

**DOCUMENTATION TEMPLATE FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS**

**PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL**

Meeting initiated by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_ Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Beginning Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Ending Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Attendee(s):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Purpose of Meeting:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Talking Points:

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_
- D. \_\_\_\_\_
- E. \_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up Items (who, what, when):

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_
- D. \_\_\_\_\_
- E. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Meeting Convener

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Attendee (s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Attendee (s)

# CIC 2013 DEPARTMENT AND DIVISION CHAIRS WORKSHOP

## *THE CHAIR AS LEADER AND FACULTY PEER*

### DEALING WITH DIFFICULT FACULTY COLLEAGUES: GUIDELINES FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

#### BEFORE:

1. Frame the issue as a problem to be resolved. What do you hope to accomplish?
2. Determine who should be part of the conversation. Do you need a third party mediator or witness? Does any other participant need a witness or advocate? (Note: If confidential matters are to be discussed, waivers may be required of third party participants). Make sure you are following any institutional policies and processes that may have bearing on the matter.
3. Gather any information you need through consultation (e.g., involved students, faculty, staff, HR director, your supervisor, college attorney) or information gathering (e.g., reviewing faculty, student and employee handbooks, obtaining data). Refrain from reaching conclusions based on information obtained (this is not a witch hunt) and be cognizant of privacy issues.
4. Clearly and succinctly communicate to the persons involved the purpose of the meeting. Even if someone else schedules the meeting, the initial communication should come from you. Do not be drawn into a conversation prior to the actual meeting, but allow time and space for questions and preparation.
5. Stage setting: Schedule sufficient time and the appropriate location. If any participant(s) feels you rushed the conversation, you will undermine your credibility as a leader who is willing to listen. With regard to location, sometimes it is best to find neutral ground rather than the participant(s)'s or your office, sometimes going to the other person's office is a sign of good will, sometimes it is viewed as an invasion!
6. Practice and reflect on the personal, interpersonal and leadership skills needed for these conversations: anger management, firm resolve, willingness to compromise and negotiate, active listening, affirming responses, ability to gently deliver constructive criticism, and problem solving.

#### DURING:

1. Opening: Express appreciation for attendance. State the purpose of the conversation and the problem you are trying to resolve or goal you hope to achieve. Be specific, clear and use data to support your statements.
2. Stay positive – believe a solution is possible, focus on the issue (not the person) and on the goal.
3. Identify agreed upon norms, values, goals (e.g., “I know you want what is best for our students,” “We agree that all students be held to the same academic expectations”).
4. Stay cool – the minute your emotions drive your responses, the conversation has just become more difficult and less likely to produce the desired goal. It is acceptable to acknowledge emotions (“I find this frustrating because...,” “I am sure this is upsetting for you”) but your cognitive responses must be in the driver's seat.
5. Saying less is better, don't be intimidated by silence. The other participant(s) needs time to think.
6. Let other participant(s) state his or her case – listen, listen, listen.
7. If you suspect the message is not being received, repeat and ask the other participant(s) to state it back to you. You cannot move forward if you are not on the same page.
8. Encourage the other participant(s) to generate possible solutions.

9. Once a possible solution has been identified and agreed upon, formulate a specific action plan - steps to achieve, who is responsible for what, timeframe, criteria to evaluate success, and follow-up.
10. If the conversation becomes heated and it appears nothing will be resolved, call a "stop." Reschedule the meeting for another time to allow tempers to cool and for you and the other participant(s) to reflect on how to move forward. Consult with others as needed to determine how best to proceed, whether it be a second conversation, inviting others into the conversation, using a mediator, or making a decision without further conversation.
11. Say thank you.

#### AFTER:

1. Immediately document the meeting (see handout): key issues raised, identified solutions and action plan (see number nine above).
2. Share documentation with all participant(s) and secure agreement that the document reflects his or her understanding of what occurred. Again express your appreciation for his or her participation, even if the conversation did not go as you hoped. If appropriate, share with others for documentation purposes (e.g., your supervisor, human resources, legal counsel). You may wish to do the latter first in order to obtain feedback.
3. Follow-up as needed, especially in terms of any commitments you made.
4. Reflect on the conversation by asking yourself the following questions:
  - a. What did I do well?
  - b. What could I have done better?
  - c. What additional resources or professional development would be helpful for handling similar situations in the future?
  - d. Did the conversation raise larger issues related to my position's responsibilities that I need to address (communication deficits, faculty development needs, resource needs, policy changes, etc.)?

#### ALWAYS:

1. Do not allow someone to refuse a conversation that you have requested, especially if you are in a supervisory role to that person.
2. Never try to have difficult conversations over email.
3. Do not delay a necessary conversation; however, make sure you have all the information you need before initiating.
4. Remember that your job is to provide the best educational experience possible for your students. Sometimes that means having these difficult conversations; keeping in mind that you are doing so for the good of the students makes it easier.

# 2013 DEPARTMENT AND DIVISION CHAIRS WORKSHOP

## Promoting Institutional Effectiveness Through Collaboration

### CASE STUDIES FOR DISCUSSION

#### A. Professor J.R. Bigguns

J.R. is a faculty member who has just been denied tenure. He is angry about the decision and holds you, his department chair/dean, responsible. He shares his anger with colleagues, some of whom become concerned when his commentary includes statements about his desire to show up in your office brandishing a handgun, in the hope that you would suffer a fatal relapse of a heart condition.

#### B. Paris and Nicole

Paris and Nicole co-teach a required majors course. Both are first year faculty; however, Paris taught a similar course for several years at a previous institution. At mid-semester, Paris complains to you that Nicole is lazy such that Nicole hasn't done any work for the course and is using all of Paris' materials without acknowledgement. Paris resents the time she has spent adapting the materials and the lack of assistance and initiative by Nicole. She says she has spoken to Nicole but nothing has changed. Paris asks you to resolve the issue.

#### C. Professor S.I. Seeum

Professor Seeum taught a course on social activism that inspires students to form a campus organization, complete with a public social networking site. As soon as the site was created, S.I. Seeum starts posting bold statements, espousing an extreme position on the issue and critiquing other posts drafted by students. Students stop posting to the site and come to you to complain about Seeum's conduct.

D. The Judge's Daughter

Class ended at 10:10 and at 10:20 your phone rings. The dean is on the phone informing you that Judge Hull (a member of the board) has just called to say that his daughter (one of your majors) feels unfairly treated by your visiting professor, who just awarded young Marjorie Hull a grade of D on the midterm exam. The dean closes by saying that he will need to brief the president on your resolution of this drama by the end of the day tomorrow

E. Professor I. Bullee

Professor Bullee and Professor Mild are both tenured members of your department who share little in common. When Professor Mild reluctantly assumed a leadership role within the department, Prof. Bullee began to organize meetings of sub-groups of the faculty that "happened" to exclude Professor Mild, to respond with hostile, public emails to any organizational communications from Prof. Mild, and to pepper you with critical emails questioning Prof. Mild's qualifications for the role and calling for his immediate removal. Each has asked to speak with you today about the behavior of the other.