

# Difficult Scenarios for Department Chairs

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Department chairs frequently must handle difficult and unexpected scenarios such as student or faculty complaints, disclosures of plagiarism, reports of harassment, or even threats of violence. In some instances, the issue raised could escalate very quickly while others may find resolution at the departmental or college level. What strategies should the department chair when that first conversation is initiated with a department chair?

## Faculty/Student Scenarios:

1. The departmental student advisor reports that a student has complained that one of your faculty members has been making inappropriate comments in class. How would the response differ, if at all, based on the type of inappropriate comments?
2. A female student participating in a study-abroad program sponsored by your department has contacted the Student Life office because of some troubling emails from one of her male professors who is in your department. The faculty member, who has previously employed this student as a research assistant, emailed the student to profess his love for her and comments on how much he misses her.
3. It is well known that one of your faculty members is in a romantic relationship with one of the department's graduate students. He is not on the student's dissertation committee. During faculty meetings to discuss the student's progress, this faculty member refuses to recuse himself from the discussion.
4. A fourth-year graduate student comes to your office on the verge of tears stating that his faculty member refuses to review his work so that he can make progress on his dissertation. The student reported that ever since he mentioned to the advisor how he felt uncomfortable with the sexist and homophobic banter at the research field site, the advisor has been ignoring him.
5. Yelling is heard outside in the hallway corridor. The department chair looks into the hallway to find a faculty member screaming at a student.
6. Yelling is heard outside in the hallway corridor. The department chair looks into the hallway to find a student screaming at a faculty member.

## Student Scenarios:

1. A senior level student in your department comes into the chair's office and threatens to do serious harm to himself.
2. The departmental student advisor reports there is a rumor circulating that some of the graduate students are looking to sleep with the undergraduate students in their classes.

3. A student whom the department regularly looks to for graduate student representation on departmental issues confides that she has heard several other graduate students make sexist comments about the abilities of some of the women graduate students and why they were admitted to the program.

#### Staff Scenarios:

1. A disgruntled staff member was found stealing office supplies over the weekend.
2. A staff member comes to your office stating that another staff member refuses to perform routine job functions and uses her position to control student access to department resources.
3. Yelling is heard in the department front office. The department chair looks out of the chair's office to find a faculty member screaming at a staff member.

#### Faculty Scenarios:

1. A faculty member is accused of sexual harassment. How would the response differ, if at all, depending on the position of the sexual harassment victim?
2. Two faculty members start bullying other faculty during a departmental meeting when they disagree with an organizational decision. The two faculty repeatedly vent their disagreement at the next several faculty meeting to such an extent that other faculty dread the faculty meetings.
3. A case of faculty plagiarism was detected by the chair of a promotion committee, who shared this discovery with the department chair.
4. A faculty member disagrees with the positive departmental vote on the tenure case of a pre-tenure faculty member. Disgruntled about the vote outcome, the faculty member makes coded derogatory remarks about the pre-tenure faculty member during faculty meetings.
5. A stalker from outside the UW attends departmental events and drops by the office of the target faculty member.
6. A faculty member comes into the department chair's office, closes the door, and starts making threatening remarks.
7. A former department chair frequently makes remarks during faculty meetings questioning departmental decisions announced by the department chair. The full faculty has previously collectively arrived at the decision announced by the chair. Even so, the former department chair continues to undermine the current chair's authority.
8. While getting coffee with a fellow faculty member, the faculty remarks he was no longer serving on a particular dissertation committee because of a change in the student's research direction. He concludes his statement saying, "I guess it makes sense that she took up a lesser science because she's a woman."
9. An anti-Semitic note is found taped to a faculty member's door.