

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION REPORT

Volume 2, Number 1, Oct 2001

The Emergence of Campus Mediation Systems: History in the Making

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(Note: this article is based on a longer, more complete paper available from the [Consortium on Negotiation and Conflict Resolution](http://law.gsu.edu/CNCR/) (<http://law.gsu.edu/CNCR/>) at Georgia State University)

In this article I explore historical changes in the campus context as it relates to mediation and conflict resolution, and make note of apparent trends in the writing and research on campus conflicts and conflict resolution. Describing the history of a social innovation like campus mediation services is an inescapably subjective, imprecise, and ongoing process. Despite these limitations, I think telling the story of campus mediation (or at least one version of it) is quite useful. The historical narrative provides newcomers to the area some grounding in what has come before, and provides practitioners and researchers who have worked in some subset of the field, often in relative isolation, a sense of the bigger picture.

Defining Terms

For the current purposes I use the term higher education to refer broadly to any post-secondary educational settings, including universities, colleges, technological schools, and community colleges. The word mediation itself has many different and sometimes conflicting connotations. To provide a shared starting place, I am defining mediation broadly as conciliatory interventions by a party (or parties) not directly involved in a problem or dispute, who work with the parties involved to facilitate the development of a shared and mutually acceptable solution to the problem. Please keep in mind that the actual practice of mediation in higher education varies tremendously according to the degree of formality or informality, the openness of the process, the amount of time the parties spend face-to-face, the type of person(s) chosen as intervenor, and the relative emphasis placed on transformation (both individual and systemic) or problem-solving and settlement.

Changes in the Campus "Conflict Environment" Over Time

The university and college environment has always had its share of conflicts, large and small. Approaches to dealing with these conflicts has varied over time, based on prevailing norms, societal conditions, and available resources. Susan Holton's article "It's Nothing New! A History of Conflict in Higher Education." (Holton 1995) provides a quick sketch of some of the earliest struggles that helped shape our higher education system, and the ever-changing parade of issues providing the grist for conflict and contention on campus.

Campus Upheaval and Change

The Cold War and the McCarthy era had a profound impact on the conflict climate on university campuses. While I don't wish to discount the significance of this period, for the purposes of this article I will begin my analysis in the mid 1960s, as this is the era where campus conflict became particularly visible and significant structural changes began to occur on campus with regard to handling conflict. This is also the first time that I find any significant research or scholarly writing on campus conflict and conflict management. In fact, research reports and studies of conflict in higher education were relatively common in the literature from the period between 1965-75. Two relevant examples are the edited volumes *Conflict and Change on Campus: The Response to Student Hyperactivism* (Brickman and Lehrer 1970) with articles such as "Student Unrest in Perspective," "Anatomy of a Revolt," and "A Strategy for Campus Peace" and *Academic Supermarkets: A Critical Case Study of a Multiversity* (Altback and others 1971) which included articles on topics such as the "Anatomy of Faculty Conflict", "Departmental Clashes", "Four Decades of Activism" (charting student initiated conflicts from 1930-1968) and "Generational Conflict."

Carolyn Stieber, a longtime campus ombudsperson at Michigan State University, describes the campus climate in the late 1960's as follows (Stieber 1991):

1967 was a different world in many ways. The concept in loco parentis was in its terminal stages. Virtually every campus of any size was traumatized by repeated demonstrations against the Vietnam War. A military draft was in effect. In 1968 disorder spilled over to the streets of Chicago at the Democratic National Convention, undoubtedly influencing the presidential election. Yellow ribbons belonged only to a corny song; military recruiters came on campus at their peril. Recurrent political protests, which involved faculty as well as students, were joined to other complaints about bureaucratic indifference and professorial casualness toward teaching responsibilities.... There was a generalized sense that no one cared about major, much less minor, injustices, system glitches, organizational errors, or unclear rules and regulations with arbitrary if

not capricious enforcement.... Police were often called upon to clear out buildings and arrest demonstrators or escort people into buildings, picking their way over shards of broken glass... (At the same time) Universities were still experiencing rapid growth; no one thought that strenuous recruitment efforts and sophisticated marketing strategies would later be needed in a search for warm bodies. There was money then. The word "Budget" did not have all the connotations of uncertainty, if not mystery, which now attach to that term. However, top administrators often were attempting to assert more centralized control over burgeoning campuses while faculty, historically anxious about protecting their prerogatives, had no great enthusiasm for the notion...

Given the turmoil of the times, it is not surprising that most of the writing during this period focused on political protests, campus crisis management approaches, and responses to student demands for greater influence over university policies and procedures.

The Emergence of Campus Ombuds

Administrative responses to this period of activism and change varied considerably, but one creative and relatively widespread university adaptation was the development of a new role, a variation the Swedish "grievance man," called the campus ombudsman. Michigan State University became the first major US university (in 1967) to establish an ombuds office. Ombuds offices were an attempt to respond to demands for a neutral, confidential, and "safe" place to discuss concerns and voice complaints. The early emphasis of ombuds programs was to increase the perception and reality of "fairness" and justice of procedures and decisions made on campus, and to assist people in navigating the increasingly complex maze of procedures that were being developed. The California Caucus of College and University Ombuds (CCCUO) was founded in 1973 to help networking among programs, in particular by hosting an annual conference at the Asilomar Conference Center in Pacific Grove, California. The First Canadian Conference of College and University Ombudsmen was held at Concordia University in Montreal in 1979. In the United States, following a range of regional networking initiatives, the University and College Ombuds Association (UCOA) was formally established in the mid 1980s and remains the central organizing body for campus ombuds in the United States.

In terms of campus conflict research during this period, the emergence of ombuds offices in the late 1960s was accompanied by quite a few dissertations and descriptive projects trying to document and define this "New Bird on Campus" (Norman 1968) . As proceedings from early gatherings such as the The Ombudsman in Higher Education: Advocate

or Subversive Bureaucrat conference (1969) suggest, the role of the new campus ombuds was never cut and dried.

From a campus conflict systems perspective, a number of interesting theoretical pieces were written during this period including Victor Baldridge's book *Power and Conflict in the University: Research in the Sociology of Complex Organizations* (Baldridge 1971), and Rensis and Jane Likerts' conflict systems theory as described in the chapter "System 4 Structure Applied to Conflicts in Universities" found in their 1976 book *New Ways of Managing Conflict* (Likert and Likert 1976).

Expansion of Rules, Regulations and Due Process Procedures

As university enrollments and personnel continued to expand with the babyboom, administrators developed an ever-increasing number of rules and regulations to try and manage the changing campus environment. At the same time, a larger proportion of university personnel joined unions and collectively bargained over contracts. While in earlier periods there had been great reluctance by the courts to get involved in campus issues, during the 1970's the courts began to hear more campus-based disputes, and federal courts established a variety of new guidelines relating to internal grievance procedures on campus. These factors, along with increased student expectations of involvement in their education institutions and more careful monitoring of the "fairness" of procedures, began to have an influence on policy-making.

In response to these changes, during the 1970s, a "due process explosion" occurred on campuses, with many new policies being developed providing detailed grievance and disciplinary procedures aimed at protecting individual rights and checking administrative discretion (and fending off possible lawsuits). These changes gradually began to effect the feeling of life on campus. A 1978 article entitled "Who Killed Collegiality?" in *Change* magazine (Ryor 1978) argued that in fact the era of collegiality was being replaced by one of liability.

Marske and Vago (Marske and Vago 1980), examining the changes in the legal climate on campus, described the environment of the late 1970's as follows:

The heterogeneous, impersonal and at times, almost alienated quality of the academic climate fosters the utilization of law to assert individual rights and settle grievances in academic situations. Students more and more come to view themselves as "consumers" of education, faculty operate under rules and regulations with regular contracts, and administrators work under a complex web of legal guidelines (p. 168).

A 1982 article entitled "The Legalistic Culture in American Higher Education" in *College and University* (Burnett and Matthews 1982) magazine further echoed this theme, lamenting the increasing legalistic nature of campus life. Other indicators of this shift in campus climate can be found in the increase beginning in the late 1970s of prepaid (i.e., student fee funded) legal services available on campus for students. Legal resources were also becoming more readily available to faculty as the AAUP began offering a liability insurance policy tailored to the needs of faculty in 1978-79. The National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA), founded in 1961 by a small group of attorneys providing legal advice and services to campuses, experienced its greatest period of growth during the late 1970s as well. NACUA grew because it helped coordinate legal resources and expertise among university administrators, who had been moving to establish in-house legal counsel, no longer able to function with occasional use of the expertise of a lawyer sitting on their board of directors. Nearly 1400 campuses (about 660 institutions), represented by over 2700 attorneys, comprise NACUA's membership today. In the late 1970's Stetson University began hosting a popular annual conference on Law and Higher Education to help university administrators keep up with the rapidly changing legal climate as it relates to universities. The Association for Student Judicial Affairs (ASJA) formed in 1987 as an offshoot of the Law and Higher Education Conference, to promote and support professionalism in the increasingly complex student judicial affairs area.

The Emergence of Campus ADR

As the laws surrounding higher education became more complicated, and the number of lawsuits brought against universities by students and faculty increased, interest began to grow in using alternatives to litigation to resolve conflicts. In addition to changes in the external environment such as decreasing enrollments and a tightening up of the economy, elements within academic culture supported the use of mediation as a form of dispute settlement. Central among these elements is the tradition of collegiality and the value placed on reasoned persuasion.

One of the more visible early examples of experimentation with mediation on campus began in 1979-80 with the sponsorship by the New York branch of the American Arbitration Association of a new entity called the Center for Mediation in Higher Education. The Center functioned for about 5 years working to encourage the use of mediation to resolve disputes involving university administrations and staff or faculty. In 1980, the journal *New Directions in Higher Education* published a special issue on conflict management in higher education edited by Jane McCarthy, director of the Center for Mediation. (McCarthy 1980). The issue addressed primarily staff and faculty conflicts, but also included an article on a new campus

mediation project (serving students) in the planning stages at the University of Massachusetts's Legal Studies program, and an article on the current state of student grievance procedures.

McCarthy's 1980 article "Conflict and Mediation in the Academy" describes some of the thinking emerging at the time,

Many educators appear concerned about the prospect that the educational communities commitment to collegial governance and decision-making will be threatened as institutions are forced to choose between conflicting constituencies as competition for scarce resources escalates. Mediation can foster collegiality by encouraging disputants to identify common interests and work supportively to achieve mutually acceptable solutions. (p. 4)

The University of Massachusetts Mediation Project, that began in 1980-81 was one of the first of a growing number of distinct mediation efforts actually located on a campus. Other early efforts included the University of Hawaii, Oberlin and Grinnell Colleges. Most of the early programs served primarily students, but over time programs emerged that served the full range of the campus population. A national survey done in 1991 using snowball sampling methods (Warters & Hedeem, 1991) identified 35 campus mediation programs in the United States and Canada, a number which had grown rapidly from the approximately 18 programs that were known of in March of 1990. My August 1998 review of the field has identified 165 programs, and the number continues to grow. (See figure for trend)

The mid-to-late 1980s was a growth period in terms of the writing about campus conflict resolution approaches, and experimentation with various types of mediation efforts. In 1983, an intern at Community Boards Program in San Francisco wrote a working paper adapting the Community Boards model for use on college campuses (Sakovich 1983) , and in 1985, a manual entitled Peaceful Persuasion: A Guide to Creating Mediation Dispute Resolution Programs for College Campuses (Girard and others 1985) was published by the University of Massachusetts Mediation Project and the National Institute for Dispute Resolution, and Shubert and Folger's research on student grievance mechanisms is published in the Harvard Negotiation Journal (Shubert and Folger 1986). Information on mediation also began to appear in specialized publications for student affairs personnel such as the 1984 article "A Mediation Workshop for Residential Staff".(Knechel and others 1984) in the Journal of College Student Personnel Association, the 1985 chapter on "Mediation and Conflict Resolution" (Engram 1985) found in The Experienced Resident Assistant, and a 1986 article for student judicial affairs personnel (Beeler 1986). These kind of publications really helped spur the growth of on-campus mediation efforts.

By the Spring of 1990 sufficient interest in campus mediation had developed to support a national conference, and in March of that year the first National Conference on Campus Mediation Programs was hosted by the Campus Mediation Center at Syracuse University. In subsequent years national campus mediation conferences were held at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, the University of Oregon, and at St. Mary's University in Texas. The annual campus mediation conference merged with the National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) in 1994. NAME, which formerly focused on K-12 programs, expanded their mandate by establishing a Committee on Higher Education, including a regular newsletter section on higher education activities, and sponsoring a track of higher education workshops at their annual conference. In late 1995, NAME merged with the National Institute for Dispute Resolution (NIDR) to become the Conflict Resolution Education Network (CREnet). (Note that CREnet has now merged with the Society for Professionals in Dispute Resolution and the Academy of Family Mediators to form the new Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR). ACR has an education section that continues to support work at the college and university level. More information on ACR is available at <http://www.acresolution.org>.)

ADR in Collective Bargaining and Grievance Handling

The early-to-mid 1980's was also a period of increasing interest in the campus collective bargaining process, and how it might be made less adversarial. Robert Birnbaum's 1980 book *Creative Academic Bargaining: Managing Conflict in the Unionized College and University* (Birnbaum 1980) is one example of this line of work. By the mid 1980s approximately a third of the professorial were represented by certified bargaining units in public and private, two and four year institutions. The majority of faculty collective bargaining agreements established grievance systems that culminated in the use of arbitration. The American Arbitration Association handles the bulk of these cases, with public relations employment boards (Herbs) and the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service also being used to a lesser extent. In 1984 associates of the Center for Mediation in Higher Education published the book *Managing Faculty Disputes* (McCarthy and others 1984) encouraging the development of more flexible grievance systems that included mediation to help manage faculty conflicts. The AAUP also began to indicate support for mediation (Mussel 1988), on occasion involving representatives from their local chapter offices, who after review of a case, might assist in the mediation efforts.

The College and University Personnel Association (CUPA), whose membership of university HR administrators had doubled between 1966 to 1986 to include about 1250 institutions, began showing interest in the mid-1980's in less adversarial ways to manage staff disputes. This is evidenced by articles such as "Taking the Conflict Out

of Grievance Handling" (Cunningham 1984) found in their central journal. An edited collection published by CUPA in 1993 entitled *Managing the Industrial Labor Relations Process in Higher Education* (Julius 1993) included several essays on ADR such as "Dispute Resolution: Making Effective Use of the Mediation Process" (Margaret K. Chandler); "Mediation in the Resolution of Collective Bargaining Disputes" (Ira B. Lobel) and "Negotiating in an Anarchy: Faculty Collective Bargaining and Organizational Cognition" (Robert M. Birnbaum).

Student Grievance Systems

It was also during the 1980's that researchers began to explore the range and type of student grievance procedures in more detail. Folger and Schubert's 1981 survey of 741 colleges and universities found that over half of the surveyed institutions had implemented some kind (formal or adhoc) of third party procedure for handling student initiated grievances. This research was followed up by Folger and Schubert in a smaller but more in-depth study of formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms reported in the 1986 NIDR-sponsored manuscript *Resolving Student Initiated Grievances in Higher Education*. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) published their survey of student academic grievance mechanisms in 1989 (Ludeman 1989), and the College Student Personnel Association published results of a longitudinal study in 1991 (Dannells 1991).

Responding to the increasing complexity of judicial affairs on campus the Association for Student Judicial Affairs was created in 1987 specifically to support campus judicial affairs staff. By 1994 the ASJA had passed a formal resolution supporting the use of mediation within student judicial affairs. More recently, in 1997, the ASJA established their On-Campus ADR Committee to encourage and support mediation efforts among ASJA members.

ADR and University Legal Affairs

While coming somewhat later, there has also been an increase in mediation workshops and training for college and university legal counsel. Efforts in this area have been lead by the National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA), which now has a separate Litigation and ADR Committee. NACUA sponsored two trainings during 1995-96 for university attorneys in non-litigious methods of resolving disputes. The trend of involving university counsel is also apparent from the growing number of workshops on mediation appearing at the various annual conferences on law and higher education (Cavenagh 1994; Zdziarski and Jackson 1994).

Mediation Becomes Almost a "Household Word"

It should be noted that all this ADR activity on campus was not occurring in isolation. Significant changes have been occurring in North America that have greatly increased public awareness of mediation, and lead to an increase in the availability of experienced conflict intervenors. In his article on campus conflict work and democratic values Geoffrey Wallace (Wallace 1993) summarizes some of these important indicators of societal acceptance of mediation generally. He writes,

Dispute systems in the United States have changed a great deal in recent years. Between 1977 and 1987, neighborhood dispute programs grew from approximately three neighborhood dispute centers to over three hundred centers. The Multi-Door court house system in Washington, DC handled 15,000 cases in 1985. In the areas of arbitration and mediation, there have been major increases in their use as evidenced by the revenue to those who provide these services. In 1992, the American Arbitration Association made 37 million dollars handling 60,000 cases; Endispute made 4.8 million dollars; Judicate made 4.0 million dollars; and, judicial mediation and arbitration made 25 million dollars. The increased use of mediation and arbitration remedies has been accompanied by an expanded array of conflict systems now available.

Increasing Visibility of Diversity Conflicts on Campus

Another important trend on campus has to do with increased attention to conflicts over race, ethnicity, and gender. During the late 1980s, campuses began to more publicly grapple with an increasing range of disputes relating to diversity issues. In the Spring of 1988 PBS Television aired a FRONTLINE documentary entitled Racism 101 that explored the disturbing increase in racial incidents and violence on America's college campuses. The attitudes of black and white students revealed increasing tensions at some of the country's best universities. In 1990, a Carnegie Foundation Report by Earnest Boyer entitled Campus Life: In Search of Community aired concerns by administrators and faculty about the loss of community on campus. Research conducted for the report found that 68% of presidents of large research and doctoral institutions felt that race relations was a problem on their campus, with the average across all types of institutions being closer to 25%. Approximately 50% of chief student affairs officers at all the institutions surveyed felt that conflict resolution workshops were now "very important," with an additional 35% saying they were somewhat important. A full 77% felt that developing better procedures for handling complaints and grievances was between somewhat and very important for their institutions.

Sylvia Hurtado's research and subsequent Journal of Higher Education article entitled "The Campus Racial Climate: Contexts of Conflict" (Hurtado 1992) also captured the attention of many higher education administrators.

Karleen Karlson, director of the mediation project at SUNY Albany, was one of a number of authors who have argued that campus mediation projects increase in significance as campuses diversify (Karlson 1991). She states

As a campus' demographics change, the demand by new groups for a campus voice - and a piece of campus resources brings an accompanying amount of "muscle flexing" - self-assertion, testing other groups, challenging the administration - which causes tension in the college as the groups seek to establish themselves within the larger community. Campuses that wish to become more culturally diverse need to consider using the services of a mediation center.

By the early 1990's presentations, articles, and special demonstration projects began to more carefully explore the use of mediation as one response to diversity disputes (Avery 1990; Hartzog 1995; Volpe and Witherspoon 1992; Wing 1994) Larger, systemwide initiatives to address diversity-related conflicts on campus also began to emerge across the country, in places such as New York, Michigan, California, and New Jersey. I was personally involved as a lead trainer in the New Jersey effort, wherein the Department of Higher Education for the State of New Jersey provided a \$100,000 grant to Jersey City State College in 1989. The grant included a statewide student leadership initiative on race relations and conflict resolution that brought together students (minority and "majority") and staff from all 54 New Jersey campuses for weekend workshop/retreats on diversity and conflict resolution skills training.

Concern over sexual harassment and sexual assault on campus also grew tremendously during the 1990s (Riggs and Murrell 1993). Mediation of sexual harassment and sexual assault cases became a controversial topic as experiments with the use mediation as a response increased in visibility and scope. (Cloke 1988; Gadlin and Paludi 1990; Sisson and Todd 1995; Weddle 1992).

Dispute Systems Design Initiatives

By the early 1990's within the larger Conflict Management/ADR field there emerged an increasing awareness of the benefits of taking a

systemic approach to organizational conflict management, spurred by the publication of Ury, Brett, and Goldberg's volume *Getting Disputes Resolved: Designing Systems to Cut the Costs of Conflict* in 1988 and the special October 1989 issue of the *Negotiation Journal* on Dispute Systems Design. Interest in ADR systems design spread to campuses as well, with MIT Ombuds Mary Rowe at the forefront, writing about integrated campus dispute systems in her articles "People Who Feel Harassed Need a Complaint System With Both Formal and Informal Options" (Rowe 1990) and "The Ombudsman Role in a Dispute Resolution System." (Rowe 1991) appearing in Harvard's *Negotiation Journal*. A number of university systems, most notably the University of Georgia system and the City University of New York system, and the University of Missouri system, have taken on the challenging task of system-wide initiatives to improve dispute resolution practices across entire multi-campus university systems. These efforts should bear considerable fruit in the years to come.

The Maturation of the Higher Ed ADR Field

In addition to these larger scale organizing efforts, we are now seeing a variety of smaller signs suggesting the general maturation of the field. These include increased use of internet discussion groups and websites as networking tools among campus dispute resolvers, and regional meetings of campus mediation programs to supplement annual national gatherings. There is increasing availability of college and university conflict resolution trainings targeted toward staff and faculty, and a growing emphasis on preparing campus mediators to handle more complex conflicts involving issues of culture, race and gender. Special summer institutes and seminars on campus conflict resolution are now being offered to national and international groups of participants. Campus programs are also now moving beyond interpersonal disputes and are beginning to intervene in more complex and larger group conflicts involving a wider range of campus constituencies.

We are also seeing the continued spread of mediation techniques to previously undeveloped areas such as community colleges. Also significant is the move to take conflict resolution services off-campus, as programs focus on forging new links with off-campus constituencies. There appears to be a gradual move toward institutionalization of mediation as a preferred mode of dispute resolution on campus, signified by the gradual development of campus grievance policies that write mediation into their basic procedures. In addition, discussions are now underway about the development of national standards of practice for campus mediators.

Clearly, campus mediation and alternative dispute resolution practices have come a long way since the early ombuds programs came on the scene in 1967 as a "new bird on campus". Having a mediation program is now being seen as good business practice on campus. Evidence of

this is provided by the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), who gave \$10,000 in award money to a campus conflict resolution project (University of Texas, San Antonio) as part of their annual Higher Education Awards Program recognizing initiatives that improve the quality and reduce the cost of higher education programs and services.

As this article reveals, the past 3 decades have shown steady growth and change in higher education's approaches to conflict. As mediation appears to be entering the campus mainstream, we can look hopefully forward at what the next decade. In terms of networking and access to information on building programs, the new Education Section of the Association for Conflict Resolution, and the FIPSE-funded national Campus Conflict Resolution Resources initiative (<http://www.campus-adr.org>) hold out great promise for the future. Higher education, "conflict prone" as it may be, may also be a domain that truly learns from conflict and gains strength as a result. Only time will tell.

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