Index Card Activity

Share a conflict/disagreement/challenging situation between a graduate student and faculty advisor or committee member that you would like to learn how to address or resolve.

You do NOT need to include your name on the card.
Setting Expectations and Resolving Conflicts with Your Advisor


The Graduate School
Michigan State University 2014
Why Focus on Graduate Students?

- Nationwide, only **60%** of students entering Ph.D. programs obtain that degree in 10 years. (Denecke, 2006)

- Differences between “early” and “late” leavers (Nerad and Miller, 1996)
  - Early leavers (within 2 years): unmet expectations
  - Late leavers (after 4 or more years): Faculty-student relationship, lack of departmental integration (Lovitts, 2001)
Basic Assumptions

- Many issues in graduate education are not negotiable (laws, contracts, requirements)
- The power differential between graduate students and faculty will always exist
- We should not expect 100% retention or completion
- Conflict itself is neither good nor bad – it’s how conflict is handled that is good or bad
Why Does the Faculty/Student Relationship Matter?

• Research mentor as a key individual
• Decades of continuous interactions via professional societies
• Careers depend on good letters of recommendation
• Faculty Power: stipends, work assignments, resources, advice
• Dependence on a small group of faculty (guidance committees)
• Limited flexibility within a small community
Common Issues of Conflict

• Decisions about publishing
• Requesting and providing feedback
• Selecting committee members/changes to committee
• Expectations for work hours/vacation
Strategies to Resolve Conflict

- Avoiding Strategy
- Accommodating Strategy
- Competing/Positional Strategy
- Collaborating/Interest-based Strategy
My Style activity

• What is your personal conflict style?
Seven Steps to Problem Solving

- Handout
Communication Barriers & Reactive (High Risk) Responses

• In conflict resolution, the first step is to understand the point of view of each person.

• The second step is helping the parties understand each other.

• This requires both listening and talking skills that are different from our typical ways of communicating.

Copyright 2013 Terrie R. McCants
Common Communication Pattern

In conflict, we tend to use a communicating pattern that goes somewhat like this, we:

1. Listen to someone's experience.
3. Stop listening.
4. End in conflict.
The Interest Based Approach....

- Focuses on the underlying interests and concerns of individuals
- Emphasizes finding options which satisfy multiple people and their interests
- Aims to retain and strengthen relationships

Context → Issue → Interests → Options → Solutions
The Importance of “Context”

- Departmental Regulations
- Relationships
- Expectations
- Assumptions
- Environment/Culture
- History
- Social

The Graduate School
Michigan State University 2014
Interests are needs that must be satisfied and values that must be preserved.

- Self-esteem
- Good working relationships
- Research excellence
- Financial security
- Reputation
“Easy to understand, hard to practice”...WHY?

- Trained to be solution-oriented
- Rewarded for defending our solutions well
- Against our “nature”?
- Strong emotions are triggered
- Can seem faster—immediate resolution
Anger

- Predisposes one to use a positional strategy.
- Impairs one’s ability to identify interests.
- Compromises one’s rational decision-making abilities.
Conflicts
are resolved by examining, in this order:

Context  Issue  Interests  Options  Solution
Expectations are made jointly explicit by examining, in this order,
Explicit Expectations

Context | Interests | Issue | Options | Decision

and then checking for **mutual understanding**
Implicit Expectations: Not stated and rarely understood.

- “What didn’t you understand about what I didn’t tell you?”

- “What part of my silence didn’t you understand?”
Explicit Expectations:

- Clearly Stated (verbally or in written form)
- Checked for understanding
- Unilaterally or jointly set
Video Vignettes Activity

• A Jump on the Journals
• Chapter 2 or 3
• Late Arrival
• Restocking the Committee

• Other issues
Communication strategies that foster the use of an interest-based approach

- Word choice
- Perspective-taking
- Body language
- Vocal delivery
- Timing and setting
- Self-reflection and constructive evaluation
Contact Information

Dr. Michael Herman
Graduate School Associate Dean
mherman@ksu.edu
532-6191
103 Fairchild Hall

Tonya Ricklefs
Doctoral Candidate
Riley Geary Mediation Program Coordinator
ricklefs@ksu.edu