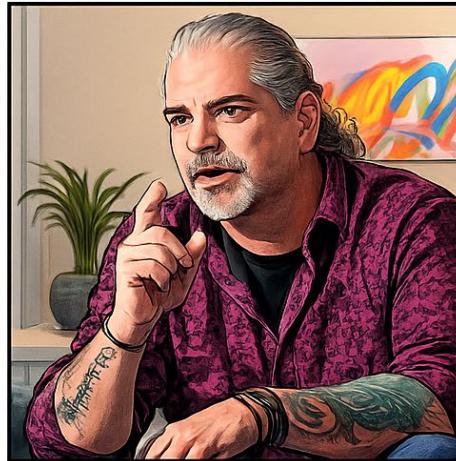
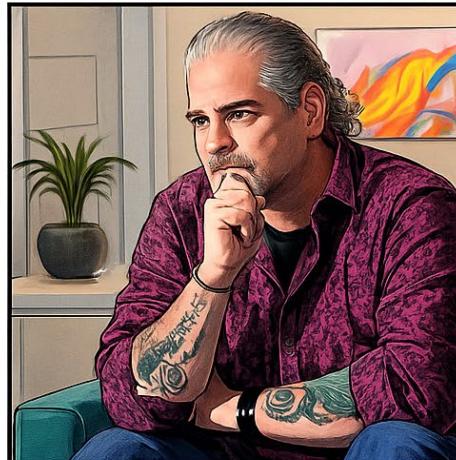
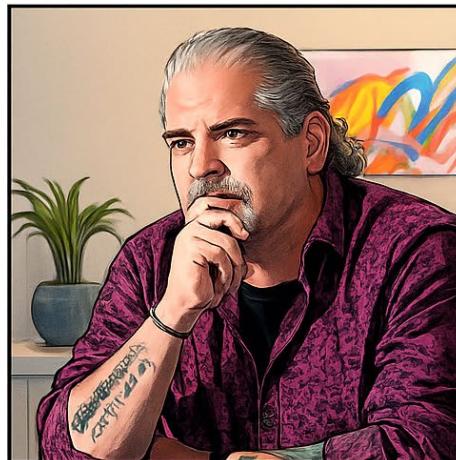


# Dusty and Brian Interview Debrief

## Dusty Harrington Case, October 2025



## Overview

Professor Dusty Harrington, a tenured political science professor, has been on administrative leave for several weeks. He claims the university has been vague, citing only "multiple complaints from my colleagues and from students," and that he's "not acting normal." He believes the true reason is censorship of his political opinions, specifically his characterization of the conflict in Gaza as a "genocide." He feels his academic freedom is being violated because he is making people uncomfortable by speaking the truth. Dusty expresses frustration over the lack of direct communication from the administration and his colleagues, who he feels are avoiding him.

Dr. Brian Van Brunt, conducting a threat assessment, clarifies that the university's concerns extend beyond the content of his teaching to include Dusty's behavior. He notes that recent student reviews have been overwhelmingly negative, with complaints about disruptive behavior and crossing personal boundaries, including repeatedly bringing up his ex-wife and divorce details in a context that students found irrelevant. Brian mentions listening to a student's 5-minute lecture recording, which he uses as a starting point to discuss the university's concerns. However, Dusty strongly disagrees, arguing it's not representative of a full semester.

### Interview Flow

Dusty defends his teaching method of 25 years, stating his job is to challenge students' beliefs and make them uncomfortable to provoke critical thinking. He believes in expressing his own strong opinions and expects students to challenge him, at which point he would be "happy to explain why they're wrong." He asserts this passionate, confrontational style has earned him "spectacular reviews" until recently. He frames the university's issue as a "pedagogical problem," believing he is being punished for not conforming to someone else's preferred teaching style.

Brian points out that a professor's role is to foster critical thinking by presenting issues impartially, not by taking a single, firm stance and having students argue against it. He suggests a more conversational, debate-oriented approach is needed, especially given the power imbalance in the classroom. He believes the university's issue is with the "singularity" and adversarial nature of Dusty's approach, not the political topic itself. Brian's interview with Dusty does succeed in the core task of ruling out imminent violence, but he also gets pulled into a pedagogy debate that makes parts of the threat work slower and more contentious.

### Threat Assessment

Over the course of the interview, Brian methodically touches on several key risk domains. He explores social supports and isolation by asking about Dusty's "typical social connection with friends, colleagues, intimate partners." He learns about his loss of colleague support and his routine of socializing at the bar. He inquires about sleep, eating, and late-night rumination ("Are you sleeping well?... I write later at night... that is when I do my best work"), which helps gauge Dusty's baseline functioning and stress. He then edges into suicide and self-harm, initially cloaked in dark humor, by asking, "Do you do that Hemingway writing, typewriter, shotgun, in case it gets too serious," prompting Dusty's clear denial that "I'm not going to kill myself, Brian." Brian also clarifies gun access, eliciting Dusty's acknowledgement, "Yes, I own guns... I have a 1911 pistol that I like to fire at the range. Do I bring it to school? Absolutely not. I know the boundaries

for that." Finally, he asks directly about alcohol and drug use. Taken together, this coverage of supports, functioning, suicidality, weapons, and substances provides a coherent foundation for a reasonably defensible low-violence-risk conclusion. The "threat" is reframed as a pedagogical one, or the risk of students "feeling threatened" by his intense style.

## Impact of Dusty's Behavior

Dusty feels secure in his tenured position, believing the university would have to go through "a lot of hoops" to fire him and that it would become a public story about censorship. He remains defiant, though he agrees to stop discussing his personal life in class. Brian warns Dusty that he seems disconnected from the seriousness of the situation and is on a path toward "separation" from the university. He clarifies that the university's concern is that Dusty is not performing his job as they define it, which goes beyond simply arguing a single viewpoint.

## Summary

The interview concludes that Dusty does not pose a direct physical threat to the university. The central conflict is a fundamental pedagogical disagreement between Dusty's confrontational, passionate teaching style and the university's expectation of a more impartial, boundary-conscious approach. Dusty believes he is being censored for his political views and punished for his teaching philosophy, even though he feels secure in his tenured position. Brian, representing the university's concerns about student and colleague complaints regarding Dusty's singular focus and sharing of personal issues, warns that despite the lack of a physical threat, his employment is at serious risk if he cannot align with the university's definition of his professional duties.

## Interview Key Points

Because the BTAM course instructor conducted the interview, interview feedback will be shared more broadly than other feedback documents, which are intended to provide interview and assessment insights directly to practitioners.

Dusty's strategy was effective at stonewalling the meeting and preventing any resolution on the assessor's terms. Still, it ultimately failed to achieve his goal of a quick return to the classroom. Brian's strategy of persistent, calm redirection to procedural facts was effective in exposing Dusty's evasiveness but failed to compel compliance, resulting in a stalemate in which neither party's primary objective was met.

### A Review of Dusty

The meeting was defined by Dusty's strategic intent to reframe a disciplinary review of his classroom conduct as a principled, intellectual battle for academic freedom. He sought to position himself as a righteous martyr being persecuted for his political views, thereby invalidating the legitimacy of the complaints against him. This strategy was designed to evade accountability for specific behaviors by escalating the conflict into an abstract, philosophical debate where he could control the narrative and assert moral and intellectual superiority over the University.

He consistently deflected direct questions about his conduct by pivoting to grander, abstract themes such as censorship, political persecution ("Is this like Nazi Germany?"), and his pedagogical philosophy. He repeatedly challenged Brian's authority by attempting to shift the power dynamic from an assessment to a peer-level intellectual debate, using his professional credentials as a shield and demanding personal information from Brian.

When confronted with the direct consequence of his actions ("But here you are in my office on administrative leave because of your teaching style"), Dusty deflected by stating, "What is going on in the world is different, not how I teach." This moment was the most revealing because it crystallized his entire strategy to deny any personal agency or fault in the situation and to attribute the conflict entirely to external political forces, thereby cementing his self-perception as a righteous actor persecuted for speaking truth to power. The question remains if this is an intentional action on his part or an unseen, uncontrolled manifestation of his personality.

### A Review of Dr. Brian Van Brunt

Brian needed to bypass Dusty's ideological deflections and ground the conversation in the concrete, non-negotiable behavioral requirements of the university, to determine if he could comply and return to the classroom. To accomplish this, Brian acknowledged Dusty's narrative without validating it, then consistently returned to the meeting's procedural focus. He attempted to build rapport with collegial language ("as a professor"), but ultimately shifted to firmly re-grounding the conversation in the institutional reality and the direct consequences of Dusty's choices.

Brian doesn't move into explicit threat-domain questioning until very late, after minutes of circular argument. When he does ask about suicidality, it's embedded in a joke ("Hemingway writing, typewriter, shotgun..."), which Dusty bats away with sarcasm before finally giving a clear denial.

There is no clean, direct question like "Have you had any thoughts about physically harming yourself or anyone else?" Similarly, he never directly probes violent ideation toward specific people (administration, colleagues, students). He reaches a sound clinical judgment based on the overall presentation. However, from a defensibility standpoint, the record would be stronger if the classic harm-to-self/harm-to-others questions were asked plainly and earlier in the interview.

Brian's statement, "But here you are in my office on administrative leave because of your teaching style," was the most revealing tactical moment. It was a direct, fact-based counter that cut through Dusty's abstract justifications and forced a momentary confrontation with the tangible, negative outcome of his behavior, perfectly exemplifying Brian's strategy of grounding the debate in concrete reality.

Once Dusty agrees to change a behavior (e.g., "I won't talk about my ex-wife in the classroom"), Brian continues to circle back to it ("And your wife and feeling disposable..."). Dusty calls this out, saying, "We discussed that I'm not going to discuss my wife anymore... we're going around in circles on that one."

- On one hand, each return to the same sore spot increases Dusty's perception of being harassed rather than assessed and burns time that could be spent on other risk domains (history of conflict, past threats, disciplinary record, etc.). Once a boundary issue is acknowledged and behaviorally addressed, note it for the report and move on unless there's new risk-relevant information.
- On the other hand, the strategy here of using the time to engage in conversation allowed the application of numerous threat questions later in the interview. It is unclear if this approach yielded more accurate information or simply delayed the overall process. Having a historical conversational connection to Dusty through the debate on teaching pedagogy could be akin to the proverbial "money in the bank" for later use.

## Brian's Strengths

Brian's strengths in the interview show up in his ability to humanize a mandated process, tolerate conflict, and still get key threat data on the record. He opens with humor and first-name use, clearly explains his role, and repeatedly frames himself as someone trying to help Dusty get back to the classroom rather than judge him. Even when Dusty is sarcastic and combative, Brian names the tension directly and continues to engage rather than shutting things down. Over the course of the interview, he eventually covers core risk domains, social supports, stressors, suicidality, substance use, and gun access. He offers a clear, plain-spoken statement that he does not see Dusty planning or preparing violence, and explains how his report will be shared and used, which supports both safety and procedural fairness.

### Role Transparency

Brian starts by lowering the power distance with first-name use and a bit of self-disclosure ("I remind my students whenever they use doctor, I don't want to be reminded of the trauma of my doctoral program. So I also do Brian..."). He states the purpose of the conversation as being "about you after this leave." This helps humanize the process, making it less hostile and evaluative in Dusty's experience. He also promises honesty about the process, saying, "If I don't know something, I'll tell you that... I'd like to almost

say an ally in this approach to help figure out what's going on, how we fix it." That kind of transparency is good threat-assessment practice.

### **Building Conflict Tolerance**

Dusty is openly argumentative and mocking at times ("That's what I just said..." "So what do you want to know?" "Perhaps you should listen to it again"). Brian tolerates this without shutting down the interview or becoming overtly punitive. He names the process honestly, saying, "You're very frustrating to talk with, and I'd imagine we probably share that opinion of each other. Is that fair?" That capacity to remain engaged with a combative subject is a real strength in threat assessment work; it allows more observation of baseline affect, thinking style, and escalation patterns.

### **Review of Assessment Report**

The offer to allow Dusty to review the report accomplishes a few things. First, it shifts some power back to him, giving him a voice and edits on a document he would likely face some pushback on. Second, it avoids a "surprise" from Dusty when he sees a final report that does not match what he was expecting. This prevents potential rupture of the relationship, which will be useful to continue, as threat assessment is rarely a "one-and-done" approach. Brian ultimately accomplishes the core threat-assessment goals of gathering enough information to credibly conclude that Dusty is not presently planning or preparing violence, distinguishing conduct/pedagogy issues from violence risk, and offering a transparent process.

### **Persistence in Addressing Difficult Topics.**

Brian repeatedly re-centers the discussion on why Dusty is there, reminding him that there are "reports of disruptive behaviors," "students complaining about how you're teaching in class," and references to his ex-wife and the Gaza content. He doesn't let Dusty keep it solely in an academic freedom frame; he keeps tying back to how students and colleagues are experiencing him and how that intersects with institutional expectations ("you're here in this meeting with me because the university has taken pause at the way you're interacting with the students"). For a threat interview, that persistence yields important data about Dusty's rigidity, grievance, and lack of perspective-taking.

### **Transparency Around Feedback**

Brian's "no imminent threat" concession reduces immediate pressure and invites collaborative edits to his report, ceding discursive inclusion while retaining decision boundaries ("not my call").

## **Brian's Areas for Improvement**

Brian's main areas for improvement in the interview center are structure, focus, and tone. He allows the session to slide into a long debate about pedagogy and academic freedom instead of keeping those themes as brief context while anchoring firmly to behavior, impact, and safety. This feeds Dusty's narrative that the process is really about censorship rather than risk. Brian's theory is to build a connection with Dusty, with the aim of asking more difficult questions and

receiving answers with greater credibility. Notwithstanding this strategy, the following critiques are provided to improve the interview approach.

### **Avoid Getting Pulled into Debate**

From early on, Brian allows the interview to become a debate about teaching style, rather than keeping pedagogy as the context and the focus on behavior and safety. He engages in extended back-and-forth about what “good teaching” looks like, and Dusty seizes on this and reframes the whole process as censorship and academic-freedom persecution (“So it’s not about threat... It is about listening to the pedagogy, which I believe should be addressed at a higher level”). Brian would be stronger to keep value judgments about pedagogy brief and instead focus on observable conduct and impact: “Here is the behavior; here is how people experienced it; here is why that matters for safety.”

### **Attend to Metaphors**

Dusty offers rich metaphors and narrative hooks, genocide, “not ducking under tables,” “sharpening a razor,” “disposable man,” “order and chaos,” and crusade language. Brian sometimes responds with smart references of his own (Jonathan Swift, “A Modest Proposal”) but rarely slows down to unpack what those images mean for Dusty. For threat assessment, those metaphors are valuable windows into grievance, identification with victims or avengers, and how he frames resistance and sacrifice. Brief, curious follow-ups like “When you talk about not hiding under the table, what does that look like for you personally?” could have yielded more nuanced risk data without escalating the power struggle.

### **Improve the Structure of the Interview**

His main area for improvement is structural and involves avoiding extended debates about teaching and politics, tightening his language and humor when addressing a grievance-driven subject, and moving more quickly and directly through a flexible but deliberate “risk spine” so the safety piece is clearly and efficiently covered.

### **Sarcasm and Humor**

While Brian’s style is relational and at times very effective, some lines come across as flippant or adversarial in a grievance-driven context (“Boundaries, man, right?” “I’m just calling it the way I see it, man” and “I’m really not trying to be a dick about this, man”). With a subject who already feels judged and coerced, that tone sometimes reinforces Dusty’s impression that Brian is arguing for sport or ego rather than assessing risk. Brian’s approach attempts to build a connection and get beyond Dusty’s defensiveness or simple acquiescence. However, a somewhat more neutral, concise style, using plain language (“I don’t see you planning or preparing to harm anyone at the university physically”) and limiting personal stories would likely reduce friction while preserving rapport. The challenge again is whether the rapport is truly indicative of a deeper connection or simply superficial.

### **Clarify Return Conditions More Clearly**

Conditions for Dusty’s return are not articulated beyond vague alignment with policy; the procedural roadmap from threat clearance to classroom reinstatement is missing. Citing

HR complaints and specific behaviors (personal disclosures, disruption), Brian moves the frame from abstract rights to employability/compliance. Dusty momentarily concedes on personal boundaries ("Okay, I won't talk about my ex").

### **Misattribution**

At the very start of the interview, Brian's misidentification of the department (biology vs. political science) briefly dents his credibility; Dusty leverages political sensitivity. Brian recovers by validating the climate and returning to the process, but the misstep remains.

# Dusty Harrington Interview with Brian

## Chronological Timestamped Core Moments

### 0:00-3:00 Minutes

Early in the interview, you can see Brian doing some of his best framing work. He uses first names and makes light of the “trauma” of his doctoral program. He sets a collaborative tone about helping Dusty return to the classroom rather than putting him on trial.

### 7:00-10:00 Minutes

The conversation shifts into the core conduct concerns. Here, Brian begins listing reports of “disruptive behaviors” and student complaints about how Dusty is teaching, shifting the focus from abstract politics to the specific behaviors and impact that brought him into the room in the first place.

### 11:00-15:00 Minutes; Mid 20:00 to 30:00

The discussion repeatedly slides into a pedagogy debate, whether 100% of Dusty’s job is to challenge student beliefs, whether the university is censoring him, and whether this is really a “threat” issue or an academic-freedom fight. Brian sometimes leans into that debate, describing this as a “pedagogical problem” and sparring over teaching style, which gives Dusty fuel to reframe the whole process as censorship rather than a safety check. The upside of this section is that it demonstrates Brian’s comfort with conflict; the downside is that it diverts time and attention from the narrow threat-assessment agenda.

### Early 30:00 Minutes

A clearer threat formulation emerges when Brian finally says out loud that he does not see Dusty “getting an Uzi and coming and shooting up the school” and distinguishes violence risk from pedagogical disagreement.

### Late 30:00 to low 40:00

Brian then pivots into more structured “risk spine” territory by asking about Dusty’s social connections, sleep, stressors, substance use, late-night rumination, and only then, with a layer of dark humor, suicidality, which draws an explicit denial (“I’m not going to kill myself, Brian”). A minute or two later, he clarifies gun ownership and use at the range, including the boundary that he does not bring firearms to campus. These later sections illustrate both the strengths and weaknesses of the overall structure. The core domains are eventually addressed, and a defensible “no imminent violence” conclusion is articulated, but they come late and somewhat indirectly, after a long, circular argument about teaching and politics.

### General

Throughout the interview, relational and process moments characterize Brian’s style. Early on and again in the mid-interview, he uses banter about RateMyProfessor, kids, and guest-lecturing to maintain some relational glue. Later, around the 40-minute mark, he names the tension frankly,

telling Dusty that he is “very frustrating to talk with” and acknowledging they probably share that view of each other, before steering into the more formal risk questions. Those beats show his ability to stay in the room with a combative subject, even as the earlier sections demonstrate how easily a threat interview can drift off the risk spine if the interviewer gets pulled too far into defending values or pedagogy rather than anchoring repeatedly to behavior, impact, and concrete safety questions.