

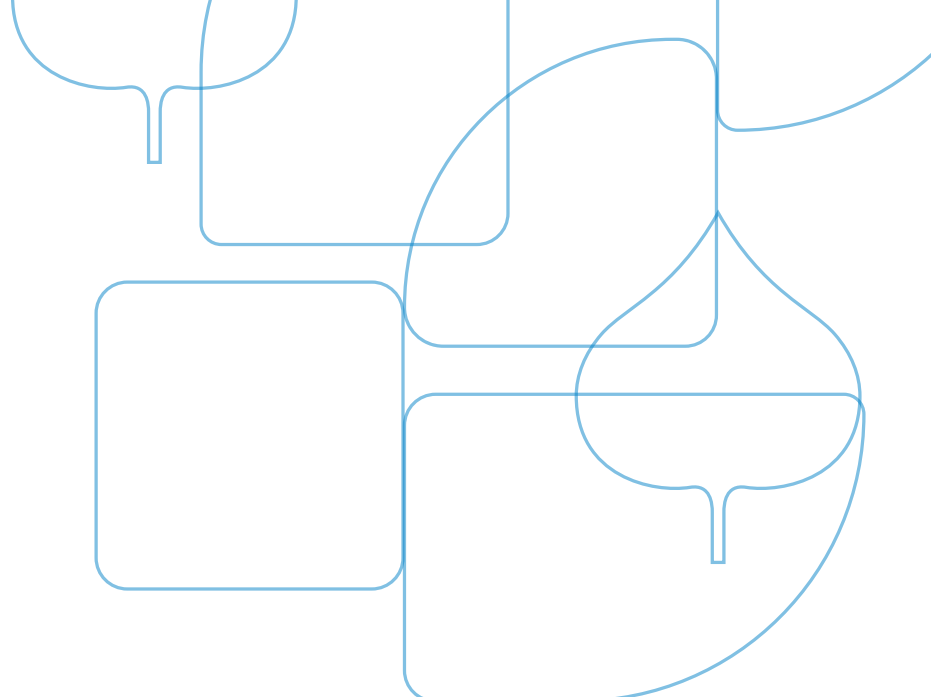


Transforming Conflict on College Campuses

Citizenship & 
American Identity
★ ★ ★  aspen institute

 Constructive
Dialogue
Institute

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THE CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE INSTITUTE (CDI)

Founded in 2017, CDI is a nonprofit organization dedicated to equipping the next generation of Americans with the mindset and skill set to engage in dialogue across differences. At CDI, we seek to help teachers, faculty, and administrators build learning environments that enable students to feel comfortable engaging with challenging topics so that real learning can occur. To accomplish this goal, we translate the latest behavioral science research into educational resources and teaching strategies that are evidence-based, practical, and scalable.

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE'S CITIZENSHIP AND AMERICAN IDENTITY PROGRAM

The Citizenship and American Identity Program focuses on the challenge of sustaining strong citizenship in America and coherent national identity in an age of demographic flux and severe inequality.

In a centrifugal time when this country has never been more diverse and polarized and when its role in the world is rapidly shifting, the question of what it means to be American—and how we as Americans create a sustainable story of “us”—is of prime consequence. In practice, the program’s work is grouped into several major initiatives, such as Who Is Us, What Every American Should Know, and the Better Arguments Project.

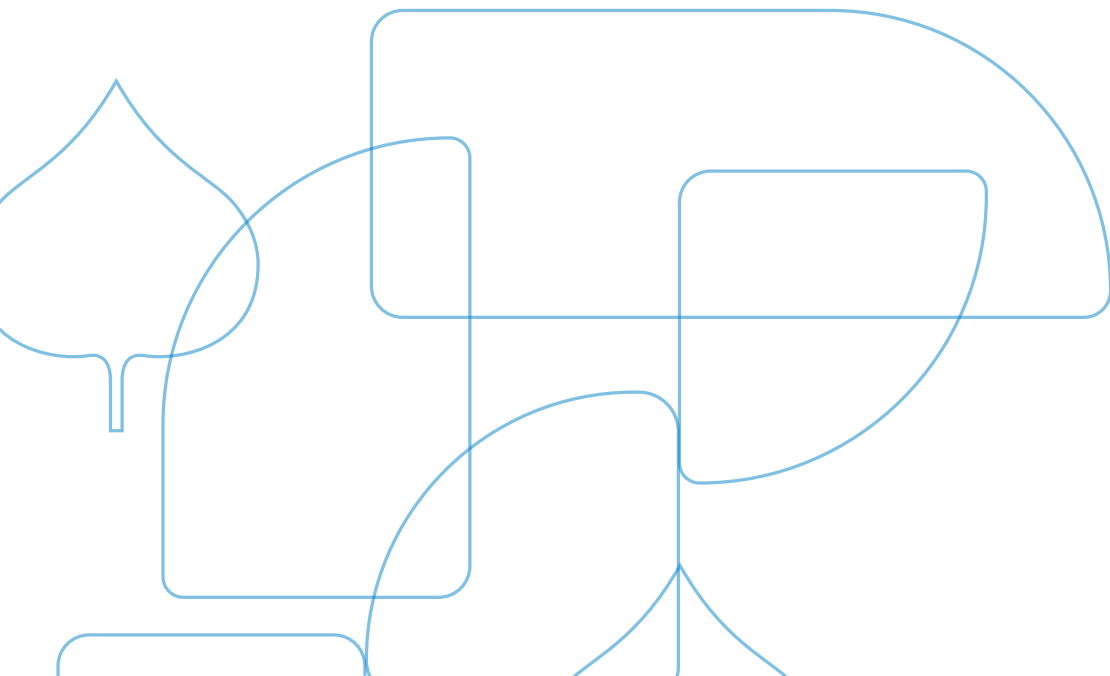


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INTRODUCTION

At this moment, we are experiencing the highest levels of societal division and social conflict in our collective memory.¹ These divisions undermine our trust in public institutions, lead to disagreement on basic facts, and make it extraordinarily difficult for us to collaborate across lines of difference. In recent years, there has been an emerging recognition that these societal rifts are leading to unhealthy, toxic, and intractable conflict. Shared problems are not being solved. People are splitting apart rather than coming together. Instead of collaboration and compromise, we see personal attacks and increasingly extreme views.



College campuses are an environment in which this fracturing is especially acute. Higher education institutions have traditionally served as the forum where ideas are formed, discussed, contested, and refined. Colleges and universities are charged with advancing societal knowledge, grappling with complex ideas, and preparing our future civic leaders. To deliver on these charges, colleges and universities have to perform some core functions:

- 1. TEACHING:** Colleges provide students with opportunities to learn, acquire knowledge, develop technical expertise, and prepare for their future careers. They also facilitate the social, emotional, and civic development of students so that they can contribute to their community and our society.
- 2. ADVANCEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE:** Higher education institutions lead research to advance science and answer societally important questions.
- 3. CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL ENRICHMENT:** Higher education institutions also serve as key drivers of intellectual and cultural growth in the surrounding community and society at large.

In recent years, many college and university leaders have found it increasingly challenging to advance the mission of higher education in the context of a hyperpolarized national climate. These challenges manifest in many forms. There is evidence, for example, that students are increasingly hesitant to express their ideas and engage with others.² Trust in higher education is in significant decline, and this decline is particularly acute for political conservatives.^{3 4} Campus protests and personnel decisions are no longer just campus matters, as media attention turns these incidents into fodder for national debate.

As the university continues its teaching, learning, and research, there exists an undercurrent of conflict over how universities should run. This conflict reflects the larger national struggle to define shared values, and it can also influence the direction of that struggle.

“ Thinking not only about those sorts of legislative pressures that are being put on, but also the way that the media is involved in bringing these sorts of larger politicized, but personal, issues into the national conversation and the way that that then plays out in the campus context...we had to spend a lot of time thinking about how we support this individual student. How do we support the institution’s values, and then how do we also communicate with the larger campus community and the team? –STAFF



“ What’s the environment that we wanna create? Remembering that inclusivity and free inquiry can be mutually reinforcing. And not in opposition. We all have obligations as citizens, and we’re not living up to them. We are responsible for what’s happening here. And so we, the people, need to do it, it’s on us. We can’t just sit it out. **–Senior Administrator**

We conducted a research project to describe this undercurrent of conflict and provide recommendations for moving forward. Over the course of fall 2022, we completed and analyzed a total of 22 interviews with campus stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and administrators, at colleges and universities across the United States. We gathered participants' assessments of the current campus climate and their personal stories about how they have tried to address tensions on campus, and what they think should be done to improve campus conflict. We then held an in-person convening of the interviewees and other stakeholders so that they could exchange ideas, explore unaddressed questions, and share stories of success and lessons learned. In doing this work, we sought to include representation from the range of campus stakeholders and to prioritize the voice of students, who have been largely absent from prior work on this topic. In sum, this report aims to address these questions:

1. What contributes to campus conflicts?
2. When such conflicts arise on college campuses, how can faculty, students, staff, and administrators respond in ways that facilitate constructive dialogue, build a shared sense of forward direction, and maintain institutional trust?

This report is intended as a peer-informed resource for higher education administrators, faculty, and staff by diagnosing the conflict and surfacing promising directions for addressing conflict on campus. The stakeholders we interviewed stressed how, due to the demands of the job, campus leadership spends much of its time in "reaction mode." That is, they need to respond quickly when an incident on or off campus causes outcry and leads to conflict. As a result, they rarely have time or space to proactively think about how to create a culture of robust dialogue before an incident happens. By compiling recommendations and best practices, we hope to catalyze that proactive planning process among higher education leaders.

The findings and recommendations that follow are divided into three sections. In Section 1, we describe the conflict that occurs on college campuses. We identified six types of conflict and six factors that contribute to this conflict. In Section 2, we summarize eleven general principles for designing initiatives and programs to transform campus conflict and culture. We end, in Section 3, with nine specific, concrete strategies that higher education leaders can use immediately to both proactively engage and react to campus conflict. Throughout this report, an overarching theme is the emphasis on conflict transformation, rather than resolution or management. **Derived from international peacebuilding, conflict transformation focuses on changing the ways people relate to the conflict and each other, and it frames conflict as both normative and an important opportunity to learn and grow.**⁵





The Six Types of **CONFLICT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES**

We embarked on this research project to better understand free speech issues on campuses, but what we heard from many participants was that the framing of **free speech situates the problem in an abstract national debate that hinders, rather than facilitates, problem-solving.** What participants emphasized instead was the increase in conflict that stemmed from competing community values and stakeholders who lack the skills and vocabulary or will to discuss and integrate these competing values.

THE SIX TYPES OF CONFLICT

on college campuses

The types of conflict we heard about were almost exclusively “people” problems.

1

Conflict over **SPEAKERS** coming to campus, especially speakers who are affiliated with national organizations

2

Conflict between or within **STUDENT GROUPS**

3

INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS among individual students, faculty, and/or staff that spiral to involve other stakeholders

4

Conflicts between **STUDENT GROUP(S)** (which might include alumni) **AND THE ADMINISTRATION** or the institution itself (which might include the board)

5

Conflicts between **FACULTY AND/OR STAFF AND THE ADMINISTRATION**

6

Conflicts between the institution and its surrounding **NEIGHBORS**

A commitment to free speech, they noted, was rarely the central factor. Indeed, students arrive on campus with the primary goals of learning, making friends, and finding a place for themselves in the campus community. Conflict then erupts from missteps or botched communication, potentiated by divergent (but undiscussed) assumptions and worldviews. These conflicts become especially heated when these assumptions and worldviews relate to social identities such as race, ethnicity, and gender.

There was a general attitude among stakeholders that protest, agitation, and people who speak their minds are good for colleges and are an integral part of higher education. The presence of this conflict was seen as important both for holding the institution accountable to its highest values and for raising difficult questions for the campus community to address. At the same time, participants noted that conflicts can sometimes spiral out of control, creating fear-based, chaotic campuses that inhibit a free exchange of ideas, impede an institution’s ability to deliver on its mission, and contribute to both student and staff attrition.

“ More active participation on the end of the administration to keep us in the loop about things without students having to demand information would be helpful. There are spaces where that happens, but they’re not public spaces.... It’s important to have private conversations where not everyone has to chime in, but the outcomes of those conversations that are private should be more public. –STUDENT



**“The Crisis
Isn’t Free
Speech—It’s
How We’re
Speaking”**

—HARVARD CRIMSON EDITORIAL BOARD



Six Contributors to **CAMPUS CONFLICT**

“Broadly speaking, we need to participate in the differentiation of the post-secondary educational sector so people can get what they want and not feel like there’s one path. Then we also have to figure out why people are distrustful. There’s a question of value. There’s a question of echo chamber, indoctrinating learners into a particular way of thinking, closed-mindedness. Then there’s the question of subsidies. What is the public good that these institutions provide such that tax benefits and all these other things accrue to these institutions and only these institutions? Those are different reasons why people are distrustful, and we have to address them as different reasons. We have to take them seriously.” **–SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR**

External Pressure

THE FINDING

Participants named **five** categories of pressure exerted by forces external to the university:

- 1. DECREASING COLLEGE ENROLLMENT** leads to a need to better justify to a variety of stakeholders, especially parents, their return on investment (e.g., in terms of students' future occupational and economic success). Although this pressure was felt across a range of higher education institutions, it was a particular issue for liberal arts institutions.
- 2. LEGISLATIVE AND POLITICAL PRESSURE** from a range of constituents trying to exert influence on institutional policies and processes. This was felt acutely among state colleges and universities.
- 3. FIERCE COMPETITION** from other colleges and universities, often resulting in investments that further challenge affordability.
- 4. INCREASED ATTENTION TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION** that results from heightened societal awareness of systemic inequities and growing diversity of the student body, while faculty diversity remains low.
- 5. NATIONAL ATTENTION** ensnares higher education institutions in culture wars. One such culture war is the value of liberal arts education. Some felt their institutions were pawns in political agendas.

THE IMPLICATIONS

Institutions increasingly need to justify their existence. Liberal arts institutions, especially, are experiencing pressure to demonstrate financial gains for their students, which can feel at odds with their broader missions to prepare engaged citizens and lifelong learners. Administrators fear a negative impact on enrollment from the "demographic cliff"—two decades of shrinking admissions resulting from dropping birth rates—predicted to hit in 2026. As they compete for enrollment, institutions have pushed tuition costs higher and higher to cover the cost of added amenities and services. In their efforts to expand access to higher education and buffer the "enrollment cliff," universities are bolstering their efforts to recruit underrepresented students and prioritizing student belonging, which can mean addressing aspects of their institutional identities that are at odds with equity and inclusion. These efforts may then create tension and have rippling implications for organizational infrastructure, policy, and procedures.

Education is embroiled in broader, societal culture wars, used as part of political agendas. A few participants worried that their peers were adding fuel to this fire by taking "alarmist" positions about "crises" on campus. The media can also feed these frenzies, often bringing unwanted attention and dehumanizing the people involved.

Higher education institutions are highly visible in their communities. As such, administration must contend with pressure from influential entities like alumni, board members, and state government. The current legislative and regulatory activity was top of mind for many respondents. Often this legislation is at odds with institutional values and practices.



“ I feel like higher ed has become a much bigger part of the culture wars. The things that are happening within the institution are being utilized by a lot of external forces, whether they’re legislative or whether they’re advocacy groups. They’re now being used as fodder for some other kind of culture war that is outside of the mission of higher education. That can be very distracting. It’s also very dangerous. –Senior Administrator

Internal Pressure

THE FINDING

Within the university itself, **four** categories of pressure contribute to heightened conflict:

1. Extreme **POLARIZATION** within the campus community.
2. **FEAR**, lack of psychological safety, and worries about experiencing significant social, professional, and even financial consequences.
3. **FRUSTRATION** that the university is not doing enough to democratize opportunities, uphold dignity, and demonstrate inclusion.
4. **MISALIGNMENT** in values and organizational priorities that occurs between institutional leaders and other stakeholders, which undermines institutional trust.

THE IMPLICATIONS

These internal pressures contribute to a lack of trust between and among stakeholder groups (e.g., students, faculty, staff, administration, and the board). This lack of trust undermines confidence in relationships, policies, and systems and can lead to an unwillingness to engage, self-censoring, policing speech, isolation and loneliness, and vitriolic verbal attacks. This lack of trust contributes to a lack of meaningful dialogue on difficult issues. These conditions make it exceedingly difficult for institutions to fulfill their missions.

“ Faculty speech is being policed by students. They worry that they’ll use a term or make a controversial statement and that there is either going to be an investigation, or it’s going to be some big blow-up on social media. And so they’re self-censoring. —SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR

Social Media

THE FINDING

Social media ups the ante—it rewards reactionary, rather than thoughtful, behavior.

THE IMPLICATIONS

Many participants named social media as an incendiary ingredient in campus conflicts. In different hands and under different circumstances, social media can be used to weaponize exchanges AND as a mechanism to balance power. On the one hand, the possibility of being live-streamed and canceled drives self-censoring and sows fear. On the other hand, social media gives students a platform to which they otherwise would not have access. This is particularly important to students who feel voiceless and powerless against faculty, administrators, and “the institution.” Nevertheless, even those participants who used social media for this purpose recognized the risk of losing control of the narrative. Incidents that might otherwise have been handled among the involved parties went viral and became fodder for a range of national or local agendas. Notably, however, most participants did not see social media as causing the current tensions on campus but helping to amplify tensions that already existed.

“ You can’t underestimate the [issues] within the higher education world, but they’re totally compounded by these other things. And social media is definitely one of them. The stakes are really high. I think to myself, if I were a student in college, I probably would be afraid to speak because who knows what’s going to happen with your words? **–SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR**



“ Anybody can get on Twitter or make a website and have their voice be heard. There’s way more access to power now in terms of communication platforms and social media. In athletics, coaches have all the power in some ways, but if the students, in their exit interviews, say one thing about a coach, they could be gone if the student complains about them or if they put it on social media. The students do have a lot of power. **–Staff**

Policy Limitations

THE FINDING

Policies, although necessary, are not sufficient for settling most speech-related conflicts on campus. Policies need to be complemented by shared norms, common values, and a network of trust.

THE IMPLICATIONS

Some explicit policies need to be in place. For example:

- What is the process for student groups to invite speakers? Is any approval required? Do you have a major event policy?
- What are your speech and expression policies?
- Where and how can students protest? Do you have protest and/or disruption guidelines?
- What are the procedures for reporting harassment and discrimination, including online incidents?

Despite the importance of such policies, many issues will not be addressed with policy alone.

For one, policies need to be clear and understood by stakeholders to have an impact. As one participant put it, “Words on paper don’t change behavior.” Many campus community members don’t understand their rights (and their own power) or the necessity of protecting speech. This lack of understanding can lead to a reactionary and perhaps misplaced overreliance on censorship, rather than using alternative responses to hateful speech that stop short of censorship.

Second, many of the conflicts are too nuanced and contextual to be settled by policy alone. Communities need to decide among themselves how and when they will respond to hateful speech that—while protected by the First Amendment—has a detrimental impact on individuals, communities, and campus climate. They can only collaboratively arrive at these decisions if they have a strong sense of community and continual dialogue.



My day-to-day challenge is the vast majority of things that I see where you’re not in a world where any conduct has violated policy. You’re in a world where it doesn’t reach that threshold, but harm has occurred.

—SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR

Contributor

5

Organizational Complexity



The way that messages from leadership are constructed, there's too many cooks in the kitchen. They go out for review and then this person tweaks this and that person tweaks that, and this person said, 'Well, you didn't mention us.' And, and by the time it's all done, it doesn't sound like it came from a person. **-STAFF**

THE FINDING

Modern higher educational institutions grapple with organizational complexity. Institutions are becoming more complicated and too large in scale for most humans to feel comfortable working inside. Their structures contain more people, more complicated narratives, more competition, more input, more power dynamics, and more output demand. This complexity makes it difficult for the campus leaders to speak as "one voice."

THE IMPLICATIONS

Particularly at larger institutions, there can be huge disconnections between the leadership and the multitude of microcommunities embedded within any university, including student groups, departments, and colleges. Specialized student services, while necessary, are sometimes associated with "bloat" and higher tuition. This observation might feed parent and student expectations that administration is there to mediate conflict when it arises. Moreover, the complexity creates a multitude of formal and informal hierarchies, making navigating relationships and negotiating norms more challenging. Finally, this kind of environment can hinder flexibility and responsiveness to emerging conflicts. Because campuses are rife with competing agendas, disseminating messages is extremely challenging. Many conflict situations call for a single, consistent message to be disseminated campuswide. In administrators' efforts to be collaborative and participatory, however, messages can get distorted, watered down, or lost in translation.

Higher education institutions face an additional complexity that is not common among other large institutions. That is, students rotate through colleges and universities faster than faculty and staff, and, for many students, the campus constitutes their entire life outside of their family. Because of this, students experience campus problems far more acutely and want them resolved in a shorter time frame than do faculty and staff. This can be dismissed by some faculty and staff as a "utopia-now" attitude. From the perspective of administrators, staff, and faculty, university processes often move more slowly than students' demand for action. Trust can break down when it appears to students that faculty, staff, or the administration are dragging their feet or are not prioritizing action.

Contributor

6

Head Versus Heart

THE FINDING

Students and staff perceive that universities tend to value intellect—sometimes at the expense of the whole person.

THE IMPLICATIONS

Faculty drive perceptions of institutional culture among students; they are the most common institutional touchpoints for students. The student body makeup, however, is increasingly diverse, and faculty demographics typically don't reflect that same diversity. These demographic shifts, as well as generational differences, naturally give rise to conflict. Many faculty are perceived as prioritizing scholarship and displaying discomfort with issues of mental health or well-being. Students sometimes believe that intellectualizing is used to dismiss their lived experiences, and they want a more holistic focus where their experiences are perceived as valid and contributing to knowledge.

“ Faculty wanna be up here intellectualizing everything and take this theoretical concept in a theoretical way and divorce it from any type of context or actual application. But students are saying, ‘Well, this isn’t theoretical to me. You’re talking about stuff that has to do with my lived experience.’ -STAFF



Eleven Guiding Principles for **TRANSFORMING CAMPUS CONFLICT**

During our in-person convening, we asked participants to consider hypothetical **scenarios**, inspired by real life, and imagine that they were in a position to advise their higher education institution on a response. Participants worked in cross-stakeholder groups to develop recommendations for each scenario.

A rich discussion followed each case presentation, and consistent themes emerged from the collective recommendations. From these themes, we derived eleven principles and nine strategies. We define **principles** as working heuristics or overarching frameworks that guide the recommendations. **Strategies**, in contrast, consist of specific, concrete actions a college or university leader can take.

NOTE

We've included a discussion guide (page 56) containing this activity for institutions to use with their own staff.

IMAGINE THESE SCENARIOS

SCENARIO A

A tenured professor believes that it is their pedagogical mission to create an environment of rigorous debate in their classroom. However, students, particularly students of color, have complained to the dean that the professor's approach to fostering debate creates a hostile environment and makes them feel emotionally unsafe. After a conversation with the dean, the professor suggests that they have a conversation with the students about how to debate while upholding emotional safety to create new norms. However, students say it is "too little, too late" and demand the professor be replaced or they will boycott the course.

INSPIRED PRINCIPLES
1-4

SCENARIO B

Following the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the university president and senior leadership, who tend not to take stances on political issues in an attempt not to show bias and to create a welcoming environment for everyone, declined to issue a statement or to provide any guidance to the campus community regarding the decision. When the university does not take a stance, many students feel that the university does not support them or share their values. Additionally, faculty would like guidance from the university about how to manage this topic in their classes. Several faculty have complained that heated and unruly debates have disrupted classroom discussions. Many faculty feel that the university has left them on their own to manage conflicts among students over the decision. Lastly, staff members, particularly medical staff, feel ill-equipped and are worried about mandatory reporting rules proposed by the state legislature.

INSPIRED PRINCIPLES
5-6

SCENARIO C

As a policy, your campus grants student groups the autonomy to invite any speaker to campus. A student club has invited a former elected official to give a talk on campus. Several former employees have accused this former elected official and members of their office of workplace sexual harassment. Although these accusations have made national news, no formal investigation has taken place as of yet. Many students do not feel the former elected official should be allowed to speak on campus. A local activist group outside the campus has denounced the speaker's presence and has gotten involved in calls to stop the speech. On the day of the speech, protestors occupy the stage to block the former elected official from speaking.

INSPIRED PRINCIPLES
7-9

SCENARIO D

Old tweets from a highly touted baseball player at the university have resurfaced and are being spread on social media. The tweets, written several years earlier when the student was still in high school, contain racial and homophobic slurs. The tweets have gone viral across the campus, amassing criticism and angry comments online. Despite an online apology from the student, many are not appeased and are demanding the school suspend the student from the baseball team. Although it is within the students' First Amendment rights to criticize their classmate online, this behavior has gotten to the point where it can reasonably be seen as creating a hostile environment on campus for the baseball player.

INSPIRED PRINCIPLES
10-12

Principle

1

Establish norms proactively.

Build and fortify a structure for dialogue.

Set up the environment *you* want—one that facilitates learning. Establishing and reinforcing community norms build a positive campus culture, facilitate psychological safety, and provide structure for dialogue when conflict arises. Campuses are complex and consist of multiple overlapping microcommunities. Norming thus needs to take place on several levels, and different models are likely necessary for different settings. Culture change is built from many hyperlocal efforts.

“ When we talk about norms, it should be a conversation generated by the community about norms for their own community. And that's time consuming. So that may look like a conversation with four people living in a suite: 'What does it look like if there's ramen noodles there? Are we sharing or not?' It's micro. It's really difficult to say, 'These are the norms for a huge institution.' When I think about teaching about norms, it's about how we talk about our values as a community. Now we can have some sort of big picture ones, and they can include things like equity, some of which is legally required adherence to freedom of expression or openly wrestling with the First Amendment. It sort of goes back to kindergarten lessons, and I have a first grader, so it's fresh in my mind, but a lot of this comes down to 'Are we talking about basic respect and engagement in a respectful way?' And I think that's new for some people. —SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR

Principle

2

Disambiguate terms within your community.

Facilitate meaning-making across campus.

Dialogue surrounding campus conflicts is replete with abstract and ambiguous concepts. Words such as “safety,” “harm,” “trust,” “accountability,” and “transparency” are used often in conflict situations, but not everyone defines them the same way. Facilitate conversations with stakeholders and community members to develop a common understanding of the terms you all use. Take the time to establish and socialize common definitions among your stakeholders. When a term comes up in a conversation, take the opportunity to clarify what the term means and what it *doesn't* mean. Expect there to be multiple definitions and emphasize the divergence among them. Include definitions in messaging and communication activities. Repeat the definitions or reintroduce them when new stakeholders are engaged.

“ We need to remind ourselves that we have this opportunity to use the microcosm of a diverse residential campus to help ensure that students see that plurality and heterogeneity as an opportunity for joy and enrichment. –SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR



“ Until we disaggregate these conflated things, these big terms like ‘civil discourse’ or ‘freedom of speech,’ it’s really hard to make progress. It’s really hard even to have a reasonable, productive conversation. That’s the intellectual work we need to do. –**Senior Administrator**

Words That Work Hard

During the convening for this project, we found it was critical to disambiguate the terms by talking about what they mean. In these conversations, we discovered both commonalities and differences in how we define the terms, and some discussion was needed to arrive at a shared definition. For example, during our convening a participant shared their definition of the term “constructive” and we all agreed that it would guide our work:

Within your colleges and universities, a collective vocabulary will facilitate more productive conversations. You will likely need to discuss the meaning of ambiguous words in this list (and others, too) for yourselves within your own campus context. In fact, establishing common definitions is one activity you can use to initiate these types of conflict transformation conversations on your own campuses. Here are some of the questions you can pose to stakeholders as you begin to disambiguate hardworking words:

- What do we mean by **SAFE SPACES OR SAFETY**? Does **PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM** entail psychological discomfort, psychological trauma, or something in between? What does it mean to do harm to a group of people?

- What does it mean to **TRUST** an institution, a system, or a process? Is it more than just trusting the individuals involved? Who is **THE ADMINISTRATION**?

- What does it mean to hold people **ACCOUNTABLE** for their speech? Do the guidelines for accountability for speech differ from those for actions? Why or why not? Further, *who* should be holding people accountable, and how?

- What is the relationship between **CONFLICT** and **POWER**? Does “conflict” encompass situations of abuse and victimization, or does “conflict” imply relatively balanced power? What are our goals in relation to conflict? Is the aim always to resolve conflict?

- Is **DIALOGUE** appropriate for all types of conflicts? Is dialogue appropriate for situations of abuse and victimization?

- Where are the borders between **TRANSPARENCY** and **PRIVACY**?

- When we say we want students to feel a sense of **BELONGING**, what do we mean? Belonging to what? How is belonging related to and distinct from **INCLUSION**?

- How are **REPARATIVE OR RESTORATIVE** practices distinct from other types of conflict transformation? What makes a response restorative rather than punitive?

- What does it mean to reflect people’s **IDENTITIES** and **LIVED EXPERIENCES** in campus spaces? What does it mean to have **CULTURAL HUMILITY**?



“ The term ‘constructive’ means progressive or not stuck. There’s movement, and that movement could be in many different directions. It is proportional. It is intentional, and it is accompanied by thoughtful actions. It does NOT mean having the same conversation over and over and over, but just louder, for example. But it also doesn’t mean you can’t be angry and be constructive. –Staff

Principle

3

Help activists think past the protest.

Encourage informed decisions.

Some conflicts may evolve into activism or protest. Regardless of whether you personally support the students' position, it is important to relay the information they need to make informed decisions. Be clear with students, faculty, and staff about the potential outcomes for various courses of action. If students boycott a course, for example, be clear with them about university policies for attendance, who makes those decisions, and whether or not you personally have any control over those consequences.

“ Our job is to create the context where these very different constituencies can surface their shared highest aspirations and then make the changes they need to make within their communities to achieve those aspirations.

—SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR

Principle

4

Dialogue cannot be mandated.

Successful dialogue requires consent.

It's intuitive to think, when you're faced with a conflict, that the parties need to meet and talk things through. However, a critical first step is to determine whether the parties *want* to engage. If one party won't come to the table, you can't be successful with dialogue. Dialogue necessitates joint contribution. It requires consent and reciprocity. It needs to be voluntary. Assessing willingness to dialogue is particularly critical when there is a power differential between the parties involved. Parties who have less power may not conceptualize the situation as a "conflict," but they may instead think about it as an instance of victimization or abuse and may not be willing to engage in dialogue. In these cases, it may be necessary to employ other interventions, such as speaking with each party separately, to obtain consent for dialogue. Over time, it may be possible to reintroduce the possibility of dialogue.

Additionally, transformational strategies, like dialogue, rely on functional and well-run systems, like Title IX and HR processes, as well as administrators and leaders who are responsible, effective, and consistent in their use of power, authority, and discretion.

“ People will ask me, like, how do you convince people to try restorative practices? And I say, 'I don't, I can talk about the benefits and I can describe pros and cons, but I'm not gonna say this is the best process for you.' They can choose. They're the authorities of their own experience. They can choose whether meeting with me is helpful to them or not, or whether participating in any kind of process is helpful to them or not. And then the power dynamic, if you force people to participate, you can't force people to participate authentically or be truthful or come to the table in good faith. You can't force people to do that. So that's why everything I do is really voluntary. —STAFF

Principle

5

Triage your response.

Prioritize those most immediately affected.

Campus conflicts do not affect all parties equally. In the immediate aftermath, the task of meeting the needs of the various stakeholders can be overwhelming. Where does one begin? Without a working heuristic, it can be tempting to attend to the latest email, the loudest constituent, or the ones with the direct line to your office phone. Rather, triage your responses by who is most affected and how. Prioritize the opportunities positioned closest to the heart of the issue and then where you can reach the greatest number of people. Who will show up to their job not knowing what to do? Whose physical safety is immediately threatened? Then, expand your response to other stakeholder groups.

“ Conflict is a big umbrella—under that can be harm, abuse, misconduct—all of which are dealt with in different ways and for some of which dialogue is inappropriate to deal with. —STAFF

Principle

6

Reveal how the system works.

Demonstrate progress.

When an incident happens on campus, students and other stakeholders often look to the administration for a statement. The chancellor or president is the face of the institution—they are in the most visible, highest position of power. Statements serve to inform, but they also serve to signal that the incident is significant and warrants attention. This creates a tension between responding quickly to demonstrate care and responding thoughtfully, with time to deliberate. One way to navigate this tricky tension is to set expectations for the process you will follow and to share your progress against that process, even if you can't communicate all the details. Proactively acknowledge when some aspects of a response have legal implications and when individual privacy needs to be protected.

For example, when an arrest is made, community stakeholders have a general understanding of the steps that will unfold. They may not have all the details of the crime, or the people involved, but they know, generally, the process that is *supposed* to accompany that situation. Higher education institutions can establish systems for how different types of conflicts are managed and can socialize these processes as a means of structuring campus culture. Then, communication can reiterate these structures and provide status updates.

“ A lot of times it's like, 'Oh, this happened on Monday, and if we say we're not having the town hall until Friday, then somebody says, 'Well, are you being timely?' But I can't really think through how I feel, what the trauma was, what outcome I want, and what accountability can look like, in 24 hours. We're thinking about it, we're not ignoring it [even if there's no public response]. —SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR

Principle

7

Work within your locus of control.

You can't always act, but you can actively listen.

Some elements of campus conflict are beyond your control. Prioritize those factors that you can control. Depending on your role, consider if any of the following approaches make sense for you. Restate the university's policy and values on issues related to the controversial topic at hand (in this case, policies about inviting speakers and workplace sexual assault). Look for opportunities to educate or to revisit and clarify the university's position on a particular topic. Then, organize activities around this topic. Use these opportunities to listen to stakeholder concerns and to clarify and distance the university from the speaker or the topic, if appropriate. In the event of a breakdown in communication or process, make a practice of acknowledging where the institution could have done better.

“ It is so very rarely just about the one instance but rather an accumulation of a huge culture that students feel wronged about and then it explodes into this one incident that students feel is reflective of all the harm or all the difficulty that they've experienced on campus. I think that some of that comes from a lack of continual conversation or continual space for students to reflect and talk about that culture that they feel harmed by. **-FACULTY ADMINISTRATOR**

Principle

8

Resolution is not always possible.

Pay attention to the process, not just the outcome.

Conflict is inevitable. It is a necessary companion to disagreement. It can be healthy, or it can be toxic, depending on how it's handled. Conflict turns toxic when an individual's or a collective's well-being is threatened emotionally, psychologically, and even physically. The common tendency is to aim for conflict resolution, but resolution is not always possible. What is possible, however, is to strive toward healthy, productive conflict rather than toxic conflict. Intentional effort is needed to normalize conflict, build individual tolerance and appreciation for conflict, and shape healthy engagement with conflict.

“ There has to be room for conflict and diversity of opinion and welcoming of difference. The challenge is not to eliminate conflict or to avoid it because that's how we get positive social change...we don't want to squash conflict. We just want to change how it's expressed, how we can navigate it constructively and effectively. **-STAFF** ”

Principle

9

Center dignity.

Don't lose sight of the humans involved.

Even if you feel that “the institution” needs to respond to “the student body,” don’t lose sight of the fact that there are *humans* in the midst of these conflicts. We’re all more than our roles, especially when we’re grappling with human issues like identity, expression, belonging, fear, and care. The emotions involved are often as important as the intellectual content of the conflict. Attend to those emotions by offering community members opportunities to process. Tap into social psychologists who research intergroup relations. Campus cultural and support centers can be natural spaces to convene the community. Look for relationships that need repairing.

“ One of the first things that all of our undergraduate students do when they get on campus is sit in a facilitated, [restorative practices] circle with members of their cohort—who they’re gonna be with for the rest of the year—facilitated by peer leaders. And so every single incoming student knows what circle is. Every single incoming student has taken a moment to slow down and connect on that more holistic human level to step away from some of the charged rhetoric that oftentimes characterizes these conversations. Then when, down the line, they’re involved in a harm or a conflict, when there’s some sort of need for a reactive intervention, they’re more receptive. –STAFF

Principle

10

Where there is no precedent, focus on the novel.

Build coalitions to solve complex problems.

The most difficult issues within conflicts are those for which no specific policy exists to clearly cover the concerns. Sometimes serious misconduct cases are easier to address because there is policy in place to address them. Rely on policy and precedent wherever possible, but recognize that those will likely cover only a small portion of the conflicts you face. Then, separate the novel aspects of the incident from those with which you have experience. Those novel elements often pose the greatest challenges. You may need help workshopping an appropriate response. Task forces and working circles may feel tired, but these cross-stakeholder formats can be important and effective in some responses. You likely have folks on campus with relevant expertise. Use them. They will usually have a better sense of context and greater personal and professional investment than an external resource.

“ As we continue this path nationally—with the degree of polarization—this idea of constructive versus destructive dialogue is the prime need of the hour.

—SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR

Principle

11

Shape a different conversation.

Get out of the reactive space.

When stakeholder groups, like the board or alumni, are exerting opposing pressure, you don't have to accept the terms of the conflict you're handed. You can shape a different kind of conversation by changing the questions that you're asking or by stepping outside of a binary either/or mindset. Can you find a third path? When faced with what feels like a choice between a rock and a hard place, or a situation that calls for choices that violate personal or institutional values, look for ways to reframe or expand the terms. If possible, incorporate the stakeholder groups into the conversation—involve them in coming up with integrative solutions.

“ We don't have the right vocabulary to engage in productive conversation, and the fact that we don't have the vocabulary pushes us, no matter what we're talking about, into binary positions that have already been articulated and that are dead ends. —SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR



NINE STRATEGIES THAT WORK

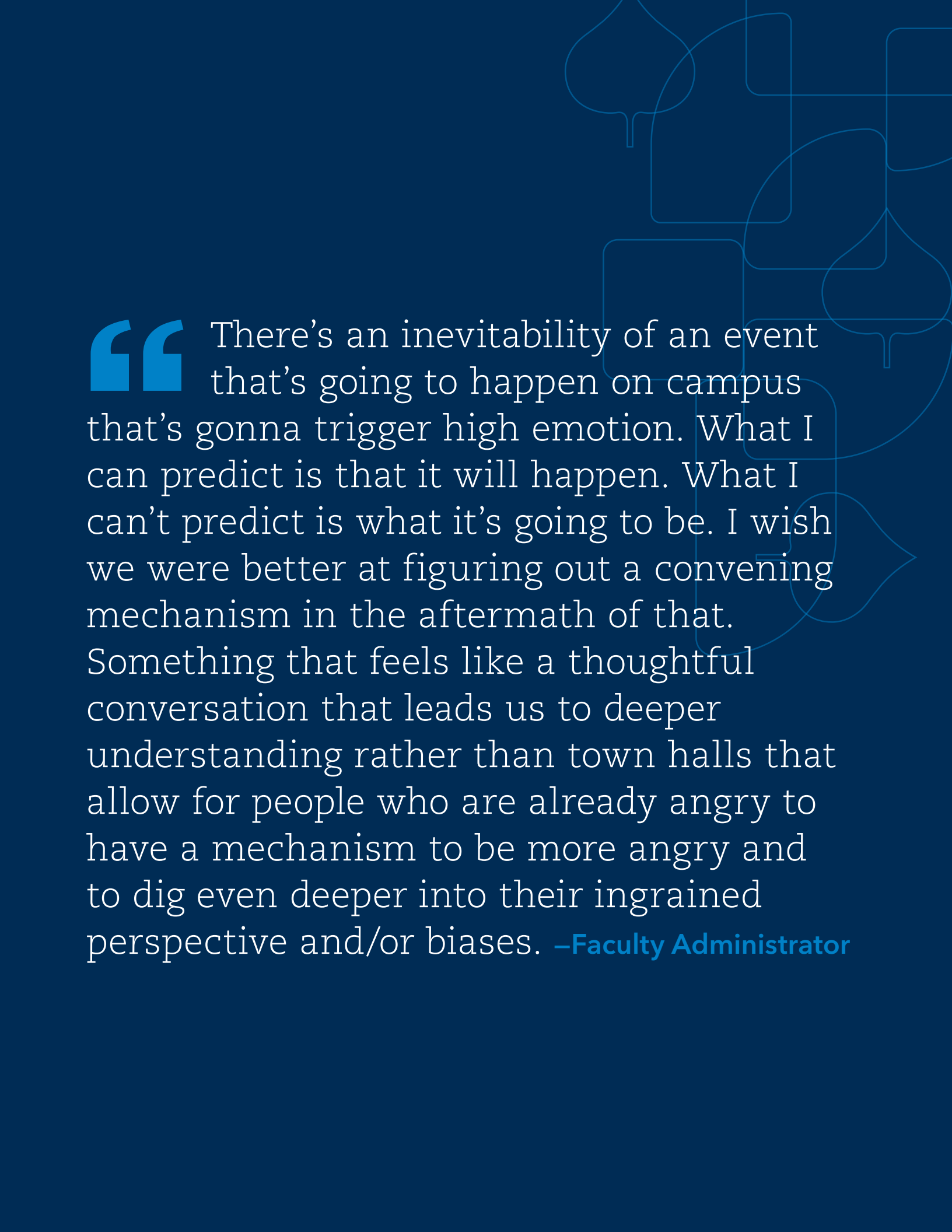
The following list of nine strategies for managing conflict on campus were collected from our study participants. Think of these as being applied, sometimes in combination, within the framework of the guiding principles. Some of these seem to work best in a *proactive* context. That is, they are applied on a day-to-day basis to build climate or culture. Other strategies are best applied *reactively*, for example, when things have already boiled over. Finally, some can be used in *both* contexts.

Establish organizational values.

Explicitly nurture, highlight, and live organizational values. The following are examples in which participants see values reflected:

- Campus symbols
- Policies, both formal and informal
- Available resources and trainings
- Meeting norms and etiquette
- Allocation of space, both physical and figurative

“ We’ve gone through a couple of shifts in the format of staff meetings. First, it was just top down: ‘I’m going to give you some updates.’ And that didn’t feel satisfactory to our dean. And it didn’t feel satisfactory to us. So now it’s molded and shifted into updates from different folks...opening up the agenda in a way that everyone feels like they can participate. That’s just something super tangible that I’ve seen to be a huge improvement in terms of how we do our work together. –SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR



“ There’s an inevitability of an event that’s going to happen on campus that’s gonna trigger high emotion. What I can predict is that it will happen. What I can’t predict is what it’s going to be. I wish we were better at figuring out a convening mechanism in the aftermath of that. Something that feels like a thoughtful conversation that leads us to deeper understanding rather than town halls that allow for people who are already angry to have a mechanism to be more angry and to dig even deeper into their ingrained perspective and/or biases. **–Faculty Administrator**

Create low-stakes practice opportunities and model desired skills.

Model and practice building skills. Give students, staff, and faculty the opportunity to practice talking, listening, and organizing via both formal and informal efforts. More formal efforts such as town halls, conversation circles, and facilitated dialogues tend to capture the attention of people who are already engaged with specific issues. Therefore, to engage a broader constituency, more informal practice opportunities need to be embedded where people already are, such as classrooms and staff meetings. Having consistent, ready access to designated spaces for conversations has an additional benefit: When incidents do occur, these settings provide a gradual “release valve” and a setting to process reactions and emotions.

Case in Point

Having an ecosystem that is supportive of diverse viewpoints starts with the understanding that there *are* diverse viewpoints on campus and that's OK. Initial, low-friction approaches, like this example, can pave the way for more intensive forms of dialogue down the road.

“ On our campus, there is a central location called The Pit where there will occasionally be people who ask topical, on-the-spot questions of passersby. Then they'll create compilations of different takes from various students and publish it in a short-form podcast. That's an interesting medium to be able to relay ideological diversity. Everyone who's featured in these podcasts may have different opinions, and it's not so exhaustive a format that you get tired of hearing someone go on a tangent. Having that quick forum for acknowledgment is a really good starting point. -STUDENT



“ All over the news we see people engaged in advocacy. We see people engaged in activism, but we don't see people engaged in diplomacy, which is really what this is. We don't see people engaged in these interest-based processes because, by definition, they're in the shadows. Many students know what activism can achieve. They don't know what an interest-based, diplomatic process can achieve, or even what it looks like or feels like. **-Staff**

Invest in administration, staff, and faculty training and skill building.

Skill building related to cultural humility and holistic student development can help allay classroom and workplace conflict. Administrators, staff, and faculty are all critical parts of the university system. It is important that they all “walk the walk” together and audit their own strengths and deficits.

“ If you want the university to teach the habits that are associated with being empathetic, you need to model it at the top. And then you’ve got to model it from the professors. If you want students to engage in an empathetic way, you’ve got to practice what you preach, right? How are we showing students how to respond in empathetic ways? Because generally we’re not. –STAFF

Be clear whom you're representing when making public statements.

During our research, some participants made a distinction between speaking on behalf of the university (for example, to impart information or to take a position on a topic) and making statements addressing their community (for example, to express concern). In the words of one college leader: "There are times when you speak on behalf of the institution, this is the institution's position, and there are times when you as president are speaking to your community. This is not a good analogy, so forgive me, but like a pastor would speak to his church, like you have to talk to this community that is struggling."

This issue was particularly salient among institutional leaders, such as chancellors and presidents, who are often asked to speak publicly on behalf of their institutions. Some leaders we spoke to adopted a position of neutrality regarding issues not directly related to their ability to carry out their institutional missions. This practice was adopted by some to signal their non-partisanship—and to reinforce that they were "everyone's president, even those who didn't vote for them." As a proactive technique, a position of neutrality must be considered in advance, as opposed to exercised on the fly.



“ Anything that doesn't affect the university directly policywise, I will not take a position on. I want my faculty and my students to take positions and to argue for them. But I do not want to lay down a party line. Doing this in an ad hoc fashion is not good. –**Senior Administrator**

Embrace novel counterprotest techniques.

Counterprotesting is a mechanism some participants used to successfully address controversial campus speakers.

“ We found out that Westboro Baptist Church was going to come and picket. They are very savvy about their rights. The way they fund themselves is by lawsuits when they are stopped. We went to the queer resource center and said, ‘We are telling you they are coming. What we’d like you to do is work with us, not to give them airtime. We don’t want you talking to them. We’ll set up spaces.’ Spontaneously, our student body president decided he was going to have a disco party on the quad at 8 AM, which is when they were scheduled to come. There was a lot of loud disco music. It was very peaceful. By the time the disco party was done, Westboro Baptist Church had gone home. We also covered up all of our signs with sheets, so they could not get any pictures standing in front of the seal of the campus that they could post and have a really great photo op about how they came and schooled us. We denied them their opportunity. We didn’t de-platform them. **-SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR**

Use participatory practices in decision-making.

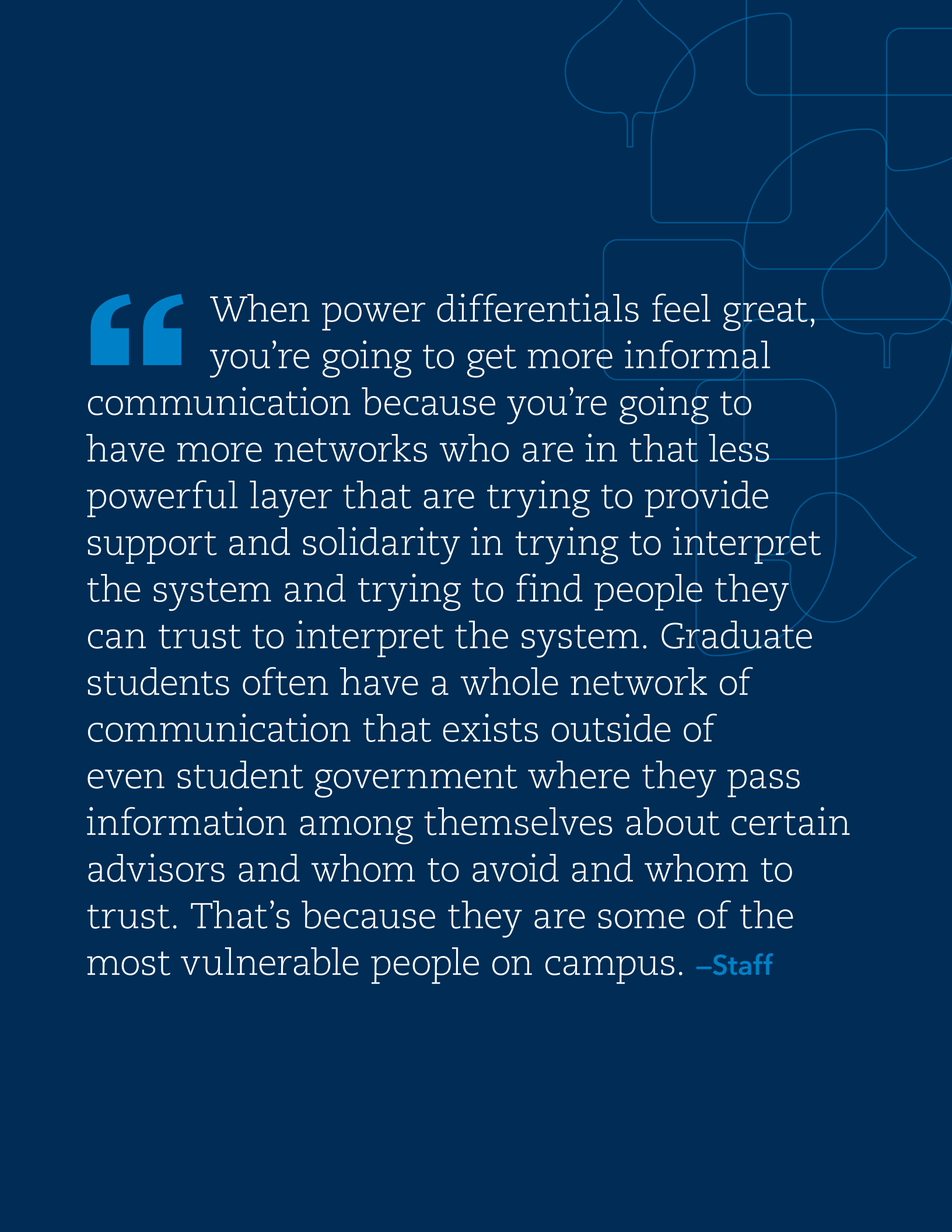
Consider who the stakeholders are and, when possible, include them in the process of making decisions. This optimizes the effectiveness of the decision and builds trust. Additionally, transparency about who has authority to make a final decision and how that decision will be made is essential to reinforcing trust.

“ You hear a policy come down. You're like, 'Wait a second. Who did they even consult about this? I know nobody's on board with that.' It's about culture, which is your people and process. Those have to match. But the most important piece is the people because the people are the ones who are going to bring life to policy and procedures. Our program has been trying to pioneer a focus on participatory practices and community-based research practices. Ways in which we can achieve as many voices being present at the table as possible in a way that is effective.... If we have an issue to solve, who are the stakeholders that are missing? We often don't ask that question. If you ask that question and there are other stakeholders that need to be at the table, then that changes the outcome of that decision-making process. **—SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR**

Build relationships across stakeholder groups and map your human information network.

Build cross-functional coalitions that comprise faculty, staff, administrators, and students and convene regularly—formally or informally. Engage them in discussions to provide them opportunities to practice for eventual conflicts. Leaders should regularly participate in such cross-stakeholder coalitions. Use this setting to build conflict transformation skills, which will make it easier for participants to embrace the conflicts that surface as learning opportunities and to respond with less reactivity and more grace.

When incidents do occur, these back-channel communication networks can be critical for collecting and disseminating information. Especially when large power differentials are at play in an incident, these informal channels can relay information that more formal channels cannot.



“ When power differentials feel great, you’re going to get more informal communication because you’re going to have more networks who are in that less powerful layer that are trying to provide support and solidarity in trying to interpret the system and trying to find people they can trust to interpret the system. Graduate students often have a whole network of communication that exists outside of even student government where they pass information among themselves about certain advisors and whom to avoid and whom to trust. That’s because they are some of the most vulnerable people on campus. –**Staff**

Invest in and engage expertise.

You will need different types of expertise at the table depending on the situation. This expertise can be formal or informal, external or internal. One of the unique strengths of a college or university is the wide variety of expertise on any given campus. Some of the specialized resources that our research participants tapped into included ombuds, social psychologists, experts in restorative practices, and experts in crisis communication. Local expertise can be especially helpful because of their familiarity with campus culture and the time required to manage conflict in a hyperlocal context.

“ A good reckoning with [our institution’s] history has to be fact based. I think it should not be legend or mere memory based. Our [campus’s equity and diversity] project has a staff person—an American historian—who heads it up. He has a staff of other historians and digital humanities folks. And what they’re doing is helping us to talk about that history on the basis of historical fact, as opposed to the legend or the legacy or the tradition. So I think that’s a good thing.

—FACULTY ADMINISTRATOR

Establish a crisis response team.

Using a crisis response team to proactively monitor communication platforms and to strategize can help prepare for and address conflicts. Often these teams comprise major university functions, such as provost, communications, and legal. Team members have experience applying techniques like inoculation to prevent amplification of undesirable messaging. They serve as advisors to higher education leadership and can anticipate optics in the midst of a campus conflict event. They maintain media relationships. And, they provide proactive monitoring of social media and internet chatter to identify potential problems, such as unwanted attention from national entities or speaker visits.

“ We have a special situations team.... You have to have a team that understands these issues deeply, that deals with them. And then you have to be able to put a response together, know how to work together, and bring in sometimes specific expertise that you need. But there's a core team that's doing this every time. We meet whenever something blows up; we'll meet the next morning. **—SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR**



A Vision for **CURIOUS, CARING, AND JOYFUL CAMPUSES**

When the topic of campus conflict comes up, particularly in the national media, debates often surround “free speech,” “inclusion,” and “civil discourse.” Useful as these concepts may be, they often relieve us of the task of creating a more descriptive articulation of what we hope to achieve. In our in-person gathering, we asked participants to envision their ideal campus culture and to describe what comes to mind.



In their responses, we saw shared aspirations of colleges and universities being a sacred space for learning. Colleges offer students the unique opportunity to encounter others with perspectives and backgrounds that differ from their own. It is a place where many students' worldviews begin to take shape. It is a place where exploration, growth, and learning flourish. Participants recognized the crucial role of community and belonging in creating this sacred space. They wanted every student, faculty, and staff member to feel connected, safe, and valued; as one participant put it, to be "comfortable and confident in critiquing without fear of reprimand, making mistakes and being held accountable without fear of destruction, and truly curious to learn from and work with a variety of perspectives."

Campus stakeholders recognized that, in order to manifest this vision, we must update our fundamental conception of conflict. They noted that, both on campus and in our national dialogue, difference and disagreement are discouraged, avoided, quashed, and punished. But it is impossible to quash the disagreements because the differences are about fundamentals and call into question shared values, existing power structures, and assumptions about how institutions should be run. Many stakeholders observed that default ways of handling conflict were not effective and at times actually served to exacerbate toxic patterns.



Joy

Participants' vision for their ideal campus touched on respectful ways to engage with one another, an emphasis on learning and relationships, the absence of fear, and the rediscovery of joy and connection.

Self-reflection

Trust

Humanity

Mutual care

Growth

Respect

Humility

Vulnerability

Learning

Inquiry

Exploration

Curiosity

Understanding

Complexity

Listening

Patience

Openness



Nevertheless, participants shared the hope that the conflicts could be transformed, and they saw that transformation as the “hardest part of what we do” and also “the most important work of our time.” There was a shared recognition of the value of engaging with, rather than avoiding, these fundamental questions. Campus conflicts were seen as challenging but also as important and worthwhile. What students, faculty, staff, and administrators want is a culture where differences are seen as adding value, where conflict is treated as natural, necessary, and as something not to be feared, but to be embraced. In the dozens of hours of transcripts we analyzed, there was a persistent aspiration from students, staff, and faculty that higher education—and our society—can come to see differences as strengths, to disagree, debate, listen, and connect, and to use both our commonalities and differences to build a better community together.

This report represents a joint effort between students, administrators, staff, and faculty to map the challenge and to codify a set of principles and practices that show promise in transforming campus conflict. In this report, we share the collective wisdom of the participants, but we hold no illusion that the work ahead is easy. Each campus, department, and community needs to define for itself how it wants to navigate difficult issues. Ultimately, these challenges can be addressed only one community at a time by having people engage with one another and finding ways to move forward together. The first step, perhaps, is to tune in to the undercurrent of conflict that lies beneath the bustle of classes, campus activities, and administrative duties and to face the challenge head on.



WHAT'S NEXT?

We welcome your partnership in tackling these challenges. In fact, we *need* your partnership. Whether you are a university leader, student leader, community organizer, researcher, alumnus, board member, parent, or policy maker, we hope you will take the principles and practices we have outlined and expand on them, adding stories, details, or necessary qualifiers.

As a next step in this project, we will translate the principles and strategies outlined in this report into concrete, actionable resources that can be adopted and replicated at campuses across the country. Similar to our role in this project, we aim to serve as the convener and synthesizer of your collective stories, successes, and lessons learned.

If you have stories or resources to share with us, please reach out at **research@constructivedialogue.org**.

Discussion Guide

DIRECTIONS

Form four small groups. Assign each group one of the following scenarios. Within each group, imagine that you are collectively in a position to advise your higher education institution on its response to this scenario. Develop recommendations for the higher education institution using the guided questions included below. After your group has had an opportunity to develop your recommendations, present your scenario and results to the full group. You do not need to answer each of the guided questions, but please include some elements from each section of questions:

- 1. Identify the problem.**
- 2. Determine key players.**
- 3. Develop possible response.**
- 4. Look ahead.**

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Identify the problem.

- What part(s) of this scenario presents an issue that needs to be addressed?
- What are the competing parts of the university mission, values, or goals at play here, if any?
- What are the key tensions at play here?

2. Determine the key players.

- Who are the key players affecting this case?
- What are their roles in this case?
- What is their relationship to the institution?
- What other stakeholders need to be considered?

3. Develop possible responses.

- What actions do you recommend in response to this scenario?
- Who should own these actions?
- How does this response support the fundamental mission of the institution?
- What stakeholders should be involved in formulating the response?
- What other information do you need to know?
- What are the implications of these actions for key stakeholders?
- How will you evaluate success?

4. Look ahead.

- What can be learned and applied from this scenario to help manage similar conflicts in the future?

Discussion Guide

SCENARIO 1: Empty Seats at the Table

A tenured professor believes that it is their pedagogical mission to create an environment of rigorous debate in their classroom. However, students, particularly students of color, have complained to the dean that the professor's approach to fostering debate creates a hostile environment and makes them feel emotionally unsafe. After a conversation with the dean, the professor suggests that they have a conversation with the students about how to debate while upholding emotional safety to create new norms. However, students say it is "too little, too late" and demand the professor be replaced or they will boycott the course.

SCENARIO 2: To Take a Stance or Not to Take a Stance?

Following the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the university president and senior leadership, who tend not to take stances on political issues in an attempt not to show bias and to create a welcoming environment for everyone, declined to issue a statement or to provide any guidance to the campus community regarding the decision. When the university does not take a stance, many students feel that the university does not support them or share their values. Additionally, faculty would like guidance from the university about how to manage this topic in their classes. Several faculty have complained that heated and unruly debates have disrupted classroom discussions. Many faculty feel that the university has left them on their own to manage conflicts among students over the decision. Lastly, staff members, particularly medical staff, feel ill-equipped and are worried about mandatory reporting rules proposed by the state legislature.

SCENARIO 3: Controversial Speakers and Guests

As a policy, your campus grants student groups the autonomy to invite any speaker to campus. A student club has invited a former elected official to give a talk on campus. Several former employees have accused this former elected official and members of their office of workplace sexual harassment. Although these accusations have made national news, no formal investigation has taken place as of yet. Many students do not feel the former elected official should be allowed to speak on campus. A local activist group outside the campus has denounced the speaker's presence and has gotten involved in calls to stop the speech. On the day of the speech, protestors occupy the stage to block the former elected official from speaking.

SCENARIO 4: Social Media Circus

Old tweets from a highly touted baseball player at the university have resurfaced and are being spread on social media. The tweets, written several years earlier when the student was still in high school, contain racial and homophobic slurs. The tweets have gone viral across the campus, amassing criticism and angry comments online. Despite an online apology from the student, many are not appeased and are demanding the school suspend the student from the baseball team. Although it is within the students' First Amendment rights to criticize their classmate online, this behavior has gotten to the point where it can reasonably be seen as creating a hostile environment on campus for the baseball player.



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