

Respect



“I regularly do not feel appreciated or recognized for my contributions within my department, be it for the particular areas of research I work in, my commitment to teaching and advising students well, or the other complex and multi-faceted aspects of the jobs we do as faculty. The culture in my department is one focused almost entirely on individual achievement in research and publication, and everything else is treated as incidental or even a waste of time. This feels isolating, inaccurate, and discouraging.”

A respectful department climate is one in which all faculty members’ contributions and perspectives are valued and recognized. This includes research, scholarship, teaching and service contributions. Including someone in a research collaboration or asking someone to review a draft are ways of showing respect for a colleague. Enabling full participation in meetings and in the decision-making process within the department are also ways to denote inclusion as a full citizen in department life. While these examples may seem ordinary and inconsequential, for those who have been excluded, cut off mid-sentence, forgotten or passed over, these kinds of actions hurt. Small things matter when it comes to creating a department climate of inclusion and belonging. Saying hello, remembering names, recalling small personal details like whether someone has a pet, all add up to helping people feel recognized and creating connection within the department.

Communication in Meetings

“Many faculty leaders have big egos and lack sensitive and thoughtful communication styles.”

Don’t take it for granted that everyone in the department has the same sensibility regarding interpersonal communication. As departments have become more diverse --by age, gender, race, ethnicity, international status and more --so too have opinions about what comprises civil, respectful and appropriate communication and behavior in departmental meetings. Agreeing to ground rules, or principles of community, with input from all department members is a good way to level expectations in this regard. If the department has already created ground rules in the past, it is wise to revisit them annually, so that newcomers are aware of them and others may be reminded. While these departmental conversations take time and may seem simplistic, faculty members’ participation in the discussion process holds more value than unilaterally implementing a list of rules.

Examples of guidelines related to respect, community and climate from other universities:

Brown University Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit, Guideline #3: Enhance Respect

<https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/institutional-diversity/resources-initiatives/resources-students-faculty-staff-and-alumni/diversity-and-inclusion-toolkit#3>

Goals for Physics Department Climate – Duke University

<https://studylib.net/doc/11560534/faculty-resolution-adopted%20-february-24-2003>

University of California Campuses - Principles of Community

<https://ucnet.universityofcalifornia.edu/working-at-uc/our-values/principles-of-community.html>

Recognition

“In being a minority faculty member, I have acquired an additional number of responsibilities that are merely rooted in my ethnic identity. This work takes a great deal of time and is not rewarded in any way.”

It is important to recognize service and teaching that faculty members contribute on behalf of the department, as well as important awards and career milestones. A department chair should thank faculty members for their service individually and also in department meetings, so that others are made aware of individual contributions. Awards and milestones can also be celebrated on department web pages and in newsletters. While a seemingly small gesture, saying thank you matters.

Harassment and Discrimination

Unfortunately, disrespect has become too common in academe. The 2019 Faculty Quality of Life Survey identified gender-based verbal harassment of women (slighted, insulted, condescended to or ignored; rude and offensive sexual remarks, sexist remarks, and offensive remarks about appearance, body or sexuality) as a prevalent experience for female respondents, with more than 30% saying they had experienced this during the last 12 months. Going beyond gender-based verbal harassment are more extreme forms of harassment, discrimination, gender-based misconduct and bullying.

“A great deal of stress has stemmed from gender discrimination and harassment within my [unit]. This has negatively affected my sleep, self-confidence and career trajectory. I have questioned my interest in continuing on faculty...due to these stresses.”

None of these behaviors should be tolerated in the department. If faculty are involved in these kinds of behaviors the department chair has a responsibility to act. Ignoring bad behavior will not make it go away, instead it is likely to increase and become more egregious over time.

Taking steps early to stop disrespectful behavior will prevent more serious harm in the future. Depending upon the situation, consult with senior administrators in your school, the Title IX Office (<https://titleix.stanford.edu/>), the Diversity and Access Office (<https://diversityandaccess.stanford.edu/>), Faculty Affairs (<https://facultyaffairs.stanford.edu/>), and Thomas Fenner, Deputy General Counsel (650-723-8122, tfenner@stanford.edu) about appropriate steps to take, required reporting, and help for addressing such cases.