Re-engaging Students

To repair strained relationships, faculty can take appropriate steps to re-engage students and resolve differences. Although faculty are encouraged to establish mutually rewarding relationships with students, they should only meet with uncivil students to resolve issues in the company of other staff (Amada, 1992). In cases where a male faculty wants to re-engage a female student, a female colleague should be invited to participate to reduce the possibility of student-directed allegations of faculty misconduct.

The re-engagement process provides faculty with opportunities to identify patterns of issues that would otherwise persist. Once again, a secondary benefit that can be gained from this process is student recognition and respect. Some faculty who have been encouraged to use this approach have been reluctant and have expressed a concern regarding their loss of status. On the other hand, faculty who invest in the re-engagement process can be perceived as individuals who are genuinely committed to student learning and personal growth.

Establishing Student Grievance Process

To prevent student-faculty conflict from escalating, a process needs to be established wherein student complaints and concerns are taken seriously and appropriately investigated. Students often report that their concerns are trivialized and are easily dismissed. Although most universities have a grievance process in place, it may only be symbolic and lack integrity. The grievance process is particularly important when considering:

> In samplings of core courses at large public universities, as many as a third of faculty treated students with unmistakable rudeness and condescension. In a few cases, they physically assaulted students who pressed them for answers or help (Boice, 1996), perhaps about as often as students assaulted professors. In many more instances (we do not know the exact figures), professors take advantage of teaching dynamics to sexually and otherwise compromise students” (Amada, 1992, p.458).

If fair and effective student grievance procedures are lacking, students and faculty must demand an institutional policy change. Training for faculty and students about the grievance procedure should be implemented. The institution must also make a determination about the privacy and right-to-know issues surrounding the grievance process.

Using a Back-to-the-Basics Approach

A back-to-the-basics approach to conflict resolution is recommended at the beginning of each semester during college/university or departmental gatherings. Although sounding simplistic, it is important that faculty be reminded of the potential ramifications of uncivil student behavior. The California Community Colleges Academic Senate (1996) lists several suggestions designed to avoid classroom conflict, which includes inviting or hiring experts to introduce conflict-management skills to faculty and staff. Although some faculty may scoff at the notion of discussing the importance of promoting civil behavior in the classroom, the negative-ramifications of such behavior cannot be ignored.