about the need for more pedagogical development, especially for new and younger faculty, as she suggests:

Having some resources, you know, pedagogy based resources or classroom based resources for young faculty is – you know and I’m – both new faculty and young faculty because it’s definitely, it’s always sort of a like – like I feel that developing some of these skills or developing these confidence can also be linked to our relative inexperience so more of that is not a bad idea as well.

Providing pedagogy-based resources in the beginning and through a faculty’s career development would ideally meet faculty where they are and address the classroom management issues they shared earlier, further relating it to classroom learning outcomes. While this does not solve the issue of faculty expressing the need to be trained around addressing and supporting distressed and disruptive students and environments, this can be considered a way to provide baseline knowledge and skills that faculty talked about in
order to explore the depth of some of the nuanced experiences of each faculty.

Nonetheless, faculty expressed a desire to be trained formally to improve their response strategies with distressed and disruptive students, as Professor Konnor notes,

I really do think that having some sort of formal training on how to deal with a distressed student or disruptive student would be really helpful and should probably be required of everybody who comes into contact with students.

Requiring faculty training and development can be difficult, not merely because requirements are difficult to implement, but because of the ongoing tensions I heard tenured and tenure-track faculty express in interviews around their three-pronged expectations surrounding their role as faculty which includes teaching and advising, research, and service. From one perspective, requiring a set of professional development standards remains complex, as Professor Lola outlines:

I think professional development opportunities would be a really good thing. I think you know as time goes on I think in general your confidence in teaching grows. But I think not having that tenure thing hanging over my head after a while will probably free me up a little bit more to not worry as much about that kind of [tenure-track] evaluation process.

As faculty continued to advocate for more training and preparation in order for them to increase their knowledge, awareness, and skills related to distressed and disruptive students, another faculty shared similar sentiments as Professor Lola, reminding us about the balancing act tenure-track faculty have to attend to, indicating that there is no time for additional professional development within the teacher-scholar model. Professor Adams struggled wondering how to integrate something that he believes is important, but felt unmanageable:

You know there are serious constraints on time, you know, part of – I don’t know that we have a really robust professional development program for faculty across many domains of our work, and that would include you know sort of teaching. It
would include service, and it would include sort of research and the like, and so – and so my concern, you know, the institution is asking me to spend my time in sort of very particular ways and there is not enough time, from my perspective, on a range of professional development opportunities that would allow me to be involved in the community in ways that I would really profoundly like to be involved.

As the data reveals, time constraints for faculty serve as a key barrier in their engagement with professional development, so while the interest is high in being involved in training opportunities, there are limitations to how much they can be engaged in improving their professional competencies related to student development. Furthermore, the data demonstrates the real and perceived lack of training opportunities faculty expressed within the context of distressed and disruptive students, shining a spotlight on the gaps that exist in supporting faculty to be responsive to student issues, supportive in the referral process, and communicative with appropriate departments and administrators to best serve the student.

4.5.2 Inaccessible Information

To further support faculty participants’ observations and personal experiences that there is a lack of support for faculty training and development, the review of website of this institution shows a lack of relevant and accessible information for faculty to learn from and use. When reviewing the website of the institution, in addition to the websites of the eight undergraduate colleges that are a part of the larger institution, there was little to no information around faculty support, training, and development related to addressing distressed and disruptive students or even simply difficult classroom situations. In reviewing each college’s website, five out of the eight colleges had a link that was specific to faculty resources for support. Within these links, the most common set of
information that was provided were curricular resources specific to submitting course information for upcoming semesters, resources for pre-tenure faculty and processes related to this, or other highly administrative resources. Short of administrative processes being outlined on each of the five colleges’ websites, which were not at all consistent, there was also a lot of information about human resources, payroll, and other funding sources for research initiatives. Alongside this, there were often descriptions of faculty and their research and introductions of the faculty within that specific college.

Among the five college websites with links titled “faculty resources” or “faculty and staff support,” one of colleges had a visually appealing design that made it easy to navigate, and that pointed faculty to “teaching.” While this was a helpful start, the links attached to this specific content area were difficult to follow, with no real indication about what kind of teaching resources were embedded within, but instead, links to those offices, departments, or programs that support faculty teaching and student learning. Again, the actual content about teaching was either vague or almost entirely missing. For the three college websites that did not have any links specific for faculty, there was nothing located on their websites for faculty to refer to for any support related to students or teaching. In fact, of those three colleges, one had a “faculty” link that was purely a description of who their faculty are as well as their commitment to student success. The dearth of information related to faculty training and professional development was astounding, and it can lead one to recognize that faculty’s perception that there is “no training offered” is consistent with what is available in the form of content on their college’s websites.
When taking a step back further and reviewing the content of the overall institution’s website, there was once again, very limited information available, but there was more content specific to supporting distressed and disruptive students than there was on the college-specific websites. When searching for the phrase, “distressed students,” in the institution’s search engine, there was an entire institutional page specific to supporting “students of concern” offering faculty as well as staff a list of the most common issues college students face. This list included 15 issues, many of those being common issues the faculty participants in this study spoke about including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideations. The “students of concern” webpage provided common “dos” and “don’ts” along with links to appropriate campus resources, as well as local resources off campus. This was a gem to find, but when reviewing where this website actually “lived,” it was quite difficult to find as it belonged within a specific division’s webpage structure, and was located under another link titled “Faculty and Staff Development,” under which it was listed as an unassuming side link that was difficult to notice immediately. The website content was helpful to find and read, but the actual location of such a helpful resource for faculty was buried and not easily accessible. However, under the “Faculty and Staff Development” link located on the Division of Student Affairs website at this institution, there were seven programs and training sessions specific to faculty development opportunities. These sessions were both timely and relevant, and were focused on three broad-based learning outcomes, focusing on faculty and staff increasing their understanding of, “critical student issues, strategies for supporting students, and available campus resources.” As promising as this resource was
to find, it once again, seemed to be buried within a website structure that may not make sense for faculty to navigate toward.

Finally, the only other information that was specific to faculty training and development was found on a departmental website whose mission it was to provide and implement training and development for faculty within the institution. This website was specific to all developmental efforts to improve teaching and learning initiatives for the campus. However, this departmental website did not provide anything specific to faculty navigating difficult or distressing situations with students. Most of the information available was directed toward events for faculty, managing their faculty portal for course instruction, and technical support for improving classroom engagement. When digging deeper into this website, there were archived presentations this department co-hosted within the last 180 days, and of the 40 professional development sessions, none of them had a focus on managing or supporting distressed and disruptive students in the classroom. While this department is solely focused on improving and enhancing faculty training and development, it is evident that the issues the faculty participants have talked about struggling with throughout this study have not bubbled up to a level of visibility where the institution has provided a more comprehensive training and development program that reflects these very issues.

4.5.3 Reframing Professional Development

As faculty reflected on their limited training and professional development opportunities, a few of them offered unique perspectives about how an institution can think about professional development for their faculty that is both supportive to student and faculty success. Their suggestions leaned toward an integrative approach to the
restrictive formula that makes up tenure-track faculty responsibilities. First, one tenured faculty talked about his experience, as he claims that his own research is a form of professional development, and being able to articulate that to faculty is critical in helping them translate how their personal and focused professional development (research) intersects with and sometimes compliments the professional development across other areas, as he shares:

Faculty are exceptionally good at professional development, and then I'll qualify it. Because our – our research is professional development along a particular trajectory, and so we are – you know we are expert in our areas of specialization. So then the question becomes you know whether or not there’s the same commitment to professional development across the other domains of the university.

Discussing the idea that research within the context of higher education is a form of professional development can possibly resonate with many faculty, helping them understand their contributions to their field of study, as well as to the larger university community. In order for faculty to be able to focus their efforts into their expert roles as researchers and teachers, there are other forms of professional development experiences that the participants feel would assist faculty in being able to attend to student needs in a highly competent and confident way, allowing them to maximize their growth in teaching while spending time on research. When faculty talked about training and professional development as an opportunity for them to improve upon their roles, they discounted activities such as one-time inoculation efforts that we sometimes witness in organizations, where faculty attend a training that is more structured like an information session, with no real skill development embedded in these trainings. Professor Adams talks about this specifically, as he states:
As I mentioned, [a student service unit] came to a department meeting. That’s not professional development. I mean that’s conveying information. You know for – to engage in professional development means engaging in conversation, it means engaging in case studies, it means you know reaching out and meeting people from across campus in meaningful ways. Not sort of one off you know one off sort of sessions.

Professor Adams was very thoughtful about what this approach to training and development could look like, as he suggested that the university needs “professional development that is geared toward the individual through a personalized professional development rather than sort of a group professional development.” Professor Adams emphasized the value he finds in individualized professional development that is undergirded by the institution’s efforts to increase a behavioral change in faculty where faculty are motivated to engage in such opportunities, empowering them to help their students succeed through the commitment to their own personal and professional development. He further states:

We [faculty] need an opportunity for meaningful professional development and that would be professional development that is at the level of sort of individual conversations with other people from across the university, and so I greatly appreciate sort of the attention during the new faculty orientation week, but there should be ongoing – you know there should be an opportunity for ongoing professional development and I think that – I think it speaks to an issue with respect to how we fashion our role in the academy.

Similarly, Professor David echoes the sentiment that frequent and relevant trainings are helpful for him, and he suggests making them more accessible in ways that allow faculty to utilize their time well, while building upon their professional development as he shares:

I’m a real big fan of, for me personally, of more frequent trainings, and I – I – none of us – none of us have enough time but I mean I went to that one training about mandatory reporting last year which was great. I could already use a refresher. You know maybe not as long as that, but I could use a refresher…We
already show up for trainings and faculty would want that training, and it should be more than once so that people with different schedules can attend. Like you offer one – you know if there’s one big training on whatever it is – mandatory reporting, dealing with students who have been sexually assaulted – whatever it is, and its only offered once and you’re not there – well then you miss it and maybe… I would benefit much more if it was online and I could watch it through a [university] website and be like “Right. I remember that.” You know sitting in that big room may not really be the best way to deliver that information, you know?

Increasing the engagement opportunities for faculty to become better teachers, advisors, and researchers would contribute to the student experience in positive ways. Thus, some participants noted that there needs to be a culture shift at the university that addresses the new and shifting role of faculty, due to the evolution of our students. The shifting demographic of students and the resulting changing student issues, as reflected in the introductory chapter, require a relevant approach to professional development and training opportunities. Professor Johnsons speaks exactly to this point, as she candidly expresses,

It’s not that the days of yore when students showed up at a university, you know, like totally put together. It’s not like Mad Men where everyone came perfectly dressed and nobody talks about anything. That’s not our reality any more. We’re in this sort of haze of self-disclosure and you know it’s just a different world.

The haze of self-disclosure she speaks about is the open and transparent ways students have approached their faculty about their varying levels of distress, often increasing faculty’s anxiety about how to help a student who has shared experiences of hurt, trauma, and in some cases, severe mental illness. Professor Johnson is correct in assessing that these are no longer the days where faculty simply teach, do research, and leave the student experience outside of the classroom up to other staff members. Professor Langley reminds himself that he cannot wish away the student issues that continue to wash upon
university campuses each year with new student enrollment, but instead, he offers a more realistic approach to his teaching by reciting a sort of mantra where he says, “I try to teach the students I have, not the students I want.” As evidenced by the data collected in this research study, there is not only a demonstrated need for increased faculty training and development, but there seems to be a sincere interest from faculty members themselves, for navigating the day-to-day interactions faculty have with disruptive students, and even more frequently, with students in distress.

4.6 Theoretical Analysis: Positioning Faculty Within A Theoretical Framework

Analyzing the data collection and findings within this research study through the theoretical framework that was introduced in Chapter 3, it became apparent that each faculty who served as a participant landed in one of the four quadrants. To summarize, the classroom management and ethic of care theories were overlapped with each other to create a window depicting faculty’s behavioral response to disruptive and distressed college students. This window depicting faculty’s behavioral responses is situated where both classroom management and an ethic of care can range from low to high, and various faculty, based on their responses to critical incidents they described, landed in a specific quadrant (see Figure 2). It is important to note that this model is fluid; faculty can find themselves in any place on this model depending on the context of the situation, whether it be classroom size, range of experiences, teaching pedagogy, relationships with students, or any other environmental factors that could influence a situation in any way. These contextual factors are highly influential to faculty’s responsiveness, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and given that faculty’s context has the ability to shift and change,
so then do the responses. The following is a brief analysis of faculty participants that represent each of the quadrants within the theoretical model.

For brevity, I will position four faculty within one of the quadrants based on the experiences that the faculty shared, pointing to their level of care and ability to manage their classrooms. While not every participant will be included in this theoretical analyses, all of them could be positioned within this theoretical model.

4.6.1 Professor David: High Classroom Management-Low Care

With large class sizes, there is a necessity to maintain a high level of classroom management, as Professor David describes. He teaches some of the largest courses at the institution, and being an experienced tenured faculty member, he is clear about his
responsibility to maintain order and uphold expectations within his classroom environments. Professor David’s candid approach is best exemplified by what he tells his students,

This is how the class is gonna run and my tolerance for bad behavior is very limited, and I can be fairly sharp about breaking the rules. Like in terms of you break the rules, I call you out in class, and if you have broken a rule that…I mean there’s a variety of things that happen. I’ve got no problem enforcing my rules for the class.

Setting expectations, according to Professor David, is critical in large classroom environments like his, where there is a commitment to maximizing the learning for every student which requires maximizing his capacity to teach a large group. He does not see any other options but to be direct and to uphold his enforcement efforts if students are acting out in ways that are disruptive or distracting. With the large-scale classroom it is difficult for him to know his students individually. However, he is fully aware that with the increased number of students, there is a higher likelihood that students are struggling with many issues that he may not know about, and he has limited capacity to know what might be going on with students unless they go directly to him. This limited capacity to practice an ethic of care is what places him on the lower end of the care scale. Professor David does not feel he has the ability to be as attentive as he would be in a smaller classroom, as he states, “With this increased scale it’s harder for me to know all of them. You know, if it’s a 20-person class I know every single one of them.” However, when Professor David is faced with a circumstance that involves a student in distress, he is clear about his role and his boundaries. In his example of the student who had disclosed she was sexually assaulted, Professor David knew he had to be responsive, but was again,
limited in his responsiveness, which affected his ability to provide a high level of care, as he shares,

I remember in that incident just being like, I’m not giving her any comfort here. I’m really not being – I’m not…And then I remember thinking my role is not to give comfort… I think what I suggest to you is to speak to the counseling center right away and if there’s anything I can do that can help you I will…I really want you to talk to a professional.

In this particular incident, Professor David still felt it was his responsibility to get the student some support, but did so in a way that maintained his boundaries, and could be perceived as a low level of care, as he made some quick referrals and did not express outward compassion toward the student. Again, this is not because he does not care, but because his experiences with these incidents are few, his relationships are more distant with students in such a large class, and he did not feel fully trained on what else he could have done. Had this incident occurred in a 20-person class, his approach may have been different, as we know context matters and can influence a faculty’s response or non-response in any given situation.

4.6.2 Professor O’Donnell: High Classroom Management-High Care

Professor O’Donnell embodied a strong faculty member interacting with students, maintaining high control and order in the classroom environment while demonstrating an extremely high level of care and concern for her students. Professor O’Donnell teaches a range of courses, many of them being about 50 students, but more recently some very large classes of about 200 students. However, Professor O’Donnell’s approach is a bit different, both her classroom management style and her ability to demonstrate a high level of care. In the beginning of her courses, Professor O’Donnell talks about how she frames the course for her students. Throughout her process of framing the course, she is
already demonstrating high control and expectations for her students, while holding herself to those expectations as well, as she tells her students, “I want you to love this class. You don’t necessarily have to love the material but I want you to come into this classroom. I’m gonna be unpredictable. I’m gonna be on top of my game.” Right out of the gate, Professor O’Donnell has commanded her classroom in ways that increase the level of respect and order her students need to maintain in a large class like hers. Furthermore, Professor O’Donnell talks about being sure she walks around her large lecture hall to remain unpredictable, and to keep students on their toes and somewhat entertained, as she shares one exchange she had with one of her students:

I was walking around and there were certain people who just were like in shock that I was doing that, and this was – could have been their first college class ever – but some of them, I had a feeling, had already taken a class in there. So I went up to one of the guys. I said, “Have you had a class in here before?” He said, “Yes.” And I said “And it really creeps you out that I’m walking around, doesn’t it?,” like right in front of everybody. And he said “Yeah it does.” And I said “But you’ve had a class in here before?” He said “Yeah.” I said “Where was – what, did the faculty just stay down?” and he said “Yeah, where they belong.” And I said “That’s not gonna happen with me.”

In addition to maintaining a high classroom management style, she has also been able to achieve a high level of care for her students, despite her large class sizes. Professor O’Donnell discussed taking on enormous responsibility for the things she felt she had some control or impact over, and she was very attentive to her students who were seeking help or even appearing like they needed help. She makes it clear to her students that she is there to help them in any way possible, as she tells them,

I want you to know that even though this class has 200 people in it, I care about each and every one of you and some of you I’ll be lucky enough to know by the end of the semester because you’ll want me to know you. And those of you who want to just sit in the corner, don’t want me to know you, never come to office hours, hand me your quiz and I have to look at your name because I don’t know
you, I’m gonna respect that…And I said, I am gonna work like the dickens to reach every single one of you.

In another instance she demonstrated a high level of care through her quick responsiveness to students who she noticed may not have been acting themselves in the classroom sensing something might be wrong. She shared the following, “I’ll email them and say ‘you know that I know that – I just felt like something was going on today. I hope everything’s OK. I hope you’re getting the help you need. If you just need somebody to talk to you know I’m here.’” Professor O’Donnell is very clear that teaching comes first for her, and she thoroughly enjoys the opportunity to advise students and make a difference in their lives. Her ability to be able to command attention and respect in a large classroom, while also being attentive to the individual needs of each student demonstrates a faculty who is attentive, approachable, and responsive to her students’ needs.

4.6.3 Professor Little: Low Classroom Management-Low Care

Professor Little, while young in terms of years teaching and not having tenure, had a significant number of experiences and interactions with students who presented as distressed and sometimes disruptive. Through her descriptions about the classes she teaches, as well as the types of issues she has had to respond to, I would place her in in low classroom management and a low ethic of care for several reasons. In terms of low classroom management, Professor Little described teaching upwards of 200 students in one course where she had stumbled into a situational case where students in the classroom became irritable and in some ways uncontrollable. She shared one example where she arrived to class after handing back a recent exam, and had the unfortunate experience:
I have had a class turn on me once but – I gave back an exam, was trying to explain a question and people wanted to argue about the answers, and it all fed off each other and I – my grandmother had passed away earlier in the day and I had spent the entire day crying and was not in a position at that point to be able to think on my feet fast enough to quell the mob mentality that was going on.

While this experience was not the norm for this faculty member, it is an important one to highlight, as this once again demonstrates how much contextual factors can impact and inform a faculty’s teaching and approach to classroom facilitation. Professor Little’s family loss, increased personal distress, and inability to articulate issues with the exam question contributed to the perfect storm. Low classroom management is something many professors would want to avoid, but there will be times where multiple contextual barriers will exist in any given moment, which can contribute to a poor classroom environment. The key in this situation was for Professor Little to be able to recover from this, and purely see it as a situational issue with no long-lasting impacts on herself or her students.

With an increased number of students in one class, it is often difficult for faculty to be able to demonstrate a high level of attention or responsiveness to their students, as depicted in Professor David’s case. Professor Little talks about this difficulty and goes on to say, “I also believe that it’s their [students] responsibility to take responsibility for their learning. If they need help they should come see me. If I’m not giving them what they need they need to tell me.” The expectation Professor Little has around students speaking up and telling her if they have a problem is not due to her lack of care, but due to the limited capacity she has in being able to be intimately involved and connected with every single one of her students. The difficulty she faces is further described as she states:

If they’re always in class and all of a sudden never in class, or don’t show, they’re always there – always there – and they don’t show up, I tend to send them an
email and then find out what’s going on. But I don’t – I don’t know of a good way for me to pick up on it when – unless a student comes to me or is severely acting out of line in class.

It is unrealistic for any one professor to know what is going on with the students in a classroom as large as Professor Little’s. While it is apparent that she truly cares for her students’ wellbeing and their overall personal and academic success, she is limited in her ability to attend to their difficulties, and this barrier places her within the low ethic of care primarily due to the contextual factors that have created the limitations she experiences.

4.6.4 Professor Lola: Low Classroom Management-High Care

Finally, we find Professor Lola in the bottom right quadrant of the theoretical model where she is able to achieve a high level of care, but has difficulty with classroom management, placing her on the low end of this scale. Much of Professor Lola’s inability to maintain control and order in her classroom environment is due to her tenure-track status, with the pressure of achieving tenure looming over her head, and being very cognizant of the power of student evaluations. Professor Lola talked about being afraid to intervene too harshly when she experiences disruption in the classroom, as to not elicit poor performance evaluations from students. This, in turn, affects her perceived ability to manage her classroom; “I’ve often felt as a young female faculty member in a large classroom space, where there might be groups of disruptive male students, that I often feel not so competent in exercising my authority over those students.” The lack of competence she feels is highly connected to the pressure she is experiencing being both a young and untenured faculty as she further elaborates:
Competing along with being young and female is being untenured and what you’ll probably hear with other untenured faculty members is that you don’t want to be a bitch in a classroom, right? Because your course evaluations mean a lot and so in a big classroom setting if I’m thinking about this big group of disruptive students I have to think is it worth me calling them out in front of the entire class? Always thinking about the fact that I am being evaluated by students.

Choosing her battles and weighing her options regarding what is worth an intervention or not is a constant struggle for Professor Lola, given the complicated dynamic of student evaluations as part of the tenure process. However, when it comes to addressing students from a place of care and concern, she shares many experiences that have required her to offer a strong sense of support for her students through her high level of attentiveness to their needs and immediate response to the issues they may have disclosed to her. What makes her successful at leveraging a high level of care is her ability to really understand her students as she shares,

I put a lot of effort into getting to know my students, right, and that especially in smaller classes I tend to know them really well, and the department is – is a place where we have you know not a huge number of majors and so we get to know our students pretty well. And I think it also is that I’m in general a pretty enthusiastic advisor.

Her enthusiasm as an advisor is what keeps her very connected to her students, a role in which she can be perceived as approachable and genuinely interested in her students’ wellbeing. As Professor Lola struggles with her fear of intervening too harshly when managing classroom dynamics, she is clear that she maintains a high level of standards related to understanding the nuanced issues affecting her students and being there to help them when she can, as she states,

I recognize that they [students] have challenges, I recognize that they have experiences, and that you know even though I’m not equipped to fully handle or handle it all, complex, mental and emotional distress, like I can hear them out and
I can point them into a direction and I think that in general I think that’s where my youth does actually work well for me, is I’ve had many students tell me like “I’m not intimidated to come and see you.” Which I think is different than their experiences with a lot of other faculty members.

In her description about how she approaches student challenges, she truly exemplifies what it means to advise holistically, offering help and support within her limited role as faculty, but making sure students get what they need through appropriate and compassionate referrals.

4.7 Chapter Summary

The data collected through individual interviews, a focus group, and content analysis of institutional web pages provided rich and saturated information that resulted in an emergence of five main themes that I was able to organize the data around: (1) Faculty Role: Holistic Teaching and Advising, (2) The Contextual Classroom, (3) The Distressed and Sometimes Disruptive Student, (4) Faculty’s Role in Responding to Students in Distress, and (5) Institutional Role: Faculty Training and Development. Within each of these themes there were clusters of subthemes that were elaborated upon, which were connected and aligned with the major theme it was supporting. The findings offered within this chapter served to answer the main research questions in this study and did so through the reporting of relevant and insightful data points, illuminating the faculty experience through their own words and perspectives.

The theoretical framework offered in Chapter 3 was reintroduced in this chapter with the intention to connect the faculty experiences within the framework itself, further providing another layer of analysis. The theoretical model is helpful in that it takes into account the contextual factors that faculty discussed in their response to distressed and
disruptive students. Navigating the contextual factors that impact and inform faculty’s approach to teaching and advising is a real experience every faculty member has had to undertake, knowing that these contextual elements shift and change over time and space. The theoretical framework depicts this and suggests the importance of addressing how faculty can successfully navigate these contextual elements in order to achieve the highest level of care with an increased effort to maintain a high standard of classroom management.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Today’s college students are arriving to college campuses with increased mental health issues, both in frequency and in complexity, thus increasing the likelihood of faculty interacting with distressed and disruptive students inside and outside of the classroom. Although there are several studies that document the impact mental health issues have on college students’ academic progress and social integration, there are only a few quantitative research studies that demonstrate faculty’s perception of students living with mental health issues, with even fewer studies focused on faculty’s confidence and competence surrounding college students’ mental health experience (Backels & Wheeler, 2001; Brockelman et al., 2006). Very little research has examined faculty’s lived experiences with distressed and disruptive students. In response to the minimal and limiting research that currently exists, the researcher developed a phenomenological study using an interpretivist approach to capture the faculty experience around their competence and confidence in responding to distressed and disruptive students.

In this chapter, the researcher offers an interpretation of the findings discussed in Chapter 4, using the central research questions within this study:

1. How do faculty construct their own understanding about what their role is in supporting or responding to students who are disruptive or are in distress?

2. What experiences or critical incidents have faculty encountered with students who are disruptive or are in distress?

3. What expectations might faculty have regarding their institution’s role in supporting them when they are working with a student who may be disruptive and/or in distress?
Following the interpretation of the findings, the researcher will relate the findings to previous literature, and discuss the limitations within the study. Finally, implications for future practice and recommendations for further research will be outlined, closing with a conclusion.

5.1 Interpretations

The findings within this study led to five emergent themes, as discussed in Chapter 4. Based on the description and analyses of these themes within the context of the three research questions, there were three conclusive themes that presented themselves prominently from the findings directly related to each research question, which are outlined below with further discussion.

5.1.1 Encouraging Holistic Teaching and Advising Among Faculty

Reflecting on the first research question which asks how faculty construct their understanding of their role in supporting distressed and/or disruptive students, it was evident in their responses that they saw their role as holistic teachers and advisors. Faculty demonstrated their commitment to holistic teaching and advising by describing their teaching and advising strategies toward students, demonstrating a developmental intent. A holistic approach addresses the whole student, not just academically, but also personally, socially, and emotionally. Being holistic in both teaching and advising is to not compartmentalize a student’s experience to classroom experiences, where faculty would only see them as their student or advisee and nothing else. Instead, the faculty in this study made some strong assertions about caring for the whole student, developing their pedagogy that allowed personal experiences to inform the classroom content, and
using advising sessions as a venue to get to know their student beyond the classroom experience.

However, when things get difficult and seemingly complex, where the student’s experiences began to reveal distressing behaviors or incidents, the holistic teaching and advising philosophy is all too often likely to vanish all of a sudden, and faculty begin saying things like “It’s not my job,” or “I’m not trained for this,” indicating they cannot help the student. If faculty’s work is truly holistic, this should also mean that they are ready and willing to meet the student wherever they are at in their developmental processes. To span this divide between faculty’s ideal (holistic pedagogy) and more common practice (distancing or even causing harm when distressed or disruptive students present) might be as simple as further connecting the student to resources and other staff members that can help them. Instead, faculty’s inclination to help seems be paralyzed when there is something happening with the student that feels to be out of faculty’s scope of expertise, despite their desire and pedagogical instincts to support the whole student. While this is a natural reaction for anyone to experience when confronted with something that is unfamiliar, there must be an effective, professional response elicited when distressed or disruptive students engage with faculty to elevate teaching and advising to a truly holistic level.

Faculty depicting a fear of the unknown or overall ambivalence to help students when they are in distress is very consistent with the previous research studies that have been conducted around faculty’s perceptions of students with mental health issues, where faculty generally did not feel prepared to respond to students in distress or were unsure (or uncomfortable) about their role in response to disruptive and distressed students.
(Backels & Wheeler, 2001; Becker et al., 2002; Brockelman et al., 2006). Faculty’s descriptions about how they identify and behave as faculty in terms of teaching and advising is not aligned with who they become when facing difficult instances related to distressed and disruptive students. Nonetheless, who they become is consistent with the previous literature that exists around faculty’s response to distressed students, where a lack of acceptance or complete disregard toward students who are struggling and demonstrating distress or disruption may be witnessed (Becker et al., 2002). This fear of the unknown coupled with current national concerns about campus safety can very well prevent faculty from feeling competent and confident in responding to their students’ needs in a holistic way, thus diminishing student support. Helping faculty expand their holistic teaching and learning across all parts of a student’s life can be done through timely and relevant training, engaged dialogue with other faculty and administrators, and an increase in comfort level working through critical incidents that will inevitably arise during their professional career.

5.1.2 Increased Experience with Critical Incidents Leads to Increased Competence & Confidence

The second research question focused on addressing the experiences or critical incidents that faculty have encountered with students who are disruptive or are in distress. Throughout this study, faculty respondents shared many experiences where they had to respond to a distressed or disruptive student during their time at the university. In fact, many faculty not only described the incident, but went on to describe how they managed and responded to the incident, despite some of them feeling like it was not their job to address student distress, but very much their job to manage the classroom which requires
them to respond to the disruptive and distressing behaviors. Several faculty talked about the frequency of these experiences being helpful in their responses and in their ability to respond to future incidents, as they were able to learn by doing, figuring out what was helpful in the moment, and in some cases, what was not helpful. In fact, Van Brunt and Lewis (2014) talk about faculty confidence being achieved through “experiences, trial and error, and time,” much of which was validated within this study where faculty shared that their culminating experiences with distressed and disruptive students led to increased confidence, improving upon their ability to be responsive while remaining centered.

However, the majority of the faculty respondents claimed that while they have had experiences working with distressed and disruptive students, this is not a huge percentage of their time, so while more experiences are helpful, because of their sporadical nature, time is a critical factor in increasing faculty’s exposure to student issues and building confidence. Given the unpredictable nature of students in distress, training faculty should be approached through a multifaceted and comprehensive lens, incorporating common issues college students face, and more specifically, common issues that emerge in the college classroom. Every situation, as faculty stated within this study, is unique and case-by-case, so they may never fully be prepared for what might emerge in their classrooms. This does not mean training is not helpful, but it is important to understand that while faculty training is a good step in the right direction, it cannot be the only factor we consider in increasing a faculty’s competence and confidence within this topical area. While the institution can prepare faculty through preventative practices such as training programs, there is something to be said about having the experience of working with a distressed and disruptive student that can boost a faculty’s competence
and confidence throughout their professional career in a supportive way. This is not to suggest that faculty simply need to be exposed to crisis situations in order to actualize their own training and development; student affairs educators must recognize and capitalize on multiple learning opportunities that exist in the face of crises for faculty. Faculty can be an important support and resource for one another, as many of the participants in this study identified helpful and informative strategies they utilized as they responded to difficult situations, and shared them within the focus group setting. Interestingly, each faculty had their own way of responding to a situation based on their comfort level, and this was supported in a previous study by Schwartz (2010), where she found that faculty landed on a continuum in terms of their ability and willingness to intervene, based on their level of awareness of students in distress. The theoretical framework applied within this study gets at that continuum in a different way, and takes into account the contextual factors that inform a faculty’s response to care for the student while managing their classroom.

As many times as faculty within this study stressed that they were not prepared adequately and they needed more training, there were multiple examples that demonstrated their valuable skillset and were articulated through their critical incident reflection, indicating that they often have the skills necessary to address issues and, in some instances, de-escalate them. Faculty may not reflect on their personal experiences, responses, and strategies as skills that were valuable in a specific incident, but if they are able to understand that their current skillset is of value already, this positive self-perception of their own competence and confidence in managing distressed and disruptive students can be further increased.
5.1.3 Between a Rock and a Hard Place: High Interest in Training with Limited Capacity

The final research question focused on the expectations faculty may have regarding their institution’s role in supporting them when they are working with distressed and/or disruptive students. The topic of increased training and development within the context of distressed and disruptive students came up in every interview—both in the individual one-on-one interviews—as well as in the focus group conducted by the researcher. As the findings demonstrated, faculty shared their strong interest and support of the institution playing a key role in developing and enhancing faculty training and development opportunities focused on providing faculty with the tools necessary to manage their classrooms and handle one-on-one experiences within the context of distressed and disruptive students. However, there seems to be a dilemma that exists especially for tenure-track faculty where they expressed high interest in institutional trainings, but in the same breath discussed their limited ability to participate in such trainings due to the restrictive formula they described that is used for promotion and tenure; where percentages for teaching and advising, research, and service to the university are all calculated in a precise and limiting manner.

Layered on top of this restrictive formula used to evaluate faculty’s role and responsibilities is the existence of the faculty union whose purpose is to protect the work load of faculty as well as advocate and represent the voice of faculty in university decision-making, essentially upholding the faculty contract. While this research study evidenced faculty’s high interest in participating in trainings to improve upon their competence and confidence responding to distressed and disruptive students, their lack of
time as well as the prescriptive and restrictive components of a faculty union contract creates a significant barrier. This further precludes the institution from requiring training programs that would undoubtedly be beneficial to both students (through increased support) and faculty (through increased awareness and skills). This dilemma, which can be viewed as a barrier to improving faculty experiences through training and development should not prevent an institution from developing initiatives focused on faculty training and professional development. Instead, an institution must think creatively and collaboratively to deliver a strong training program that may not be neatly aligned with the promotion and tenure formula, but can surely be aligned with the institution’s mission to provide an optimal teaching and learning experience for all campus constituents, including faculty. Hernández and Fister (2001) offer a systems-approach on ways to institutionalize training, mentorship, and policy implementation to further support faculty competence in responding to distressed and disruptive students. Addressing distressed and disruptive students from an individual, environmental, and systems approach is most effectively achieved by developing a strong and supportive culture of care through faculty training.

Additionally, it is important to not forget those instructors and teachers who are not tenure-track faculty, but instead are hired to teach 100% of the time within their role and responsibilities, as was shared by several instructors in this study. There is a perceived (and often real) barrier that teaching 100% of the time may not allow instructors the ability to engage in meaningful professional development opportunities outside of their roles and responsibilities as dictated within their position descriptions. Instructors who are hired to teach 100% of the time at the institution are typically
teaching four to five courses a semester at the institution under investigation, which is approximately two times the number of courses tenured and tenure-track faculty teach. Teaching significantly more students means even more exposure to the possibility of interfacing with students in crisis or those who are distressed and disruptive. It seems equally important and even more critical to develop opportunities these instructors can engage in, allowing training and development programs to take place that support instructors’ teaching and informal advising, while also meeting the needs of students. Increasing contract stipends to incentivize training and development opportunities for instructors would be one way to address this from an institutional and systems approach. The issue of capacity is a huge one, and faculty must be able to identify the time and resources to participate in institutionally supported training programs. While the university may need to do some work on making a case to some faculty about why this is important to the institution’s mission and goals, the university must also take a measured approach to address and respond to faculty’s time toward professional development opportunities.

5.2 Findings Supporting and Opposing Existing Literature

The findings within this research study both complimented and contradicted existing literature, which I will briefly summarize. Numerous researchers have determined that there is an increase in both in quantity, frequency, and severity of students arriving on college campus with mental health issues (Collins & Mowbray, 2005; Gallagher, 2014; Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004; Kitzrow, 2003; Zivin, Eisenberg, Gollust, & Golberstein, 2009). While this may be the case, and this study did not set out to confirm this, it seems logical to assume that faculty would then experience an increase
in responding to or managing distressed and/or disruptive students within their classrooms. Within this study faculty noted that they indeed have had many experiences with distressed and disruptive students, however, none of them identified this as a prominent trend in their years teaching. All of them stated that when faced with difficult issues surrounding distressed and disruptive students, there were defining moments that included incidents that have taught them some lessons. They were also quick to state that this was not the norm on a daily basis, and it was often unique, nuanced, and individualized. This does not mean the increase in numbers and severity of students living with mental health issues is not actually occurring, however, it should not be assumed that faculty are witnessing this increase in proportionate ways inside their classrooms.

This study has further illuminated factors influencing faculty’s competence and confidence in responding to distressed and disruptive students. The majority of the faculty in this study discussed their lack of competence in this arena. In sharing this vulnerable aspect about their self-perceived lack of competence, they often attributed this to a lack of training, knowledge, and awareness and were not ashamed to be open about this one-on-one or in the focus group format. In fact, they were much more open about their self-perceived lack of competence with their peers and sought advice and affirmation from each other. This finding is inconsistent with Hernández’s & Fister’s (2001) conclusions that faculty often chose not to discuss their thoughts, feelings, or details about disruptions even with colleagues who may also be experiencing similar kinds of behavior, fearing the idea of being seen as incompetent or irresponsible. Within this study it was evident that faculty often do not discuss or share their feelings of
incompetence, but this was not due to the fear of being seen as incompetent, but rather, the absence of opportunities to connect with their colleagues around this topic. Faculty in this study also talked about a certain level of intervention not being their job so the self-perceived need to increase their competence was not as critical to them as they further shared uneasiness about what they claimed to be the possibility of legal implications for knowing too much, sharing too much, or asking students about information that may seem to be too personal. Faculty hesitance surrounding legal issues is a valid one, but what is most important is that faculty become educated about their ability to share information with administrators who need to know and they need not be paralyzed by the fear of legal implications (Van Brunt & Lewis, 2014).

Finally, within this research study the faculty did not bring up fear as a main barrier and often articulated the desire to help students, but identified many other barriers such as lack of knowledge around institutional protocols, limited capacity in their role as faculty, and the tensions between wanting to be proactive versus having to be reactive to issues that come to their attention. This seems to be incongruent with Becker et al.’s (2002) study where they found that faculty believed in stigmatizing statements regarding students with mental illnesses and demonstrated a level of discomfort, fear, and social distancing from these students. Not one faculty in my study discussed being afraid of their students in crisis or in distress, nor did they discuss or demonstrate avoidant behaviors that would lend themselves to what Becker et al. (2002) identified as social distancing from students. They certainly talked about the unpredictability of student behavior, but in light of the recent national media around campus shootings and gun violence as a whole, they did not allow that to get in the way of their empathetic approach.
to finding students the support they believed they needed. This could be a result of the institution’s culture around mental health, where it may be more welcoming and de-stigmatized. It is interesting, given the history of college campus shootings, that not one faculty brought up a fear-based reaction to incidents that required them to respond. Despite assumptions university administrators have about faculty’s ambivalence toward helping students in distress or responding to those who are disruptive, faculty within this study were more inclined to accept the reality of college students today and in turn, address the individualized issues that emerged within their classrooms.

5.3 Addressing Limitations

Several limitations have been identified within this study, which I will briefly review and discuss. First, the impact of the study should be considered, as the study garnered 10 faculty from diverse backgrounds in terms of years teaching and academic disciplines. All except one faculty identified as white, and of the 10 participants, seven were self-identified as women, with three self-identified men. Increasing the diversity of respondents in terms of racial and gender identity should be considered as a way to strengthen a study like this, if replicated. While the study reached a saturation point where many of the faculty elicited similar themes within their responses, a slightly larger participant pool could be considered to increase the transferability of this study.

Another limitation is the nature of the qualitative study itself. While the study is meant to capture the unique and shared experiences of participants, there could be some benefit in developing a quantitative tool to assess faculty confidence and competence working with disruptive and distressed students, further identifying their level of exposure, training experiences, and factors predicting likelihood to intervene or not. A
mixed methods study could further increase the data power within a future study, rounding out the faculty experiences contextually.

Additionally, this study was designed to capture the experiences of faculty who primarily teach undergraduate first year students. Expanding the research design to include faculty who teach undergraduate students as a whole (including second, third, and fourth year students) as well as faculty who teach graduate students could potentially provide an increased understanding of the nuanced experiences faculty may have working with specific college populations.

A final limitation is the fact that this study was conducted at one northeastern medium-sized public institution, and it would be beneficial and insightful for a study like this one to be replicated within a difference cultural and environmental context in terms of university size, geographical location, public vs. private, and varying faculty to student ratios.

5.4 Implications for Future Practice

5.4.1 For Student Affairs Administrators: Building and Sustaining Relationships with Faculty

Within the local context of this study, there are several recommendations I would offer to student affairs administrators working with faculty within the context of identifying and responding to students who demonstrate a concerning level of distress or disruption. Student affairs administrators are those staff members who working within the co-curricular environment, focused on student development outside of the classroom. First, student affairs administrators, specifically those who work in the areas of crisis management, prevention, and intervention efforts must see faculty as key partners in
supporting distressed and disruptive students. No longer can we address student behavior that is separate and apart from the academic experience. Instead, student affairs administrators must address student issues in collaboration and coordination with faculty, as appropriate, in order to mitigate the negative student behavior that undoubtedly has an impact on the entire student experience academically, socially, and personally. Such coordinated efforts can resemble the following:

- **Proactive outreach and development with faculty:** Helping faculty see student affairs staff as critical partners, and building positive and strategic relationships among each other.

- **Increase engagement with behavioral intervention teams:** Student affairs units often lead these teams for the institution. There should be conversations about how such teams are involving faculty or other academic units to help them connect the dots to student issues, and enact early intervention efforts with the goal of improving the student experience.

- **Promote transparency around policies and protocols:** Student affairs administrators should strive to be open in their communication and transparent in their protocols with faculty as it relates to students who are distressed or disruptive. Clear and transparent communication can increase the likelihood of faculty have an increased sense of confidence in the institution’s intervention strategies with students, further promoting faculty involvement in the response and reporting process.

Faculty in this study often talked about the divide between student affairs professionals and themselves, expressing frustration with this divide, and feeling like
they were not privy to information that would help them do their job better as teachers and advisors. This real and perceived divide must be addressed, and one step in doing so is to have student affairs educators take the lead and delivering faculty training to faculty chairs, deans, and departmental meetings in collaboration with training and development programs at their institution with the goal of helping faculty make positive connections and understand how they can be supported as faculty by student affairs administrators.

While student development and student success is a primary focus for student affairs practitioners (as well as faculty and other college administrators) in terms of their overall mission, what is just as critical is the success of faculty in the classroom. If faculty feel supported in their role to recognize a concerning issue, engage the student, and refer appropriately, they will do so with higher levels of confidence, knowing that they could rely on the relationships and connections they have made through prior interactions and trainings with their student affairs colleagues. Most importantly, helping faculty understand what is within the purview of their role and the kinds of strategies they can employ that is within their scope of classroom management are helpful tools to articulate. Similarly, student affairs administrators must outline their role in relation to distressed and disruptive students and the types of intervention tools they have to implement in order to address and de-escalate a situation while optimizing the teaching, learning, and living environment for all.

5.4.2 For Institutional Senior Leaders (Deans, Department Chairs, and Directors): Develop a Holistic Training and Development Experience for Faculty

Faculty can no longer be viewed as institutional stakeholders that are relegated to their own research and teaching arenas. Just as faculty described approaching their work
with students holistically, campus administrators must begin to frame faculty
development through a holistic approach, understanding that faculty can benefit from the
development of skills and accessing opportunities outside of their areas of expertise,
which will surely enhance the student experience. Training and development programs
for faculty must be improved upon with some clarity and transparency for faculty to
better understand why their role matters in the lives of students beyond the classroom.
There must be a sense of urgency communicated accurately and compassionately to
faculty so they not only understand why their role is critical to student success beyond the
boundaries of the classroom, but in a way that builds their confidence in engaging with
students while maintaining their professional boundaries within their scope of expertise.
This may not be able to be achieved through an inoculation approach to training, where
faculty are recommended or required to go through one mandatory training session, but
rather through a graduated and relevancy-based approach to training that is conducive to
individual professional development, meeting faculty where they are based on their
current knowledge, awareness, skillsets, and needs.

Senior leaders should consider placing more value around professional
development within reappointment, promotion, and tenure (RPT) processes and
guidelines, further institutionalizing faculty engagement in ongoing professional
development at their college or university. For non-tenured faculty/instructors, where
teaching is 100% of their responsibilities, training and development could be incentivized
to encourage their engagement in such practices, especially given the high number of
courses they teach per year. Furthermore, deans, departments chairs and senior leaders
must promote and encourage bridge building between student affairs and academic
affairs in an effort to deliver valuable trainings focused on creating seamless and collaborative experience, further communicating a shared responsibility for student success. Given that faculty have shared experiences and demonstrable skillsets related to this topic, as discovered within this study, it may be even more beneficial to have faculty contribute to a training program where they are able to coach each other on practiced-based strategies be able to identify areas of strength as well as areas of growth, further affirming their ability to respond to students while mutually supporting each other in times of crisis.

5.4.3 For Institutional Resources Focused on the Faculty Experience: Increasing Faculty Awareness through Online Platforms

As evidenced in this study, faculty are unsure as to where to locate appropriate resources to make accurate and timely referrals to students who may be disruptive or in distress. Additionally, while this varied by the faculty’s discipline and departmental area, they are looking more toward their individual department for help and resources than to the broader university, since this is the world they live in while teaching at the institution. Campus administrators should review the most commonly used platforms by faculty such as departmental or unit-level websites, faculty online portals, and educational technology programs such as Blackboard as entry points for faculty to easily and readily access tools and resources (that may even already exist at the institution) to better support their ability to respond to and intervene with distressed and disruptive students early. The document analysis conducted in this study indicated that there are many things happening on the institutional level and there is relevant and helpful information focused toward faculty, however, faculty are still confused as to where to go and whom to tell. Knowing one’s
audience is an integral aspect to developing meaningful information to support institutional efforts, but knowing how to find and access that audience is more critical and must be addressed to consistently and comprehensively increase faculty’s competence and level of confidence as they work to support their students.

5.4.4 For Institutional Policies and Protocols: Increasing Faculty Awareness of Institutional Response Mechanisms

Within this study, faculty respondents wondered if the institution was prepared for a large-scale crisis or campus emergency. As faculty respondents spoke about classroom crises that they have experienced, they were often perplexed about what the institution would do if there was a mass shooting, or a national crisis like 9-11 which would have a dramatic impact on the entire campus community. While the institution under investigation has an emergency crisis protocol and crisis response team in place, this was not known to the faculty respondents, and in fact, faculty questioned the fidelity of the institutions policies and protocols.

Increased education and awareness of institutional policies and protocols for faculty could serve as another factor in increasing faculty’s competence and confidence in addressing distressing and disruptive incidents. An institution can communicate their emergency protocols through an increased web presence, coordinated communication strategies with academic units, faculty trainings, and the use of digital media such as videos that provide information through dynamic engagement. Additionally, institutions often test emergency alert systems to raise awareness of such systems to the entire campus community. They can capitalize on this effort and embed information, resources, and tools that point to the institution’s emergency infrastructure that is accessible for
faculty in terms of awareness and knowledge. Within the national context of mass shootings that have garnered much attention and fear within this past year, it is even more critical to provide faculty with accessible and meaningful information regarding campus safety initiatives. However, an institution must approach this strategically, balancing the privacy of an institution’s internal crisis response strategies as to not place themselves in a vulnerable position to a perpetrator of violence.

5.5 Implications for Future Research

Within the scope and context of the findings and limitations presented within this study, there are several recommendations for future research that would help expand on the current body of knowledge within this topic. I offer two major areas of further study: (1) Increasing and expanding upon the qualitative research in this area, with a focus on gender dynamics within the context of this study; and (2) examining the perceived decline in college student readiness and its impact on the experiences of distress in college students.

5.5.1 Expanding Qualitative Research with a Focus on Gender

First, increased and improved qualitative research studies surrounding this topic can enhance the transferability of this study, offering additional voices and experiences of faculty throughout other geographical environments, further contributing to a more robust and well-rounded research and scholarship within this particular area of focus. More specifically, an alternative study with more gender balance would help clarify findings. While gender dynamics in the classroom did come up in this study, further research can help improve the knowledge about gender informing and impacting faculty’s competence and confidence in responding to distressed and disruptive students. Incorporating the
importance of identity and student identity development would further strengthen this area of study and could possibly inform training and development efforts specific to a gendered lens.

5.5.2 Examining College Student Readiness in Relation to Student Distress in College

Finally, faculty spoke peripherally about college student readiness and the experience of students entering college with decreased content knowledge, thus creating a challenging experience for faculty to teach and the student to learn. The idea of college student readiness being on the decline raises the question of whether the lack of college student readiness contributes to heightened stress and anxiety levels among college students, and in turn contributes to the rising mental health issues on college campuses. Further research on college student readiness in relation to academic success and student distress could be a helpful in identifying other factors that may be contributing to the heightened levels of depression and anxiety cited in the literature.

5.6 Conclusion

There is no question that the college student demographic is evolving with new and challenging issues that must be addressed by campus administrators and faculty alike. As college student needs and issues evolve, so should the approaches to student development, including the engagement of faculty in holistic pedagogy. Student affairs administrators must work diligently to bridge the gap between the academic and co-curricular experiences on college campus, approaching student success through a lens of shared responsibility with faculty as partners. An integrative solution to addressing the increasing distress and disruption among college students can truly be achieved through
strong partnership across all constituents and key stakeholders, which include student affairs educators, faculty, college health professionals, parents and families, and students themselves.

Developing and sustaining a culture of care across an institution is a challenging feat to accomplish, but doing so can improve and enhance the student experience, further supporting an institution’s goals for retention and completion to graduation. In essence, Kadison and DiGeronimo (2004) remind us that the costs of not intervening with students and not responding to distress and disruption on our college campuses are much greater than the costs of noticing behavior, responding appropriately, and referring students to supportive resources with the overall goals of promoting student health and wellness, improving upon academic success among students, and creating a safer campus climate for all.
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Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five*


Jain v. State of Iowa, 617 N.W. 2d 293, 300 (Ia. 2000).


Shin v. MIT, Civil Action 02-0403 1-27 (Superior, Middlesex, MA 2005).


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Literature Plan

National Context/General Overview of Mental Health Among College Students
- National Data
- Prevalence & Severity

Role of Higher Education: Historical Overview
- In loco parentis
- Civil rights Era
- Bystander Era
- Facilitator Era

Virginia Tech 2007
- Lessons Learned
- Fear Among Faculty (and administrators)

Disruptive and Distressed College Students
- Faculty experiences, attitudes and perceptions
- Barriers to academic success

Gap in Literature
- Understanding faculty competence and confidence in responding to disturbed and disruptive students—Gap in Literature
Appendix B: Conceptual Framework

Disruptive

Confidence (+/-)
- Destigmatization
- Positive perceptions of mental health

- Care/empathy
- Responsive
- Resourceful

Competence (+/-)
- National tragedies
  - Fear, lack of experience
  - Stigma

- Increased knowledge, awareness and skills
  - Trainings
  - Experience

- Increased knowledge, awareness and skills

Distressed

- Classroom management
- Early Intervention

- Classroom chaos
- Lack of knowledge about resources

- Lack of accountability

Potential Results

Inclusive, supportive, and validating student experience—faculty feel supported and knowledgeable

Little to no faculty support—students unsupported, stigmatized, and disengaged

Institutional Climate/Support
### Appendix C: Research Questions Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>What does the researcher want to know? Information needed?</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>What experiences do faculty have interacting with students who are perceived as disruptive or being in distress?</strong></td>
<td>Any examples of incidents and/or student experiences/interactions that they would define as distressing or disruptive.</td>
<td>1:1 Interview Critical Incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>How do faculty construct their own understanding about what their role is in supporting or responding to students who are disruptive or are in distress?</strong></td>
<td>Perceptions or beliefs abut what they think their role is as faculty in response to students who are distressed or disruptive. Examples on how they have supported a student or referred them to helpful resources.</td>
<td>1:1 Interview Critical Incident Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>What expectations might faculty have regarding their institution’s role in supporting them when they are working with a student who may be disruptive and/or in distress?</strong></td>
<td>Beliefs or attitudes on what they think their institution should be doing to support them as faculty. Examples on how the institution may have addressed something that was either supportive or challenging for them as faculty.</td>
<td>Focus Group Document Review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Studies on Faculty Perceptions of Mental Health

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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=1482 (all faculty)</td>
<td>N=337 (all faculty)</td>
<td>N=561</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Response Rate | 21.2% (315) | 34% (113) | 20.5% (115) |

| Recruitment of Participants | All faculty were mailed an invitation to complete survey | All faculty were sent questionnaires | Faculty randomly selected in each college at the university. Every third name form the list was selected. Surveys were mailed. |

| Location/geographical demographics | a single large urban university in the south which may preclude generalizations to other universities. | Small Eastern university | Large Midwestern research university |

| Duration of Study | One time survey | One-time survey | Mailed survey |

| Findings | Faculty’s sense of fear and moral judgment increases with their sense of discomfort and not feeling secure around students with mental illnesses. Faculty believe in stigmatizing statements regarding students with mental illnesses, and social distancing was illuminated where some faculty believed that students with mental illnesses should not be in school. | The majority of faculty in the study believed mental health had an impact on students’ academic functioning. Faculty were found to be more flexible in academic accommodations around crisis situations (death of parent, rape, suicidal ideation) and less flexible around anxiety and depression. Study suggests that faculty may not be aware of the importance of extending flexibility for non-crisis mental health issues. | Most faculty believed they could differentiate between a student with a PD and an upset student; discuss concerns with students who showed signs of a PD; and thought that students with PDs could succeed academically. A negative correlation was found between the ability to help and fearfulness. three experiential information sources were strong positive predictors of faculty perceptions of working with students with PDs: having a friend with a PD, knowing a student with a PD, and currently being treated oneself for a PD. Many faculty felt they did not have adequate knowledge or training to work with these students and would like to have more resources available. |

| Weak Spots | Only done at one institution. Not generalizable. Low response rate for faculty. | Only one institution; not generalizable. Academic flexibility was not defined in the study, and up for interpretation from each faculty. | Asking faculty to describe their concept of PD would have allowed for greater understanding of the results of this survey. |
Appendix E: Proposed Recruitment Email

Dear Department Chair,

My name is Nicholas Negrete, and I am currently working on a qualitative research dissertation study focused on faculty’s competence and confidence in responding to disruptive and/or distressed college students, with the purpose of completing my doctoral dissertation in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. I am interested in interviewing faculty members from diverse disciplines and backgrounds who would be willing to offer their time by participating in a semi-structured interview, and if they choose, a subsequent focus group. I am asking for your support by forwarding this recruitment email to any faculty members or instructors who may meet the following criteria:

1. Primarily teach first year undergraduate students
2. Served as a faculty/instructor at the University of Vermont for at least three years

This research study will seek to develop future support for faculty training and development as it relates to disruptive and distressed college students within the classroom setting or in an advising capacity. If any faculty within your department would like additional information and wish to participate in this study they can contact Nicholas Negrete, the PI, at nnegrete@uvm.edu. I will respond in an email and provide them with an official invitation along with a purposeful recruitment survey.

If you have any questions about this research study, I encourage you to contact me either by phone at 802-656-3829, or by email at nnegrete@uvm.edu
Appendix F: Purposeful Recruitment Survey

Examining Undergraduate Faculty’s Competence and Confidence in Addressing Disruptive and Distressed College Students

Recruitment Survey for Doctoral Dissertation Study

You are being invited to participate in a research study under the direction of the Principal Investigator (PI) and doctoral student, Nicholas Negrete, within the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies housed in the College of Education and Social Services.

This research study is being conducted under the PI’s role as a doctoral student, with the purpose of completing his doctoral dissertation. This dissertation study seeks to develop a better understanding of faculty’s competence and confidence in responding to students who are disruptive and/or in distress. Furthermore, this study will seek to better inform colleges and universities about how to develop meaningful training and development plans for faculty, and build better partnerships with faculty experiences in connection with student affairs units.

Taking part in this research study is entirely voluntary. The purpose of this survey is to recruit participants who are identified as full-time faculty are the University of Vermont who may be willing to participate in a second phase of this study that will involve a one hour long one-on-one interview.

If you choose to take part in this survey, you will be asked to complete the online survey that follows. The questions you will be asked will cover your general experiences interacting with distressed and/or disruptive students, basic demographics, including your role at UVM. The total amount of time you will spend in connection with this survey is five (5) minutes or less. You may refuse to answer any of the questions and you may stop your participation in this study at any time.

There is minimal risk and discomfort involved in this study should you choose to participate. There is always some risk of an accidental breach of confidentiality. However, the PI will take measures to protect information he collects from you during the study.

You have the option to discontinue your participation at any time during the study by notifying Nicholas Negrete, the principal investigator. If you decide to withdraw, none of the information you have provided will be used in the study’s data collection, analysis or final report. All the data you provided will be destroyed. If you are willing to participate in the one-hour long individual interview, you will be asked to provide your name, phone number, and email address. If results of this research study are reported in journals or at conferences, the people who participated in this study will not be named or identified.
The Research Protections Office, at the University of Vermont at 802-656-5040, can provide further information about your rights as a research participant. You may contact Nicholas Negrete, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies doctoral candidate, at telephone number 802-656-3829, to obtain further information regarding the study itself.

Your consent to participate in the first phase of this research study is implied if you proceed with completing the survey.

There are 13 questions in this survey.

**Experience with Distressed & Disruptive College Students**

[ ] During your professional career, have you encountered a student you felt was in distress or demonstrated disruptive behavior in or out of the classroom? *

Please choose all that apply:

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Unsure
- [ ] No Answer

[ ] Have you ever referred a student who you thought was in distress to a mental health professional (e.g. Counseling & Psychiatry Services)? *

Please choose all that apply:

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Unsure
- [ ] No Answer
Training & Development

[ ] Have you ever participated in trainings or workshops on mental health or managing students in the classroom, sponsored by the CARE Team from the Dean of Students Office in the Division of Student Affairs?  *

Please choose all that apply:

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Unsure
- [ ] No Answer
Demographic Information

[] Are you currently a full-time instructional faculty member at UVM? *
Please choose all that apply:

☐ Yes
☐ No

[] To what group of students is your primary teaching responsibility? *
Please choose all that apply:

☐ Both undergraduate and graduate
☐ Exclusively undergraduate
☐ Exclusively graduate
☐ Other: __________________________

[] Do you primarily teach first year undergraduate students? *
Please choose all that apply:

☐ Yes
☐ No

[] What is your faculty rank and status (please mark only one)?
Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Tenured</th>
<th>Tenure Accruing</th>
<th>Non-Tenure Accruing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full Professor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within which college is your primary faculty appointment? *

 Please choose all that apply:

- [ ] College of Agricultural and Life Sciences
- [ ] College of Arts and Sciences
- [ ] College of Education and Social Services
- [ ] College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences
- [ ] College of Nursing and Health Sciences
- [ ] Continuing and Distance Education
- [ ] Graduate College
- [ ] Honor's College
- [ ] Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources
- [ ] School of Business Administration
[ ] For how many years post-graduate training have you been teaching? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years
- 6 years
- 7 years
- 8 years
- 9 years
- 10 years
- 11 years
- 12 years
- 13 years
- 14 years
- 15 years
- 16 years
- 17 years
- 18 years
- 19 years
- 20 years
- 21 years
- 22 years
- 23 years
- 24 years
- 25 years
- 26+ years
[] What is your gender? *
Please choose all that apply:
☐ Man
☐ Woman
☐ Transgender
☐ No Answer

[] How do you identify racially/ethnically (please self-identify)?
Please write your answer here:
[ ] Would you be willing to participate in a one-hour long interview regarding faculty’s confidence and competence in responding to students who are disruptive and/or in distress? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

[ ] If YES—please provide your name, campus address, phone number, and email address below:

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was ‘Yes’ at question 12 (C9) (Would you be willing to participate in a one-hour long interview regarding faculty’s confidence and competence in responding to students who are disruptive and/or in distress?)

Please write your answer(s) here:

- First Name
- Last Name
- Email Address
- Phone Number
If you have chosen to participate in the second phase of this study, Nicholas Negrete, doctoral candidate, will be in contact with you shortly. Thank you!

09-30-2015 – 00:00

Submit your survey.
Thank you for completing this survey.
Appendix G: Human Subjects/IRB Approved Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Research Project: Examining Undergraduate Faculty’s Competence and Confidence in Addressing Disruptive and Distressed College Students

Principal Investigator: Nicholas E. Negrete

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Judith Aiken

Sponsor: College of Education & Social Services

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you have been identified as a faculty member who teaches primarily first-year undergraduate students at the University of Vermont. This study is being conducted at the University of Vermont, in an effort to complete a doctoral dissertation within the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program housed in the College of Education and Social Services. The goal of this study is to develop deeper understanding about the experiences of faculty who teach first-year college students who may be experiencing distress or causing disruption in the college classroom.

We encourage you to ask questions and take the opportunity to discuss the study with anybody you think can help you make the decision to participate.

Why is This Research Study Being Conducted?
This qualitative research study is being conduct to better understand the experiences of undergraduate faculty who teach at a research university in terms of their responses to distressed and/or disruptive college students that they encounter inside and outside of the classroom. A second aim of this study is to use the findings to improve upon the professional development and training opportunities for faculty in order to support students with mental health problems. Approximately 10-12 faculty will participate in this study, drawing from different colleges and schools across the university campus.

What Is Involved In The Study?
You are being asked to participate in one 60-minute individual interview with the Principal Investigator to take place in one sitting, at a neutral location. This session will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. Questions will be related to your experience as a faculty member in responding to students you encounter who may be experiencing distress or causing disruption in the college classroom.

Additionally you will be invited to participate in a follow-up focus group interview, comprising of 5-8 faculty that will be 75 minute in length, but it will be your choice to participate or not. The focus group will be guided by questions related to your experiences working with distressed or disruptive college students. Focus group questions are directed to the group, not the individual.

What Are The Risks and Discomforts Of The Study?
There is minimal risk and discomfort involved in this study should you choose to participate. There is always some risk of an accidental breach of confidentiality. However, I will take measures to protect information I collect from you during the study. You have the option to discontinue your participation at any time during the study by notifying Nicholas Negrete, the principal investigator. If you decide to withdraw, none of the information you have provided will be used in the study’s data collection, analysis or final report. All the data you provided will be destroyed.
You should be aware the PI is considered a Campus Security Authority (CSA), and is obligated to report any information that involves alleged criminal behavior, including abuse of minors or elderly.

If at any point during the interviews or focus groups you are experiencing discomfort you have the right to end your involvement in the research study. You are also encouraged to reach out to Employee Assistance Program known as EAP by calling at (802) 864-3270 for employee assistance. The PI will remind you of this resource and provide it to you if you are in need.

**What Are The Benefits of Participating In The Study?**
There may be no direct benefits to you but participation in this study will allow you to offer insights about the faculty experience, and be able to read the final results of this study. Your participation will allow for the researcher to be able to further identify how faculty can be better supported in their response to students who are disruptive or in distress.

**Are There Any Costs or Compensation?**
There are no costs associated with participation in this study other than the value of your time.
There is no compensation offered for your time.

**Can You Withdraw or Be Withdrawn From This Study?**
You may discontinue your participation in this study at any time. You have the option to discontinue participation by notifying Nicholas Negrete, the principal investigator. If you decide to withdraw, none of the information you have provided will be used in the study’s data collection, analysis or final report. All the data you provided will be destroyed. The PI has the right to withdraw participants from the study if they appear to be significantly distressed as a result of the study’s protocol.

**What About Confidentiality?**
Your identity will be carefully protected throughout the study. Participants will appear under pseudonyms and real names will not be stored as part of the database. After the interviews and focus groups sessions, and once this data has been transcribed and coded for themes, the audio files will be deleted. Only the electronic data will be kept and stored on a password-protected file on a secure computer. Also, during the focus groups I will ask that everyone not repeat what they heard others say, but there is always a chance that this occurrence could happen, although everything you say will be kept confidential by the interviewer.
You also have the option of asking the recorder be turned off or not answering questions. The record of your progress will be kept in a confidential form at the University of Vermont. The security of your record will be maintained by the principal investigator (PI), Nicholas Negrete. The results of this study may eventually be published and information may be exchanged anonymously between the PI and faculty advisor, but confidentiality will be maintained.

**Contact Information**
You may contact Nicholas Negrete, the Principal Investigator in charge of this study, at nnegrete@uvm.edu for more information about this study.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project you should contact the Director of the Research Protections Office, at the University of Vermont at 802-656-5040.

**Statement of Consent**
You have been given and have read or have had read to you a summary of this research study. Should you have any further questions about the research, you may contact the person conducting the study at the address and telephone number given below. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice.
To participate in this study and you should keep a signed copy of this form for your reference.

Signature of Subject (18 years of age or older) ___________________________ Date __________

Name of Subject Printed __________________________________________________________

This form is valid only if the Committees on Human Research's current stamp of approval is present below.

Signature of Principal Investigator or Designee ___________________________ Date __________

Name of Principal Investigator or Designee Printed __________________________________

Name of Principal Investigator: Nicholas Negrete
Address: 41 S. Prospect St., Nicholson House
Telephone/Email: 802-656-3829, nnegrete@uvm.edu

Version Date: 7.15.2015  3 of 3
Appendix H: Individual Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in my research study. As you may or may not be aware, college student mental health challenges continue to increase in terms of severity and prevalence, and oftentimes behaviors can manifest in the classroom that you may characterize as disruptive and or distressing. The purpose of this study is to understand undergraduate faculty’s experiences related to the development of their professional competence and confidence in recognizing, responding to, and supporting disruptive and distressed college students.

Throughout this interview, which should be no longer than 60-minutes and will be audio-recorded, please consider your role as a faculty member at the University of Vermont. Please focus your responses to the interactions you have had with undergraduate students, namely, first-year students. Please know that we can end the interview at any time, and you can choose not to answer any questions you may not feel comfortable answering. To ensure confidentiality, please do not reveal the names of any student(s), and/or faculty or staff members.

To begin:

1. Can you please describe your role and responsibilities as a faculty member at this university?
   a. What would you say are your primary responsibilities as a college teacher?

2. In your time that you have served as a teacher at this university, what kind of trends have you observed about the student population?

3. Can you share your personal definition of a college student who is distressed?

4. Can you share your personal definition of a college student who is disruptive?

5. Can you describe how you discern when a student is in distress or when their
behavior has become disruptive?

6. **Critical Incident Question:** Think back to an incident or situation where a student demonstrated disruptive behavior and/or showed signs of emotional distress. Please describe the details of the incident or situation that accurately demonstrate the disruptive or distressing event. *(ask generally first.)*
   a. What signs or indicators prompted you to identify that there may be a student in distress or someone had been disruptive?
   b. How prepared did you feel in addressing or handling the situation?
   c. What were your initial thoughts or reactions as you addressed the situation?
   d. What do you wish you would have known then, that you know now?
   e. Would you have responded any differently if this happened again today?

7. How would you describe your level of competency in responding to students in distress or those who are disruptive?
   a. How might your competency be further improved?

8. How would you describe your level of confidence in intervening or responding to a situation that appears to be disruptive or involving a student in distress?
   a. How might your level of confidence be further improved or increased?

9. How would you describe the institution’s role and/or responsibility in addressing students who appear to be disruptive and or in distress?

10. Do you have any other insights, experiences, or ideas that you would like to share in relation to disruptive and distressed college students?
Appendix I: Focus Group Protocol

Thank you for participating in my research study. As you may or may not be aware, college student mental health continues to increase in terms of severity and prevalence, and oftentimes behaviors can manifest in the classroom that you may characterize as disruptive and or distressing. The purpose of this study is to understand undergraduate faculty’s experiences related to the development of their professional competence and confidence in recognizing, responding to, and supporting disruptive and distressed college students.

Throughout this focus group interview, which should be no longer than 60-75 minutes and will be audio-recorded, please consider your role as a faculty member at the University of Vermont. Please know that we can end the interview at any time, and you can choose not to answer any questions you may not feel comfortable answering. To ensure confidentiality, please do not reveal the name or names of any students.

Classroom Management:
1. What strategies do you utilize to manage your classrooms?

Help Seeking Behavior
2. How and when do you decide to ask for help around a student who may be disruptive or distressed?

3. How do you manage to remain healthy and grounded in the face of difficult situations?

Institutional Expectations & Support:
4. In what ways has the institution been supportive or unsupportive as it relates to your personal experiences with addressing disruptive and distressed students?

5. How would you describe your level of confidence or trust in the institution’s response to crises or critical incidents?

Training & Development:
6. Can you discuss or describe any documents, policies, trainings, or other resources on campus that may support your approach and interactions with students who are disruptive or in distress?

Other:

7. How, if at all, do you think your personal or social identities inform your response to students in distress or disruptive, such as race, gender, age, etc.?

8. Do you have any other insights, experiences, or ideas that you would like to share in relation to this topic?
### Appendix J: Faculty Participant Demographic Data

**Table 1. Faculty Participant Demographic Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Tenure Status</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Received Training</th>
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<tr>
<td>Professor Little</td>
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<td>Instructor</td>
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<td>Professor O’Donnell</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mathematical Sciences</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
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<td>Professor David</td>
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<td>Associate Professor</td>
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<td>Professor Lola</td>
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<td>Assistant Professor</td>
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<td>Associate Professor</td>
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<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Non-tenured</td>
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<td>No</td>
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</table>
Appendix K: Figure 3. Classroom Management Intersecting with Care Theory (Expanded version)

Contextual and Backdrop: Classroom size, faculty experience, national and local issues, etc.

**High Classroom Management**
- attentive and competent
- high pedagogical development that informs classroom management practice

**Low Care**
- lack of responsiveness to individual needs, little need to feel responsible for care/concern of students
- inability to be able to care for or address students due to classroom dynamics

Summary:
Commitment to classroom control and addressing class dynamics—supports group and institutional needs; Classroom management trumps individual care and concern—classroom most likely is too large to track individual concerns so high emphasis on classroom management techniques over care and concern.

**+ High Classroom Management**
- attentive and competent
- high pedagogical development that informs classroom management practice

**High Care**
- responsible and responsive to individual needs
- ability to address concerns quickly and notice issues arise early

Summary:
Views student and faculty relationship as interdependent. Commitment to care and sustaining caring attitude both with the individual student and toward the group. High individual support and care, and also balancing the care and commitment to group/classroom and institutional care—effectively strikes the balance of group and individual care.

**Low Classroom Management**
- inattentive to needs of class, and low competence
- inability to interrupt classroom behavior that is disruptive or distracting due to external pressures
- allowing students to “self-monitor” with little emphasis on classroom expectations.

**Low Care**
- lack of responsiveness to individual needs, little need to feel responsible for care/concern of students
- inability to be able to care for or address students due to classroom dynamics

Summary:
Does not support group needs, or individual needs—unsupportive to both group and individual. Lack of cohesive structure in classroom, and student experience with faculty is lackluster.

**- Low Classroom Management**
- inattentive to needs of class, and low competence
- inability to interrupt classroom behavior that is disruptive or distracting
- allowing students to “self-monitor” with little emphasis on classroom expectations.

**- Low Care**
- lack of responsiveness to individual needs, little need to feel responsible for care/concern of students
- inability to be able to care for or address students due to classroom dynamics

Summary:
Commitment to care and sustaining caring attitude. Supportive to individual needs, and allows individual care to trump group and institutional care.