

## Model A:

### **Purpose/Rationale:**

The purpose of Peer to Peer (P2P) conversations are to promote growth and flourishing over a faculty career and build relational culture and climate on campus. When enacted with integrity and fidelity, the P2P conversations will help faculty at DU find new or deeper ways to experience the life-giving elements of their teaching, research/creative activity, and service. Minimally, faculty who initiate P2P conversations will acquire resources and new ideas for attending to professional challenges, making productive changes, or deepening practices in the personal/professional matter most to their work at DU. Given the collaborative nature and shared problem-exploring format of P2P conversations they will cultivate intentional, collegial networks that stretch across and even beyond campus. As these social networks grow, faculty will likely feel an increasing sense of meaningfulness and belonging in the DU community. Their sense that they are valued at the university will also increase. These benefits will 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 and invite a small group of faculty members, staff, or administrators 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/creative activity, 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 P2P conversation can consist of any number of committee members, but the recommendation is three committee members (CM) plus the faculty convener (FC). Committee members may hold any rank from any of the DU faculty series or staff/administrators with relevant expertise as a committee member. Additionally, a committee member may hold appointments outside of DU. The main criteria for CMs is a capacity to listen instead of direct problem solving, and expertise that either helps refine the question under examination or can offer new angles and insights yet to be considered.

Sample P2P topics could include:

- How might I advance in rank while continuing to remain an engaged and passionate, teacher, and member of the DU community?
- 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 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 do this?

-What is my aspirational horizon over the next three-years? How do I pursue that which is visible but just beyond my sight, grasp, or professional trajectory?

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. For this reason the conversations may feel counter-cultural to the individualistic and competitive conversations to which many faculty are accustomed. Although the 2-hour conversation might result in clear next steps or solutions, it is also likely that the conversation will generate additional questions and inquiries that mark the professional path forward.

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.”

### **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 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 P2P conversation is best experienced as a 2-hour process, and the following text provides a brief outline and suggested stages for that process. A more detailed conceptual explanation and detailed practical considerations is included in *Peer to Peer Conversations Manual/Best Practices* a document of best practices for faculty hosting P2P conversations. The manual is available on the Faculty Senate website.

**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 conversation. The initial reflection can take a more traditional academic format of research questions and sub-questions or it might resemble an open letter to self, exploring themes around professional satisfaction and wonderings. 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 or 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/creative activity, 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? In what experience as a faculty member did you feel most alive?
- 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? In order to capture your initial uncensored thoughts, you are encouraged to write this 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 a 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?

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

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 around the question under examination, content knowledge expertise, willingness to work collaboratively, and ability to synthesize or extend discussion. The availability of CMs may vary depending on the CM's personal and professional commitments and it is possible that a CM may decline the invitation to join a P2P conversation. All three CMs

need not hold similar views around 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.

Invite CMs who can meet you at the core of the question you are seeking guidance around and who can set aside professional ego 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 who might be willing to join a P2P conversation depending on their availability.

As you recruit CMs it might be helpful to consider the following questions as you engage CMs in conversation about their role:

- Ask your potential CM a question about teaching, scholarship, or service that hits close to the question you are considering and listen for ways that suggest a capacity to hear your question instead of a moving quickly to a resolution or solution.
- Ask your likely CM about their experience or expertise with the question you are holding. What is their level of curiosity around the continued exploration of the lived experience?

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

The qualities of a good space will include quietness and privacy, natural light, contemplative and inviting feel, and comfortable seating. Think about the qualities of a space where you would hold a scholarly presentation or defense. The FC and CMs are encouraged to array themselves in a rough circle facing each other to facilitate a deeper form of conversation. In most cases the space at the center of the circle will remain open but in some cases the FC may decide to bring an object to focus on. Writing or note taking materials might also be helpful for capturing the questions or observations made by either the FC or CMs (at the end of the conversation all notes should be given to the FC for future consideration).

### **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 conversation. The FC distributes a list of suggested norms for the conversation that are quickly discussed and agreed to (see *Peer to Peer Conversation Manual/Best Practices* document for Norms Handout). This process may take 10 minutes or less to complete.

The Faculty Convener offers a brief (10-15 minute) overview of the problem, issue, or conundrum under investigation. Ideally the committee members will 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 silence 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 conversation if CMs refrain from offering solutions or advice. Rather, they should focus on asking questions that broaden the nature and complexity of the question at hand (see *Peer to Peer Conversation Manual/Best Practices* document for suggested questions). Later in the process, the CMs may, at times, offer direct advice, but even the CMs should resist offering 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.

The question asking phase of the process may last about 40-45 minutes. To aid in this process, it is suggested that committees adopt a strategy of using open-ended questions (see *Peer to Peer Conversation Manual/Best Practices* document for Open-ended Questions on strategies for framing open-ended questions). Allow for silence by providing wait time between questions, which allows for deep listening to occur for both the FC and the CMs. Committee members might consider taking notes or drawing images that come to mind during the discussion, remembering that these notes will be given to the FC at the end of the P2P conversation.

Two hours may seem like too much time, however, experience suggests that committees should meet for the full time to allow for intentional, deep, and spontaneous interaction. After the first hour the conversation may slow down and seem to run its course. But with a willingness to hold silence and wait, the conversation will likely continue but from a deeper place of understanding and engagement. 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.

During the last 15-20 minutes of the conversation, committee members might share an affirmation, a word of encouragement, or final summary point about the FC's question. The tone of the session at this point is a "what-I-heard-you-say" or next-steps conversation. The FC can express thanks and appreciation for the committee members and their insights. Any written documents or notes taken by the CMs should be given to the FC for the FC's future consideration and to preserve confidentiality. Close with a reminder of the norm of confidentiality regarding the full two hours. The CMs and FC can talk about their personal experience of hosting or participating in a P2P conversation but each committee member should not share what other members said or experienced.

**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 may be sent to the Committee Members for their general interest.

The intention of the P2P conversations is to promote a form of professional engagement that is often missing from higher education communities because of current political, economic, and social constraints. P2P conversations are not intended to replace other forms of faculty to faculty conversations which occur in less formal settings or gatherings. The P2P conversations differ in

that they are formally structured around key moments in the life of a faculty, focused on professional development, and are bounded by norms of confidentiality.