

Model B

Peer to Peer Conversations

Purpose/Rationale:

The purpose of Peer to Peer (P2P) conversations is to promote growth and flourishing over a faculty career and to build relational culture and climate on campus. When enacted with integrity, the P2P conversations will likely increase the likelihood that faculty at DU will find new or strengthened ways to experience their teaching, research, and service holistically.

Minimally, it is anticipated that faculty who initiate P2P conversations will acquire resources and ideas for solving professional challenges that matter most to their work at DU. During a P2P conversation, individual faculty identify an area/key question of practice to engage in a confidential 2 hour conversation around this question, conundrum, or problem. A P2P conversation consists of 3-4 committee members plus the faculty convener. Committee members may hold any rank from any of the DU faculty series or staff/administrators with relevant expertise as a committee member or potentially other institutions depending on the topic and needed expertise. The P2P conversation structure is customized to the DU community based on professional development work developed by the *Center for Courage and Renewal*¹

During a Peer to Peer (P2P) conversation, individual faculty identify an area/key question of practice and invite a small group of faculty members and staff with relevant expertise to engage in a confidential 2-hour conversation around this question, conundrum, or problem. P2P conversations can address *functional/strategic* topics in the areas of research, teaching, 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 depending on the topic and needed expertise. Sample P2P topics could include:

-How might I advance in rank while continuing to remain an engaged scholar? Or I'm a full professor and wondering about ways to remain passionate about teaching, scholarship, and service.

-How might I use my passion for research/scholarship 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.

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

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. Educator, social activist, and scholar Parker J. Palmer is a co-founder.¹

are encouraged to convene a P2P conversation at the following benchmarks: within three years of initial appointment, within three years following promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor, and within three years after promotion from Associate Professor to Professor. These recommendations apply to faculty in all benefitted faculty series, including Tenure Line Professorial Series, the Professorial Series in University Libraries, the Teaching Professor Series, the Clinical Professor Series, the Professor of the Practice Series, and the Research Professor Series.

Format:

The optimal P2P conversation takes about two hours, and the following text provides a brief outline as well as recommended stages of the process. A more detailed conceptual explanation and practical considerations are included in *Peer to Peer Conversations Manual/Best Practices* and is available on the Faculty Senate website.

Step 1: Initial reflection

The faculty convener is encouraged to write a one- or two-page document refining ideas, questions, and considerations. The initial reflection might take a more traditional academic format of research questions and sub questions, or it might be more reflective, exploring themes around personal and career satisfaction. The faculty convener is encouraged to distribute this document to the 3-4 committee members to help focus their feedback during the P2P conversation.

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

A list of 2-3 questions that could keep the committee members 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 or increase your rate of publication. Or they can be more conceptual, like how to find renewed energy in teaching or research or identify elements of a meaningful faculty life after promotion.

In generating your own questions, you may find it useful to consider some of these prompting questions:

- What was your scholarly, service, or teaching high point in the last three years? In what experiences as a faculty member did you feel the most energy and satisfaction?
- What have you always wanted to explore or experience as a faculty member? What opportunities exist on this campus that might facilitate that exploration?
- What are your concerns and opportunities as you advance from one rank to another? What changes are you anticipating—in your personal and professional life—as you advance? What will keep you engaged as a member of the DU community after promotion to full professor or the equivalent rank?

P2P conversations are patterned after discourse communities that value holistic considerations, a shared commitment to community, and a trust in individuals' ability to discern choices that matter in their personal and professional lives. It is likely that the 2-hour conversation may generate additional questions and inquiries that mark a path forward.

Step 2: Inviting 3-4 committee members

The faculty convener reaches out to 3-4 faculty of any rank or staff/administrators of any position. Criteria to consider when selecting the committee members include listening ability, capacity to ask questions that open up the conversation rather than seeking solutions, a willingness to work collaboratively, and an ability to synthesize discussion. All three committee members need not hold similar views around the question under consideration. In fact, selecting committee members 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. Select committee members who show a capacity to enter into the questions you want to ask, who can set aside their own preferences and agendas in the service of your questions. That may mean that the best committee members are close colleagues, but it might also mean that the best committee members reside outside your immediate social/academic networks. Faculty Senate can provide a list of faculty across campus who self-identify as committee members or have participated successfully in the process.

To recruit supportive committee members, ask potential committee members an open-ended question and listen to how they answer: do they ask more questions in response to your question? Are they able to hear and consider the specificities of your question? Are they able to be reflective about their experiences? Do they project a sense of intellectual generosity?

The availability of committee members may vary depending on the committee member's personal and professional commitments and it is possible that a committee member may decline the invitation to join a P2P conversation.

Step 3: Finding the best place

Although almost any space will work, it is suggested that the qualities of a good space will include quiet and privacy; it is additionally recommended that a space has natural light and comfortable seating. Participants are encouraged to sit in a circle, facing each other. Writing or note taking materials can be useful for capturing questions or observations made by either the faculty convener or committee members.

Step 4: Introductions and purpose

Introductions can be as simple as name, unit affiliation, and what understandings/knowledge each committee member brings to the conversation. The faculty convener offers a brief (10-15 minute) overview of the problem, issue, or conundrum under investigation and distributes a list of suggested norms to guide the conversation (see *Peer to Peer Conversation Manual/Best Practices* document for Norms handout).

The committee members ask questions aimed at bringing additional clarity or insights to the question at hand. The goal is to explore and examine the question to its fullest potential instead of moving toward a quick resolution and conclusion. It is helpful at this stage if committee members refrain from making problem-solving or advice-giving statements but rather focus on asking questions that seek complexity of the question at hand. Later in the conversation, committee members might offer direct advice, but even then the suggestion is to resist giving advice that shuts down or limits the conversation. The goal, instead, is to explore and examine the question fully.

It is recommended that committee members adopt the strategies of using open-ended questions, allowing wait time between questions to allow for deep listening, and to write down ideas that

come to mind as they listen (see *Peer to Peer Conversation Manual/Best Practices* document). Although two hours may seem like too much time, committees should meet for the full time so as to allow for intentional, thoughtful, and spontaneous interactions. Even after a conversation may seem to have run its course, a willingness to wait out the silence can often result in the conversation continuing with even more understanding and engagement.

During the last 15-20 minutes of the conversation, the committee members are invited to share any final thoughts (a word of encouragement, a summary point regarding the question). Committee members should give any notes taken to the faculty convener. Close with a reminder of the importance of confidentiality: participants should not share with others what other members of the P2P have said or experienced.

Step five: One-page summary

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 may be sent to the committee members for their general interest.