



MANAGING CONFLICTS AT AN EARLY STAGE

CHAIRS 2 DAY WORKSHOP
SEPTEMBER 10, 2021
BINNIE SINGH, ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Overview/Agenda

- Conflict in academia
- Proactive steps to take
- Steps to conflict management
- Case studies – GROUP WORK
- 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
- Become aware of and utilize 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

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

Do you all do any of this? If so, how has it worked?

Steps to managing conflict

Plan

Act

Resources (consult)

Document

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?

Act: Things to consider

- Intervene early and as needed!
- Perfection is not the goal
- You know the person, what approach will work
- Depending on the issues, such as involving grad students, grad chair connects and works with dept chair
- One example: “Documented conversations” with *talking points* from Academic Affairs
 - keep the conversation on track

Resources: Consulting

- Your Dean's Office can be a great place to start (may differ for grad chairs)
- They may be familiar with the issue and have insights and strategies to address the problem.
- Academic Affairs and Graduate Studies, depending on the issues, would be good next offices to consult about these types of issues. We may have more history about the parties involved and can offer ideas on approach.

Resources: Consulting (cont'd)

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

WHEN MUST YOU CONSULT OR ELEVATE AN ISSUE?



CHOICES: HOW AND WHEN TO RESPOND



← Involvement →	Low Immediacy – High Involvement	High Immediacy – High Involvement
	Low Immediacy – Low Involvement	High Immediacy – Low Involvement

← Immediacy →

Source: How to Confront a Bully, David Maxfield (Crucial Conversations and Influencer)

Group Exercise



Debrief



RESOURCES

The word "RESOURCES" is rendered in a bold, white, 3D sans-serif font, centered within a white rectangular area. The text is surrounded by a vibrant collage of overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes in various colors including blue, green, yellow, orange, and pink. Some of these shapes have dashed outlines, giving the overall graphic a layered, patchwork appearance. The entire graphic is set against a dark blue background with a subtle, curved, light blue gradient on the left side.

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 their work on 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.

- What issues, if any, come up for you?
- What, if anything, will you do or say?



Document:

- Document for yourself along the way, as needed (note to file)
- 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, Grad Studies, etc.)

The Aftermath

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

Tips for minimizing harm

- Share what can be shared (consult about this with central campus resources, e.g., Academic Affairs, Counsel) --- ambiguity breeds fear and catastrophizing
- Over-communicate – People don't hear well when they're stressed
- Accept and promote the idea that conflict is part of being human

LET'S ACKNOWLEDGE...

- You can't control other people's actions, decisions, etc.
- You're close to those involved
- Fight or flight – a body's response to threat (reputational, emotional, not necessarily physical)
- Anxiety is a response to emotion, not an emotion itself

(Are you angry, sad, guilty, apprehensive ...)



QUESTIONS?