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COLLEGIALITY AND CIVILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The words of the Evil Ones . . . The words of the
Unmentionable Times . . .

—*Ayn Rand (1995)*

A friend of mine, Mark, told me a story that is much more than an urban legend. Mark is from Texas. Why this fact is important will become crystal clear in roughly three minutes as you continue to read on. Mark was standing in line at the international airport in Singapore waiting to board an airplane to return to the United States. He was the sixth person in line. He heard, as he is sure everyone in the country of Singapore heard as well, a very large man screaming at a frail, young, and peaceful-looking counter person representing the airline. The man was yelling, “I’m from Texas” (I told you to be patient for the Texas connection). “In the U.S. of A. we do things the right way. If this was America I could upgrade without a question. But, by your inability to communicate coherently, it’s obvious you are not from America.” The young woman continued to smile and answered the man’s loud attack with kindness, gentleness, and a quiet demeanor. Finally the man stormed away. When Mark went to the counter for his seat assignment he felt obligated to apologize for two reasons: (1) he is American and (2) he is from Texas. He said that he was sorry for how abusive and demeaning the man was to her. She indicated it was quite all right. Mark stated how impressed he was with her calm deportment. He asked her if she had special training in dealing with difficult, loud, and

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obnoxious people. She replied that, no, she did not have training in this area. Mark asked her how she was able to be so pleasant under this nasty onslaught. She softly replied: “As he was screaming at me I kept thinking: he is flying to Columbia, South Carolina, . . . but his luggage is flying to . . . Colombia, South America.”

Although this aphorism is clearly not within the academic culture in which we work, the result of this man’s belligerent and demeaning behavior did evoke a somewhat predictable response: uncivil and nasty behavior elicits like behavior and like responses aimed toward the person who precipitated the encounter. This account is not an indictment of people from Texas. If the traveler had been civil and respectful to this person who was doing her job to the best of her ability, both he and his luggage would have arrived at the same destination. Civility and collegiality can also be strong allies in facilitating a department to arrive at the same destination. Yet we seem to be in short supply of civility these days.

What happened to civility? screamed the front page of *USA Today* (della Cava, 2009). Della Cava cites the following illustrative examples of this scorching headline:

- Kanye West—Suggested to Taylor Swift that Beyoncé should have won MTV’s Video Music Awards; stated in front of a live television audience of countless people.
- Serena Williams—Lost the U.S. Open semifinal match with an expletive-laced tirade whereby she threatened a woman judge with bodily harm; subsequently fined \$82,500.
- South Carolina Republican Representative Joe Wilson screaming, “You lie!” at President Obama during the State of the Union address.
- And in August 2010 Steven Slater, a Jet Blue flight attendant, after an on-board confrontation with an uncivil passenger, cursed out the passenger on the airplane’s

intercom and abruptly left the plane by sliding down the emergency chute. His actions evoked a visceral response from the public: he was cast as somewhat of a hero and became an overnight media icon. People throughout the country showed their support and understanding of his reaction to dealing with an uncivil and nasty person.

These stories are just an example of the incivility that seems to mark much of our interactions and relationships these days. Unfortunately, this is also true for the world of higher education.

Incivility in Higher Education

Many of us have seen how a toxic, uncivil, noncollegial faculty member can destroy a once-great department. Such a person can create an unhealthy and poisonous environment that deleteriously affects the entire department. Mean-spirited and uncivil people cause much damage to those they belittle, to the bystanders (students, staff, and department peers) who suffer the ripple effects, to the overall department performance, and to themselves. Faculty members who previously were stalwarts in the department simply disengage so that they are no longer targets to the malicious onslaught of nastiness perpetuated by this venomous person. A vicious cycle follows as faculty members retreat so they are not part and parcel to this person's nasty attacks, students change majors because the climate in the department is contaminated, the chair becomes frustrated in her attempt to stop this escalating asperity, and the administration is swept up in the detritus of this department. And in some cases, the president and provost declare fiscal emergency and the department is dissolved. This may seem an unlikely scenario but it has happened in the past in more or less the same sequence.

The academy does not have a glorious past in investing in a climate and culture of civility. Documented cases of abuse go back as far as Harvard in 1636 when the wealthy acted against

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the underprivileged and pitiable to prevent them from attending the university. Unfortunately, academe has not become a much more civil place to work in the intervening years.

Incivility is on the rise within institutions of higher education. This fact was unfortunately seen in the extreme in January 2010 when Amy Bishop brought a 9-millimeter handgun to a faculty meeting and allegedly shot six fellow faculty members, killing three. In another incident, Bruno Ullrich, associate professor at Bowling Green University, was suspended after making verbal threats to colleagues in February 2010. Although these are extreme cases, there are many noncollegial, uncivil, and nasty encounters that occur in the academy on a regular basis.

“Academe, with its rigid hierarchy in what is supposed to be a collaborative culture, is a natural incubator for conflict.”

—P. Fogg (2003)

I have spoken with countless department chairs, deans, and provosts who recount horror stories of how one cruel and venomous person spewing nastiness and malice in a vindictive manner caused a department to be dissolved.

Changing Dynamics of Higher Education

The landscape of higher education for the sixteen hundred public and two thousand private institutions of higher education is rapidly changing and constantly evolving (ostensibly on a daily basis). Fueled by economic uncertainty, universities struggle with the perfect storm of increased student demand coupled with diminishing resources. Administrative edicts of doing “more with less” are falling on fewer ears as the academy ages into retirement and vacant positions remain unfilled.

In addition, there are other factors, both positive and negative, that challenge universities and faculty members and can lead to an increasingly uncivil workplace. Here are some of the factors adding to an uncivil workplace in institutions of higher

education, which for ease of reading are placed in five distinct categories:

Students

- More diverse students
- Perception by faculty of less-qualified students
- Perception by faculty of less-motivated students

Faculty

- Professors' work subject to scrutiny and validation by their peers
- Academic freedom
- Shared governance
- Internal tension between faculty members who must choose between loyalty to profession or discipline and loyalty to their institution
- More rigorous promotion and tenure standards
- Ratcheting up of the workload
- More competition between departments for limited resources
- More competition among members of the same department to obtain resources
- Power imbalances—tenured versus nontenured faculty, full professor versus assistant professor, full-time faculty versus contingent faculty, and so on
- Changing face of the professoriate in terms of gender, age, and race
- The holy grail of higher education—AKA tenure
- Politics of specialization, which has hurt collaboration
- Overuse of, and overreliance on, e-mail as a mode of communication
- Eroding of faculty member benefits

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- Job insecurity—job market shrinking
- Reward structures—rewards individual accomplishments rather than collaboration
- Shift to online education
- Unionization of faculty members and staff on the rise

Administration

- Hierarchical bureaucratic model that has led to miscommunication and distrust between faculty and administration
- Liberal arts curriculum versus vocationalism
- More top-down decisions, which do more harm than good
- Bureau-pathology—universities are underled and overmanaged
- High turnover rates of deans, vice presidents, provosts, and presidents

Budget and income

- More money and resources available in the 1970s and 1980s for research than at the present time
- Dwindling department budgets
- Decreased support for higher education by the states
- Institutional operating funds that flow to intercollegiate athletic programs rather than academics

Social climate

- Mission creep—straying from the core values of teaching and service in favor of the market share
- Turmoil of the 1960s led to a decrease of a culture of civility.
- Expectations to do (much) more with (much) less
- Heightened campus politics

- Corporate culture influence
- Affirmative action controversy
- New campus culture wars
- Competition of the for-profit sector in higher education

Many of these factors are new to faculty; they may not have had to address anything like it in their entire career. Thus, they may trigger emotional anxiety and insecurities and strain personal relationships. This is relevant to new faculty members as well because they have the additional stress of meeting promotional and tenure standards. Responding to these stressors may, in turn, be causative factors that elicit noncollegial behavior on the part of an individual toward students, staff, peers, and colleagues.

These challenges have taken place within a relatively brief time period. Most institutions of higher education are not prepared to move quickly and proactively to meet these challenges head on. Institutions of higher education move in a ponderous manner. Colleagues have told me that their institutions of higher education, although not exactly a dystopia, conduct the business of education in a slow, ponderous way primarily because of its many layers of bureaucracy. Higher education has been characterized by bureau-pathology—it is overmanaged and underled! This description is offered as a note of caution when strategies are presented regarding how institutions of higher education can implement policies to facilitate a more collegial campus.

Institutions of higher education go about the business of education with the efficiency of the Department of Motor Vehicles and the compassion of the Internal Revenue Service.

Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2007) wrote that “challenging times require everyone’s efforts, the mutual commitment of all

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stakeholders to the well-being of their college or university. All members of the academic community must accept responsibility and work together to ensure high-quality, supportive academic workplaces where each member is respected and valued for his or her contributions” (p. 157).

We are truly at a crossroads in higher education and much of the systemic change falls on a position that continues to be ill-defined with incumbents who are ill-prepared to address myriad challenges they are facing daily: the department chair. Destined to be agents of that change by their central position in the organizational hierarchy, department chairs play a leadership role that few understand, yet all would agree is critical to the transformative revitalization of departments and to campuswide civility and collegiality.

The Importance of Civility in Higher Education

A campus culture that values collegiality and civility is among the most important contributions a university can make. Academic departments recognize the desirability of a collegial environment for faculty members, students, and professional employees and that such an environment should be maintained and strengthened throughout the university. In an environment enhanced by trust, respect, and transparency faculty members can be revived so that they can play an active and responsible role in academic matters. A collegial relationship is most effective when peers work together to carry out their duties and responsibilities in a professional manner.

Universities are one of the last bastions where people can share divergent ideas and thoughts. In fact, both shared governance and academic freedom are endemic to sharing knowledge—with students as well as with colleagues and peers. Collegiality does not impinge on the freedom of faculty members to make their views known.

Collegial or Noncollegial, You Make the Call

1. Dr. Thunder yells at faculty members and students.
2. Dr. Will Doitt is a pleasant person and a good teacher.
3. Dr. Nix Doitt refuses to advise students and does not serve on any department or university committees.
4. Dr. Tempest, the former chair of the department, declines to attend department meetings.
5. Dr. Fairly volunteers to serve on university-wide and department committees.
6. Dr. Carp chronically complains . . . about everything and everyone.
7. Dr. Chitchat spends hours gossiping.
8. Dr. Humility facilitates the functioning of all collaborating assignments in the department.
9. Dr. Contrary does not, and steadfastly refuses to, collaborate with colleagues.
10. Dr. Unbendable has developed a reputation for being inflexible.
11. Dr. Numb is insensitive to feelings of colleagues when commenting on their teaching, scholarship, or service.
12. Dr. Delightful always agrees to disagree without being disagreeable.
13. Dr. Catalyst offers emotional support to colleagues who are experiencing a personal tragedy.
14. Dr. Gracious responds promptly and politely to e-mail and phone voice messages from colleagues and students.
15. Dr. Forbearance is tolerant of opposing opinions of colleagues.
16. Dr. Browbeat is a bully to the nontenured colleagues in the department.

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Perhaps the person reading this book has made a determination that she would be elated to have faculty represented by numbers 2, 5, 8, 12, 13, 14, and 15 as colleagues. Conversely, she may have decided that faculty represented by numbers 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, and 16 are people to avoid at all costs. At first blush, the majority of people will have made the same determination. A more thorough synthesis and analysis, however, is required so that one can see beyond a one-sentence description to what may lie beneath. Therefore, what is taken as 100-percent factual may in reality constitute a verisimilitude. Therein lies a monumental dilemma that requires a great deal of cogitation to resolve. For example, perhaps Dr. Fairly (number 5, “volunteers to serve on university-wide and department committees”) refuses to keep office hours, misses his assigned classes, does not engage in scholarship, refuses to advise students, is a terrible teacher, and so on. And Dr. Thunder (number 1, “yells at faculty members and students”) may be a great teacher, who tirelessly advises students, is an eminent scholar, a very successful grant getter, and so on. To accurately ascertain the collegiality of a colleague, coming to uniformity and agreement—throughout the university as a whole—of what constitutes collegial as well as noncollegial behavior is a vital step in fostering a civil, collegial university. This will also address the legitimate concerns of faculty members who believe that collegiality can be used as a code word for “getting” someone they do not get along with. One example of this is when a powerful senior faculty member’s strong views on a subject may lead to “group think” for fear of reprisals against those who do not agree with him. Another example is when a nontenured person disagrees with a senior faculty member who will be evaluating the person for promotion

and tenure decision. It is self-evident that faculty, administrators, and staff need to be educated about the ramifications of uncivil and noncollegial behavior. This edification should focus on its context, its contents, and its consequences to the department and the university as a whole.

Collegiality Operationally Defined

There has been much deliberation and outright confusion concerning the term *collegiality*. The following represents acceptable definitions of the word:

- As a noun *collegiality* means cooperative interaction among colleagues.
- As an adjective *collegial* means collective responsibility shared by each member of a group of colleagues with minimal supervision from above.
- To the many detractors *collegiality* is a code word for a person who is overweight, smokes, dresses badly, has a different way of seeing things, and so on.
- *Collegial* behavior does not imply mindless conformity or absence of dissent. Rather, operationalizing collegiality as either a noun or an adjective enhances productive dissent, a basic tenet of the academy.

Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2007) wrote about the importance of collegiality and the fact that many people in the academy regularly refer to each other as colleagues. They wrote that “collegiality refers to opportunities for faculty members to feel that they belong to a mutually respected community of scholars who value each faculty member’s contributions to the institution and feel concern for their colleagues’ well-being” (p. 305).

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Yet this sense of belonging can be torn apart by a hostile, nasty person discharging venomous rancor on a continuous and unswerving basis.

What we strive for in the academy is a healthy and respectful sharing of ideas and concepts where people feel free to express their divergent and oftentimes conflicting views. In fact, many historians consider this concept to be one of the hallmarks of higher education. We most certainly do not want affable Babbitts mimicking everything that a senior faculty member subscribes to or thinks. What we do want is dissent—more specifically, positive dissent. One of the dominant characteristics of higher education is that professors have opportunities to express their ideas openly and unafraid of castigation in the form of petty reprisals of a personal nature. Discussions may be passionate. Discussions may become heated. But discussions should never become mean, nasty, or vindictive. Professionals may disagree, express their thoughts ardently, but never vindictively or personally.

Facilitating a culture of collegiality can be the synergetic agent of good relationships among members of a department—which all too often is severely missing. The clarion call can be agree to disagree without being disagreeable! It is clear that constructive arguments over ideas—but not personal arguments over ideas—drive greater performance and creativity. It is important for the chair as well as other faculty members in the department to deal with and, as stridently and quickly as necessary, address the malefactors on the staff. Contagion from uncivil and venomous faculty members can create significant short-term and long-term threats to the department. They become a ubiquitous presence that stifles the culture and productivity in a department. However, when people engage in disagreements over ideas in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, they develop stronger ideas and perform better. The end product is often superior to one person working alone in isolation. Working on a solution to a problem in an environment

built on trust, reverence, and civility can awaken people from their self-afflicted torpor and enable them to contribute a meaningful resolution to a quandary.

Several studies have documented the importance of maintaining civility in a department:

- Departments that function most effectively have demonstrated an ability to work collegially; they view themselves as a collective whole, a team (Pew Higher Education Roundtable, 1996).
- Climate, collegiality, and culture are more important to early career faculty than workload, money, and tenure clarity (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education, 2007).
- Misunderstood, disrespected, and disenfranchised faculty and administrators exit universities, most often citing conflict and miscommunication as the primary reasons (Kezar, 2000).
- Lack of civility in a department leads to faculty disengagement. Once productive faculty members who experience a negative, often traumatic, incident in the department or university simply extricate themselves from collegial discussions, campus and university service, department socials, and faculty mentoring (Cipriano, 2009b).
- In a study of department chairs at community colleges in Connecticut, the chairs reported their biggest challenge was a lack of collegiality (Cipriano, 2009a).

The Challenging and Complex Role of the Department Chair

I have been privileged to have been invited to many campuses to speak with department chairs and academic deans regarding

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the chair's role in facilitating a collegial department. When questioning the chairs and deans in attendance at the various campuses, fully 80 to 100 percent indicated that they had at least one noncollegial or uncivil faculty member in their department. I have spoken with countless chairs, deans and provosts who recount horror stories of how one venomous person spewing nastiness and malice in a vindictive manner caused a department to be dissolved. In one university on the East Coast, a department was dissolved and the dean and provost blamed the chair who couldn't "handle" the problem of two tenured faculty members who constantly spewed venom. Yet the dean and provost had totally abrogated their professional responsibilities to intervene on behalf of the students, professional staff, faculty members, and department chair.

The department chair is often placed in the untenable position of resolving conflicts between and among faculty members in their department. After all, the thinking goes, the chair is the front line in settling disputes. However, few department chairs have been adequately trained to know with any degree of exactitude and confidence how to dispel a problem before it degenerates into a long-standing feud that can render a department dysfunctional. Lucas and Associates (2000) wrote that "a leader is needed, one who can manage resistance and conflict so that the department is strengthened and faculty are revitalized rather than demoralized by the process. A courageous department chair who is knowledgeable about the steps to take and what to expect at each stage is the ideal person to launch such a change, which can transform a department" (p. 14).

The Lynchpin of a University

I have always viewed the department chair as a service position and the lynchpin of a university. Although chairs have always occupied a pivotal role in higher education, the position is often poorly defined, and deans, faculty members, students, and chairs

themselves may have conflicted expectations about the functions of the role. The “job description” of a department chair is ill-defined and ambiguous. In fact, most universities do not have a job description specifically for chairs. At best, many universities compile a laundry list of job duties and responsibilities that chairs are expected to perform. Suffice it to say that the chair’s role is changing. In fact the chair’s role has morphed into a large and varied multiplicity set of skills, not the least of which is managing and leading a civil, respectful, and collegial department. The road to a successful reign of chairing a department is highly reliant, if not totally dependent, on having the internal constituencies perform in a civil manner that optimally advances the mission of the department.

In addition, chairs function in a hybrid person-in-the-middle role. Chairs are not faculty members, *per se*. Most chairs do, however, consider themselves first and foremost faculty members rather than administrators. They are also not administrators in the true sense of the word. Their unique role is to serve as a liaison to bridge the gap between faculty and the administration. The role of a department chair has become more complex and, at the same time, more ambiguous.

It is true that the chair inhabits a vitally important role in the academy. It is also instructive to note that 75 percent of the chairs I have surveyed indicate they will go back on faculty when their term as chair ends. Department chairs are typically tenured faculty members who are appointed or elected into a position with no formal training in how to succeed in this managerial and leadership position.

The Power of the Chair

Department chairs set the tone and culture in their department.

A chair is short on both formal authority (granted from a higher level in the college or university) and positional authority (merely having a title). Chairs do, however, have personal

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*"A house divided against itself
cannot stand."*

—Abraham Lincoln,
speech, Springfield,
Illinois, June 16, 1858

*"The beatings will continue until
morale improves!"*

—bumper sticker

power that is achieved by the respect and confidence that faculty members place in them. The chair wears many hats, given the particular circumstances he is faced with. The one-size-fits-all chair position does not exist with any degree of regularity. A multitude of skills are needed on a habitual and consistent basis. In my twenty-eight years of serving as department chair, I have always (okay, the last four years anyway) understood that I had very limited carrots or sticks to persuade faculty members to support my advocacy in moving the department in a specific (usually new) direction. My persuasive powers were called into play on a regular, almost-daily basis. I have had good working relationships with strong and supportive academic deans as well as pusillanimous deans. My positive relationships with the deans and vice presidents I have served under have made my life as department chair much easier. A dean or vice president can make a decision and very seldom, if ever, meet face-to-face with the people directly affected by that decision. Conversely, the chair works with and interacts with people on a regular, everyday basis. This permits greater scrutiny, questioning, and opportunities for noncollegiality to permeate within the department. Faculty members will in all likelihood support a chair who is perceived as being competent, honest, and fair, has good interpersonal and communicative skills, is widely respected (throughout campus and in her professional field), has well-earned credibility, is universally known to be trustworthy, and treats all people with respect and dignity. When the chair's behavior leads faculty members and staff to distrust him, and he is not thought to be trustworthy, problems ensue: small problems become large ones and large problems become monumental and cause detritus that influences and infiltrates the entire department.

There are myriad challenges confronting higher education, not the least of which is the fact that 40 percent of the 595,000 full-time faculty members are fifty-five years of age or older. In addition, tenure (a reward for excellent service and possibly the major reward for displaying a high degree of collegiality) is being attacked from within and outside of institutions of higher education. The chair can serve for as little as three years or as long as a lifetime. The average chair, however, serves for six years. Twenty percent of chairs leave the position each year. A further variable that bears mentioning is the fact that more than 96 percent of chairs have not been trained to serve as chair and the position's varied roles have not been thoroughly explained to them (Cipriano and Riccardi, 2010b). Given the fact that the chair is called on to demonstrate a vast array of technical and personal skills, the jury is still out concerning what makes the most effective chairs. An enormously successful grant getter, a master teacher, or a great scholar does not necessarily have the requisite skill set to chair a department.

What Draws Someone to Chair a Department? To Make a Difference

Given that a chair's work is difficult and challenging and the chair is often not given adequate training—why would someone take on this role? Since 2007, a colleague and I have been surveying department chairs throughout the country to help define who they are, what they do, what they are expected to do, and ultimately, what drives them to want to be in their current position. In 2007, we surveyed a state university system on the past, present, and future aspirations of department chairs (Cipriano and Riccardi, 2008) and found that department chairs set their own expectations at almost unrealistic levels: a “master of all trades.” In 2008, we broadened the survey in scope and distance (Cipriano and Riccardi, 2010a), surveying chairs from across the country about their satisfaction level and reasons why they stay

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as department chairs. In this study, we were puzzled to find that more than 85 percent were either satisfied or very satisfied serving as chair, yet the number-one reason they remain in their position is that “no one else will do it.” Further qualitative research resulted in modifications to the 2008 survey instrument as focus groups with chairs brought to light that “making a difference” was a key factor in becoming a department chair. It is important to note that many of the skills listed (such as leadership and problem solving) are simply not innate but can be taught in some type of instructional setting such as a chair’s institute, where new chairs could be paired with internal mentors or, as Olwell (2009) suggests, individuals from outside the university (“coaches”). It is significant to repeat that more than 96 percent of those department chairs surveyed have never been trained or educated to serve in the critical role of department chair and almost 80 percent have never had formal management training.

However, it was directly through my personal discussions with current and former department chairs that something insightful came to light: this job was more than merely “money,” more than just “career aspirations,” and more than just a burden that no one else would shoulder. Like the master potter, chairs truly believed that they could mold their department into something meaningful, casting profound influence on faculty members and students, and ultimately shaping the legacy of their department.

A salient question that these data raise is, Given the empty tool set that many universities give to department chairs, how will they be able to, as Lucas and Associates (2000) write, “transform the department”? It is perhaps the adjective Lucas uses to describe department chairs—*courageous*—that provides us some insight into the qualities chairs must have in order to be successful. Such a quality is necessary to travel a road that is difficult at best, bridging the ever-widening gap between faculty and administration, and in these stress-filled times, many chairs

are looking to just survive, not necessarily thrive. University administration must also do its part; in this period of academic and financial challenges, department chairs must be empowered with the means to make the difference they long to make. To paraphrase Gandhi, department chairs must be the change they wish to see in their department.

The Power of Collegiality

People who are true colleagues are explicitly united in a common purpose and respectful of each other's abilities to work toward that purpose. Therefore, the word *collegiality* can connote respect for another's commitment to the common purpose, goals, and strategic plan of the department and an ability to work toward it in a nonbelligerent manner. Generally, a peer who is collegial collaborates with others, fosters teamwork, resolves conflict, proactively assists and actively involves others, builds bridges among colleagues, promotes rapport, shows patience and respect when working with colleagues, and makes decisions about the department's operational efficiency based on a professional assessment, not a personal judgment. The importance of collegiality cannot be overstated in view of the fact that departments' work depends heavily on consensus.

I have been on campuses where the morale can only be described as parlous. Administrators were jabbing chairs from the left and faculty members were jabbing from the right until most chairs resembled St. Sebastian (the human pincushion). However, in spite of the morose environment on campus, some departments were upbeat, engaging, and enthusiastically looking forward to coming to work! It is undeniable that department chairs play a significant role in how productive and collegial their department is. Don Chu (2006) wrote that "for the academy to function best, there should be an atmosphere of trust, respect, and collegiality. Ideas are the coin of the realm in the academy, and ideas are most freely exchanged when faculty and

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staff value each other and respect each other's opinions. In the best departments, the climate is one that invites expression, exploration, and inquiry. If there is one area that chairs most directly impact, it is their department's climate" (p. 30). It is worth reiterating that a chair who is characterized as trustworthy, an excellent communicator, is highly visible (he walks the halls rather than relies on e-mails to "speak" with faculty members, staff, and students), and is available, is transparent and consistent and fair in working with faculty, staff, and students is on his way to becoming an excellent leader as a chair.

Question: "If you were hiring a chair, please rank in order of priority the importance of each factor: demonstrated expertise in (1) teaching, (2) scholarship, (3) collegiality, (4) service."

* * *

Answer: "(1) collegiality, (2) teaching, (3) scholarship, (4) service. Collegiality is critical for a chair. From my perspective, I want a chair who is collegial but also a strong leader—both on campus and in the discipline." —William F. Williams, provost and vice president for academic affairs, Slippery Rock University

Answer: "(1) collegiality/civility, (2) teaching, (3) scholarship, (4) service." —Roger L. Coles, interim dean, Graduate Studies, Central Michigan University

Answer: "(1) collegiality and leadership, (2) teaching, (3) service, (4) research—and if not active then teach more." —Walter H. Gmelch, dean, School of Education, University of San Francisco

Answer: "I would rank the factors in priority order: 1. teaching, 2. collegiality, 3. scholarship, and 4. service. I think many search committees informally apply this concept—this is based

on comments such as, I don't know that I could work with this person or I would like to collaborate with this applicant, and so on." —Bruce W. Russell, dean, College of Business, Information, and Social Sciences, Slippery Rock University

Question: "In your role as dean, how important do you think it is to hire a department chair with a demonstrated behavior of being collegial and civil?"

* * *

Answer: "One of the most important roles of the department chair is to manage the culture of the department so that it is a civil and productive unit. As we know many times this task is like herding cats as faculty are independent thinkers and doers but the chair must bring faculty together as a collective—a team if possible!" —Walter H. Gmelch, dean, School of Education, University of San Francisco

How Chairs Can Facilitate a Positive Environment in Their Department

According to Chu (2006) department chairs can develop and maintain a productive atmosphere in their department by recognizing and implementing the following:

- Department climate is the chair's responsibility. Chairs are called on to represent the department, assign teaching schedules, evaluate faculty members, and control the budget. Therefore, the chair can make the department conducive to a productive entity or a place where no one wants to spend time.

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- Chairs can have a positive effect on the department environment by modeling the characteristics they wish their faculty members, staff, and students to exhibit. Chairs are symbolic leaders. They must treat everyone with respect and dignity if they expect the same from their colleagues. Do not fall into the “do as I say not as I do” syndrome.
- The chair position is a service position. Chairs serve the faculty so that faculty in turn can serve their students. The most important ingredient of an institution of higher education is the intellectual capital of its faculty. Therefore, faculty members must be supported, especially by the department chair who works closely with faculty members on a daily basis.
- Chairs need to be knowledgeable and competent. Chairs who are unable to perform the countless tasks associated with the position quickly poison the atmosphere in the department. Chairs are required to perform many tasks that have fixed deadlines.
- The chair’s work should be as transparent as possible. Information in the department, with the exception of privileged personnel matters, should be regularly shared. Budget, teaching schedule, advisee lists, short-term and long-range planning, mission statements, and so on should be translucent. Secrecy directly spoils the morale in a department.
- Chairs should see themselves as equal. Chairs need to see and deport themselves as no better or worse than other faculty members. Note that the chair serves an average of six years. He will most likely return to faculty when his turn as chair expires. Also, great ideas are not limited to one person. Chairs who consistently convey that they are equal to faculty will gain the trust and respect of their colleagues.
- Chairs must be objective. We all have our personal biases. The chair must not allow her personal interpretations to

take over the department. The chair should listen to all sides, whether or not they are in concert with her beliefs, weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each side, and publicly convey the reasons the decision was made.

- Chairs must be credible. When a chair does what he says he will do, he is thought to be credible. Faculty members support the chair because he can be trusted to follow through on his promises.
- Chairs must respect all members of the department. Free department discourse can take place only in an environment built on trust and respect. The chair does set the tone. She must model respect for all individuals, both junior and senior faculty members, those who have a point of view similar to hers and those who do not, the staff, students, student workers, and so on.
- Chairs must be humble. Chairs who take credit for every success in the department destroy the climate in the department. Humility should be practiced with exactitude!
- Department climate is bolstered by demonstrations of appreciation for jobs well done. Public recognition should be part and parcel of a good department. Successes should be celebrated through announcements at meetings, published in department newsletters, e-mails, and in letters congratulating the accomplishment. A word of caution: do not overdue this and make a public disclosure for trivial things: "It's great that Dr. Thompson met her class two times in a row."
- Chairs need to protect the confidentiality of the privileged information they receive. People's private information must be treated with the greatest respect. A chair can lose his credibility and trustworthiness if confidential information is shared with other people.

Problem

You are the chair of a department consisting of thirteen full-time faculty members. Dr. Latest is a new tenure-track assistant professor in your department. He began working in your department during the fall semester. He is a very fine and popular teacher; students acknowledge that he cares about them and he is very well prepared and engaging in his classes. You know that he devotes a great deal of time preparing to teach his classes. Dr. Latest has a postdoctorate in research and measurements from a highly acclaimed university.

Dr. Ancient is a tenured full professor who has been in the department for thirty-seven years. He currently teaches a graduate research class, the same class he has taught for the past twenty-four years. The course is scheduled to be taught in the spring semester. His teaching evaluations from students are terrible. He is very defensive when you show him the student evaluations. His response is, "These students are not prepared for graduate school. They are lazy, unmotivated, and do not want to learn." You and other members in the department want Dr. Latest to teach this very important core required class. You realize that Dr. Latest will do a far superior job than Dr. Ancient in teaching this graduate course in research. However, you are fearful that if you make this decision Dr. Ancient will become uncivil, wreak havoc in the department, and make everyone's life miserable. More pointedly, you recognize that Dr. Latest's tenure decision could be compromised: Dr. Ancient chairs the department evaluation committee. He is also very friendly with a number of people serving on the university-wide tenure and promotion committee. What will you do?

- Tell Dr. Ancient that Dr. Latest will be teaching the course next semester.

- Have Dr. Ancient and Dr. Latest work it out between the two of them.
- Get the dean to make the decision.
- Tell Dr. Latest that Dr. Ancient has outlived his usefulness to the department, he is a bad teacher, but “it’s his course to teach.”
- Hold a department meeting whereby all the faculty advocate for Dr. Latest to teach the course.

Possible Solution

You do not want to do anything to publicly embarrass Dr. Ancient. Meet individually with him and indicate how important his legacy is at the university and in the department. As he is the senior faculty member in the department, ask him to serve as a mentor to Dr. Latest, helping him to teach effectively, conduct research, make presentations at conferences, and publish his research. Recommend that Dr. Latest co-teach the graduate research course with him next semester.

Resources

The following sources address the department chair’s roles and responsibilities:

- *The Essential Department Chair* (Buller, 2006, pp. 50–55). Chapter Eight, “Promoting Collegiality,” presents a cursory overview of the importance of collegiality. A department code of conflict is also provided.
- *The Department Chair Primer: Leading and Managing Academic Departments* (Chu, 2006, pp. 29–33). Chapter Five, “Department Climate,” describes the chair’s responsibilities in promoting a positive environment in his or her department.

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- “What Is Unique About Chairs? A Continuing Exploration” (Cipriano and Riccardi, 2010c). This article reports the results of a three-year study of the responses of 727 department chairs across the country. The reader will find demographic information concerning chairs (gender, highest degree held, academic rank, and so on), personal information (degree of satisfaction in serving as chair, plans after term as chair ends, and so on), perception of the skills and competencies needed to function effectively as chair, and the tasks chairs need to perform that are deemed pleasant or unpleasant.
- *Work and Peace in Academe* (Coffman, 2005). This book assesses the nature of conflict within institutions of higher education and describes practical ways to resolve nonproductive disputes. Best practices in conflict management are presented.
- *Rethinking Faculty Work: Higher Education’s Strategic Imperative* (Gappa, Austin, and Trice, 2007). This book articulates the profound challenges that higher education is facing. Chapter Five discusses collegiality and provides strategies that foster collegiality.
- *The Department Chair as Academic Leader* (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, and Tucker, 1999). Although this book was written in 1999, it is still relevant today. The authors identify roles and responsibilities of department chairs as well as important functional topics. The book is organized into four parts: (1) roles and responsibilities, (2) the department and its people, (3) the department and its operations, and (4) the department and the university. All parts of the text refer to the department chair.
- *Faculty Incivility* (Twale and De Luca, 2008). This book provides a perspective on incivility and bullying in institutions of higher education. The history of incivility in higher education is explored, along with the major causes of

incivility. The third and final part of the text offers strategic suggestions for dealing with incivility, aggression, bullying, and mobbing in the academic workplace.

Conclusion

Our society seems to be in short supply of civility these days. Sadly, this is also true for the world of higher education. A campus culture that values collegiality and civility is among the most important contributions a university can make. A collegial relationship is most effective when peers work together to carry out their duties and responsibilities in a professional and respectful manner. A vital first step in fostering a civil, collegial university is to determine objectively what constitutes collegial as well as noncollegial behavior. The chair is often called on to resolve a conflict in her department. Constructive arguments over ideas—but not personal arguments—drive greater performance and creativity. Faculty members will support a chair who is perceived as being competent, honest, and fair; has good interpersonal and communication skills; is respected; has credibility; is trustworthy; and treats all people with respect and dignity.

Chapter Two provides the reader with useful documents that can be used to enhance collegiality in the department. Included are seven questions designed to measure collegiality that search committees can ask a prospective faculty member during a job interview.

