

MANAGING CONFLICTS AT AN EARLY STAGE



CHAIRS 2 DAY WORKSHOP

SEPTEMBER 14, 2023

Binnie Singh, ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Overview/Agenda

- Conflict in academia
- Role of the chair
- Proactive steps to take
- Case studies
- Resources
- The aftermath of conflict
- Questions/Discussion





Objectives for Today

- Provide strategies to address issues and minimize potential for escalation
- Increase awareness of ripple effect of conflict
- Learn about resources for department chairs in managing conflict
- Identify gaps in support for chairs – what issues aren't being addressed adequately?

SCENARIO



- You've noticed that two members of your department seem to be at odds. You used to see them chatting in each other's offices, often going out for coffee/lunch, and joking together at meetings. You realize that lately, you haven't seen any of that happening. In fact, they seem to be going out of their way not to sit near each other in department meetings.
 - Is there anything that concerns you about this situation?
 - Do you have a role to play?

Unique factors in academia that impact conflict management

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Faculty autonomy & independence▶ Team-oriented decision-making on program issues/changes▶ Lengthy faculty careers▶ Rotational nature of leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Differing philosophies▶ Competition for limited resources within the college/school/discipline▶ Lack of preparation for managing people▶ Power dynamics▶ OTHER FACTORS? |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|


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



Role of the Department Chair, APM 245, Appendix A


As leader of the department, the chair has the following duties:

1. The appointee is in charge of planning the programs of the department in teaching, research, and other functions. The chair is expected to keep the curriculum of the department under review, and to maintain a climate that is hospitable to creativity, diversity, and innovation.



Role of the Department Chair, APM 245, Appendix A (cont'd)

3. The appointee should be receptive to questions, complaints,
and suggestions from members of the department, both faculty
and staff personnel, and from students, and should take
appropriate action on them.




Be proactive

- ▶ “Living the Principles of Community” eCourse (and facilitated discussion, speakers, etc.)
- ▶ Use faculty meetings to set climate and allow for input & feedback
- ▶ Foster discussion regarding how, as a department/group and interpersonally, issues are addressed
- ▶ Follow through and follow up consistently
- ▶ Model effective behavior and engagement

Have you seen this done? If so, how has it worked?



Steps to managing conflict

- ➡ Plan
 - ➡ Consult (Resources)
 - ➡ Document
 - ➡ Follow-up
- 

Plan: Questions to ask and share with resources

- Potential policy violation? Required to notify anyone?
- What harm is caused by this conflict?
- What do I know about the parties?
- Is there prior history? Who would know? (This informs next steps.)
- Who can help determine the best approach?
- Logistics - when, where, and how to intervene?

Consulting: Resources

Reasons to consult with campus resources:

- Reduce potential for escalation
- Responding and managing in a manner consistent with the level of issue
- You don't have to be the "expert"
- Extra help
- You may be too close to those involved (colleagues) – need outsider's view
- Large issues, policy implications
- **Share the liability**

Ideas on some of the campus resources that could be useful?

Note: Academic Affairs works regularly and closely with a number of campus resources



Question

You need to elevate a situation to the correct campus office when:

- A.** There are allegations of Sexual Violence/Sexual Harassment
- B.** There are allegations of misuse of university resources
- C.** A faculty member is alleged to be regularly missing office hours, isn't responding to students, and sometimes misses a lecture
- D.** A and B



Question

You need to elevate a situation to the correct campus office when:

- A.** There are allegations of Sexual Violence/Sexual Harassment
- B.** There are allegations of misuse of university resources
- C.** A faculty member is alleged to be regularly missing office hours, isn't responding to students, and sometimes misses a lecture
- D.** **A and B**

WHEN MUST YOU CONSULT OR ELEVATE AN ISSUE?



If these issues are involved:

- SVSH
 - Misuse
 - Retaliation
 - Violence
-
- **Share the liability**



RESOURCES



SCENARIO

- The tension seems to be increasing between your two faculty members. Yesterday, you overheard two graduate students discussing the friction between these two professors. Each of these students works with one of these professors, and they've all been collaborating on a project – until recently. The students are expressing frustration about how the project is stalled since these two professors won't talk to each other and have recently bad-mouthed each other in front of the students.
- You've also heard that one of these faculty members has been very demanding about things they need from staff. He never used to be this way. The faculty member has been reported to have raised his voice with staff, saying things like, "Why can't you just have this done on time for once!" He then reportedly slammed the door on his way out.
- What issues, if any, come up for you?
- What would you say, if meeting with these faculty members?





Document:

- Document for yourself along the way, as needed (note to file)
- Academic Affairs can assist with preparing talking points that will be the outline for a documented email back to the appointee
- When appropriate, document back to the individual(s)
- Don't keep unnecessary documentation in your file
- If this has happened before, documenting may not be enough – may need to elevate (dean, Academic Affairs, etc.)



Follow-up: The Aftermath

- Confidentiality - need to know
- Ripple effect
- Support services

More practice:

- Your Grad Coordinator shares with you that she recently has been hearing from some female grad students that Professor Jones has been acting “creepy.” He tends to get close to these women when talking and often touches their arm or leg when emphasizing a point, and his hand lingers. . .

More practice:

- Your CAO comes to you to share that one of your faculty, Professor Smith, has had some odd spending of late. The CAO shares that Professor Smith recently put in a request to purchase a couple of laptops (though they already have a fairly new laptop.) They don't have staff or students working for them so it's unclear who the laptop could be for. One of the CAO's team members heard Professor Smith say "well, I earned those AEF funds. I taught so many freshman seminars. It's about time I used those monies. My kids need computers!"

More practice:

- You are in the office, late in the day. A faculty colleague, Tracy, knocks on your door asking if you have time to chat. You agree. Tracy shares that she is having a difficult time in her personal life. She has an elderly parent who has become limited in what they can do and will need more of her help. Tracy is very stressed because she still has school age children and isn't sure how she can manage caring for everyone. She asks if there's anything that you can do to alleviate her teaching load this year while she sorts this all out.



DISCUSSION/ QUESTIONS

DEI

- As a new chair, you are hearing rumblings about concerns from graduate students, including those who work as TAs. They have been saying that the faculty “are out of touch,” and don’t understand the needs of diverse students. They share that they aren’t receiving the support they need and that they regularly experience “microaggressions” from faculty.