

Peer to Peer Conversation: Manual/Best Practices

There's a thread you follow. It goes among / things that change. But it doesn't change. / People wonder about what you are pursuing. / You have to explain about the thread. / But it is hard for others to see. / While you hold it you can't get lost. / Tragedies happen; people get hurt / or die; and you suffer and get old. / Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding. / You don't ever let go of the thread.

~ William Stafford ~

To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science. ... Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning.

~Albert Einstein~

Everyone in a complex system has a slightly different interpretation. The more interpretations we gather, the easier it becomes to gain a sense of the whole.

~Margaret J. Wheatley~

Purpose/Rationale:

For many *faculty, the reasons for joining an academic community go beyond salary and more instrumental considerations like scholarly recognition or student evaluations. In many cases the impulse to engage in the tasks of research, teaching, and service stem from a deeper sense of calling, passion, or commitment to foster change. Yet, at times the institutional and role requirements for faculty can obscure or diminish the energy behind this sense of higher purpose and vocational mission. When faculty become disconnected from the deeper wellspring of calling or passion, the levels of cynicism, burnout, or loss of agency can increase. Job satisfaction plummets along with connections to the wider academic community. In contrast, some faculty on the same campus never experience a diminished sense of purpose and commitment to teach, research, create, or serve. They maintain a high degree of internal integrity and vitality with respect to the daily tasks for faculty. Yet, at times even this group of faculty might find it difficult to stay focused on the calling, passion, and personal mission that drew them to academia. Or they may wonder what the next five years will look like as they move deeper into their career and advance through the faculty ranks.

*Throughout this document, the word "faculty" includes all tenure and non-tenure track faculty of any rank.

The primary purpose of the Peer to Peer (P2P) conversation is to provide a platform for faculty to talk about the challenges or uncertainties they experience regarding their institutional role. The P2P conversations are intended to promote growth and flourishing over a faculty career and to build relational culture and climate on campus. When enacted with integrity and fidelity, the

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P2P conversations will increase the likelihood that faculty at DU will find new or deeper ways to experience the life-giving elements of their teaching, research, and service. Minimally, it is anticipated that faculty who initiate P2P conversations will acquire resources and new ideas for solving professional challenges, make productive changes in their work, or deepen practices in areas of personal or professional life that matter most to their work at DU. Given the collaborative nature and shared problem-exploring format of P2P conversations it is anticipated that they will foster the cultivation of intentional, collegial networks that stretch across and even beyond campus. As these social networks grow, faculty will likely feel an increased sense of meaningfulness in their work and belonging to the DU community. Their sense that they are valued at the university will also likely increase. These benefits would impact the entire campus ecosystem and ripple through its relational networks, be they faculty-student, faculty-staff, departmental, unit, or interdisciplinary.

During a Peer to Peer (P2P) conversation, individual faculty identify an area/key question of practice to explore. To help with the investigation the faculty invites a small group of three faculty members and/or staff—who may or may not know each other—with relevant expertise to engage in a confidential 2-hour conversation around this question, conundrum, or problem. P2P conversations can address *functional/strategic* topics related to research, teaching, creative activity, or service as well as *conceptual/philosophical* questions about work-life balance or finding meaning and purpose at different stages of one's career. A faculty member initiating a P2P conversation can invite colleagues or staff from across campus or potentially other institutions (via direct invitation) depending on the topic and needed expertise. Sample P2P topics could include:

- How might I advance in rank while remaining an engaged scholar, teacher, and member of the DU community? Or, I'm a full professor and wondering about ways to remain passionate about teaching, scholarship, creative activity, and service.
- What was my teaching, scholarly, or service highlight in the last three-years, and how might that experience impact my next three-years at DU?
- How might I use my passion for research/scholarship/creative activity as a seed source for award winning teaching?
- I want to start (grow) my family/relationships, but I'm concerned that my career will suffer. How can I accomplish both with integrity and fidelity to my sense of what it means to be a professor? What do I need to consider when making choices?
- What are my aspirational horizons over the next three-years? How do I pursue those goals that are partially visible but still just beyond my sight, grasp, or professional trajectory?

The P2P conversation structure is customized to the DU community. However, much of the content and process is modified from professional development strategies developed by the *Center for Courage and Renewal* as well as articles and books from educator, social activist, and scholar Parker J. Palmer. The Center for Courage and Renewal (<http://www.couragerenewal.org/>) is an internationally recognized organization offering

workshops, consulting programs, and retreats for teachers, physicians, social workers, clergy and other members of the helping professions for several decades. The mission of the Center “is to create a more just, compassionate and healthy world by nurturing personal and professional integrity and the courage to act on it.” Their trademarked “Circle of Trust©” approach to professional development is intended to “cultivate the heart and soul of leadership, encouraging people to lead and act with courage on their true callings; develop trustworthy relationships; cultivate practices to sustain themselves and inspire others for the long haul; and work together to transform the institutions they serve.” Additional resources supporting this approach to faculty peer to peer conversations are included in the references at the end of this document.

The P2P conversations are patterned after discourse communities that seek wholeness, shared commitment to individual/community wellness, and an enduring trust in the power of individuals to discern life-giving choices. As such the P2P conversations may feel awkward and uncomfortable compared to more typical conversation patterns in academia which often feel competitive and individualistic. Although the 2-hour conversation might result in clear next steps or solutions, it is also likely and even preferable, that the conversation will generate additional questions and inquiries that mark the professional path forward.

The P2P conversations are intended to reconnect or deepen faculty association with their calling to teach, serve, or research/conduct creative activity; to enhance the capacity of faculty to hold tight to the thread of their professional identity at DU. P2P conversations will promote growth and flourishing over a faculty career and build relational culture and climate on campus. Both goals are intended to enhance a sense of belonging, meaning, and joy in the lives of DU faculty. P2P conversations are faculty initiated and facilitated. They are designed to promote intentional career guidance/decision-making and cultivate collaborative peer consultation across campus.

A purpose of peer-to-peer (P2P) conversations is hinted at in William Stafford’s poem in the prologue. Faculty typically enter the profession for a particular reason, a sort of calling or vocational purpose that fuels the journey from graduate school into the faculty role. The thread they follow, often called a research agenda, can be clear to the individual but not so clear to others in the academe. Much of faculty work consists of explaining that thread to publishers, research participants, students, colleagues, department chairs, and funders. And at times faculty may find they even have to explain the thread they are following to themselves. Or perhaps more accurately, faculty have to remind themselves that the thread exists provided they can stop long enough in their busy rush toward professional fulfillment to look around.

Because of the collaborative nature and shared problem-exploring format, P2P conversations will foster the cultivation of intentional, collegial networks that stretch across and even beyond campus. As these social networks grow, faculty will likely feel an increasing sense of meaningfulness in their work, that they are valued, and an enhanced sense of belonging in the DU community. Such benefits would impact the entire campus ecosystem and ripple through various relational networks, be they faculty-student, faculty-staff, departmental, unit, or interdisciplinary.

The P2P conversation is premised on the following assumptions about professional life and faculty formation in academia.

1. Faculty experience a “vocational calling” to the work of academia; the role of professor is more than an avocation. There is a strong connection and sense of satisfaction between faculty affective affiliation for research, teaching, creative activity, and service and many of the day-to-day tasks of a professor. In an ideal sense, heart, head, and hand work in tandem in fulfilling passion and mission throughout a professor’s career.
2. The nature of institutional life can, over time, separate the vocational calling for the work from the technical requirements of promotion and tenure in academia. For instance, meetings, reports, and performance evaluations, while necessary, can sometimes draw attention away from the initial sense of purpose and commitment to something greater than self that drew many faculty to higher education. This can be the case for pre-tenure faculty who sometimes focus too narrowly on institutional markers of success while sidelining or dampening the initial passion and joy for the work. And non-tenured faculty can also experience this sense of lost purpose post promotion when they might struggle to connect, in ways, their sense of purpose with institutional markers of success.
3. Recovering, reigniting, or sustaining the deep call of the work of academia requires both individual reflection and a community of deep listeners. While the link between heart, head, and hand is unique to each faculty the process of understanding and implementing this signature element requires community to draw out and authenticate.
4. While there is a clear time and place for summative assessment of faculty performance, for instance at times of promotion and tenure, the P2P conversation is anchored in formative and asset-based conceptions of professional development which believe in the principle of faculty wholeness and self-advocacy. As such, the P2P conversations are less about problem solving in the sense of an external authority providing answers and solutions and more about professional formation and creating space for the inner authority, derived from vocational calling, to emerge and offer guidance regarding compelling problems of practice.

In the poem “Two Kinds of Intelligence,” the 13th century Persian poet and Sufi mystic Rumi speaks to the question of the power to “author” one’s professional life. He argues for the existence of two sources of knowledge (mind and heart) about the world that humans have access to when looking for a place of meaning and direction:

There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired, / as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts / from books and from what the teacher says, / collecting information from the traditional sciences / as well as from the new sciences. / With such intelligence you rise in the world. / You get ranked ahead or behind others / in regard to your competence in retaining / information. You stroll with this intelligence / in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more / marks on your preserving tablets. / There is another kind of tablet, one / already completed and preserved inside you. / A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness / in the center of the chest. This other intelligence / does not turn yellow or stagnate. It’s fluid, / and it doesn’t move from outside to inside / through conduits of plumbing-learning. / This second knowing is a fountainhead / from within you, moving out.

As with the P2P conversations, Rumi argues for the importance of paying attention to the heart when the questions of practice are less conceptual (technical) and more social-emotional (heart-felt).

The philosophical and practical underpinnings of the P2P conversations are time tested in the field of professional development, particularly in higher education settings. When carried out with integrity and fidelity, the P2P conversations will increase the likelihood that faculty at DU will find new or deeper ways to experience the life-giving elements of their teaching, research, creative activity, and service.

Timing/structure:

Ideally, faculty should initiate a P2P conversation at least every three years for the purpose of sustaining a vibrant intellectual and professional trajectory within the DU community. Faculty are encouraged to convene a P2P conversation at the following benchmarks: within three years of initial appointment, within three years after promotion to Associate Professor, and within three years after promotion to Professor. These recommendations apply to faculty in all benefitted faculty series, including the Tenure Line Professorial Series, the Professorial Series in University Libraries, the Teaching Professorial Series, the Clinical Professorial Series, the Professor of the Practice Series, and the Research Professorial Series.

A P2P conversation is most effectively structured around a faculty convener (FC), who is hosting the conversation, and three committee members (CM). Committee members may hold any rank from any of the DU faculty series or staff with relevant expertise--as defined by the faculty convener. Additionally, a committee member may hold appointments outside of DU. The main criteria for CMs is a capacity to listen while resisting the tendency toward direct problem solving, and expertise that either helps refine the question under examination or can offer new angles and insights yet to be considered. Since participation in the P2P conversation for CMs is by invitation it is possible that a CM will decline the opportunity to join a P2P committee for personal or professional reasons.

The poet Rilke in his collected “Letters to a Young Poet” offers this advice regarding the interface between the heart’s calling and the nature of work which is often dis-heartening:

...have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.

In the same way Rilke offers the advice of patience to his young colleague, P2P conversations are intended to open up the conversation space rather than close it off with pat answers or boiler plate advice. P2P is an invitation for faculty to “live the questions” as Rilke advises. This may mean resisting the tendency to force a straight path through the questions of professional identity and trajectory at DU and instead seek out opportunities to explore and imagine a career path at DU.

Format:

Although the 2-hour dialogue might result in clear next steps or solutions it is also likely that the dialogue will generate additional questions and inquiries that mark the professional path forward. As the previous excerpt from Rilke suggests, some questions of professional identity and formation are best lived into through an extended process of community and self-reflection. And unlike P2P conversations, it is equally true that some faculty development questions are technical in their structure and can be most effectively attended to in a direct, advice-giving, format. In contrast, P2P conversations are almost exclusively directed at questions of the heart, passion, and calling. They are fueled by the metaphor of exploration and discernment suggesting an emphasis on problem-complexifying not problem-solving.

The best kind of questions brought to a P2P conversation often begin long before the convening of the P2P conversation and will continue long after the 2-hour gathering is completed. As such, the success of the dialogue is premised on notions of clarity into the multifaceted nature of the problem, not a singular concrete-next step. The goal of a somewhat indefinite outcome relieves CMs of pressure to provide “answers” or the tendency to be sidetracked by the need to know whether or not they solved a colleague’s problem. Once released of this responsibility, the CMs are now free to focus on the exploration and expansion, with the faculty convener, of the inner-driving energy behind the question. Clarity around the core elements of a question can help the FC envision a plan forward that is responsive to the FC’s sense of inner integrity as it interfaces with the day-to-day requirements of faculty work.

As envisioned and initiated, the P2P conversations will likely feel counter-cultural to most conversations that define the academic life of faculty where the outcome is often individualistic and competitive. These are important academic skills and should be validated and developed. But as the Rumi poem suggests the P2P conversations are patterned after the communication patterns of communities that seek wholeness, shared commitment to individual/community wellness, and an enduring trust in the power of individuals to have the inner resources to discern life-giving choices.

The Formula for Good P2P Questions:

There are many kinds of questions faculty ask on a daily basis in their work. They ask questions to students during class. They direct questions to their colleagues about the best ways to organize curriculum or address department policies and procedures. They generate questions that lead to research proposals, creative activities, conference presentations, and publications. The primary authority or purpose for these questions resides outside the faculty and rests in the purview of the institution; they are role-based questions. P2P conversations move the source of authority from external to the internal emotional life of faculty which is a better generator of questions that foster thriving and flourishing because they are closer to the heart of the work. As Elizabeth Baron articulates in “*The Heart of Higher Education*” by Parker Palmer and Author

Zajonc (2010), “Awareness of my inner condition informs and inspires my external interactions – with growing knowledge of myself, I am better equipped to serve the world.”

The question can be raised as to why paying attention to the social-emotional elements of faculty career development is important. One intriguing answer lies in the distant history of human development. We know from the work of evolutionary biologist and social scientists that humans have developed two internal systems for making sense of the world. The oldest and most time-tested system dates back over 100,000 years and is primarily an emotional or gut-centered structure. During the long years of human development on the plains of Africa, it was important to act quickly out of instinct in the face of danger. Only in recent human development has the “mind” and rationality come on line and acted as a center of control and direction. But the older system never went away. It runs in the background like a computer operating system that has become buried under lines of code, evident but unseen, influencing how the current rational-update runs. John Haidt (2006) in his book *Happiness Hypothesis* offers the metaphor of the “elephant and the rider” to explore the interface and potential stumbling blocks surrounding the interaction between these two systems of human meaning making. The elephant represents the older more well developed emotionally-based system of meaning making. The rider is the new less well-tested system of rationality and thinking. Haidt argues that although the rider may feel “in control,” it is really the elephant who ultimately has a bigger say in what happens. In most cases a frightened elephant will take the rider wherever the elephant is heading no matter what the rider thinks or wants. Instead of ignoring this wisdom system, Haidt argues for increased attention to the life of emotions especially as they impact the capacity to think and rationally engage the world.

P2P conversations are purposefully designed to create space for the inner-life of faculty to move closer to the surface of day-to-day interactions and become more conscious as a tool for career advancement. In some sense, it is better to know how the elephant feels and to respond to the elephant’s emotional state than to deny its existence and be taken for an unexpected ride, off-course, out of balance and if the rider is careless, pitched into the weeds of academic life.

Experience, and Haidt’s analysis of the human psyche, suggests that the best kind of questions to bring to a P2P conversation rest at the interface between passion and role. They capture both the energy and interest of the elephant and the rider. If a question is too heart-based, it can stray into psychological terrain that is better handled by trained professionals. If the question is too role based, it can more easily be answered by program coordinators, department heads, or institutional staff. An example of the first question is “why am I so attached to a particular project and course assessment even though some students find that the assignment impedes learning?” An example of the second question is “how do I earn tenure or promotion to the next rank?” Both types of questions are important and necessary questions but neither quite fits the model and format of a P2P conversation.

A good questions to bring to P2P conversation is like a Mobius strip bending back and forth on itself, it contains elements of both the outer technical side of academic life as well as the emotional inner core of teaching, creative activity, and service. Here are a few examples for consideration:

-How do I take my controversial ideas that are true to my calling and develop a strategy for publishing and tenure/promotion?

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-I became an academic because I enjoy being alone and researching questions or creating things but I also want to be a member of the community contributing to the success of my department.

-I received tenure based on my research/teaching/creative activity but I'm less energized by my research/teaching/creative activity than I was 7 years ago.

-I love the work I'm doing at DU and find lots of satisfaction there. I also love my personal relationships, friend networks, and family life that exist outside of DU. I spend a lot of time balancing these divergent commitments, which seem to take time and energy away from each other.

-I'm a Full Professor, now what?

-If given a choice I would spend all my time advising students and engaging them in critical conversations about their academic trajectory but my department chair is constantly encouraging me to publish more.

To fully answer any of these questions requires both a deep examination of inner drivers (the roots of the call to the role of professor) and an awareness of institutional considerations/requirements. Good P2P questions combine, instead of separating out the *who* of professional identity from the *how* and *why* of institutional expectations.

The first step is initiated by the Faculty Convener (FC) and consists of a reflective process around professional goals/aspirations/conundrums.

Although it is not required, the FC is encouraged to write a one- or two-page document articulating ideas, questions, and considerations for the P2P committee. The reflection can take a more traditional academic format of research questions and sub-questions; or it might resemble a reflective essay exploring themes around professional satisfaction and uncertainties; or the P2P one page document can simply take the form of a description of questions and goals for the conversation. The format is less important than the goal of refining the question or problem under consideration for the faculty convener. The FC is encouraged to distribute this document to the three Committee Members (CMs) to help focus their feedback during the P2P conversation.

The one-two page planning document can include the following:

-A list of 2-3 questions that the FC would like to discuss with the CMs. The fewer the questions the better so as to keep the CMs focused on the essential elements of your question, conundrum, or problem. These questions can be concrete and specific, like how to move from one rank to another, improve student learning, or increase your rate of publications. Or these questions can be more abstract and philosophical. Such questions might address how to regain your passion for teaching/research, establish a better balance between your love for your profession and your care for others, or identify elements of a meaningful faculty life after promotion? What was your scholarly, service, or teaching high point in the last three years? When as a faculty member did you feel most alive and connected to the reason you became a professor?

-What is the essence of the professional question(s) you are examining as you lean forward into your career at DU? How might this question invite collaboration, connection, and expanded community at DU? One way to approach this topic is to write as if you were in an elevator and had only a limited time to express the question to a colleague.

-What have you always wanted to explore or experience as faculty but have never tried? What elements/opportunities or people exist on the DU campus to initiate that desire?

-What are your concerns and opportunities as you advance from one rank to another? What changes in your professional/personal life do you anticipate as you move from assistant to associate professor? What will keep you engaged and alive as a member of the DU community post full professor promotion? In your last five years pre-retirement what would you like to experience, accomplish, or contribute to DU and your professional community?

Another way to approach the process of question refining is to work from the more abstract, right-brain thinking that is the signature of good poetry. Take a poem or wisdom story you know. A text that you return to in times of challenge that has a voice that grounds you in yourself and your work. Let that poem interact with you in a way that opens up the questions of deeper meaning and purpose you hold but seem ill-fitting for your current lived academic experience. For instance, the following poem by Mary Oliver, titled “Wild Geese,” offers many entry points for reflection around the head/heart/hand interface of a good P2P questions.

You do not have to be good. / You do not have to walk on your knees / for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting. / You only have to let the soft animal of your body / love what it loves. / Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine. / Meanwhile the world goes on. / Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain / are moving across the landscapes, / over the prairies and the deep trees, / the mountains and the rivers. / Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, / are heading home again. / Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, / the world offers itself to your imagination, / calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting— / over and over announcing your place / in the family of things.

Writing in response to the following questions might be a useful activity.

-What does it mean to be good as an academic? What/who supports or thwarts this sense of goodness?

-What do you love most about the role of faculty? When and where does the soft-animal of your academic body feel the most at home and alive?

-What does despair look like when your work goes sideways? Who do you share this despair with? What keeps you going in the face of despair?

-Close your eyes and let your imagination roam like the wild geese. What are you being called home to do or accomplish?

What is it about poetry and wisdom stories that are particularly well-suited companions for writing the kinds of questions worth exploring in a P2P conversation? The poet Emily Dickinson in her poem “*Tell all the truth but tell it slant*” opens with the line “Tell all the truth but tell it slant,” and she ends with the explanation “The truth must dazzle gradually or every man be blind.” T.S. Eliot, when asked about the value of poetry, replied, “The chief use of the “meaning” of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him: much as the imaginary burglar is always provided with a bit of nice meat for the house-dog.” An anonymous 18th century rabbi tells the following story:

Naked Truth walked down the street one day. / People turned their eyes away. / Parable arrived, draped in decoration. / People greeted Parable with celebration.

As these three texts suggest, poetry and wisdom tales are an effective way to introduce core ideas and concepts in a way that is less direct, thus increasing the chance that the listener will hear the main points in a less defensive way. Much of academic discourse is direct and to the point, and as such it can “dazzle” and create a sort of blindness to the deeper purposes of the heart. Poetry allows for the introduction of ideas or ways of being an academic at a “slant” or like the burglar who brings a “bit of nice meat for the house-dog.” The poem opens up the possibilities for thriving by temporarily distracting the academic mind. In this way, poetry can act as a sort of poetic Rorschach test; we see what we most need to see in the story of our academic life.

In the second step, the Faculty Convener reaches out to three Committee Members

The potential CMs (some may decline the invitation to participate for personal or professional reasons) can be faculty of any rank or staff of any position. When inviting the CMs, FCs should consider potential CMs listening ability, capacity to ask questions that open up the investigation instead of closing it with predetermined solutions, previous experience with the question under examination, willingness to work collaboratively, and the ability to synthesize or extend discussion. All three CMs need not hold similar views with respect to the question under consideration. In fact, selecting CMs with contrasting expertise or experiences can increase the effectiveness of the P2P conversation by adding diversity and unexpected insights that open up the potential for professional growth and flourishing. Select CMs who can meet you at the core of the question you are seeking guidance for and who have the capacity to set aside professional identity in service of your question. That may mean that the best CMs are close colleagues, but it might also mean that the best CMs reside outside your immediate social/academic networks. Faculty Senate can provide a list of faculty across campus who self-identify as CMs or have participated successfully in the process.

Listening is an important quality of the CMs you select. Listening with a particular intent in mind. Listening for the purpose of hearing interesting leads and insights that are often hidden within the noise of conversation. Sylvia Boorstein, who writes about mediation and mindfulness, offers this analogy of listening in a different kind of way:

You might think of the difference between radar that goes out looking for something and a satellite dish with a wide range of pickup capacity that just sits in the backyard, waiting. Be a satellite dish. Stay turned on, but just wait.

You want to ask colleagues who listen like a satellite dish. Who have a wide capacity to hear what most needs to be heard and can turn down the traditional academic filters and institutional models of success in their head.

A quick strategy for selecting CMs includes:

- Ask your potential CM a question about teaching, scholarship, or service that hits close to the question you are considering for your P2P conversation. Have a frank conversation with potential CMs to see to what extent their interests and expertise (personal or professional) fit with your reason for hosting a P2P conversation.

- Ask your likely CM to explain their experience or expertise with the question you are holding. Look for the following attributes. Do they exhibit a basic ability to talk complexly and reflectively about their experience? What is their level of curiosity around exploring the question you are asking?

- What is their affect? Is the person projecting a sense of generosity? Do they have a generative spirit that invites a fullness and engaging richness?

- How comfortable is the person with silence? Will they be able to sit with others in silence, if warranted, to allow you the space to reflect deeply on the question you are holding? Sometimes a good question is answered initially, and then following silence the speaker finds another layer or angle to explore. CMs need to be able to hold silence in productive tension, listening the FC into speech.

The above questions are not intended as a sort of litmus test by which to sort out good from bad listeners; everyone is capable of effective listening in a P2P conversation. Instead, the questions are intended to help the FC make conscious choices about CMs and to signal the qualities of listening unique to a P2P conversation.

The third step is finding a time and suitable space for the two hour P2P conversation.

The qualities of a good space will include a quiet atmosphere and privacy, natural light, contemplative and inviting feel, and comfortable seating. Although the conversation could occur at a coffee shop or pub the potential distractions might detract from overall outcome of the P2P conversation. The FC and CMs are encouraged to array themselves in a rough circle facing each other. Writing or note taking materials might also be helpful for capturing the questions or observations made by either the FC or CMs.

The fourth step begins with introductions for the purpose of establishing a sense of shared purpose to serve the question of the Faculty Convener (FC).

Introductions can be as simple as name, unit affiliation, and what understandings/knowledge each CM brings to the dialogue. The FC distributes a list of suggested norms for the dialogue that are quickly discussed and agreed to (a graphic of norms is included on the next page). This process should take 10 minutes or less to complete. The intent is to frame the conversation with norms that invite open sharing of ideas. The following norms are modified from norms used by the *Center for Courage and Renewal* during retreats to foster a space that supports deep personal reflection in a collegial context. In brief each norm conveys the following message:

1. *Choose for yourself when and how to participate:* This is not a share-or-die conversation. It is an opportunity for faculty and staff to come together in a thoughtful and intentional conversation around questions of deep meaning. As such, there is no need for each CM to speak every time a new idea or suggestion is surfaced. The emphasis is on quality conversation not quantity.
2. *Make space for silence and reflection:* The best conversations contain extended periods of silence. This allows time for everyone to think about the question instead of feeling like they must rush to answer or share ideas before the topic moves on. Silence invites wait-time for the topic under discussion to deepen and find fruitful ground out of which insight can emerge.
3. *Embrace differences:* An effective tool for embracing differences is to encourage each participant to share their particular life-wisdom by using the singular pronoun “I” instead of the plural pronoun “we” when talking. By using statements like “I think...” or “I have experienced...” instead of “we” as faculty, staff, or un-tenured, the emphasis shifts to individual differences instead of group affiliation.
4. *No fixing. No saving:* Everyone in the room is already whole and complete and therefore does not need to be fixed or saved. The P2P conversations are asset-based discussions not deficit-based discussions. The goal is to uncover existing truths and wisdom already present amongst the participants instead of imposing answers on everyone.
5. *When the going gets rough turn to wonder:* discussions with the piercing quality of P2P conversations are by their nature hard conversations that may invite participants into uncomfortable discussions that run counter to their beliefs or orientations to academia. When encountering these rough patches, it is better to ask, “I wonder why I feel this way regarding...” or “I wonder what I would do if I experienced that?”
6. *Observe confidentiality:* P2P conversations follow the “Vegas Rule”; what is said here stays here. This preserves the likelihood that all participants will share openly and honestly their experiences and thoughts which can bring everyone closer to the truths imbedded in the question under examination.

Circle of Trust®

Touchstones for Safe and Trustworthy Space

Choose for yourself when and how to participate.

There is always invitation, never invasion;
always opportunity, never demand.

Make space for silence and reflection.

Slow down and pay attention to the
"inner voice" that is trying to speak.

Embrace differences.

Speak your truth with "I statements."
Listen with an open mind to others' truth.

No fixing.

Seek instead, through deep listening
and open questions, to help each other
find his or her own clarity and resourcefulness.

When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.

Turn from reaction and judgment to wonder and
compassionate inquiry: "I wonder why they feel/think
this way?" or "I wonder what pushed my buttons?"

Observe confidentiality.

Safety is built when we can trust that our words and stories
will remain with the people with whom we choose to share,
and are not passed on to others without our permission.

Opening/framing statement:

The Faculty Convener provides a brief (10-15 minute) overview of the problem, issue, or conundrum under investigation. In many cases the committee members will already have a general familiarity with the question, having previously received a copy of the one-two page overview written by the FC. A brief moment of stillness and quietness follows the FC's presentation to allow for a deepening of the question under investigation. The Committee Members are invited to begin asking questions aimed at bringing additional clarity or insights to the question at hand. It is helpful at this stage of the dialogue if CMs refrain from making problem solving or advice giving statements but rather focus on asking questions that help broaden out the nature and complexity of the question at hand. The types of questions that open up the conversation in this way are called "open-honest questions."

Asking open-honest question:

Following the FCs opening statement is a period of 1.5 hours of conversation guided by the practices and principles of open-honest questions. The guideⁱ that follows is intended to help frame open-honest questions that by their nature will invite the FC into a state of deeper reflection around the question they are holding. (The following documents are used with permission from the Center for Courage and Renewal and their Circle of Trust© retreat model.) Allow for silence by providing wait time between questions, which will allow for deep listening to occur for both the FC and the CMs. It is important to remember that the goal of the questions is to create a more complex web of understanding rather than delivering a concrete answer. Committee members might consider taking notes or drawing images that come to mind during the discussion. All notes should be given to the FC at the conclusion of the conversation.

Open & Honest Questionsⁱⁱ

Open & Honest Questions are thoughtful and curious responses to move us beyond our normal patterns of communication. Often our questions are laden with advice, problem solving, or meeting our needs to be a "good leader". Open & Honest Questions serve to invite a more spacious, authentic conversation, which enables us to:

- Create a more authentic and deeper exploration of "a problem or question" for both the person talking and the one listening;
- Step away from our tendency to jump to solutions, assign blame, or otherwise approach our exchanges attached to a specific end (teaching with a specific goal in mind, defend what we know, "respond as a good listener would");
- Invite a person to explore their own "inner teacher", calling upon their own wisdom and knowledge of self. This builds capacity for their own leadership – exploring and finding

their own assets, questions and answers. This invites them to discover their own “hidden wholeness.” A person can access this inner teacher by thinking about the situation in a new way, applying past learning and experience to now, and thinking through on their own before/ or instead of you giving direction or input. This supports a deeper conversation within one self;

- Slow down the pace of our conversation;
- Expand and deepen an exploration rather than narrow or restrict possibilities;
- Explore and “hold” important questions or complicated problems. This recognizes that there is significant value in a discernment process instead of reacting with a quick, simple or incomplete answer (that may make things worse in the long run);
- Use meaningful metaphors that help to “step out” of the problem/situation, helping to reframe or explore the problem;
- Invite more authentic responses rather than second guessing the “right answer”, and contributes to a deeper, yet mutual engagement; and
- Change the dynamic of our saving, healing, changing, fixing or setting the other person straight. In these responses, we see the person as “broken” or deficit. Our new role is to create a safe and meaningful process in which we help the person access their “hidden wholeness.”

Framing Open-Ended Questionsⁱⁱⁱ

- The best single indicator of an open, honest question is that the questioner could not possibly anticipate the answer to it. *What surprises you? What moves or touches you about this? What inspires you? What was easy? What was hard?*
- Ask questions that aim at helping the person rather than satisfy your curiosity. Ask questions to the person as well as to the problem – about feelings as well as facts. *Have you ever had an experience that felt like your current dilemma? Did you learn anything from that prior experience that feels useful to you now? How do you feel about the experience you just described? Use words the person is using not what you think they might be feeling, i.e. What do you mean when you said you felt frustrated? You said this was an impossible situation - could you say more about what this means to you?*
- Formulate questions that are brief and to the point rather than larding them with background considerations and rationale. *What were your expectations or hopes?*

- Avoid long storytelling or speech making that may draw attention to yourself.
- The best questions are simple: *How does this work for you? What questions do you have? What is the hardest aspect of this situation? What is the easiest aspect of this situation?*
- Avoid questions with right/wrong answers. (*Don't you think this is helpful?*)
- Use images or metaphors that the person might relate to so as to open things up in ways that more direct questions do not. *If you were writing a book about this experience, how would you name this chapter? If you were using a roadmap to navigate this problem, what would be on your map – the rest stops, the destinations, the detours?*

Avoiding questions that can truncate deep exploration:

The typical conversation pattern in higher education is back and forth, often with the intent of discovering the shortcomings in the other person's point of view. The goal of academic-listening is to discover these weak points so as to "win" the argument. This form of discourse has its place and it is effective at sharpening the intellect and honing debate skills. In the context of P2P conversations there are three categories of questions that tend to shut down the conversation and exploration of a topic: curiosity, agenda, and problem solving.

Curiosity: I just want to know, it does not serve the person talking. *"So what does your wife think of you spending all this extra time here?"*

Agenda: Offering advice, ideas, or suggestions because they serve your needs. *Don't you think you have several issues here that you might need to work with, such as the large amount of anger you seem to carry?*

Problem Solving: Suggesting hidden advice, fixing, healing, saving, or changing that the other person has not asked for. *"Don't you think you might want to deal with your workaholic husband? I have a great book for you on this."*

Later in the process, the CMs may, at times, offer direct advice but even then the suggestion is to resist the kind of advice that shuts down or limits the conversation. The goal is to explore and examine the question to its fullest potential instead of moving toward a quick resolution and conclusion.

Although it may seem like two hours is too much time, experience suggests that committees should meet for the full time so as to allow for intentional, deep, and spontaneous interaction. It is the case that after the first hour the conversation may slow down and seem to run its course. But with a willingness to hold silence and wait, it is often the case that the conversation will suddenly continue but from a deeper place of understanding and engagement. It might be helpful to think of this process less like a back and forth conversation and more like a series of questions that lead to deeper questions of meaning and purpose as a faculty member.

Affirmations, thanks, and encouragements:

During the last 15-20 minutes of the conversation, the invitation is for the committee members to share an affirmation, a word of encouragement, or final summary point regarding the question brought forth by the FC. The tone of this section of the process is along the lines of a “what-I-heard-you-say” or next-steps. The FC can express thanks and appreciation for the committee members and their insights.

The final step is an invitation for the Faculty Convener to write a one-page summary of the conversation.

This short document may include key questions that were asked, possible steps to follow, and any questions that were raised that are still unanswered. This document is primarily for the benefit of the faculty convener, but if warranted it can be sent to the Committee Members with an understanding of confidentiality.

Final thoughts

As noted at the beginning of this document, the P2P conversations are intended to reconnect or deepen faculty association with their calling to teach, serve, or research. They will typically foster a sense of “new beginnings” and a leaning forward into the next stage of faculty professional development. John O’Donohue, the Irish poet, offers this advice in his poem titled “New Beginnings”:

*Though your destination is not yet clear / You can trust the promise of this opening;
/ Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning / That is at one with your life's desire.
/ Awaken your spirit to adventure; / Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk; /
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm, / For your soul senses the world that awaits
you.*

This manual/best practices for hosting a P2P conversation is detailed and comprehensive for the purpose of providing a depth of background knowledge and technical information to guide FCs and CMs through the process. But the extensive descriptions should not be taken as a statement of the expertise required or level of exertion associated with hosting or participating in a conversation. In essence, a P2P conversation is a 2-hour discussion between 4 colleagues about a particular problem, concern, or question one of the faculty members holds. What makes a P2P conversation different from a water-cooler conversation or a happy-hour drink is the setting and the format for the discussion. P2P conversations take place at a venue that encourages introspection and are bounded by norms that encourage exploration and deepening of a question rather than intellectual exploration, quick answers, or problem solving. The true success of a

P2P conversation is not resolution but rather did the process move the question and the FC closer to a sense of inner-wisdom, calling, and passion for the role of faculty.

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ⁱ The following material/worksheets on open-honest questions were written by Susan Kaplan, M.S.W. who was inspired by the work of Parker Palmer and Center for Courage & Renewal. Reproduced with permission.

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