ETHICAL ISSUES IN FACULTY CONFLICT

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PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this paper is to explore issues of faculty conflict within higher education organizations by 1) reviewing pertinent research literature; 2) providing a set of observations of faculty conflict on one campus in the form of a descriptive typology; and 3) musing on implications of our observations for ethicists and ethics-across-the-curriculum programs in colleges and universities.[1] Our study of faculty conflict suggests possible academic and practical issues for scholars interested in ethical literacy within organizations of higher education. We assume that the roles of ethicists and ethics-across-the-curriculum programs in organizations are driven by negotiable social scripts and thus may be informed by ethical principles themselves.

We do not address all possible sources of conflict in the academic life of a college campus. Rather, we focus on conflict between and among faculty members on the campus of one small liberal arts college. We make no judgments about whether conflict among faculty members is ethical or unethical, good or bad, nor do we attempt to resolve the conflicts. Nor do we address conflict resolution in its strictest legal sense. We do examine the dimensions and possible range of consequences of conflict among faculty, recognizing that some conflicts may be more destructive than others to the community. Furthermore, we examine the role of ethics-across-the-curriculum programs in developing some ethical literacy among members of the faculty, thereby offering a tool for managing conflict. We posit that such ethical literacy among faculty may provide insights into the concepts and language of ethics, which, when used as behavioral and organizational decision-making guidelines, might create positive academic, personal, and institutional outcomes.

It is overly simplistic to point out the importance and value of some forms of conflict to the academic organization. By "conflict" in this case, we mean a state of opposition or difference in ideas for the sake of some

modest refinement in intellectual thought. Science, philosophy, humanities, the arts — all develop, we assume, through a civil and respectful exchange of ideas and especially through the open and honest debate of those ideas. We acknowledge that some forms of conflict among faculty are inevitable and institutionalized within the social constructions of the academy, and so we recognize that some forms of conflict become the engines that drive us toward intellectual clarity. One might contend that we are really able to arrive at intellectual understanding through collaboration as much as, if not more than, through conflict. Our response to this observation is that in the case of intellectual discourse in higher education, the distinction between collaboration and conflict is false, since both operate within an over-arching principle of a search for truth, beauty, justice and equality. When we knowingly and willingly engage in an exchange of conflicting ideas, we do so in a spirit of collaboration that affirms the value of passion for dispassionate scholarship. And if academic collaboration were reduced to consensus for its own sake and the avoidance of struggles associated with the exchange of different and perhaps conflicting ideas, then the traditional essence of the academic community would be fundamentally altered in ways that may be more commensurate with dogmatic expressions of intellectual orthodoxies.

There are many other sources of conflict in academic communities besides those coming from intellectual exchanges. We recognize and acknowledge the importance of the substantial body of literature that demonstrates power as a central variable in institutional decision-making processes.[2] Power differentials based on race, class, and gender and their intersections certainly manifest in many ways and often lead to the continued advantage of those already privileged and to the entrenched disadvantage of those without a full share in institutional privilege. This study, however, addresses observed instances of faculty conflict as it is experienced in everyday life on one campus. We do not deny the possibility that race, class, and gender are sources for the kinds of faculty conflict observed. Rather, we set aside these concerns in favor of responding to types of conflict seen on our campus. Faculty-student, faculty-administrator, faculty-registrar's office staff, faculty-athletic staff, and faculty-student development staff are but a few combinations of people in an academic organization who may have dissimilar organizational interests and find themselves in conflict. Such all-too-human qualities as personality conflicts, extreme self-interest, a high need for control or power, jealousy, spite, or revenge may disrupt our professional and personal lives and even the civil functioning of our academic community. One chal-

lenge, then, is to transcend the reality and possibility of organizationally corrosive qualities resulting from conflict for the sake of achieving the more constructive and contributory goals related to the search for truth that drives our disciplines and our passion for our disciplines.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing in her memoir *A Life in School*, literary critic Jane Tompkins reflects on both the nature of and reactions to conflict in institutions of higher education. In an imaginary postcard to Ford Foundation Scholars at Eckerd College, she writes

> A friend of mine whose marriage was breaking up told me that how you deal with the problems that come up in a relation-ship is more important than what the problems are. It's the same in intellectual life. But we, your professors, do not know how to conduct ourselves when there is real conflict, inside the classroom or out. We fumble around. Sometimes we tear each other apart, or, afraid of doing that, we avoid speaking. I for one could use some instruction in how to disagree fruitfully. And in how to listen constructively to an opponent.[3]

Conflict, real or otherwise, is a part of life in an intellectual community. As we begin to examine the ethical issues embedded in the conflicts of intellectual life, we begin by posing several questions. Is conflict always negative? Do we as members of that community truly know how to conduct ourselves when there is conflict? What happens to the life of that intellectual community when we avoid speaking, whether to avoid conflict or to avoid tearing each other apart? And how do we resolve conflict in ways that preserve the vitality of the intellectual community?

A cursory search of the archives of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reveals the prevalence of conflict in academic life. A search of back issues from September 1989 through September 2004, using "conflict" as the keyword, produces 1,986 entries. Likewise, a search of *Chronicle* archives using "civility" as the keyword produces a list of 172 articles in a similar time period. Not all of the articles listed deal with issues of faculty conflict.[4] Some articles deal specifically with conflict in academe related to world events. Both Judith Rodin, former president of the University of Pennsylvania, and Amitai Etzioni, professor of sociology and Director of the Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies at Georgetown University, wrote in the *Chronicle Review* of November 1, 2002, about the ways in

which college and university campuses deal with issues related to Arab-Palestinian questions.[5] Both *Peer Review* and *Liberal Education*, publications of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, include articles that address conflict in its various forms.[6] Similarly, publications intended for department chairs present discussions of root causes of faculty conflict and offer suggestions for dealing with those conflicts in ways that will ensure continued departmental vitality.

A consideration of models of learning reveals that conflict is essential to and an integral part of the processes of teaching and learning. Parker Palmer, writing in *Change,* describes knowing and learning as communal acts, requiring a continuous cycle of discussion, disagreement, and consensus over what has been seen and what it means. Conflict in a learning community serves as a sort of system of checks and balances, checking, correcting, and enlarging the knowledge of individuals by drawing on the collective knowledge of the group.[7] Diana Chapman Walsh, in her inaugural address as president of Wellesley College, likens learning to narrative, or story. Narratives forge identities and organize struggle, contest, and change. Narratives likewise presuppose, challenge, and remake the moral order from which our lives derive their shape and meaning. Like Palmer, Walsh suggests that learning and teaching require a community in which individual narratives can be told and heard, a community in which conflict is inevitable. She says,

> If we persist at this work [achieving higher education's goal of becoming more accessible, democratic, and diversified] honestly and well — if we open our hearts and minds to stories of anger, frustration, exclusion, and pain — then we can be certain that collisions will occur, and disputes will erupt.[8]

It is essential, however, to distinguish conflict from competition. The fourth edition of the American Heritage dictionary defines conflict as open fighting, or a state of disharmony between incompatible or antithetical persons, ideas, or interests. In literary terms, conflict is the opposition between characters or forces in a work of drama or fiction; conflict often motivates or shapes the action of the plot. Competition, on the other hand, is defined as rivalry, the act of competing, often for profit or a prize. In ecological terms, competition is the simultaneous demand by two or more organisms for the same limited environmental resources, such as living space, nutrients, or light. Conflict is open and public, often noisy, while competition is silent and private. Conflict allows for commu-

nal gain, as the whole group wins by growing, while competition is a zero-sum game, played by individuals for their own gain.

The roots of conflict — arising over curriculum, affirmative action, hiring and tenure policies, faculty governance, and campus perks — are found in individual circumstances, institutional contexts, and social environments. The intellectual community is made up of a collection of intense men and women, teaching and learning what they love — the power of ideas. Often people on both sides feel simultaneously threatened and justified in their stances. Furthermore, the academic community attracts — and rewards — such traits as isolation and competitiveness.[9]

Another of the roots of conflict lies in the concept of "career anchors" developed by Edgar Schein and discussed by Sandra I. Cheldelin in her study of faculty members' resistance to change.[10] These anchors "combine our sense of competence, our orientation toward our work, and the values that we are most reticent to relinquish."[11] According to Schein, "most professionals are guided by one dominant anchor that 'hooks' us to what is important, highly valued, and a significant part of our self-images."[12] One of the eight career anchors identified by Schein is that of autonomy/independence, an anchor strongly supported by the "socialization process of becoming an academic professional."[13]

Institutional contexts often foster conflict, and decreasing resources — and/or desire for control of available resources — exacerbate latent conflicts. Generational tensions between academic "haves" and "have-nots" escalate in the face of discrepancies, real or perceived, in salaries, power, or people. In some instances, administrators confronting multiple and conflicting demands on limited resources focus on efficiency at the expense of effectiveness, restrict communication networks, and reduce the number of participants in decision-making processes — all strategies that create new sources of tension in the campus community.[14]

The very principles of maintaining order and community in the college or university are often a source of conflict. Historically, the polity of the college or university is a mixture of religious calling, with its elements of self-imposed discipline and personal freedom and collegiality, interpreted as a company of equals whose political center is civility and mutual influence; elements of formal bureaucracy; and a system of dual governance that is at once hierarchical, with administrators retaining final authority, and democratic, with administrators delegating widely to and/or consulting with faculty, staff, alumni, and students. Issues of power, control, and vulnerability often surface in this hierarchical structure, and

open conflict may erupt.[15] Often these principles are in conflict with each other.[16]

The intellectual community is neither isolated from nor immune to the same societal forces that produce conflict in the civic community. Differing interests that divide society produce a series of confrontations over such difficult issues as the allocation of dwindling resources. Postmodern society is characterized by deep-seated skepticism, perverse relativism, and the lack of a unifying culture or canon, hence the "Culture Wars" of the intellectual community. In addition, identity politics, in academic settings as well as in the public sphere, challenge any coherent civic purpose.[17] Cheldelin, describing sources of conflict in academe, notes that the changing nature of the membership of the academy lies at the root of some persistent conflicts. She says, "The increasingly diverse membership in departments will at some point likely surface society's struggles with deeply rooted and enduring sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia."[18]

Conflict, whether in intellectual, business, or civic communities, may have both negative and positive consequences. On the one hand, conflict is often unproductive, diminishing all parties involved. The organizational climate of the college or university may be affected and its organizational cohesiveness may diminish along with commitment of individuals to the organization. The role of the political strength of various constituencies as a factor in resource allocation may increase. At its worst, conflict may lead the parties involved to implode personally or to explode professionally.[19] The results of such implosions or explosions may include denials of tenure or promotion; the fragmentation or collapse of departments, or in extreme cases, campus violence.

On the other hand, dealing appropriately with conflict can bring out people's creativity, energy, and motivation.[20] Direct management of faculty engaged in joint research or writing projects or in team-teaching may result in more productivity and the possibility of future working relationships.[21] If we respond to conflict appropriately, it can be transformative. Furthermore, how we choose to resolve conflict may result in a "teachable moment" for our students.[22]

As Jane Tompkins points out, we in academe often go to great lengths to avoid the conflict that is clearly inevitable in our community. She hints at the consequences of doing so: "Sometimes we tear each other apart, or afraid of doing that, we avoid speaking."[23] Faculty meetings are sometimes characterized by what Alvin Snider calls "awkward

silence and polite shuffling, instead of lively debate of the issues at hand. We practice an institutionalized 'civility' in the restricted sense of 'making nice,' which ultimately means bending at the knee in a kind of academic 'courtiership,' embracing compulsory niceness."[24] In such circumstances, reserve and intellectual timidity often masquerade as good manners.

If, like Tompkins, we need instruction in how to disagree fruitfully, how do we go about learning to do so? An examination of what conflict resolution is *not* leads to lessons in conflict management from the worlds of business and politics, as well as an examination of the relationship between conflict and liberal education and of value-based decision-making as a means of dealing with conflict in the intellectual community. As Laura Nader points out, in an essay entitled "Harmony Coerced is Freedom Denied," conflict resolution is not "coercive harmony" resulting from dispute resolution practices that trade justice for harmony and lead us to confuse all criticism with being negative.[25] As Nader demonstrates, coercive harmony can stifle dissent for a time, but if dissent is bottled up too tightly for too long, it can and will explode — or implode.

"On Collegiality as a Criterion for Faculty Evaluation," a statement approved in November 1999 by the American Association of University Professors Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure, strongly advises against using "collegiality" as a means of avoiding conflict. The AAUP statement notes that a number of institutions have added 'collegiality" as a fourth criterion for faculty evaluation but takes the position that "collegiality" is not a capacity that can — or should — be assessed separately. Rather, in the view of the AAUP, "collegiality" is a quality whose value is expressed through successful execution of the other three criteria for evaluation, teaching, scholarship, and service. The AAUP statement notes that "collegiality" is not infrequently associated with ensuring homogeneity among the faculty and has the potential to threaten academic freedom, one of the principles of which is to protect a faculty member's right to dissent from the opinions of both administrators and colleagues. "Collegiality" may be confused with expectations of "enthusiasm," "dedication," and constructive attitudes" that "foster harmony," or even with excessive deference to administrative or faculty decisions where reasoned discussion may be more appropriate. The AAUP statement further notes that "collegiality" as a criterion for evaluation has the potential to stifle faculty debate and discussion. In the words of the AAUP,

> Criticism and opposition do not necessarily conflict with collegiality. Gadflies, critics of institutional practices or collegial

norms, even the occasional malcontent, have all been known to play an invaluable and constructive role in the life of academic departments and institutions.[26]

Just as conflict resolution is neither coercive harmony nor collegiality in its most restricted sense, neither is it employing euphemisms to deliver unfavorable judgments, as we might be tempted to do when writing letters of recommendation. Nor is conflict resolution resorting to what Walsh describes as "the silence of cowering individualism — a frightened retreat from opposition as an organized 'we' into a self-absorbed and radically isolated 'me.'"[27]

As Tompkins notes, we professors often do not know how to conduct ourselves when there is real conflict. We are frequently not acquainted with the literature of negotiation that is required reading in business and politics, a literature that makes it clear that negotiation is not just about winning, nor is it just about power. The literature of negotiation, like William Ury's *Getting Past No*, explains how to separate people from problems, how to listen, how to identify shared interests, and how to develop a process of principled dialogue and negotiation.[28]

If indeed how we deal with problems is more important than the problems themselves, then what can we learn about dealing with conflict from this literature of negotiation? First, we must pay attention to its vocabulary. Over and over, the words "civility" and "respect" occur in the literature of negotiation. Civility differs from good manners in that manners are rules of social behavior, while civility is respect for other people.

If we structure academic programs around what Gerald Graff calls "teaching the conflicts," then we must accept that tempers may flare and that our rhetoric may become impassioned, and we must recognize that conflicts are real and not easily accommodated. In an online article entitled "The Meaning of Civility," published by the Conflict Research Consortium at the University of Colorado, Gary Burgess and Heidi Burgess note that "any reasonable definition of civility must recognize that the many differing interests which divide our increasingly diverse society will produce endless series of confrontations over difficult moral and distributional issues. Often these issues will have an irreducible win-lose character." Each of the conflicting parties must also recognize that there is a distinct possibility that they are wrong and an equally distinct possibility that the policies advocated by the other side may actually be better.[29] Nevertheless, we need to be able to articulate our differences without

resorting to mean-spirited attacks or silencing the other side. We must learn to avoid dubious strategies for controlling and containing the speech and writing of the other side. As Mary Lefkowitz suggests, we must learn to avoid intellectual intimidation or defending our own academic turf by revealing another person's ignorance about that turf; by employing charges of racism or sexism; by stifling debate by claiming that facts or statistics do not matter; by heaping personal abuse on colleagues; or by confusing the parts with the whole, for example by indulging in claims that criticisms of a single aspect of a course are attempts to eliminate an entire program.[30]

We professors need to learn what the business world calls "emotional intelligence" skills. "Emotional intelligence" includes capacities for empathy, self-awareness and self-regulation, and the ability to reward and to motivate both ourselves and others. As Elaine Showalter points out, we "need to learn to listen rather than to boycott, to consult rather than to insult, and to search for common interests rather than to revel in divisive ideologies."[31]

Instead of indulging in such dubious behaviors, we must re-learn the etiquette of debate prescribed in *Robert's Rules of Order*: showing respect for our colleagues, concentrating on the substance of the argument, allowing the presentation of several points of conflict and listening respectfully to all of them.[32] It may be useful to distinguish between debate and dialogue, a distinction similar in many respects to that between conflict and competition. Debate carries an expectation of interruptions and of a threatening atmosphere. In a debate, little new information is offered, as participants are unwaveringly committed to their own points of view. A dialogue, on the other hand, takes place in an exploratory atmosphere, where participants express uncertainties as well as deeply held beliefs, and they listen to, understand, and gain insights from each other.[33] The fundamental purpose of dialogue, then, is to gain information.

A liberal education must balance rigor, grounded in standards of scholarship and excellence, with freedom of expression, exploration, and thought — freedoms that must be coupled with civility.[34] Likewise, a liberal education must teach and practice participatory democracy, which requires the lively, active involvement of all parties in determining the common good and working toward it. The manner in which we resolve the conflicts that are an inevitable part of engagement with issues may produce "teachable moments" in which we may model a process of identifying assumptions, naming priorities, clarifying differences, and weigh-

ing the options in the interests of making good decisions that lead to effective policies. Our efforts to foster a climate of mutual respect, civility, and tolerance among our various constituencies thus models for our students ways to create a desired and desirable sort of community as they explore ways to live lives that are humane, responsible, productive, and principled in the midst of change and uncertainty — and inevitable conflict.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

As current research indicates, conflict is a pervasive presence in institutions of higher education. Our observations, conducted over a five-year period, permit us to consider positive and negative consequences of faculty conflict at a small, church-affiliated liberal arts college located in a medium-sized metropolitan area in the southeastern United States (hereinafter called Small Liberal Arts College). Our observations also lead to considerations of appropriate ways to deal with faculty conflict.

The three authors of this paper represent more than thirty years of professional experience at this institution. One is the college's resident ethicist and director of its ethics across the curriculum program. One has served multiple terms as coordinator of a once large and contentious division. In addition to chairing the department of her own academic discipline, she has taken over, at the request of the Dean of the Faculty, the duties of chair of a second department that was so riddled by conflict that it had become non-functional. The other is Dean of the Faculty and continues to teach courses in his own professional discipline.

There are about sixty-five full-time faculty and roughly the same number of part-time faculty at Small Liberal Arts College, which enrolls approximately 1300 students. The college supports twenty-nine undergraduate majors, offering, in addition, secondary-level teacher licensure in six majors outside the Education Department. Four undergraduate degrees are offered: bachelor of arts, bachelor of science, bachelor of business administration, and bachelor of music education. In addition, the college offers graduate programs in elementary education and special education, leading to the master of education degree, and a graduate program in teaching English to speakers of other languages, leading to the Master of Arts degree.

The college has supported an active and visible ethics across the curriculum program for ten years. According to assessment data, the ethics

across the curriculum program has significantly enhanced and sustained the discourse of ethics among campus faculty and fostered a climate of intellectual attention to questions related to ethics across all disciplines. This endowed program has supported semi-annual colloquia; summer seminars for faculty; monthly faculty presentations; frequent student-organized panels on thematic ethical concerns; the publication of a book written and edited by college faculty; and professional faculty development in ethics.

According to its mission statement, Small Liberal Arts College is an academic community uniting the liberal arts and Judeo-Christian values in a setting characterized by diversity and mutual respect. The section on professional ethics of the *Faculty Handbook* includes a statement adapted from the "Statement of Professional Ethics" issued by the American Association of University Professors (1966) and formally adopted by the faculty of the college. The statement indicates that as professors, faculty members are guided by "a deep conviction of the worth and dignity of the advancement of knowledge" and are committed to seeking and stating the truth as they see it and to practicing intellectual honesty in the process. Faculty members thus encourage the free pursuit of learning, modeling for students the best scholarly standards of their disciplines. In addition, faculty members demonstrate respect for students as individuals, avoiding any exploitation of them for private advantage. Faculty members likewise respect and defend the free inquiry of their colleagues and show appropriate respect for the opinions of others in exchanging criticism and ideas.

A Typology of Faculty Conflict

Our observations of intra-faculty conflicts are presented here in the form of an organizing typology, which is neither exhaustive nor undebatable. The types of conflict included here are suggested by previous research on faculty conflict and by our judgment of the level of potential corrosive force on the community exhibited by each. As the typology is constructed from a non-scientific sample of observations on one campus, we do not claim that it is universally generalizable to institutions of higher education or other complex organizations. We do suggest that the typology offered may have reasonable commensurability with others' experiences and so might provide insight into the conditions of faculty conflict on college and university campuses.[35]

The types of conflict observed are presented here in alphabetical order by title. There is no suggestion on our part about the potential level

of organizational destructiveness associated with each type. We also do not claim that these types are mutually exclusive. In fact, several observations suggest overlapping and/or interactive types of conflict. However, observations also suggest that each type may be identified by its dominant characteristics, as our examples demonstrate.

I.   *"Ad Hominem" Attacks*

We have observed situations where a faculty member attacks another's character instead of responding directly to scholarly or academic contentions. Often seen by others as fueled by political partisanship, psychological pathology, or just plain maliciousness, such *ad hominem* attacks are perceived as self-aggrandizing events that do little to enhance the community or scholarship. They are also viewed as functioning to create political fear and organizational dominance and appear to arise from the individual circumstances described by Damrosch or the personal abuse noted by Lefkowitz.

We have noticed that most of these attacks happen behind the scenes of public performances, scenes that are generally governed by rules of "civility." The data appear to suggest that *ad hominem* attacks take place *post facto* and *ante facto* to any specific faculty drama. However, we have noticed that once exposed, these attacks are often sources of conflict that may affect the quality of faculty exchanges for many years. Charges of unprofessionalism, administrative complacency toward destructive faculty behavior, and reciprocal attacks are not uncommon responses to these situations.

II.   *Artistic and Educational Differences*

Another type of conflict arises when faculty members who claim to know what is best for students within their disciplines find themselves competing for supremacy of educational principles when interdisciplinary interests are in conflict. As a result, students find themselves torn by demands placed on them by competing loyalties. The demands, justified by educational philosophy or principles of appropriate pedagogy, escalate when one set of faculty members judge that students are not progressing at an appropriate pace because of the demands imposed on them by another set of faculty members. We have observed that the conflict in this situation plays itself out in discussions of what students should and should not be doing behaviorally to reach their academic goals. Such actions often stifle academic debate and confuse individuals' educational goals with the overall goals of the institution. In these situations, faculty

members' professional identity anchors as described by Cheldelin are exaggerated and overwhelm their judgment.

We have observed this faculty tug-of-war over what students ought to be doing to reach their educational goals many times and across many disciplines. We recognize that faculty members are invested in these debates because of their interests in students and their students' disciplinary progress. However, this type of conflict can create blocks to fruitful communication, a cycle of charges and counter-charges over appropriate educational principles, and "cold wars" among individual academic disciplines or faculty members that truncate the potential for more positive organizational outcomes.

III.   *Appreciation for Scholarship*

Since the definition of "scholarship" is open to negotiation in a post-Boyer[36] academy, then the identification, whether by oneself or by one's peers, as a "true" scholar may also produce contentiousness within a faculty. We have observed that this type of conflict is common intra-departmentally and can be perceived — by those inside the department and those outside the department — as indications of intellectual elitism and snobbery. The isolation and competitive aspects of our intellectual organization appear to foster these situations. We also observe that examples of this conflict can remain dormant for many years before a faculty member might claim that she or he is an object of another's scholarly contempt.

IV.   *Charges of Violating Ethical Principles*

Breaches of ethical standards are considered serious professional offenses at Small Liberal Arts College; thus, a charge that a faculty member has violated an ethical principle is treated very seriously by the institution. Some breaches of professional ethics are considered minor and treated informally. More serious charges (not a frequent observation in five years of data collection, where we know of only five cases) are treated in a more judicial fashion, with obligatory burdens of proof, evidentiary proceedings, and constructions of defenses. As ethical codes are internalized and definitional elements of our professional identities emerge from individual circumstances, such allegations can be a source of potent, robust, and vicious conflict when leveled by one faculty member against another.

We have observed that an allegation of breach of professional ethics 1) may be used as a trump card to attempt to dispose of a disfavored fac-

ulty member; 2) may result in the accuser being assailed by other faculty for bringing the breach to the attention of college officials and thus not being a team player; 3) may result in the accuser being charged with withholding information until a significant moment in professional performance evaluation for its greatest negative impact on the faculty member in question; and 4) usually results in the faculty member found responsible for an ethics violation claiming ignorance as justification, misinterpretation of rules for exoneration, or denial of actions altogether for exculpation.

V. *Coerced Loyalty/Team Building*

We have had occasion to observe faculty working diligently to secure loyalty for their "team" by seemingly deliberately pitting some faculty against others. From the perspective of those who are not part of the loyalist team, this form of coerced civility within the group for the sake of establishing "we-them" organizing categories creates a drama where the loyalist team captain is usually perceived as gaining perverse pleasure in dividing faculty. Her/his professionalism and psychological motivations thus become suspect. Loyalist team members, we observe, are accused of being "boot-lickers" and sycophants too afraid to speak their own minds because they must fear the possibility of being the ones attacked by the team and especially the team captain. Mirror-like, each team considers itself "the good guys" while the other team is "the evil empire." Those who are outside the game consider themselves above such petty academic politics.

VI. *Empire Building*

When resources are limited and budgets always judged to be inadequate, and administrators retain the final authority in the destiny of institutional finances, faculty who display exaggerated self-advocacy for themselves, their programs, both new and established, may become organizational objects of concern. However, if a faculty member engages in these actions and consistently insinuates him/herself into multiple programs that may be only tangentially — or not at all — related to his or her disciplinary interests, then the potential for conflict increases. Questions of territorial authority, and professional boundaries fuel internecine exchanges. The issues of power, control, and vulnerability identified by Cheldelin reveal themselves clearly in these situations.

We have observed that this pattern of activity is often accompanied by the claim that the "invading" and "occupying" faculty member claims

or wishes to claim accomplishments that are beyond her/his real contribution. The final assessment is that the "occupying" faculty member is "hungry for power" and intends to acquire all academic space for his/her own.

VII. *Pied-Pipering*

Observations indicate that faculty may encourage students not only to major in their discipline, but also to see the world exclusively from their chosen form of paradigmatic expression and personal point of view. This pied piper effect does not usually create conflict until a faculty member encourages students to disregard or resist the academic contributions and consciousness of other faculty. Emanating from departmental or individual differences regarding curriculum and exaggerated identity anchors of individual faculty members that cloud an understanding of the purpose of the whole institution, pied-pipering can fuel faculty conflict for long periods of time. When the faculty members who feel disparaged have discovered this situation, they have responded with bitterness, outrage, charges of deliberate authority usurpation, disciplinary insecurity, allegations of threat to the core of the liberal arts philosophy, and academic meddling. Since the mission of Small Liberal Arts College calls for the nature of interaction to be characterized by "mutual respect," simple reminders of this fact can resolve the conflict.

At this point in the discussion of faculty conflict it is appropriate to offer a caveat. By selecting faculty conflict as a research reference, we may appear to overemphasize its presence and power for destructiveness within the academic community of this study. In point of fact, our observations indicate that, in general, Small Liberal Arts College operates smoothly, ethically, and with a great deal of sincere faculty camaraderie, academic collegiality, and goodwill across all sections of the organization. However, the overall positive character of the college only underscores the necessity of paying attention to faculty conflict as a possible destructive organizational force.

CONCLUSIONS

Having seen the pervasiveness of the problem of faculty conflict, and considered the various forms that this conflict might take in one academic community, the question begs to be asked: what should be done? Indeed, can anything profitable be done? Though personalities can certainly have an exacerbating effect, differences are bound to arise, given

the various interests and perspectives that inhabit the academy, and given that conflict appears to be an integral part of the *modus operandi* of all academic disciplines.

On the other hand, it is abundantly clear that faculty conflict can have deleterious effects on both the personal and institutional level. Given the institutionalized nature of the conflict, we cannot expect to avoid its dysfunctional manifestations with the personal approach. We cannot hope to convert all souls on campus in an attempt to reform our academic community, because there will always be new points of conflict, new souls to convert, and some souls who will not want to be "saved." Even if the individual is to be the focus of our address, the address itself must be institutional in scope. *Ad hoc* visits to the offices of troubled personnel by the resident ethicist, the chaplain, or the Dean of the Faculty might be helpful, but these will generally have the character of putting out fires that have already started. An institutional issue demands an institutional response.

One possible institutional response would be to reform the power structure of the college. On the theory that many of the debilitating clashes on campus are the result of displaced anger — frustration about the faculty's lack of power to determine the actual priorities of the schools at which they teach — we might propose a new approach to college governance from the field of business ethics. The role of the academic administrator should be modeled after that of the business manager, not by following traditional business models, but by using the stakeholder theory[37] of business management. In this model, the administrators of the college or university are ultimately beholden to more than the board of trustees, just as the manager of a corporation is responsible to more than the board of directors. Rather, all of the stakeholders in the organization, all of the groups who have an interest in the institution's success, have a legitimate voice and should be granted legitimate power, in determining its shape and direction.[38]

Administrators might object that they already serve at the pleasure of the various constituencies of the academic community; but until faculty are given significant power over the allocation of money, members will always feel disenfranchised. Given real ownership of the institution, in partnership with the board of trustees and administration, faculty will experience less alienation. Instead of competing with each other for the administrators' affections, or lashing out at each other in fits of despair, faculty can conceive of themselves as working toward a common goal.

Rather than follow Hobbes' description of our social contract, in which we choose our leaders (for our own good) but must grant them dictatorial power, faculty might be granted some leverage in getting a program funded or hiring a new colleague, for instance, even if other alternatives might appear to be more profitable.[39] But such decisions would not be made irresponsibly, because faculty would be fully aware of the financial and political realities that the institution faces.

We can revel in the irony of using a business model for our campuses that is so contrary to the more usual, and more odious, recent trend of applying market metaphors to the academy, but there are aspects of the stakeholder approach that should give us pause. Do we really want to give students, who also represent an interested party, power to help determine the priorities of the institution (no class on Mondays or Fridays, a keg in every classroom!)? We should also question whether it is wise to invest faculty conflict with power. The stakeholder model will not end the fighting. It could give faculty more ways to hurt each other. It might also drag the conflict into a more desperate arena, where every disagreement devolves into a scrap over the fundamental financial priorities of the school.

There is something good about the idealized sphere in which faculty are asked to consider their hopes and dreams. We are academics for a reason. We like to study. Being burdened with administrative concerns, if not with the actual duties of an administrator, can only detract from the time spent pursuing our professional discipline. There are some selfless souls among us who turn from the contemplation of the Ideal Forms to help run the polis, like the philosophers from Plato's *Republic*; but most of us find administrative concerns to be an unwanted distraction at best.

If we are not prepared to engage in such a wholesale restructuring of academic life, we are obviously best served by trying to improve things within the current framework. We should turn our attention toward promoting an intellectual and social climate that promotes faculty harmony without stifling the possibility of productive disagreement. We should pursue practical solutions that allow the various narratives of our faculty members to be told without succumbing to the idea that our disciplines and perspectives are simply incommensurate.

These negative possibilities — a wholesale restructuring of academic life or stifling any possibility of productive disagreement — supply the underpinnings of destructive faculty conflict. Whether we quash debate or claim that sociologists are from Mars and ethicists are from Venus, we imply that the arguments that attend our disciplines and per-

spectives simply do not matter. Once the field has been cleared of the notion that some arguments are better than others or that debate can lead to agreement, there is nothing left to animate faculty interaction but *ad hominem* attacks and political power plays.

An Ethics Across the Curriculum program can be of service in this regard by promoting ethical literacy on campus. We choose the term "literacy" to refer to familiarity with, if not fluency in, the basic theories, issues, and vocabulary of ethical study. The term also implies that our goal should not be the imposition of a specific moral vision. We should not ask everyone to become a Kantian or operate as a natural law theorist. The program or the resident ethicist(s) should not function as a moral authority, in the sense of being able to establish the good and condemn the bad, but only in the same way that any other faculty member is an authority in his or her own field. Particular faculty members, not only the ethicists, may informally develop such moral authority on campus due to their wisdom and experience, but this should not be established at the institutional level.

The intent is to avoid the imposition of a narrative-silencing unity. Nevertheless, ethical literacy would be helpful for the faculty as a whole if for no other reason than it would raise awareness of practices like empire building or pied pipering — dynamics that often like beneath or scholarly or administrative conflicts. Artistic or disciplinary disagreements are one thing, but these debates can be freighted with challenges that are unidentified or that colleagues do not feel competent to discuss. If I point out the inconsistencies in a colleague's paper with too much zeal or without generosity, for instance, I can easily transform my challenge into an *ad hominem* attack, suggesting that you are intellectually deficient and/or professionally incompetent. Ethical literacy may not always help us avoid such practices, but we could at least identify them, call the offending member to account, and attempt to separate their destructive reverberations from the issues at hand.

We are accustomed to the give and take of academic debate, but when ethical concerns arise, we are often out of our depth. Facility in the languages and concepts of ethics will address this concern. If we can critique the curricular proposal of colleagues, for instance, by pointing out its utilitarian rationale and the limits of consequentialist thinking, we may not resolve the conflict inspired by the proposal, but there will be less chance that our challenge will be construed as a personal attack. We will have a shared language, a common ground upon which we can stage the disagreement. We will find ourselves in the comfort zone of an academic

discourse with whose parameters we are already familiar in the practice of our own disciplines.

A central component of our campaign for ethical literacy also will require a sustained discussion of moral relativism. Moral relativism is here conceived not only as the demand to grasp the historical influences on any set of moral principles that we might study, but also the claim that moral truth operates only within, never between, these historically influenced sets, except by coincidence. If we expect faculty members to engage in fruitful debate, they must be convinced that their arguments are more than the expression of individual or departmental taste.

There are probably fewer relativists on campus than the far right would have the public believe, but there is, nevertheless, a kind of *de facto* relativism that can permeate a college campus, usually motivated by despair over ever solving the problems the faculty currently faces. Thus, we need to point out the lack of intelligibility at the heart of corrosive forms of relativism (the relativist claims the universal moral truth that there is no universal moral truth). We should also highlight the practical demands of everyday institutional life, which requires the exercise of moral judgment and which pushes us to stand for some things and not for others. An environment that invites reasons for these judgments helps to establish the integrity of the individual and the institution. We should ask our colleagues, in short, to apply the same determination to resolve moral disagreements that they bring to the apparently intractable conflicts within their own disciplines.

Does this constitute the imposition of a specific moral vision, against our own stated desires? No. The suggestion that an argument against relativism involves us in an embrace of some form of absolutism creates a false dichotomy. Such an argument obviously does not commit us to any one absolute, but further, there is no need to run to a second extreme in an attempt to avoid the first. We do not need theoretical purity, nor do we need to convert all the relativists or run them off the college green. We only seek to set the practical conditions in which arguments can be taken seriously. As long as our resident relativists argue in earnest, we will have accomplished all that we desire.

In any case, most colleges and universities adopt a code of ethics which faculty are expected to uphold, as we have noted. Such codes, however, form a rather thin ethic, outlining only the negative conditions necessary for civility. Nevertheless, it should not be the function of the ethics program to establish or enforce even these minimalist rules. We should focus our attention on the concrete — on the ordinary and

extraordinary interactions among faculty members — and try to make a positive contribution within the proper capacity and authority of the program. We can make our resort to the rules a rare event. This might involve the impromptu development of a moral vision or spirit on campus, but it would not be imposed, and the program could work to ensure that it does not become exclusionary.

Such an approach would also be a model for our students, who often harbor the negative form of relativism without any self-awareness. Whether we expose them to our disagreements with panel discussions, team teaching or open forums, and whether these discussions are explicitly ethical or focused on a specific discipline, we can demonstrate our commitment to one of the basic assumptions of academic life: some ideas and arguments are better than others. This is essential, one could argue, in a world where our students are assaulted with unfiltered arguments and information, all claiming their attention in ways that have little to do with substance or intellectual clarity.

Like academia, the various factions in our society often seem bent on tearing each other apart, or individuals drop out of public life and keep quiet. We have an obligation, therefore, to teach our students that tolerance and respect does not preclude disagreement, or even passionate argument. On the contrary, failure to take the arguments of our opponents seriously by failing to respond is the utmost sign of disrespect. When we fail to engage our opponent, we perpetuate the creeping moral fatuousness of a society that often appears to be fearful of thinking about where it is going. We can warn our students against this in their ethics classes, but it would be far more effective for us to model an alternative.

Having implied that the teaching of ethical literacy on college campuses is the silver bullet for society's ills, we must inject several notes of caution and qualification. First of all, as we have already suggested, moral literacy is not, and should not be presented as, a simple means of conflict resolution. Given our commitment to the value of moral argument, and given the increased sensitivity that can develop through a growing facility with ethics, some conflicts might be avoided. Agreements might be reached. Indeed, an occasional speaker or seminar on conflict resolution would seem to be a helpful addition to the program; but if we aim too directly at our target, we are more likely to miss.

As Aristotle reminds us, the moral life is as much a matter of the will as it is of the intellect. Some may use their literacy as a weapon to more thoroughly humiliate their opponents. Even among those without ill intentions, agreement is hardly a foregone conclusion. The field of ethics

is as full of controversy as any other, and though we have asserted that many of the issues that prompt the troubling forms of faculty conflict are ethical in substance, these issues usually underlie conflicts of an entirely different or broader nature, and these can be intractable in their own right. Ethical literacy cannot help to determine whether a rat model or a mouse model has better prospects for the study of multiple sclerosis in humans.

Furthermore, some faculty conflicts must be resolved as practical matters, and perfect compromises can rarely be found. Some win and some lose. Increased sensitivity might help to restrain the gloating of the winners, but it cannot change a loss into a victory. The pain and bitterness of the loss will remain.

Finally, whether we state our intended goal to be conflict resolution or not, we must be sensitive to the fact that as a group, academics are highly intelligent and individualistic. They will tend to rebel if they feel that they are being treated like cattle. Our attempts to achieve ethical literacy, therefore, must be executed in varied and attractive ways. Whether this takes the form of informal, interdisciplinary discussions about the ethical questions within a particular field, faculty colloquia, panel discussions for the students, or faculty development seminars, we need to make a case for the importance of participation. That participation is a concrete step toward creating the kind of working environment we want, but we should also hold out the possibility that these activities might be fun.

An Ethics Across the Curriculum Program can be at least part of the response to faculty conflict. We can hope to create the groundwork for a collegial community. We cannot force it to grow, and there will always be times of trial or personalities that put us to the test. We can hope to mitigate the negative consequences of the conflicts that are bound to arise, and we can hope for the occasional flowering of a type of harmony that incorporates discord and that represents the best of what academic life should be.

NOTES

[2] For instance, see such research as Allan Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 2001); Robert Nelson and William Bridges, *Legalizing Gender Inequality: Courts, Markets, and Unequal Pay for Women in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Ann Morrison, Randall White, and Ellen van Velsor, *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1982).

[3] Jane Tompkins, *A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996), 151.

[4] Some of the more revealing and relevant titles include "Taming the Rampant Incivility in Academe" (January 15, 1999); "Stifling the Naysayer in an Age of Compulsory Niceness" (May 7, 1999); "In Wars of Words, a Role for Rules of Etiquette" (February 20, 1998); "On Collegiality, College Style" (May 26, 2000); and "Harmony Coerced is Freedom Denied" (July 13, 2001).

[5] Their articles are respectively entitled "We Must Defeat Hate, Not Simply Ban It" and "Harsh Lessons in Incivility."

[6] Titles in the AAC & U archives included "Divided We Govern?" (Spring 2001); "Public Values in a Divided World: A Mandate for a Higher Education" (Spring 2002); and "Compacts and Collaboration Across the Faculty/Administration Divide" (Summer 2002).

[7] Parker J. Palmer, "Community, Conflict, and Ways of Knowing." *Change* (Sept./Oct. 19973). n.p.

[8] "Diana Chapman Walsh's Inauguration Speech," www.wellesley.edu/PublicAffairs/President/Speeches/1993/inaug.html (May 23, 2002).

[9] David Damrosch, *We Scholars: Changing the Culture of the University* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), quoted in Elaine Showalter, "Taming the Rampant Incivility in Academe." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 15 January 1999, B4.

[10] Sandra I. Cheldelin, "Handling Resistance to Change" in *Leading Academic Change: Essential Roles for Department Chairs*, ed. Ann F. Lucas & Associates, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 65.

[11] Cheldelin, 64.

[12] Cheldelin, 64.

[13] Cheldelin, 65.

[14] "Why Mediation and Conflict Resolution Services Matter to Faculty," www.campus-adr.org/Faculty_Club/rationales_faculty.html (October 4, 2004).

[15] Cheldelin, 63.

[16] Carlin Romano, "On Collegiality, College Style." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 26 May 2002, B6.

[17] Walsh, "Inauguration Speech."

[18] Cheldelin, 56.

[19] Frances Hesselbein, "The Power of Civility." *Leader to Leader* 5 (Summer 1997): 6-8. http://www.leadertoleader.org/knowledgecenter/L2L/summer97/fh.html (October 4, 2004).

[20] Showalter B4.

[21] "Mediation and Conflict Resolution Services"

[22] Irene S.M. Makarushka, "Embodying the Values We Teach." *Peer Review* Vol. 5, No. 4 (Summer 2002): 27.

[23] Tompkins, 151.

[24] Alvin Snider, "Stifling the Naysayer in an Age of Compulsory Niceness." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 7 May 1999, A64.

[25] Laura Nader, "Harmony Coerced is Freedom Denied." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 13 July 2001, B13.

[26] "On Collegiality as a Criterion for Faculty Evaluation." www.aaup.org/statements/Redbook/collegia.htm (October 4, 2004).

[27] Walsh, "Inauguration Speech."

[28] William Ury, *Getting Past No.* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993).

[29] Gary Burgess & Heidi Burgess, "The Meaning of Civility," (Boulder, CO: Conflict Research Consortium, 1997). www.colorado.edu/conflict/civility.htm (October 4, 2004).

[30] Mary Lefkowitz, "In Wars of Words, A Role for Rules of Etiquette," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 20 February 1998, A64.

[31] Showalter B4.

[32] John Sherman, ed. *The New Robert's Rules of Order*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993), 12-13, 135-139.

[33] "Dialogue and Debate," Conflict Resolution Network, www.crnhq.org/govt2.html (August 30, 2002).

[34] Walsh, "Inauguration Speech."

[35] Previous drafts of this paper included specific examples of each type of faculty conflict presented here. The authors reviewed the examples and agreed that they could constitute types of faculty conflict. The examples have since been removed in order to protect the confidentiality of the faculty members observed.

[36] Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate. (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*, 1990). Boyer argues that research and publication should not be the only criteria that determine tenure and define faculty success. Rather, Boyer suggests, four areas should be considered as priorities of the professoriate: scholarship: research (or the creation of knowledge), the integration of knowledge, teaching and service.

[37] Sharon H. Garrison and Dan Borgia, in "Responding to Stakeholders in the Educational Process and the Impact on Course Design," (*Journal of Financial and Strategic Decisions*, Spring 1999:1-3) note that "The idea that corporations have stakeholders has now become commonplace in management literature" (p.1). A number of diverse participants in the corporation may work to accomplish multiple, but not always congruent, purposes. Garrison and Borgia discuss stakeholder theory in the context of higher education by noting that "In its application to higher education, stakeholder analysis focuses on how to define quality in education and serve the needs of its constituents. This entails forging a consensus between stakeholders in the educational process. Stakeholders include learners, faculty, industry, and the community" (p. 1).

[38] Edward Freeman, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, (Boston: Pitman, 1984), 46.

[39] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (New York: Collier, 1962), 134ff.