

Conflict Resolution in an Academic Environment

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Definition of Ombudsman

- "...one that investigates reported complaints, reports findings, and helps to achieve equitable settlements."
- Accessible - working with all members of the university community
- Independent - reporting directly to the Provost and through the Provost to the President
- Unbiased - considering the rights and interests of all parties involved

Role of the Ombudsman

- Resolve problems and conflicts that arise in the course of interacting with the institution
- Deal with student concerns of an academic nature
- Assist students in making contact with the appropriate office for dealing with their problem

Contacting the Ombudsman

- Academic grievances should be addressed first by the department chair and then by the college dean
- Disputes that cannot be resolved by this route can be brought to the Ombudsman
- The grievance and desired resolution should be in writing

Response to Conflict

- Formal – Laws
- Informal – Ways we deals with daily disputes

Forms of Conflict Management

- People can negotiate a settlement by talking to each other and trying to resolve the issue between themselves.
- They can avoid each other.
- They can simply tolerate the wrongdoing and decide not to take action.

Forms of Conflict Management

- They can resort to self-help, which involves using force or aggression to resolve the conflict.
- They can ask a third-party to intervene and help manage their conflict.

Third-party Settlements

- Mediators can help to solve a conflict but do not have the power to decide how to resolve it. Their role is to help the parties communicate.
- Arbitrators have a little more power. They usually listen to both sides and then decide what should be done. They usually do not have the power to enforce the decision.
- Adjudicators, like judges, listen to both sides and have the power to make a decision and the power to enforce a settlement.

Factors in Conflict Management

- Power equality/inequality
- Nature of the relationship - Student to faculty, faculty to faculty, faculty to administration
- Cultural distance - Individual differences and culture of the work environment
- Managing internal conflict - Counseling Center

Suggestions For Resolution

- Meet face-to-face
- Stay rational and professional
- Identify ultimate objective
- Seek to understand, then to be understood
- Clarify points on which there is agreement
- Isolate the issues that need resolution
- Identify proposed remedies

At Cross Purposes

- The training doctoral students get is not what they want, nor does it prepare them for the jobs they take.
- Many students do not clearly understand what doctoral study entails, how the process works, and how to navigate it effectively.
- 50% of doctoral students leave before completing the Ph.D.
www.phd-survey.org

Views of Doctoral Education

- PhD students, especially in the humanities, want to become faculty members, although other research shows that in most fields no more than half of the students will enter the professoriate.
- Half to three-quarters of doctoral students say that they are not prepared for the various teaching and service activities that most faculty members spend the majority of their time doing. However, most say that they are prepared to conduct research.

Caveats

- All issues in graduate education are not negotiable
- Faculty set standards for quality and progress
- All conflict is not necessarily to be avoided; conflict over ideas advances knowledge
- The power differential between graduate students and faculty will not become more equal, nor should it
- We should not aim for 100% retention and completion; there are appropriate reasons for students to leave their graduate programs

Responsibilities for Graduate Research

- Institution
- Department
- Supervisory Chair
- Committee Members
- Student

Institutional Responsibilities

- Mission and Goals relate to institution type
- Library Holdings
- Sponsored Research
 - Funding sources
 - Grants Processing
 - Financial
 - IRB and Animal Care Committees
 - Animal Resources
 - Technical Support, computing, Statistics
- Buildings and Facilities

Departmental Responsibilities

- Mission and Goals
- Faculty
- Policies and Procedures
- Laboratories and Equipment
- Funding for student travel to meetings

Supervisory Chair

- Personal Relationship
- Agreements - Verbal/written

Committee Members

- Internal and External Faculty
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Role of External Member
- Areas of Expertise
- History with Other Students

Student Responsibilities

- Types of Relationships
 - Mentoring
 - Employee/employer
 - Labor/management
 - Trust and Respect for faculty
- The Learning Experience
 - Ideal
 - Reality

Selecting an Advisor

- Publication record, active, high-quality, peer reviewed
- Extramural funding, competitiveness and continuity
- National recognition, invited papers, consultantships
- Rank, tenure, retirement age
- Number of students currently working with the mentor

Selecting an Advisor

- Prior training record
 - Time to complete degree
 - Number of graduate students
 - Enthusiasm for student's accomplishments
 - Current positions of recent graduates
 - Student co-authorships
 - Laboratory organization and facilities

Student/Supervisor Dyad

- Naturally or artificially created
- Faculty interests
 - Grants
 - National recognition
 - Publications
 - Inventions/intellectual property
 - Power- differential; trust, respect, communication

Student Interests

- Knowledge and skills
- Publications
- Networking
- Letters of recommendation
- Help with job placement
- Professional development

Improving Advising

- Academic/training guidelines
- Define responsibilities
- Evaluate students
- Grievance procedures
- Safeguards – other faculty

Steps in Resolving Problems

- Identify the issues in the situation.
- Who are the parties involved?
- What are their individual interests?
- Identify the range of possible options.
- Determine mutually agreeable option.

"On the Dotted Line" Scenario

- Professor obtains a contract that includes a confidentiality clause
- Student's graduation is being delayed because she cannot submit her thesis to the Graduate School
- No Contract

"Establishing a Committee" Scenario

- Graduate student is admitted but not funded
- Required to rotate through laboratories to determine research interests
- Does not fit into any laboratory
 - Faculty
 - Graduate students
- Cannot find an Advisor with funding

Thank You