

ADVANCE  
Detox your Department: *Handling and Managing your Faculty*  
March 7, 2017

### **Scenario 1**

You are the Chair of the Department of Rural Development and Agriculture Studies. Dr. Carrie Mathison, Professor of Integrated Farmland Architecture, comes to you and tells you that she has concerns about the behavior of a colleague, Dr. Peter Quinn, Professor of Viticulture. Both Drs. Mathison and Quinn are full professors with tenure. Their long history of philosophical disagreement about the direction of the Department predates your arrival to the University three years ago.

According to Dr. Mathison, Dr. Quinn has shut her out of meaningful participation in a search committee chaired by Dr. Quinn. In fact, Dr. Quinn has complained to you within the last two weeks about what he views as Dr. Mathison's obstructionist, uncooperative behavior in the search process and her seeming fixation on pushing agendas that relate considerably more to landscape architecture than are appropriate for a search for a professor of horticultural physiology. You have heard similar grumblings about Dr. Mathison from other faculty.

Toward the end of your conversation with Dr. Mathison, however, she tells you something else: she suspects Dr. Quinn's hostility to her is in retaliation for a comment she made to Dr. Quinn recently, disapproving of his relationship with Jessica Brody. Ms. Brody is a graduate student within the Department. This is the first time you've heard anything about this relationship. Dr. Mathison tells you that she was not going to bring it up, except that last month she overheard what appeared to be a long, loud argument between Dr. Quinn and Ms. Brody; later that evening she observed Ms. Brody sobbing in her office. Dr. Mathison tells you that now she feels she has no choice to come forward with this and that she wants to know what action you plan to take. She also tells you that Dr. Quinn should no longer be permitted to chair the search committee in light of these concerns.

#### *Questions for Consideration:*

What are the key issues involved in this situation?

Which is/are the most serious issue(s)?

What would you say to Dr. Mathison in the moment?

Who might you turn to for an additional perspective, guidance, or direction?

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## Scenario 2

When Dr. Samina Ali was asked to serve as Chair, her first question was “what can be done about Jeffrey?” The department’s faculty meetings, committees, and even engagement with graduate students was regularly derailed by Dr. Jeffrey Wittenberg’s loud and negative comments about the department and the capacity of “inept leadership” to address the “challenges we currently face.” Dr. Ali had seen him press this case in public and oftentimes in ways that seemed, in her estimation, to cross the line with the two previous Chairs. Dr. Wittenberg is a full professor and never misses an opportunity to undermine leadership either in-person or over group emails. He served as the department chair back in the 90’s and, while others have a somewhat different recollection, he maintains that time was “pretty damn good compared to what we have seen since, which is a steady march to our current status: broke and inconsequential.” Dr. Ali was particularly concerned since she is an Associate Professor and has already experienced friction with Dr. Wittenberg because their areas of research are somewhat contradictory.

After a lot of thought, Dr. Ali decides to accept the position of Chair after being assured that Dr. Wittenberg is a marginal voice, that she will have the support of a majority of the department’s faculty, and there would be some support given to his request for a sabbatical in Malaysia which would get him out of her hair.

Now, as she wraps up her first faculty meeting in the role, she is ready to quit. The meeting had quickly deteriorated into the “Jeffrey Show” and in addition to cutting off the discussion with some of his regular hits, she was dismayed to find several of the other faculty echoing his concerns and/or shaking their heads in support. Worse yet, she was told that Dr. Wittenberg’s partner is no longer interested in going to Malaysia so he is pulling his request for a sabbatical.

### *Questions for Consideration:*

Should Dr. Ali follow her gut and simply step down as Chair?

If not, how serious a problem is her senior colleague?

Should she speak with him one-on-one and confront him directly?

Should she seek help? If so, who should she turn to for additional perspective, guidance or assistance?

Should she be aware of other potential issues beyond her colleague’s outbursts in meetings?

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### Scenario 3

After 18 months as Chair, Dr. Samina Ali was feeling pretty good about what she had accomplished in the role. Despite a great deal of initial pushback, she had been able to: enact a long overdue change in undergrad curriculum, promote a new faculty member whom she had mentored, and re-shuffled the leadership on her department's stagnant faculty committees. Dr. Ali had even been able to limit occurrences of the "Jeffrey Show" and facilitated productive faculty meetings.

However, she heard from Ted Wilkens, a lecturer in the department, that senior faculty members were regularly meeting and exchanging emails to discuss their displeasure with her administrative decisions and that they had begun taking their concerns "outside the department." These faculty members were supposedly asking around about what a "vote of no confidence" entailed and what was required to initiate the process. Further, they were discussing their concerns publicly in the department's break room, which was how Mr. Wilkens learned about them.

Mr. Wilkens said that he didn't have much more to report but felt that Dr. Ali should know about the discussion. He was unwilling to share the names of the senior faculty members, but Dr. Ali could take a pretty good guess at who were the ring leaders.

#### *Questions for Consideration:*

How seriously should Dr. Ali take the comments made by Mr. Wilkens?

What steps, if any, should she take to confirm them?

Should she try to approach this situation on her own, to keep it "in house?"

Should she seek assistance from outside the department? If the latter, where should she turn for additional perspective, guidance, or direction?