

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION REPORT

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Regional Meetings Benefit Campus Conflict Resolution Efforts

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Regional meetings are on the increase among campus conflict resolvers, with a variety of one-day "drive-in" conferences and seminars cropping up across North America. Recent relevant events include sessions hosted by the City University of New York (CUNY) Dispute Resolution Consortium, the Ottawa-area Symposium on Conflict Resolution, the Georgia State University System network, the University of California system, and other more informal gatherings occurring in North Carolina, Eastern Pennsylvania, California and elsewhere. And as the number and variety of campus-based conflict resolution programs grows, so too do the opportunities for regional collaboration and information sharing.

The gatherings have taken a variety of formats and addressed various audiences, demonstrating once again the creativity of problem solvers everywhere. What the sessions share in common is a relatively convenient, time limited opportunity for busy folks to get together, build new relationships, nurture existing networks, and share best practices and lessons from experience. A few examples of successful regional meetings are provided below as food for thought.

In March, Temple University hosted a one-day event in Philadelphia celebrating the 5-year anniversary of their Conflict Education Resource Team. The conference focused on exploring new horizons for the peaceful resolution of campus conflicts. Among the many workshops at the conference were sessions on Stuck Conversations and the Power of Dialogue, by the director of training at the Public Conversations Project in Boston, and a number of workshops focusing on transformative mediation skills including a workshop given by "local talent" Joseph P. Folger, co-author of *The Promise of Mediation*, which received the 1995 Annual Book Award from the International Association of Conflict Management.

In California this past May UC Davis hosted a statewide Mediation Conference on the theme "Employment Related Mediation in Higher Education and Public Employment." The conference addressed the current state of mediation in higher education and public employment both locally and nationally. Breakout sessions included discussion and demonstrations of various mediation models and techniques used in employment mediation. Cosponsors of the event included the California Center for Public Dispute Resolution, the State Personnel

Board, and University of California, Office of the President. At the this event, the audience learned more about a study done by the Task Force on Faculty/Staff Partnership that was formed jointly in January 1999 by the Council of University of California Staff Assemblies (CUCSA) and the Academic Council of the systemwide Academic Senate. Its charge was to identify and share campus best practices that foster positive communications and cooperation between faculty and staff; to identify training opportunities for faculty and staff that support relationship building and partnership; and to describe the resources available to both faculty and staff for resolving conflicts. Their work included a survey of all the existing conflict resolution services within the UC system, which is now available in a downloadable report.

In Michigan, Wayne State University offered a one-day seminar designed to support faculty and staff teaching academic courses in the areas of Conflict Management or Conflict Studies broadly defined. It was designed as a working session to help faculty develop new and/or refine older courses in light of current knowledge. The program provided a hands-on review a broad range of available resources (videos, textbooks, web-based resources) for teaching conflict resolution concepts; explored best practices in the teaching techniques (role-plays, constructive controversy, case analysis, etc.); reviewed a range of syllabi and some sample boilerplate language that has been used successfully by others in outlining their courses; and discussed issues related to student assessment and grading.

In New York, back in November of 1998, the CUNY Dispute Resolution Consortium (CUNY DRC) cosponsored a one day conference with The Abraham Fund entitled "The Role of the University in Fostering Interethnic Coexistence on Campuses, in Communities and Beyond." The conference featured a keynote speaker, a plenary session with leading local and national coexistence and dispute resolution practitioners and scholars, workshops highlighting diverse aspects of interethnic coexistence, and a town meeting focusing on "next steps" for those involved in coexistence work. The conference drew from a then new book entitled the Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence edited by Dr. Eugene Weiner that included a chapter explaining the successful campus Town Meetings model developed at John Jay College in light of student protests involving takeovers of campus buildings. This past year the CUNY DRC followed up this conference with a one-day student focused event on the same theme.

These examples are only illustrative of what is possible. While ombuds programs have been around since the late 1960s, and campus mediation programs has existed since 1980, a growing wave of interest in campus dispute resolution means that new conflict resolution projects are emerging every year. At this stage in the field's growth, we have enough "oldtimers" around to offer some truly sage advice, and we have plenty of new or refurbished programs looking for ideas and support as they get underway. Clearly the regional meeting model is an important approach to supporting the growth of campus conflict resolution, and it is one we all should consider encouraging

into the future. Perhaps it's even time to develop speaker's bureaus and other more formal methods to nurture regional collaboration. Think regionally, practice locally? It certainly can't hurt.