Navigating Difficult Conversations

Marcia Gee Riley, Director & Ombudsperson
Sunny Lee, Assistant Ombudsperson

Ombuds Office for Students & Postdoctoral Appointees
(510) 642-5754
Agenda

- What is an Ombuds
- What is Conflict
- Costs and Benefits
- Conflict Styles
- Strategies & Gift of Feedback
- Non-Defensive Communication
- Intent vs. Impact
- Case Scenario
Ombuds Office for Students & Postdoctoral Appointees

- Informal dispute resolution
- Advocacy of justice and fairness
- Alert mechanism for systemic change on campus

- Confidentiality
- Neutrality/Impartiality
- Independence
- Informality
Visitors to the Student Ombuds Office

- Undergrad: 43%
- Graduate: 36%
- Staff: 5%
- Faculty: 6%
- PostDoc: 5%
- Other: 5%
UNDERGRADS

- Student-Staff 3%
- Student-Policy 15%
- Student-GSI 4%
- Student-Student 7%
- Student-Dept 13%
- Student-Faculty 58%

GRADS

- Student-Staff 3%
- Student-Policy 15%
- Student-GSI 4%
- Student-Student 17%
- Student-Faculty 33%
- Student-Dept 23%

CONCERNS INVOLVE
Most common issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNDERGRAD ISSUES</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatm't/Civility</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy/Prcd-not clear</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy/Prcd-not followed</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial Concerns</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acad Dishonesty</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>11%</td>
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26% of cases involved facilitated resolution.
59% of cases required follow-up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRAD ISSUES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<td>Policy/Prcd-not clear</td>
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<td>SHIP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>11%</td>
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32% of cases required facilitated resolution.
50% of cases required follow-up.
3 Ms of Conflict

Miscommunication

Misunderstanding

Mistrust
What keeps you from having difficult conversations?
What are the **costs** of not having this difficult conversation?

- Status quo
- Resentment
- Escalation of problem
- Diminished options
- Challenged relationship
- Stress
- Impact on physical health
What are the benefits of having this difficult conversation?

- Enhanced trust
- Empathy
- Creativity
- Energized climate
- Collaboration
- Understanding
- New opportunities
- Positive change
Fierce Conversations
By Susan Scott (2004)

Our work, relationships, our lives succeed or fail, one conversation at a time.

The conversation IS the relationship.

If the relationship stops, all of the possibilities for the relationship become smaller, and the possibilities for the individuals in the relationship become smaller.
Two Types of Difficult Conversations

Two types of difficult conversations:

Planned conversations
• Subject has been given thought
• Circumstances have been arranged such as time and place

Unplanned conversations
• Takes place on the spur of the moment; often fuelled by emotion such as anger.
• I express what I believe directly to the other party
• I candidly express my disagreements to the other party
• I fully express my convictions

• I avoid criticizing the views or position of the other party
• I express my complaints indirectly
• I am cautious in sharing my own wants, goals, and needs
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• I candidly express my disagreements to the other party
• I fully express my convictions

• I avoid criticizing the views or position of the other party
• I express my complaints indirectly
• I am cautious in sharing my own wants, goals, and needs

DIRECT

INDIRECT
• I keep strong emotions like fear and anger hidden from the other party
• I use an emotionally calm style to get my point across
• I make sure my own feelings do not interfere with my interaction with the other party

• I express my deeper emotions like fear and anger
• I present my ideas with full emotion, even if those ideas are not as logically presented as they could have been
• I interact with the other party with emotional intensity
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EMOTIONALLY RESTRAINED  EMOTIONALLY EXPRESSIVE
Intercultural Conflict Style Model

DIRECT

Discussion Style

Accommodation Style

INDIRECT

Dynamic Style

Engagement Style

EMOTIONAL RESTRAINT

EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIVENESS
Strategies for Engaging in Difficult Dialogue & Giving the Gift of Feedback
Work on yourself first

- What is the issue? What is bothering you?
- What are your triggers and emotions?
- What are your assumptions?
- What will happen if you have this conversation? What will happen if you don’t?
What do you really want?

Positions vs. Interests

**Positions** are statements or demands framed as solutions.

**Interests** are broader than positions (needs, concerns, hopes) and are what each party needs for satisfaction or resolution.
INITIATE CONTACT: Ask for permission to give feedback.

• I have something I’d like to discuss with you that I think will help us work together more effectively.
• I’d like to talk about ___________ with you, but first I’d like to get your point of view.
• I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk?
• I need your help with something. Can we talk about it (soon)? If the person says, “Sure, let me get back to you,” follow up with them.
• I think we have different perceptions about ___________. I’d like to hear your thinking on this.
• I’d like to talk about ___________. I think we may have different ideas about how to ________________.
• I’d like to see if we might reach a better understanding about ___________. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well.
Initiate contact

Start with respect and care.
  - Be empathetic.

Share your story; maintain mutual respect.
  - Be assertive.
  - Stay calm and relaxed.
  - Remain focused on your message.

End with a question.
Move to action

1. Create a mutual agreement that is sustainable.
   - Be prepared to negotiate and aim for a win-win outcome.
2. Agree to objectives and timelines.
Effective Verbal and Non-Verbal Language

Speak clearly, avoid jargon, sit relaxed, make eye contact as appropriate, do not use confrontational language or body language. Use non-defensive language.
Non-Defensive Communication

Avoid judgment. Stick to the facts.

1. **State an observation. Focus on what you see and hear.**

   - You are always late.
     - The deadline for submission was 5pm, and you turned it in at 9pm.
   - You always criticize me.
     - I heard you say you thought I wasn’t smart enough.
   - You never participate in class.
     - I haven’t heard you share your thoughts in class discussions once this semester.
Non-Defensive Communication

2. Use “I” statements. Identify and describe your feelings.

You make me so angry!  
I feel frustrated and stuck.

You don’t care.  
I feel unsupported and lonely.

I’m upset.  
I’m worried and frightened.
IMPACT MODEL

INTENTION

BEHAVIOR

IMPACT

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

INTENDED CONSEQUENCES
CASE SCENARIO

You are in the early stages of writing your dissertation proposal and your advisor wants you to go in a different direction with your topic that is more in alignment with her own current research focus.

1. What is the issue here?
2. What are the costs and benefits of approaching this issue with your advisor?
3. What is your advisor’s position and interest, and what is yours?
4. What is your strategy?
RESOURCES


The Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory: http://www.icsinventory.com