



Sankalp Gilda, Ph.D. @spaceman_gilda Wed Sep 15 18:53:48 +0000 2021

"As an Indian, I just assumed you were submissive."

"Shut the f**k up. I won't tolerate backtalk from someone like you...Idiot."

I filed charges against @UF & Dept of Astro. for racism, harassment & retaliation. #phdlife #AcademicChatter #AcademicTwitter #phdjourney #phdchat

1/24

Statements like these from my former PhD advisor were not uncommon. I was demeaned, harassed, and bullied into silence when I cried out against abuse. "You know you are on a visa, right?... Stay in your lane, don't antagonize me, and you might have a future in America."

2/24

A month ago I graduated with a PhD in Astronomy from @UF. This almost didn't happen, thanks to my former dept. (@UFastro) and advisor, who seemingly singled me out for abuse (his only other grad student was a White woman, who has since started working with someone else).

3/24

I was called demeaning names, blackmailed into silence using my status as a foreign student, lied to into overworking, and asked to keep tolerating abuse unless I either killed myself or was physically assaulted. All this, because I chose to stand up for my dignity.

4/24

What began as a normal relationship turned sour after I started noticing and complaining about shocking behavior by my former boss. A man who once threatened to have a janitor fired for not cleaning up his trash can by lying to his boss that the poor man was drunk at work.

5/24

Who threatened to have a fellow Asst. Prof. fired and his professional career ruined, over a simple disagreement. Who responded to students' complaints about his lack of preparedness for classes with "I don't give a shit, I just have to get grants to get tenure."

6/24

Who so much as refused to set up a weekly meeting time with me. "Be here from 9 to 6, I'll come by to check on you whenever I have time." Who repeatedly called me an 'idiot' for bringing up the disparate ways in which he treated me and his other, White, student.

7/24

I am sharing my story in hopes that it will provide strength and encouragement to other minority students to stand up for their rights and do the right thing. Despite attempts to silence me, I continued escalating my complaints about threats and abuses to various leaders.

8/24

The Chair tried to convince me that the abuse being meted out to me was just acclimatization--'growing pains' was the phrase. When I informed her of repeated and explicit threats to my career, she literally chuckled in my face. "That's nothing. If he hits you, come to me."

9/24

She tried to bully me into including him on my paper. "He likes being on papers, let him." She brushed aside my complaints about late-night and weekend calls and texts. She ignored my requests for accommodations and forced me into overtime work by blatantly lying.

10/24

"According to our internal calculations you are required to work for him for 47 hours a week, so if he wants to be on your paper, or call you after hours, that's his right, I can't help you." A lie. Thanks to @uf_gau, every grad. student at @UF has an employment contract.

11/24

When I informed the Chair of his shockingly poor pedagogy, appalling reaction to criticism, and a mid-semester week-long trip to see his partner while misrepresenting it as a professional visit (and likely misusing research funds), I was told to "mind your own business."

12/24

She strongly advised against filing formal charges, or soliciting other professors' assistance, instead inviting me to 'vent' to her. "If you email me I might have to act in my capacity as a Chair, and who knows how that will go."

13/24

She accused me of overreacting. "It might seem to some that you are late to take your qualifying exam and are just making excuses". This sentiment was shared by the Dept. Grad. Coordinator, who 'thoughtfully' reminded me that my complaints were a case of he said-she said.

14/24

The Grad. Coordinator in fact deemed it necessary to remind me of my ethnicity. "Feel free to complain, but this will just be swept under the rug. As an Indian, you should be used to things being real." Followed with "Now if you ever feel suicidal, come to me."

15/24

When I escalated to an Associate Dean, he assured me that I would face no repercussions. My former advisor denied all charges & quit my committee. I was given 30 days to find a new advisor & 4 months to write a first-authored paper, or be kicked out of the program.

16/24

"This is really the end of the line for you", I was told. Fortunately I was able to work with a supportive professor and graduate in 6 years. Ofc, changing fields from cosmology to galaxy formation a year from graduation meant working 60 hour weeks, week after week.

17/24

That former advisor, Dept. Chair, Dept. Grad. Coordinator, Associate Dean, Chair of my new committee---all White. I was betrayed at every level of leadership in my Dept. and College, who sided with a fellow White prof. against a 'submissive' Indian grad student.

18/24

This retaliatory behavior has been noted. 3 minority students, including two women, have shared with me that they were disturbed enough by his behavior (some of which was potentially sexual in nature) to start keeping notes, but were not motivated to file formal complaints.

19/24

I can't blame them. Such is the atmosphere. at [@UFastro](#) that my former advisor once dared me to complain. "Feel free to complain to whoever you want. UF paid \$250,000 to DESI (Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument) to hire me, which they'll lose if they fire me."

20/24

In all likelihood, he is fully aware of his transgressions, and is confident of getting away scot-free. When he quit my committee, he asked me in a matter-of-factly manner, "You didn't record any of our conversations, right? You know that's illegal in Florida."

21/24

I am deeply concerned about the future of grad. students at my former dept. That young Harvard-educated Asst. Prof. is still on track for tenure, the Chair is likely on track for a Deanship, and the Grad. Coordinator is now taking his bigotry to [@UCF](#). Rug, meet broom.

22/24

I graduated with 4 first-author papers, 12 contributed and invited talks, and having won a prestigious \$150,000 Hubble grant. Not that I feel the need to justify not being an 'idiot'. The point is, if they can treat me like this, they can treat anyone like this.

23/24

My sincere hope is that my lawsuit will force [@UF](#) to acknowledge and change the toxic environment festering in the Dept. of Astro. before another student at UF commits suicide due to abuse by their advisor (<https://t.co/j4hljWHgs4>).

24/24