Building Consensus

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Building consensus

- Disclaimer
  - Free advice: probably not good advice
  - Some methods work for some people, not for others
  - Nothing magical, just common sense
    - "Everybody gets so much information all day long that they lose their common sense." (Gertrude Stein)
- Some methods and examples
- What to do when there is no consensus

Consensus considerations

- Consensus on an issue
  - Understand and analyze the issue as much as possible
    - Who benefits?
      - People: Students, faculty, staff, a few persons
      - Abstract entity: program, department, school, etc.   BEWARE
    - What needs to be done? Why? When? How?
  - Who makes the decision? Most likely you?
- How much is consensus?
  - 100%, 90%, 75%, 50%, 30%, just 1 person?
  - Varies depending on goal
  - 100% is not necessarily good! And vice versa.

Some methods

- State issue clearly
  - Talk to a smaller group first and see
    - Find somebody who thinks different
- Present all aspects (think of as many as you can) fairly
  - Easier said than done
- Present your suggested course of action first vs. solicit suggestions first
  - Be willing to listen and re-think in any case

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People are the key

- Do not pigeon-hole or black-list people
  - People think differently on different issues
    - Very few really really bad people to be ignored all the time
- Quid pro quo (trading favors)
  - Some people do, I personally don't
  - Better to focus on issue and try to do what you think is the right thing
- Discuss ideas, suggestions, disagreement, etc., based on the issue, not on personality
- Listen and be willing to change / modify

Some interesting cases

- Appeasement (100% consensus)
  - You cannot please all the people all the time
  - Promises of future favors   BAD for morale
- Consensus with only one available option
  - No time for deliberation, no options   BAD for morale
- No consensus or little consensus
  - Decision must still be made so make it! do not delay!
    - Available information, ideas, suggestions
    - Common sense
- After the issue is over
  - Communicate fully and clearly
  - Be willing to look back and correct errors

Last notes

- There is no win or lose or tie
  - Was there reasonable discussion of issues?
  - Based on issue and not on other factors?
  - Based on people or abstract entity or ...?
  - Was a decision made in a timely manner?
- Let go of your ego
  - Take things lightly (it is not about you, really!)
- Integrity, trust, and credibility matter more in the long run than consensus on one specific issue
- Learn from the experience & use common sense
  - Cheap at any price