

Don't Pickpocket Your Students

Imagine you're a professor somewhere. You hear rumors of the creation of a new Office of Student Property Security. "Whatever," you think.

Yet before long, you're summoned to a brand-new mandatory training session run by certified officers of Student Property Security. At this session (in-person back in the old days; now Zoom of course), they give you a tortoise-paced 90-minute Powerpoint presentation on the student property crisis and the appropriate faculty response. And the whole spiel can be readily summarized in a single commandment: "*Don't pickpocket your students.*"

To me, such a training session would be insulting, pointless, and unhinged.

Why insulting? Because I would never consider pickpocketing my students in a million years. I don't need a self-styled anti-pickpocketing "expert" to remind me of this elementary obligation. To quote Uncle Junior in *The Sopranos*, "Where does he get the effrontery?"

Why pointless? Because any professor who *did* pickpocket his students would probably not be dissuaded by a training seminar. Wrong-doers already know the rules; they just don't care.

Why unhinged? Because there is no ongoing pickpocketing "crisis." Sure, the media can pinpoint a few egregious scandals in a country with over 300 million inhabitants. But no matter how much outrage such scandals spark, they show next to nothing about statistical reality. And outrage directed at those who demand hard numbers – not horrifying anecdotes – shows *less than nothing* about real life.

What would motivate an institution to impose this insulting, pointless, and unhinged training? It could be an effort to diminish the school's legal liability; if a pickpocketed student ever sues the school, the school can protest, "Don't blame us, we run a first-rate anti-pickpocketing training program!" But it's hard to imagine that a jury would find such protests convincing. The real motive, I suspect, is not that the administration is protecting their school from lawsuits, but that administrators are protecting *themselves* from hassling. Once the student pickpocketing availability cascade gets off the ground, the administrator who refuses to "do something" to "address the crisis" troubleth his own house and inherits the wind.

Now to be fair, no American university currently requires faculty to attend mandatory anti-pickpocketing training.

As far as I know.

And that's great, because it would be truly Kafkaesque if any university did.