

Towards Development of a Reliable Instrument to Rate Collegiality among Faculty Members of a University Department

INTRODUCTION

Although some criticism still remains [see, for example, AAUP (2006) 39-40], case law in the United States has continued to uphold the use of collegiality as a factor in tenure and other personnel decisions, and they have affirmed the use of collegiality as a factor in making decisions regarding faculty employment, promotion, tenure, and termination. (See *Mayberry v. Dees and University of Baltimore v. Iz.*) Indeed, the lack of civility or collegiality can be used as a legitimate basis to terminate a full-time faculty member. (*Bresnick v. Manhattanville College*, *Stein v. Kent State University*.) Moreover, US courts have acknowledged all of the following in rendering their decisions relative to collegiality (Connell & Savage, 2001).

- Faculty members do not operate in isolation; decisions such as curricula, class scheduling, and advising are all often made as a group.
- An ability to cooperate is relevant because of the length of a faculty member's employment in systems where there is tenure.
- The courts perceive collegiality as an important factor for universities to fulfill their missions.
- Universities do not have to specify collegiality as a specific criterion — in addition to teaching, research, and service — in order to consider it in personnel decisions. In fact, universities may regard collegiality as a relevant consideration in a faculty member's teaching, research, and service.

- The courts have long deferred to university decisions regarding who should teach. They have continued to do so even when issues of collegiality and termination of tenured faculty have been involved.
- Because of the subjective nature of what does or does not constitute collegiality, courts should not substitute their judgment for that of faculty and administration.
- Because universities make a substantial commitment to the individual (i.e., tenure is commonly viewed as a lifetime appointment), they should be given wide discretion in making personnel decisions regarding that individual.

Most position descriptions for college and university faculty will include benchmarks subtly indicating assumptions about collegiality. For instance, many universities include within the teaching or service components of tenure and promotion documents a requirement that the candidate demonstrates an “ability to work well with colleagues,” “show good academic citizenship,” or “contribute to a collegial atmosphere.” The department chair is the primary person who assumes responsibility for monitoring these types of activities among the faculty. Moreover, it is the job of the chair to determine whether faculty members meet expected standards for professionalism and institutional citizenship when decisions about tenure, promotion in rank, or reappointment are made.

RATIONALE

Accepting and sharing responsibility for creating a productive work setting within the department and institution result, at least to a great extent, from how well each member of the community carries his or her own fair share of the common workload. The challenges faced by

colleges and universities in the 21st century cannot be successfully mastered nor can the efforts of dedicated professionals be sustained when the actions of a faculty member are divisive, uncompromising, and inflexible. In a similar way, it is destructive to a unit's morale and effectiveness when one or more of its members accept a significantly lower degree of responsibility for achieving a shared purpose. These elements lie at the heart of that salient, fundamental hallmark of successful interactions in academic life that is commonly called collegiality.

Collegiality is reflected in the relationships that emerge within departments. It is often evidenced in the manner in which members of the department interact with and show respect to one another, work collaboratively in order to achieve a common purpose, and assume equitable responsibilities for the good of the discipline as a whole. It is thus not an exaggeration to say that, in higher education, collegiality is the cornerstone of professional work. Yet, judging from the amount of time spent discussing the nature of collegiality at professional conferences, it would appear that the concept lacks clarity in the minds of many faculty members and administrators. Since it is often not clearly understood precisely what collegiality is, it is nearly impossible for chairs to articulate what their expectations are with respect to interpersonal relations, to help those who are facing some difficulty in determining what constitutes a significant breach of collegiality, and to document instances where standards have not been met. Without a consistent and well-defined sense of what constitutes collegiality, many chairs and deans resort to the dodge of "I recognize it when I see it," creating situations in which the likelihood of grievances, lawsuits, and increased departmental tension is extremely high.

SOLUTION

What is needed, therefore, is not only a consistent definition of collegiality, but also a standard instrument that can be used to evaluate its presence or absence. The value of such an instrument is twofold. First, like a rubric used to grade a class assignment, the evaluation instrument can be used both to clarify exactly what the expectations are and to evaluate, as objectively and coherently as possible, whether those expectations have been met. Second, by creating a common instrument that can be used to evaluate the collegiality of faculty members at different institutions, in different disciplines, and at different ranks, it will be possible to develop a set of nationally-normed data that can clarify an issue that has hitherto been debated only on the basis of anecdotal evidence: Whether demographic data — such as gender, academic discipline, geographic location, and so on — correlate in any statistically significant way with perceptions of a faculty member's collegiality.

The instrument that is under development has resulted from surveys sent to a panel of leading professionals in the areas of higher education administration and the development of collegiality. [See Appendix.] The proposed instrument, which is being called the Collegiality Assessment Matrix (CAM), reflects those observable behaviors which the panel regarded as most highly related to the ways in which collegiality is demonstrated in an academic setting. The authors also pilot tested the CAM at one university. The intent of the pilot test was to have a validated and tested instrument that can be used during evaluations as an objective measure of a faculty member's collegial behavior. It is envisioned that the CAM can be used in the following way. During any type of personnel evaluation (such as an annual review, tenure or promotion process, post-tenure review, and the like), each member of the faculty member's

unit would be given a copy of the instrument and requested to complete it. The faculty member being evaluated would also complete the instrument as a form of self-evaluation, but his or her responses would not be aggregated with the rest of the department. Each statement related to the faculty member's collegiality would be rated on a modified Likert scale, with a 5 representing "strongly agree," a 1 representing "strongly disagree," and space provided for the respondent to indicate "no basis to judge." After each question and at the end of the entire instrument, the respondent would have the opportunity to provide open-ended comments. The instrument could be distributed on paper (with the results tabulated by scanning and the comments typed into a word processing document to maintain anonymity) or electronically (with the results tabulated automatically and no need to retype the comments).

The numerical entries provided by the evaluators would be tabulated and averaged in a number of different ways. Since the scores are entered as discrete data rather than continuous data, medians will provide more meaningful results than means and will prevent the results from being distorted by outliers. Items left blank by any individual respondent or those checked "no basis to judge" would be omitted when the statistical analysis is performed. Standard deviations will provide a sense of where the unit is in general consensus and where there is greater disagreement. The faculty member's self-evaluation can then be compared to the departmental result in order to determine where his or her self-image differs substantially from the view of his or her peers.

At the close of the evaluation, the CAM will provide the dean or department chair with the ability to assess the faculty member's level of collegiality based on aggregated data rather than on innuendo, anecdotal evidence, or general impressions. Even more importantly, the

CAM will offer specific guidance on where improvement needs to occur. In this way, instead of making unhelpful remarks such as “There seems to be a perception out there that you haven’t been very collegial,” the supervisor would be able to provide advice like “Your peers indicate that you occasionally make comments to them that they view as disparaging, and this behavior is hampering their work” or “While you’re regarded as a good colleague here in the department, there’s some concern about how well you interact with the rest of the campus.” Taken together, the numerical results and the open-ended comments will allow the supervisor to follow these remarks by saying, “And so, based on this evaluation, here’s what I need you to do about it ...”

In order to enhance the reliability and validity of the CAM, the authors:

1. Administered the instrument to a targeted number of programs so as to determine its ease of use and the clarity of its language.
2. Assessed the degree to which the programs piloting the instrument found it to be a valuable component of their evaluation processes.

The goal of the next phase of the authors’ study will be to:

1. Begin collecting a set of data spanning several institutions and disciplines that can form the basis for further studies.

Institutions or departments that wish to be considered for the targeted pilot of the instrument should contact the authors at the email addresses listed at the end of this article.

CONCLUSION

Discord and a lack of collegiality have long existed within academic life, with documented cases occurring as early as 1636 at Harvard College. [Cipriano (2011)] The U.S. courts have repeatedly affirmed the use of collegiality as a factor in making decisions concerning faculty employment, promotion, tenure, and termination. Despite this legal support, the lack of civility currently permeating institutions of higher education appears to be at an extremely high level. Lack of professionalism, rudeness, and general toxicity are causing many department chairs to rethink their commitments to administrative assignments. Even worse, more than one president or provost has considered eliminating a department largely because its faculty members cannot get along. The destructive behavior of even one toxic person can bring departmental productivity to a standstill and ruin morale. Department conflicts can quickly escalate and, even when they are resolved, resentments may long fester.

The Collegiality Assessment Matrix thus provides a much-needed resource to document problems in as objective a manner as possible and to guide departments to focus on what collegiality actually is. By focusing on widely recognized elements of collegiality and professionalism, the instrument protects faculty members from accusations of noncollegiality simply because that have unpopular views, variant political or sexual orientations, smokes or engages in other legal but socially unacceptable behaviors, or thinks “differently.”

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RESOURCES

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APPENDIX

Panel of Advisors on the Content of the CAM

- a. Walter H. Gmelch, Dean, School of Education, University of San Francisco
- b. Jim MacGregor, Chair, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Southern Connecticut State University
- c. N. Douglas Lees, Professor Emeritus, Department of Biology, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
- d. William F. Williams, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, Slippery Rock

University

- e. Tim Hatfield, Professor Emeritus, Department of Counselor Education, Winona State

University

- f. Bruce Russell, Dean, College of Business, Information and Social Sciences, Slippery Rock

University

- g. Raoul A. Areola, Professor Emeritus, Department of Education, University of Tennessee,

Memphis

- h. Bill Pallett, Director, IDEA Center, Manhattan, Kansas

- i. Stuart J. Schleien, Department Chair, Recreation, Tourism, and Hospitality Management,

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

- j. Richard L. Riccardi, Director, Office of Management Information and Research, Southern

Connecticut State University

- k. Alice Anderson, Dean, School of Education, Purdue University, Calumet

Title Page

Robert E. Cipriano is chair and professor emeritus of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at Southern Connecticut State University. His most recent book, titled *Facilitating a Collegial Department in Higher Education: Strategies for Change*, was published by Jossey-Bass, August, 2011. Physical Address: Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Southern CT State University, 501 Crescent Street, New Haven, CT 06515. Telephone Number: 203/392-6387. Fax Number: 203/392-6147. E-mail: ciprianor1@southernct.edu.

Bob has a doctorate from New York University in Therapeutic Recreation, Area of Concentration in College Teaching. He is the author of 3 textbooks, has contributed chapters in 3 textbooks, has published more than 130 journal articles and manuscripts, and has been awarded more than \$9 million in grants and contracts. He has delivered in excess of 200 presentations in the U.S., Asia and the Middle East.

Jeffrey L. Buller is dean of the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College at Florida Atlantic University. His latest book is *Academic Leadership Day by Day*, published by Jossey-Bass, 2011 and also available as an app for iPhone/iPad/iPod. Physical Address: Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College, John D. MacArthur Campus, 5353 Parkside Drive, Jupiter, FL 33458. Telephone Number: 561/799-8579. Fax Number: 561/799-8602. E-mail: jbuller@fau.edu. Jeff holds a doctorate in classics from The University of Wisconsin - Madison. He is the author of four books on administrative leadership, one book on Wagnerian opera, 21 articles of academic research, 76 articles on higher education administration, and 112 essays and reviews. He is currently active as a consultant to the Sistema Universitario Ana G. Méndez in Puerto Rico and to the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia.

Abstract

Collegiality, reflected in the relationships that emerge within departments, has evoked a great deal of controversy throughout institutions of higher education. Although criticism still remains, case law in the United States has continued to uphold the use of collegiality as a factor in making decisions regarding faculty employment, promotion in rank, tenure, and termination.

Since it is often not clearly understood precisely what collegiality is, it is nearly impossible for individuals in higher education to articulate what their expectations are with respect to interpersonal relations, to help those who are facing some difficulty in determining what constitutes a significant breach of collegiality, and to document instances where standards have not been met. Without a consistent and well-defined sense of what constitutes collegiality, many department chairs and deans resort to the dodge of “I recognize it when I see it,” creating situations in which the likelihood of grievances, lawsuits, and increased department tension is extremely high. The authors have developed an instrument, called the Collegiality Assessment Matrix (CAM), that reflects those observable behaviors that are regarded as most highly related to the ways in which collegiality is demonstrated in an academic setting. The CAM, along with a slightly modified version for faculty members to complete (i.e., CAM Faculty Self-Assessment), were pilot tested by chairs and faculty representing two departments in the 2011 fall semester. The chairs and faculty members all indicated that both matrices were highly useable, measured a person’s observable behaviors, and held great promise to be used on an institution-wide basis.