

College of Arts and Sciences
Dean's Council of Department Chairs
Wednesday, December 7, 2011

Attended:

Steve Bayne, Chair of Philosophy
Cecelia Bucki, Chair of History
Mary Ann Carolan, Chair of Modern Languages and Literatures and Director of Italian Studies
Matt Coleman, Chair of Mathematics & Computer Science
David Crawford, Chair of Sociology & Anthropology
Nancy Dallavalle, Chair of Religious Studies
Jean Daniele, Assistant to the Dean of College of Arts & Sciences
Manyul Im, Associate Dean of College of Arts and Sciences
Janie Leatherman, Director of International Studies
Mark LeClair, Chair of Economics
Lynne Porter, Chair of Visual and Performing Arts
Ronald Salafia, Chair of Psychology
James Simon, Chair of English
Kraig Steffen, Chair of Chemistry & Biochemistry
Brian Walker, Chair of Biology
Maggie Wills, Chair of Communication
Joan Weiss, Associate Dean of College of Arts and Sciences
David Winn, Chair of Physics

Regrets:

Marcie Patton, Chair of Politics

Approval of Minutes

Dr. Brian Walker moved to approve the November 9, 2011 Dean's Council minutes and Dr. Mark LeClair seconded the motion. All were in favor of the minutes after two minor changes.

Conflict Management Workshop—The Dean distributed a self-reflection exercise to department chairs. This was a reflective tool to help think about their predispositions toward conflict. People learn what they see (e.g., in families) and take those practices, often unconsciously, into all aspects of their life, including various organizations in which they work. Because conflict can be a high stress situation, people tend to gravitate to their default style bypassing acquired knowledge and learned skills. Conflict is situational and there are numerous approaches we either consciously or unconsciously deploy in different settings. In leadership roles it is beneficial to become more collaborative and compromising. It is an evolving picture, depending on situations, type of conflict, experiences, etc. Every style of conflict management has advantages and disadvantages. Avoidance is organizationally problematic if it is the dominant mode of dealing with conflict and if conflicts are allowed to fester over many years. In certain situations avoidance, even temporarily, can be appropriate.

Dr. Mary Ann Carolan mentioned that in her role as department chair, she finds that her first reaction is not always the best method of action. Reactions are best when there is time to think about the situation for consideration. The Dean mentioned that being reflective vs. impulsive are important aspects to consider. Taking time to react and determine a strategy is not avoidance.

Dr. Leatherman mentioned that often notions about conflict are very static. The Dean agreed adding that conflicts and the reactions to them may vary depending upon the relationship, topic, situation, choices, etc. Within organizations, we also have values that structure hierarchy in ways that are spoken and unspoken, built on consensus and non-consensus, and that are productive and nonproductive.

The Dean presented the following points relative to conflict.

- **Conflict**
 - It is “a process whereby individuals and groups experience and react to disagreement about goals, roles, rules, resources, outcomes, norms, patterns of communication...”
 - It can arise from perceived or actual differences in opinion.
 - The outcomes of conflict depend upon how it is perceived and managed by participants. There is no right or wrong way in handling conflict.
 - Conflict can be derived from substantive and/or relational issues.

- **Some Organizational Characteristics that can create conflict:**
 - Structure (values that structure hierarchy that are spoken and not spoke, productive and not productive).
 - Heterogeneity (individual, disciplinary, epistemological...)
 - Specialization
 - Supervision
 - Participation—As a University organization, we try to be highly participatory in decision making, which creates conflict, because we are soliciting and expected to account for differences of opinion, individual votes, etc.
 - Interdependence— (competition for resources, work together to make programs work effectively)
 - Resources
 - Lack of them
 - Lack of control over them
 - Uneven distribution of them

- **Some Characteristics of groups/relationships that can create conflict:**
 - Department History
 - Interaction—Organizations are places where people build relations. When we interact, conflict is likely to arise.
 - Interdependence
 - Intimacy—In some departments the culture is familial, while others are more business oriented with less intimacy. There can be a large continuum in this area.
 - Boundary Maintenance
 - Change
 - Principles and values
 - Engagement—Active vs. passive

- **Approaches to Organizational Conflict:**
 - In the 1890s through 1940s traditionalists viewed conflict as destructive and felt that it should be eliminated.
 - In the 1950s through the 1980s behavioralists viewed conflict as natural and that it should be expected.

- In intergenerational conflict, we have people that operate with different notations of conflict. There are cultural issues that may interface with conflict styles. What we are comfortable with relative to conflict largely comes from how we are socialized within the family. When we get out into organizations and interface with people of different styles, we are often out of our comfort zones and also there are many default conflict styles operating.
 - In the present day interactionalists feel that conflict is necessary and that it should be encouraged in order to surface issues, generate creative solutions and ideas, grapple with diversity and change, etc.
 - A chair's responsibility to handle conflict is different than their colleagues' responsibilities. A chair needs to find the best way for the department as a whole, taking everyone's interests into account.
- **Conflict Styles:**
 - Competing (forcing win/lose)
 - Collaboration
 - Compromising—sits between other styles
 - Avoiding
 - Accommodating

The following comments were made relative to conflict:

- Dr. Carolan asked if chairs are expected to seek compromise. The Dean mentioned that the rubric sees compromise as combining elements of all of the styles. In some situations compromise would not be a good outcome, in others it would be. When there is an argument on principal, winning the argument for the good of the organization is important. Dr. Im mentioned that this is an assessment of the tendency of an individual. It is not stating the right or wrong way of handling conflict. "It is better to know yourself."
- Conflict can be productive for organizations in particular. The chair's role is to find ways to achieve collective goals and work through conflict to get there. Sometimes these goals may be reached through compromising and coming to terms with long standing disagreements or interpersonal feuds that have grown within the department.
- Effective conflict management is a matter of making choices based on collective goals.
- Conflict management involves skills that can be learned, shared, and practiced. The Dean encouraged chairs to look for conflict workshops associated with their disciplines, chair workshops, etc.
- The Dean commented that a script could be developed to help chairs with specific instances of conflict management. Early statements set the tone when engaging in conflict; therefore, having a guide will help avoid the reliance on default styles.
- On-campus resources to help with conflict management and offer an outside of the department perspective were shared.
 - Dean
 - Associate Deans
 - Fellow Chairs
 - Campus Conflict Resolution Consortium—Dr. Marsha Alibrandi and Kamala Kiem, Co-Directors
- Dr. Carolan asked how to handle a situation when there is a conflict based on one person who is bullying someone. The Dean mentioned that it is very hard when you have someone who is essentially uncivil to an individual or a select group. She commented that sometimes

folks develop adaptive behaviors to deal with these dysfunctional situations. Dr. Walker commented that in academia, we cannot get rid of these “thorns” but in business they can be fired. The Dean noted that “bullying” could be a legal category, and she has not seen many instances where the term is used casually that really apply to the legal definition.

- Dr. Steffen commented that there is different symmetry in private vs. public sectors. People present differently in different contexts. The Dean agreed and commented that there are situations in departments where things are presented differently depending on the environment. Sometimes this is strategic and there is a utility to this behavior, while other times it is a disingenuous, where people are working behind the scenes to undermine the chair, another colleague, or a department project, which makes situations challenging.
- The Dean encouraged engagement in conflict management conferences to develop a network of colleagues outside of the University, who share similar roles.
- The Dean revisited the case study listed below, which was previously discussed with department chairs and the University lawyers. The following comments were made.

A new faculty member joins the department and her work in the discipline intersects strongly with feminist theory and ethnic studies. She is publishing in some unfamiliar journals and teaching required courses in new ways, as well as teaching new courses in the department. At the time of her annual review, one of the senior members of the department indicates that he doesn't believe her work is legitimate; that is, he thinks it is outside the parameters of the field, that her methodology is soft, and that she is being published in venue that are not respectable. You do not include his concerns in your annual review letter to the Dean, because you believe his views are old-fashioned and potentially discriminatory. When the senior colleague's concerns get back to the junior faculty member through the department rumor mill, and she comes to discuss it with you, you dismiss the concerns of your senior colleague. You want to alleviate her anxiety and you say, “don't worry; he's just jealous of your success. Just keep your head down and you'll be fine.”

- Dr. LeClair felt that the ramifications of avoidance would later affect the junior faculty member's chances of tenure.
- The Dean added that the junior faculty members might interpret the chair's comment as an approval of their progress, when, in fact, the conversation was not about their progress at all. It seemed that choices were made in the moment without a careful response.
- Dr. Salafia shared that this was an illustration of a situation where there were two different points of view and each could be subjected to empirical verification. An open discussion could have been made relative to the items of contention. Dr. Bucki agreed commenting that broader discussion about the field of study would be useful. This situation could have been a product of a change in the discipline that was not discussed in detail during the hiring process. The Dean added that fields are dynamic and lack of intellectual conversations relative to the complexities and changing approaches and expectations within a discipline could cause conflicts.
- Dr. Carolan felt that it would have been helpful to have a meeting with the junior and senior faculty member in consultation with the department chair. If you don't confront the situation it will fester causing more problems. Bullies don't bully when other folks don't tolerate it. When people realize they are perceived as a bully they are surprised and generally change their behaviors.

- Dr. Simon recommended that the chair find a way to have the junior and senior faculty members work together by putting them on a committee together; creating opportunities for them to share in positive outcomes. The Dean commented that this scenario often works, as it gives each faculty member equal status as they work on accomplishing a shared goal. They get to know each other better, and may later become open to the differences between each other.
- The Dean distributed a list of the “Top Ten List of De-escalation Techniques” (the “P’s” of de-escalation). This was shared by Prof. Betsy Gardner.

Announcements

- FY '12 budget issues—The Finance Division is still uncovering items that were not permanently budgeted. The style of previous budget management has become problematic in the present environment. The Dean clarified that when she raises this issue she is not trying to say that previous management (e.g., Orin Grossman and Bill Lucas) were ineffective and definitely not that there was any budgetary wrongdoing. Rather, she means to say that their style of managing the budgets is not the same as the current approach, in large due to the present economic climate.
- The Dean’s understanding is that the current deficit is about 6 million using actuals for fall semester and projections for the spring semester. She shared that programs at the university both academic and non-academic are being reviewed to see if resources are available. Decisions will not be made merely around cost effectiveness or some other metrics, because mission does matter at Fairfield. The Dean recommended department chairs assess the programs under their supervision to determine how operations could be performed leaner. It is better to volunteer contributions to filling the budget gap.
- Dr. Carolan asked if there was a cost benefit analysis to assess whether the university needed to limit the financial aid offered. The Dean commented that we already moved towards “need blind” to “90% need base and 10% merit.” Our diversity and low economic and first generation population are drastically affected. There are real cost to doing this and there are short-term concessions in regards to our diversity goals (socio-economic diversity, racial/ethnic diversity, geographic diversity). We are trying not to affect the academic program as much as possible. That said, the Dean felt that the departments could assess whether their class size could be increased from 20 to 25, for example, or from 30 to 35 temporarily. The number of courses with enrollments of 19 students or lower apparently affects our rankings. The Dean feels that every student should have at least one small group intensive learning experience in their major, but perhaps we don’t need to offer so many upper-level low-enrollment classes. If departments offered four of these types of courses each year, for example, it would be helpful if they cut back to three. Just a small effort across departments would go a long way. We should all take responsibility to seek a long-term leaner operation. If we are more proactive about this in our own unit, we will make better decisions.
- Dr. Salafia questioned whether larger donations from wealthy people declined. The Dean commented that these donations are increasing and she would discuss this further during the February 1st Dean’s Council meeting. She would like to arm the Admission, Advancement, and Marketing staff with summaries of our academic programs, successes, and case statements for endowed professorships, inclusive of faculty bios. The idea is to create a portfolio highlighting our programs. This resource will help the Advancement Division when speaking with potential donors.

- The two biggest expenses we have as an institution are salaries and financial aid; these are not easy to cut.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.