

Conflict Management for Department Chairs

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Agenda

- Introductions
- Brown Bag Objectives
- The Unique Nature of Academic Conflict
- Prevention and Intervention Strategies
- Scripting and Documentation
- Principles in action
- Review of Resources

Introductions

- ❖ Your name
- ❖ Department/Program
- ❖ Types of faculty conflict you've encountered or worry about encountering

Brown Bag Objectives

- Provide strategies to proactively address issues
- Creating a plan
- Practice intervention through a case scenario
- Resource support for department chairs in managing conflict

Scenario

A graduate student has come to you because she feels her major professor is delaying her graduation so she can continue to work in his lab. The grad student cites that there are three papers that the PI is “sitting on” and that the PI has begun to make unreasonable demands on her time, including frequently requiring her to stay in the lab late into the night to oversee lab experiments, some of which are completely unrelated to her work or research. When she has indicated she can't stay, he yells and questions her commitment to completing her PhD. She has no idea what to do and is very concerned about retaliation or the situation becoming worse.

What are some of your thoughts in considering an approach to this situation?

Unique Factors in Academia that impact conflict management

- Faculty autonomy & independence
- Team-oriented decision-making on Department issues/changes
- Pre-tenure vs. post-tenure dynamics
- Lengthy Faculty careers
- Rotational nature of leadership
- Differing philosophies
- Competition for limited resources within the College or discipline
- Other factors?

Source: Mending the Cracks in the Ivory Tower: Strategies for Conflict Management in Higher Education by Cynthia Berryman-Fink

Prevention Strategies

- Create multiple avenues for feedback
- Convene meetings that allow for faculty input with ground rules developed by the faculty, explore problems before meetings - Chairs Bag Lunch Session - *Conducting Effective Faculty Meetings on 1/11/17*
- Encourage all faculty to engage in discussing *how* we address conflict here? What are the boundaries?
- Encourage parties to engage with each other directly
- Inquire if you sense something is wrong
- **New Resource** - **An All-Faculty Bag Lunch Session - *Is it Bullying? - Awareness, Understanding & Strategies in Dealing with Abrasive Behaviors on 2/22/17***

Intervention Strategies

- Plan and, if necessary, buy time
- Engage instead of avoiding
- Dispel misperceptions
- Gain better understanding of needs/expectations/interests
- Interrupt problem interactions
- Leverage your knowledge of the individuals in conflict to benefit resolution
- Intervene if you observe dysfunctional conflict

Planning the Dialogue

- Consider your approach
 - what do you want to say
 - what are the goals of the dialogue
 - what points must be covered
 - should there be a third party present?
- Consult with former chair, Academic Affairs & Dean's Office
- Consider possible solutions and have that ready, but be open to changing direction depending on what you learn
- Consider engaging Ombuds office, depending on the needs

Ombuds Office

Confidential Impartial Informal Independent

- The Ombuds Office is a safe, confidential, conflict management resource for students, faculty and staff.
- Ombuds assist visitors with university-related concerns by:
 - Listening to disputes
 - Identifying underlying issues
 - Generating options
 - Exploring policies and procedures
 - Recommending campus resources
 - Providing conflict-model and communication coaching
 - Facilitating conversations
 - Mediating conflicts

The Discussion

- Help the individual frame their main points
- Remind them to be open and listen
- Dispel misperceptions, gain better understanding of concerns
- Avoid being “sworn to secrecy”
- Work to come to practical solutions with action items

Follow-up

- Consider an appropriate time to check in, typically requires more than one check-in
- Did action items occur?
- Any consequences that need to be managed (for others in the department)

Scripting and Documentation

Purpose

Scripting Benefits

1. Stays on track
2. Provides a process
3. Promotes consistency with future issues

Document - to confirm what was discussed

1. To yourself (note to file)
2. Back to the individual
3. Don't keep unnecessary documents (drafts, your rough notes, etc.)

Presenting Issues Discussion - What next?

During a one-on-one meeting, a junior faculty member raises concerns that as a group, newly hired junior faculty have been marginalized with respect to their viewpoints. In particular, he cites that there is validity and a strong interest in collaborative research external to the department; however senior faculty have inappropriately discounted these efforts in merit and promotion dossier discussions. The junior faculty are feeling pressured to conform to “old guard” perspectives and efforts to voice alternative perspectives have been met with derision or been dismissed by a few senior faculty, leading to silence in the junior faculty ranks.

What discussions, steps and actions should be considered in response to this complaint?

Presenting Issues Discussion - What next?

A senior faculty member in your small department is meeting with you to demand that another senior colleague do more service work in support of the department. As a small department with only a handful senior faculty, there are constant requests to chair search committees, participate in ad hoc committees, mentor junior faculty and host recruitment candidates during campus visits. The senior member in question has declined doing any of these things and implies that given the high-profile nature of his research, he doesn't have time to do these things.

What discussions, steps and actions should be considered in response to this complaint?

Conflict Issue Scenario - Role Play

An associate professor in your department has been unproductive for about four years. As the new chair, you've received complaints that she is unresponsive to her graduate students. The Grad Group Chair in her area of expertise has reported similar complaints. The faculty member has continued to teach her assigned courses and the student evaluations are generally positive. Most recently you visited her lab and there seemed to be very little activity. The faculty member is due for a five-year review (after two deferred merits) and you are concerned that it may not be favorable. You've attempted to speak with her on this issue for the last three weeks but she has been unresponsive to your requests to meet. In this last meeting request, you indicated to the faculty member you may need to involve the dean's office if she continues to be unresponsive. She has agreed to meet.

Resources

Academic Affairs and your Dean's Office are great places to start - they may be familiar with the issue and have insights/strategies to address the problem

Use your resources:

- To help deal with conflict early to reduce potential for escalation
- To ensure consistency in addressing issues and ensure support of the approach
- As a good starting point; conflict stems from a lot of different situations, your resources list helps eliminate the need to pinpoint the best place to start

Questions & Evaluations