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# The Interrelationships among Culture, Communication, and Conflict in a Newly Formed Doctoral Program

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# THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS AMONG CULTURE, COMMUNICATION, AND CONFLICT IN A NEWLY FORMED DOCTORAL PROGRAM

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the Setting Expectations and Conflict Resolution project was to provide faculty and doctoral students with a professional development program that addressed conflict resolution using an interest-based approach. The program included two days of training focusing on setting expectations, exploring sources of conflict, and designing interventions to address conflict as it occurs. At the end of each day, participants were given a questionnaire to evaluate the usefulness of the training and its impact on their attitudes toward conflict. Focus groups were also held to assess the impact of the program. Preliminary results indicate that the program met or exceeded program objectives, and attendees felt that the training was successful in helping to set expectations and resolve conflict. Both student and faculty attendees reported an increase in their confidence in preventing and managing conflict.*

## INTRODUCTION

The culture of any group/organization is largely defined by the way that individuals communicate with each other and the ways in which conflicts are resolved. In doctoral education, the lack of explicitly communicated expectations between graduate students and faculty undermines the retention of doctoral students and creates the greatest potential for interpersonal conflict in the graduate education process (Golde, 2000; Lovitts, 2001). The program at Michigan State University (Klomprens, Beck, Brockman, & Nunez, 2008) adopted the interest-based approach to preventing and resolving conflict not only for its adaptability to a variety of contexts but also for its strength in fostering relationships between parties. The interest-based approach to managing conflict is a collaborative strategy that seeks to craft solution(s) which satisfy the interests of the parties involved in the conflict (Fisher & Ury, 1991). The relationship between graduate students and their faculty advisors is critical for progress through the degree program as well as for the long-term success of the graduate student. In the early phases of a student's graduate career, for example, faculty advisors

play a key role in research mentoring, as research is a fundamental requirement for graduate program completion. Over the long term, faculty often assist their former students long after program completion and graduation, through writing letters of recommendation, supportive networking, and providing critical comments on articles and grant proposals.

### **CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY'S PH.D. IN EDUCATION PROGRAM**

Chapman University's College of Educational Studies (CES) Ph.D. in Education is the first and only Ph.D. program on campus. The faculty, under the leadership of the Dean, developed the program over a period of six years. The 57 credit hour program has full-time and part-time pathways in three areas of emphasis: Cultural and Curricular Studies, Disability Studies, and School Psychology. These three areas were chosen due to the need to take advantage of the strengths of Chapman's CES faculty. There are courses in four core areas: foundations, inquiry, emphasis, and dissertation. We accept 18 students per year, six in each emphasis.

There are several innovative aspects of the program. First, as previously mentioned, students are accepted on a part-time as well as a full-time basis. Second, all of the classes are offered in the late afternoon or evening, making it easier for students to have some employment while they are in the program. Third, extensive writing support is offered from the very beginning, with supplemental support provided by faculty whose specialty is writing and rhetoric and by writing fellows (advanced doctoral students who have a strong propensity for writing). Fourth, there are three qualifying exams: a conference presentation, an article submitted for publication, and a grant proposal. We felt that the qualifying exams should approximate what university faculty do in their field. Fifth, faculty and students collaborate on three research forums during each academic year, bringing in some of the best minds in their respective fields to present the latest research. Finally, the faculty decided also to conduct specialized activities such as the Setting Expectations and Conflict Resolution workshops, with funding provided by a small faculty development grant from Chapman's Chancellor's Office. What was different about this program was the inclusion of both faculty members and Ph.D. students.

### **THE CULTURE OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION**

As we noted above, several authors have pointed out that graduate education, especially at the Ph.D. level, is remarkably unsuccessful when one considers how many of those who start a Ph.D. program actually complete it. In one major study, the average completion rate in six fields, including English, history, political science, economics, mathematics, and physics, was only 56.6% at 10 major universities across the country (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992). These rates were even lower for programs in the humanities and social sciences, which manage to graduate only a little more than one-third of those who begin a Ph.D. program (Damrosch, 1995). Other data suggests

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that although smaller programs do somewhat better than this average, their completion rates still only reach about 60 percent (Damrosch, 1995).

What accounts for the finding that, at best, only about half of the students who enter Ph.D. programs finish them? Some clues can be found in descriptions of the culture of graduate education at the Ph.D. level (Adrian-Taylor, Noels & Tischler, 2007; Green & Bauer, 1995; Harnett & Katz, 1977; Nerad & Miller, 1996). Damrosch (1995) characterized academic life as encouraging both solitude and competition. Sociability in general is discouraged, and academics become what Damrosch calls a “community of one” (Damrosch, 1995, p. 100). If academic life is seen as one of isolation and competition, then it is unlikely that many of those who live it will have the skills needed to support junior scholars and resolve the conflicts that are inevitably part of the path to completion of a dissertation.

Although the culture of academic life and the process of graduate education encourage solitary work, completion of a dissertation also involves the paradox of working within an intense and hierarchical social relationship, that of doctoral student and dissertation chair. The power differential between student and advisor is largely one-sided, with the advisor holding all the cards. In such a lopsided relationship, it takes an unusually brave student to initiate a conversation about unmet needs or conflicts. This suggests that many conflicts remain unresolved and become the source of festering dissatisfaction and eventually withdrawal from the program.

### **COMMUNICATION BETWEEN GRADUATE STUDENTS AND FACULTY ADVISORS**

Research has shown that a better working relationship with faculty is developed for those students who receive useful early information about *program expectations* (Green, 1991). The way that expectations are communicated, set, and aligned between faculty and graduate students is a function of the context and culture of the graduate program. For the graduate student, the experience of graduate education is often vague, and misalignments and the resulting conflict are too often attributed to personal failure on the part of the graduate student. As one graduate student stated, “The doctorate pursuit is frighteningly vague and arbitrary” (Kerlin, 1995, p.15). Another lamented, “Experience with my advisor—I’ve never felt comfortable in his presence . . . our relationship is stilted—a game with unwritten rules and no mercy” (Kerlin, p. 16).

The culture of graduate education is one in which there are unclear expectations, implicit assumptions (Kehrhahn, 1999) and frequent misunderstandings (Lovitts, 2001) between faculty and graduate students. Kehrhahn found that the lack of clear, realistic expectations about the process, milestones, and timeframe required to complete a Ph.D. was one of the top three issues directly related to how efficiently doctoral students progressed through their program (the other two issues include fragmentation of program phases and the inaccessibility of institutional and program supports for working part-time adult graduate students). Likewise, the more explicit these

expectations, the more graduate students are better able to accommodate to their role as graduate students and the more productive these students are as measured by the number of future publications (Bauer & Green, 1994). Nerad and Miller (1996) reported that personal frustration, resulting from misaligned expectations, is cited as a primary reason for leaving by students who exit within the first two years of graduate study.

In the beginning stages of socialization into graduate studies, students slowly become aware of the explicit behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive expectations held for them (Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001). Lovitts (2001) reported that students usually understand the formal expectations but do not have the same understanding of informal expectations. The shared expectations, based upon formal, written policies and rules, serve to communicate explicit institutional requirements. However, such institutional requirements are only a small portion of the expectations that need to be met for successful degree completion. Many of the important behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive expectations are informal and implicit.

Lovitts (2001) reported that doctoral degree completers identify, among other things, an understanding of informal expectations as an important aspect for successful graduate education. Informal expectations are often understood through trial and error, the departmental grapevine, intuition, and socialization. These strategies for understanding informal expectations are not always effective and are often very risky. An awareness of the importance of informal expectations in graduate education and any intervention that helps make these informal (and implicit) expectations explicit are positive steps in any effort to improve retention of graduate students and their graduate education experience.

Hartnett and Katz (1977) posited that *clarity* about expectations results in more accountability on the part of both graduate students and faculty. Gaining clarity and an explicit understanding of expectations is a positive step. Going one step further, to jointly setting expectations, improves accountability and strengthens the faculty/student relationship. It is within the joint setting of expectations that the interest-based approach provides a unique alternative to developing clear understandings between graduate students and faculty. Further, the setting of mutually explicit expectations between faculty and graduate students, using an interest-based approach, serves to first develop, and later protect, through interest-based conflict resolution, faculty-student relationships.

### **CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION IN DOCTORAL EDUCATION**

Conflict exists when two (or more) people (or groups) perceive their values, actions, or activities as incompatible (Tillett, 1991). Conflict over ideas, research methods, and analysis and interpretation of data advances knowledge and is a fundamental part of academic institutions. New knowledge is created by conflict, thus making conflict both inevitable and necessary in higher education. Conflict itself is neither good nor bad—its value is measured in its outcome. The

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outcome is directly related to how the conflict is managed. When interpersonal conflict is not managed well, it can be costly for students, faculty members, and administrators, and it can tarnish the reputation of the department and university. When conflict is managed well, it can lead to constructive outcomes. Managing conflict constructively is a matter of strategic, intentional choice.

Generally speaking, there are five strategies for resolving conflict: competition, avoidance, accommodation, collaboration, and compromise (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Because the relationship between graduate students and their faculty advisors is so critical, the collaborative strategy is often the best choice to use in a conflictive situation. One approach within that strategy, which serves to maintain and foster relationships, despite the occurrence of a conflict, is called the Interest-Based Approach (Fisher & Ury, 1991). An interest-based approach to setting expectations and resolving conflict focuses on the underlying interests and concerns of the involved parties, with an emphasis on crafting options that satisfy multiple parties and their multiple interests (Fisher & Ury, 1991; Klomparens & Beck, 2000).

## METHODS

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of faculty and doctoral students who attended a professional development activity that consisted of two workshops, one on setting expectations between doctoral students and faculty and the second on resolving conflicts that may emerge. According to Patton (2002), when an investigation deals primarily with the lived experiences of a phenomenon by a group of people, a phenomenological approach is appropriate. Patton stated, "To gather such data, one must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest" (p. 104).

This study incorporated a survey that was administered at the conclusion of each workshop as well as in-depth interviews with four focus groups: faculty who attended both workshops, faculty who did not attend either workshop, students who attended both workshops, and students who did not attend either workshop. The focus groups utilized a protocol adapted from Brockman, Basu, and Nunez (2008). The interview protocol is in Appendix B.

A limitation of our design was the constraint that some faculty and students attended one of the workshops but did not attend either both or neither. The resulting number of participants in each focus group was as follows: four faculty members attended both workshops, two faculty members attended neither, three doctoral students attended both, and four students attended neither. Faculty/students who attended neither workshop are heretofore referred to as non-attendees. Similarly, faculty/students who attended both workshops are heretofore referred to as attendees. An evaluation survey was administered at the conclusion of each workshop (Appendix A). Items were constructed by the researchers using a standard format commonly used to evaluate workshops. The reliability of the survey was not assessed. Content validity was determined by asking

colleagues to assess the items for the stated purpose (i.e., conflict resolution workshop evaluation) and revising the survey based on the feedback.

Approximately six months after the workshops, the four focus groups were convened by the faculty members who had initiated the project. Transcripts of the focus group sessions were made, and the content of these transcripts was analyzed for recurring themes and patterns. After first reading the transcripts individually, the authors came together to discuss their observations. This first reading produced a framework of broad categories or themes. These themes were discussed and given preliminary labels. During a second reading, the authors read and labeled the statements individually and then met to discuss and compare their observations. This process was iterative, repeating itself several times until the authors concluded that all themes and patterns were identified.

## RESULTS

As noted above, two kinds of data were gathered for this study. Evaluation data was gathered for all participants immediately after the workshops. In addition, focus group data was gathered from both participants and non-participants about six months after the workshops.

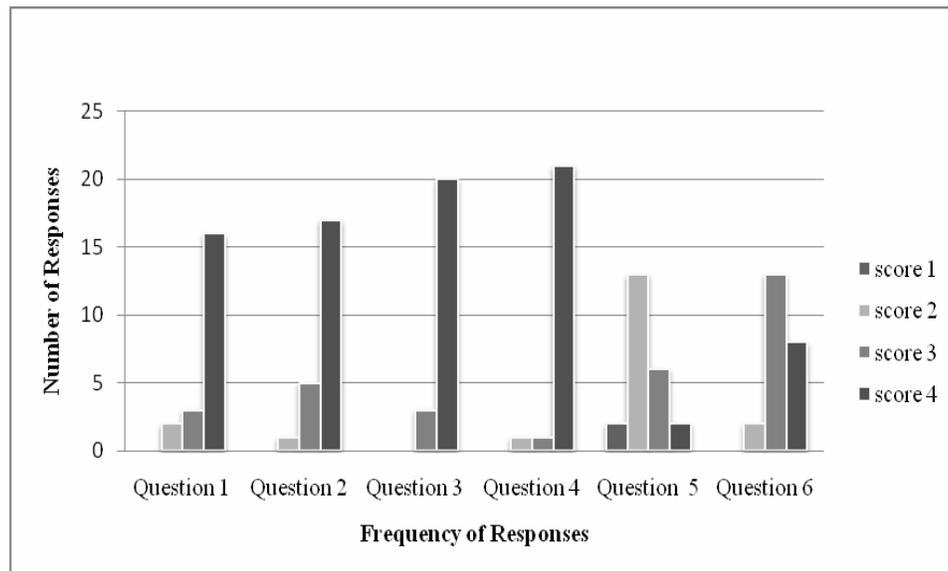
### **Evaluation Survey**

Following each session, participants, 14 faculty and 27 students total, completed an evaluation survey (Appendix A). After the first session, which focused on setting expectations, the vast majority of the participants said that they found the workshop very useful and would recommend this kind of training to other doctoral students or faculty. Almost all of the participants reported that the presenters were excellent. The structure of the workshop incorporated lecture, small group interaction, and role-playing with the aid of video-cases that were developed by the presenters. The majority of participants found this style and structure to work well with their own learning style. The most positive feedback, however, was the participants' reported change in confidence levels in dealing with issues between doctoral students and faculty. More than half said that, before the workshop, they felt only somewhat confident in dealing with these situations but that, after the workshop, everyone reported feeling confident or very confident with the skills that they acquired (see Appendix C and Figure 1).

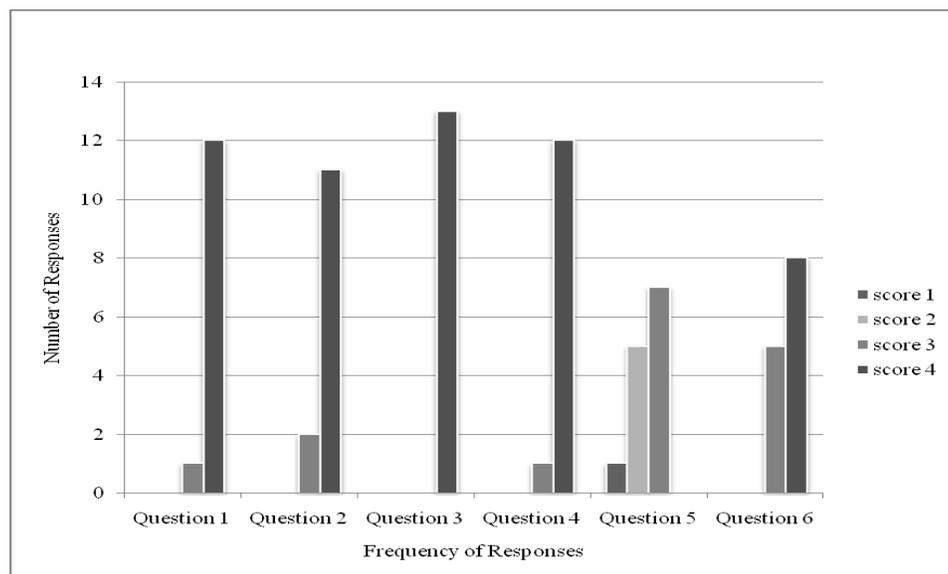
Following the second session, which focused on conflict resolution, an even greater majority of the participants reported finding the workshop to be very useful, and everyone said that they would absolutely recommend this kind of training to other doctoral students and faculty. Video-cases were incorporated into the structure of the workshop to show examples of conflicts that could arise and how to deal with them. The vast majority said the structure of the workshop worked well with their learning style. Additionally, all of the participants rated the presenters as excellent. Before this workshop, most participants reported that they felt confident in dealing with conflict in

the program, but, after the workshop, every participant reported feeling confident or very confident (see Appendix D and Figure 2).

**Figure 1: Evaluation Scores for Session One**



**Figure 2: Evaluation Scores for Session Two**



In both workshops, participants indicated learning about alternative approaches to conflict, focus on interests instead of positions, and trust between faculty and students, which they reported are all keys to increasing their confidence in dealing with conflict. Even more importantly, participants realized there is a place for conflict in that it is necessary for learning and growing as long as it is handled and resolved with both parties looking at it from an interest-based approach.

## **Faculty Focus Groups**

### **Conflict depersonalization**

Among faculty members, non-attendees tended to perceive their role in faculty/student conflict in terms of following policies and procedures. They saw conflict as rare, and, when it occurred, their main strategy was to depersonalize conflict. Non-attendees expressed this theme of depersonalizing conflict by frequent references to roles, rules, and institutional processes as a way of dealing with conflict. For instance, a member of the focus group made up of faculty non-attendees described how institutional roles led him to take a hands-off approach to conflict:

Well, something I've really reflected on recently and confirms what you're saying is that experience of realizing that everyone has their role inside the institution and you have to respect those roles and perhaps not even, intervene or, it's not my place to say this to that person because they are managing it within their own sphere of influence.

As noted above, non-attendees consistently responded to questions by referring to policy, procedures, and a process of depersonalizing conflict. Examples of this theme included the following statements:

It is not confrontational, it's just presentation of facts: these are the issues, these are the ramifications as I perceive them.

When you're dealing with people I try to have them identify what the problem is and not personalize it, for example as opposed to saying you are such-and-such, no this is your behavior and tell them what the consequences are and if you continue to do this, this is what's going to happen. So kind of depersonalizing it and keep the behavior.

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You know for example there are certain requirements, policy or practice or regulations, you have to work within that framework, and so there is a limit to what you can; there's a limit to the type of solutions.

But let me say first that we have the mechanisms in place, there's an appeals process that's spelled out that they can be referred to and advised to follow step by step.

I tell them [other faculty] is be consistent and don't be arbitrary or capricious in your decision making, they may not like your decisions but at least you'll be consistent and predictable.

Attendees rarely referenced policies and procedures and seemed to see conflict through a more interpersonal lens than the non-attendees did. In contrast to the depersonalized follow-the-rules-and-procedures approach discussed by non-attendees, attendees saw interpersonal engagement, through empathic listening, as an important way of managing conflict.

[The] way I handled it, I felt like I wanted to listen and felt very strong about listening because I believe it was a stressful experience.

It was my main job to listen more so than come up with a plan.

I tried to be kind, I tried to listen, I tried to understand.

Make sure they feel like 'I am hearing you.'

### **Frequency of conflict**

Interestingly, non-attendees also seemed to see conflict as rare, suggesting that they did not see faculty/student conflict as a critical issue in graduate education.

I can't recall a situation with a student . . .

But I'm thinking of over the course of a quarter century there were very few real problems with students.

(Q) Any experiences with student teachers out there? (A) Yes, for example, every once in a while, a great once in a while there's not a good match.

In contrast, faculty attendees saw the prevention of conflict as important and expressed appreciation of the difficulties of managing conflict. This is demonstrated in the following statements:

I think I try to prevent conflict and I think I do that better than I manage conflict.

It's hard for me to manage conflict sometimes.

I really like to prevent it if I can.

This group also emphasized resolving conflict directly rather than passively or indirectly.

I realized that the only way to resolve it was to go in and get one-on-one and say here's the situation so we need to resolve this otherwise it will fester and get worse and get blown out.

I think one would be not to avoid it but to take it head on even though it's painful and tough at times but to deal with it instead of avoiding it.

For this group, this sense of directness as a virtue in resolving conflict appeared to be directly connected to their experience in the workshop. When asked how participation affected them, one participant stated:

You know the thing that stood out for me that you just mentioned is being explicit. They talked a lot about being explicit and you know sometimes I soft-soap things too much . . . so I'm not as direct as I need to be at times and their voicing 'be explicit, be explicit, be explicit' keeps coming back to make it crystal clear what we're talking about instead of trying to soft-soap it a little bit.

### **Workshop feedback**

Attendees also connected listening, empathy, and a more personalized approach to faculty-student relationships to their workshop experiences.

They said a lot about the listening part too, they really hammered that about the listening and I tend to, I like to be a good listener but I have to work at it because I usually want to keep going.

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And I like to try to put myself in the student's shoes so that I can see it from their reference point, not from my reference point and that's hard.

In addition, faculty attendees mentioned that their experience with the workshop led them to value directedness in dealing with conflict.

Yeah, I agree, I remember that from some of the videos in particular and one of the things is I tend to be pretty laid back and sometimes that's misinterpreted as I don't care and you can do whatever you want and so when something does come up and I say 'Wait a minute, where is this? Why haven't you done it?' then they're like whoa! So they misunderstand being explicit without being harsh or anything, but I just need to be aware of my own tendency that I created a problem down the road in clearness verses harsh.

## **Student Focus Groups**

### **Perceived power differential**

Students in both focus groups seemed much more aware of the power difference between them, their advisors and instructors than did faculty members. None of the faculty members who participated in the focus groups discussed power differences explicitly, yet it was an important theme for students.

I think just the intimidation factor.

I think that person intimidated me.

Pay-backs are hell.

I felt it was safer to retreat than to have possible retaliation.

But when you know they're gonna be responsible for grading you for half your program, it's, you know it definitely puts you, it's just an unequal playing field I guess.

Sometimes the awareness of power was expressed strategically in that it was important to know who among the faculty had more power and who is was safe to approach.

You know that there are definitely professors in the program that seem to hold a higher power than other professors.

I'd probably say the fact that the school is so small that you have to think before you decide to confront someone, how will this (confrontation) affect me in the future.

### **Setting Expectations**

Failed expectations appear to be at the heart of conflict. Sometimes these involve expectations around assignments and related concerns.

I had submitted a paper for the end of the semester project and I had submitted it early as I had assumed without stating it, I had assumed that because it got in early it would get read early and get back to me early but I didn't articulate that so it didn't get back to me early, it got back to me like two days before the last class.

Others seem to involve broader expectations, such as whether a conversation is confidential or whether information about a person's performance is private.

But I really honestly thought my concerns and frustrations would be confidential not the minute I left the office the person would be on email with the person saying, you know, whatever I had just said. So that really did surprise me, I really did think there was, there should be a level of confidentiality.

I heard something about my paper from someone else, from different sources and so I felt bad because I felt like people were talking about me behind my back.

### **Strategies to manage conflict**

One important strategy that students use to manage conflict is to consult a confidant. Sometimes this is a faculty member, while other times it is their peers. For instance, the person above who was upset about the publicity of her performance on a paper described how she dealt with the conflict thus:

But I did actually speak to someone about it . . . another professor, not the person who actually . . .

Another student described the importance of her advisor as a confidant.

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I just tend to talk a lot to my professor or my advisor.

Other students sought out peers and used them as confidants.

I would say more so if you can find a few peers in the program that you really, really trust, and those you really click with; to use them as a sounding board.

I think if it wasn't for one or two peers in the program who you know at the same time were going through similar situations, you know, if I hadn't had their support I don't think I would have stayed in the program.

When students have no confidante, students see themselves as especially vulnerable.

I think I attempted that at the beginning of the program, I tried to, I think I came into the program maybe overly trustworthy, in terms of colleagues as well as faculty members and experienced a backlash in terms of the way I was treated.

I mean this is a big program, you don't know if you open your mouth or who you speak to if that's going to somehow, you know, affect your future.

When vulnerability sets in, students see themselves as having few options. One clear theme, especially among those students who did not attend the workshop, was avoidance.

I've done my best to keep my mouth shut and not share my opinions and really be careful about whom I talk to. Across the board in terms of faculty including my advisor.

So basically it's just keep a low profile and get done.

Tread softly. For me, tread softly. Be careful with your trust.

Although both focus groups saw power as an important theme, attendees described conflict in terms that were more positive as well as advocated for a more direct approach to dealing with it.

I would say that conflict is probably part of the process too, so to expect that, and then to address it.

I tend to just not address it, I avoid it. This program is teaching me that it's not a positive thing for me because then I get all worked up.

### **Workshop Feedback**

One student described the benefit of the workshops in this way:

I think it helped me realize that it just got me prepared to know that this is a common thing whereas in my undergrad and in other graduate work I really hadn't experienced that.

Another described how the workshop changed how she saw her advisor.

I did feel more comfortable talking to my advisor after the workshop, I don't know why that was, I have a good relationship with my advisor. It kind of was a trigger to say don't just plow on through your program without having a regular consultation with your advisor.

## **DISCUSSION**

Differences were found between those faculty and students who attended the workshop and those who did not. For the *faculty*, the main difference between attendees and non-attendees was their perception of the role that they take in the wake of faculty/student conflict. For non-attendees, the role was described as depersonalized, arms-length, and procedural. For attendees, the role was described as personalized, hands-on, and personally explicit. In addition, the communication skill of listening as a way of managing conflict was quite pronounced in the faculty attendee group, whereas it was not discussed in the non-attendee focus group. Both the qualitative and the quantitative data, along with other research (Adrian-Taylor, Noels, & Tischler, 2007; Zweibel, Goldstein, Manwaring, & Marks, 2008), show that a single intervention in the form of an interactive workshop can increase the use of collaborative strategies and effective communication skills.

For the *students*, similar to faculty, the main difference between student attendees vs. non-attendees was the strategy that they would use in resolving conflict. More often than not, non-attendees used avoidance as a strategy to both prevent and resolve conflict, whereas the attendees advocated for more of a direct approach. Barsky and Wood (2005) recommended that universities must "promote norms of assertiveness, constructive dialogue and other methods of handling conflict more effectively" (p. 262).

Interestingly, differences also exist between faculty and students (both attendees and non-attendees) in that graduate students perceive a power differential between themselves and their

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faculty advisors (though graduate student attendees did feel that the workshops decreased this perception). As one student attendee stated in the workshop evaluation report, “(I learned) that we are part of a larger community with equal voice.” Another student became aware of the fact that, “in the school setting, it is okay to approach them (faculty) and ask for clarity.” Clearly, for this student, the power gap narrowed. Conversely, faculty in both groups did not explicitly discuss a perceived power differential, although those faculty who did attend the workshop seemed to become more aware of the differential, as one faculty member wrote, “Hearing students talking about safety emphasized for me the importance of dealing with conflict which then encourages me to ‘deal’ whether I am confident or not.” The issue of safety is in direct relation to the power differential perception (Barsky & Wood, 2005; Kerlin, 1995). Within this context, safety refers to a relational environment free of risk regarding their graduate student status. The main conflict management strategy used by students within the attendee and non-attendee focus groups was to consult with another person. This strategy is often used when one party perceives itself as being less powerful than the other party. Rubin and Zartman (1995) suggested that “the power of the weaker parties in the cases studied derived from their ability to draw on a broad array of resources . . . perhaps the major source of power . . . was the ability to bring in support from external actors” (p. 361).

The evaluations completed immediately after the workshop coupled with the feedback from focus group participants who attended the workshop suggested that workshop principles had, to some extent, transferred to practice. In fact, both student and faculty attendees reported an increase in their confidence in preventing and managing conflict following the workshop. This newly found confidence could be attributed to this transfer. Zweibel et al. (2008) showed similar results in their study of medical residents and academic health care faculty.

We have demonstrated that our two-part intervention for faculty and students on preventing and resolving conflict increased the confidence levels of workshop attendees in preventing and resolving conflict with faculty/students regarding issues within our newly formed Ph.D. program. Further, workshop attendees’ perspectives regarding the strategies that they would use to resolve conflict with one another, as compared to those who did not attend the workshop, were more direct and less avoiding. We believe that, by applying the interest-based approach to the setting of expectations, the frequency and intensity of conflict between graduate students and faculty will be reduced or possibly may be prevented altogether. The implicit nature of expectations within graduate education can easily lead to incomplete or incorrect communication and, hence, conflict between graduate student and faculty. Clearly, the use of an interest-based approach as a strategy for resolving conflicts in graduate education is an important tool for graduate students and faculty alike. Reduction or prevention of conflict between graduate students and their faculty advisors will go far to improve not only the retention of individual graduate students but also the experience of graduate education for both faculty and graduate students alike.

## IMPLICATIONS

The interest-based approach makes visible the interrelationships between culture, communication, and conflict in doctoral education. In doing so, it provides a way to mitigate the influence of the existing power differential by focusing on a communication approach that addresses both the prevention and resolution of interpersonal conflict between faculty and doctoral students.

The current economic crisis looming over the nation's higher education system brings with it increased stress on both faculty and graduate students. The visible signs of stress often reveal themselves in the form of interpersonal conflict. Building a system's capacity to recognize and withstand such occurrences is critical to the health of the organization and the faculty and graduate students who must survive and thrive within the organization. Capacity-building for preventing and resolving conflict is critical to any developing organization such as a new doctoral program. Holton (1998), in her book *Mending the Cracks in the Ivory Tower*, stated that, "Direct negotiations, without the intervention of a third party, should be attempted first as they encourage communication and education." (p. 211).

The prevention of conflict requires that behavioral expectations are explicitly communicated from the start of any working relationship. When a new doctoral program is successful in encouraging both faculty and graduate students to develop and commit to explicitly defined expectations, the resulting working relationships will flourish. Results of this study and others make it quite clear that failed expectations between parties increase the occurrence of interpersonal conflict. With doctoral student attrition at unacceptable rates across disciplines, timely education and organizational commitments that increase the likelihood of program success for doctoral students should be embraced as a best practice and shared with the higher education community.

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## APPENDIX A

### Opinionnaire

*Please respond to the following items by circling your response.*

1. Overall, how would you rate the usefulness of the workshop?  
1 = not useful at all   2 = somewhat useful   3 = useful   4 = very useful
2. How did the style and structure of today's workshop work for you?  
1 = not at all   2 = somewhat   3 = well   4 = very well
3. Overall, how would you rate the presenters?  
1 = poor   2 = so so or okay   3 = good   4 = excellent
4. Would you recommend this type of training to other doctoral students/faculty?  
1 = not at all   2 = maybe   3 = yes   4 = absolutely
5. Before attending this workshop, how confident did you feel in dealing with conflicts with faculty members?  
1 = not confident at all   2 = somewhat confident   3 = confident   4 = very confident
6. How confident do you feel now?  
1 = not confident at all   2 = somewhat confident   3 = confident   4 = very confident
7. If your confidence increased, what did you learn today that increased your confidence?
8. What should have been different for your confidence to increase (or increase more)?

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## APPENDIX B

### Focus Group Questions

#### *Focus group questions for graduate students*

1. Do graduate students attempt to prevent or manage conflict with faculty?
2. Can you describe a conflict you have experienced with your faculty advisor or another faculty member?
3. How did you manage that conflict?
4. Can you describe any barriers you have encountered to managing conflict with your advisor or other faculty members?
5. What advice would you give to new graduate students about how to manage conflict with faculty members?
6. Did participating in the workshop influence how you perceive or handle conflict with faculty members? If so, please explain.

#### *Focus group questions for faculty members*

1. Do faculty members attempt to prevent or manage conflict with faculty? Please explain.
2. Can you describe a conflict you have experienced with your advisees or other doctoral students?
3. How did you manage that conflict?
4. Can you describe any barriers you have encountered to managing conflict with your advisees or other doctoral students?
5. What advice would you give to new faculty about how to manage conflict with students?
6. Did participating in the workshop influence how you perceive or handle conflict with students? If so, please explain.

**APPENDIX C****Building Relationships through the Setting of Expectations between Faculty and Students**Summary of Survey Responses (1<sup>st</sup> Session, N=23)

1. Overall, how would you rate the usefulness of the workshop?  
1-Not useful at all- 0  
2-Somewhat useful- 2  
3-Useful- 3  
4-Very useful- 18
2. How did the style and structure of today's workshop work for you?  
1-Not at all- 0  
2-Somewhat- 1  
3-Well- 5  
4-Very well- 17
3. Overall, how would you rate the presenters?  
1-Poor-0  
2-So so or Okay- 0  
3-Good- 3  
4-Excellent- 20
4. Would you recommend this type of training to other doctoral students/faculty?  
1-Not at all- 0  
2-Maybe- 1  
3-Yes- 1  
4-Absolutely- 21
5. Before attending this workshop, how confident did you feel in dealing with conflicts with faculty members/students?  
1-Not at all confident- 2  
2-Somewhat confident- 13  
3-Confident- 6  
4-Very confident- 2
6. How confident do you feel now?  
1-Not at all confident- 0  
2-Somewhat confident- 2  
3-Confident- 13  
4-Very confident- 8

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**APPENDIX D****Building Relationships through the Setting of Expectations and Resolving Conflict  
between Faculty and Students**Summary of Survey Responses (2<sup>nd</sup> Session, N=13)

1. Overall, how would you rate the usefulness of the workshop?  
1-Not useful at all-0  
2-Somewhat useful-0  
3-Useful- 1  
4-Very useful- 12
2. How did the style and structure of today's workshop work for you?  
1-Not at all-0  
2-Somewhat-0  
3-Well- 2  
4-Very well- 11
3. Overall, how would you rate the presenters?  
1-Poor-0  
2-So so or Okay-0  
3-Good-0  
4-Excellent- 13
4. Would you recommend this type of training to other doctoral students/faculty?  
1-Not at all-0  
2-Maybe-0  
3-Yes- 1  
4-Absolutely- 12
5. Before attending this workshop, how confident did you feel about dealing with conflicts with faculty members/students?  
1-Not at all confident- 1  
2-Somewhat confident- 5  
3-Confident- 7  
4-Very confident-0
6. How confident do you feel now?  
1-Not at all confident-0  
2-Somewhat confident-0  
3-Confident-5  
4-Very confident- 8

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