

Fostering Inclusive Departmental Climates

Case Studies for Chair Workshops

Case Study 1

Characters:

Steve (department chair & professor)

Bruce (associate professor)

Chet (assistant professor)

Sam (assistant professor)

Maria (assistant professor)

***Narrator:** The scene is a department faculty meeting, a few minutes before the meeting is set to begin. The room is empty except for the department chair, Steve, who is fiddling with the projector.*

Enter Bruce.

Steve: Hey Bruce, great to see you. How was your trip to the conference?

Bruce: Great trip, my session was well attended with lots of interest and questions. I was invited to give an invited talk at the national meeting next year!

Steve: Terrific! I'll get communications to contact you and work up an article on that.

***Narrator:** Bruce and Steve continue to chat about their university's recent football victory.*

Enter Maria. Maria is in her second year on the faculty. Like Bruce, she recently returned from the conference, where she gave a talk. Also, Maria just received notification that her grant proposal was successful!

Maria looks around to say hi but isn't noticed since Bruce and Steve are in conversation. Maria sits down.

Enter Chet and Sam, in deep conversation.

Chet: I'm just having such a challenge with this class, the students aren't doing the readings and grades on the first exam were dismal.

Sam: Yes, I'm having a similar problem. I suppose that the pandemic has affected all of us, including the students. My students want all the lectures recorded and available, so they don't have to come to class. It's a real challenge.

***Narrator:** Steve and Bruce break off their conversation to welcome Sam and Chet.*

Steve to Chet and Sam: Great to see you both. Sam, I saw your successful grant notification, and your new proposal - terrific. Great to see young faculty thriving so well.

***Narrator:** Several others enter and chat among themselves and take their seats.*

Steve: In the interest of time, I'm going to start the meeting now. . . .

Narrator: End Scene

Discussion Guide:

1. What did you notice about this scenario?
2. What might the chair (Steve) have done better in this scenario?
3. How can the chair (and the faculty) work to change the pattern of interactions, and the tone of these interactions, among faculty?
4. Imagine that the venue had been a department seminar with graduate students present. The department chair introduces several of the faculty to the speaker, but not Maria. What might the effect be on the students, especially Maria's students?

Case Study 2

Characters:

Sarah (*department chair & professor*)

Seth (*associate professor*)

Tom (*professor*)

Megan (*associate professor*)

Michael (*professor*)

Helen (*assistant professor*)

Narrator: *The scene is an annual faculty retreat. All departmental faculty (including Helen) are present, and the discussion topic is the faculty hiring strategy for the next several years.*

Seth: We've had several faculty departures recently in area X. We've had a hard time covering our core courses, and we haven't been able to offer an elective in their subfield the last few years. Students are complaining. I think we should prioritize that area for the next one or two hires.

Tom: That doesn't make sense, we're a research university and research should drive our hiring agenda. If we want to bring in big grants we need to hire in an up-and-coming field. It will attract more students, too.

Sarah: These are both good points, let's keep the discussion going. Does anyone else have thoughts?

Michael: Are we getting an extra faculty line this year? We made that diversity hire as a favor to the dean two years ago. It's not fair for it to count against us.

Narrator: *Awkward pause*

Sarah: Hmm, the dean hasn't mentioned anything like that. Times are tough, I wouldn't count on it.

Megan: Let's not refer to Helen as "a diversity hire." We were lucky to get her. The dean did us a favor recruiting her. She's only been here a year and she's already published two major papers and the students love her. How does that "count against us"?

Sarah: Yes, of course, we are thrilled to have Helen with us. Getting back to the matter at hand, does anyone else have thoughts about our upcoming hire?

Michael: Sarah, you should push the dean hard for an extra hire this year. If you don't try, we don't stand a chance.

Narrator: *The conversation continues....*

End Scene

Discussion Guide:

1. What, if anything, went wrong here?

2. How do you think Helen felt during this exchange?
3. What could/should the chair have done differently?
4. Would your department address disrespectful behavior of this sort? How?